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Winter Day Out in Atlanta

By [KEVIN SACK](#)

IT is in Midtown that [Atlanta](#) feels most like a real city. That is where the sprawl finally ends, where Costco and Outback give way to condos and Outwrite (the gay bookshop). There is a vertical grace to the streetscape, a fundamental yet all too rare appreciation for proportion and design. Home to the arts center, a great urban park and some of Atlanta's best restaurants, the district has a vitality that is at once hip and sophisticated.

This makes Midtown an Atlanta oddity, a destination for its own sake, and one that my family and I can enjoy on an early-darkening winter day as well as a long, scorching one in midsummer. After all, in Atlanta's temperate climate, we have seasons but not snow shovels.

A crisp, clear day for my family begins with a walk or jog through Piedmont Park, the city's century-old "common ground," which stretches north from 10th Street. Pathways wind through 189 acres of sweeping lawns, offering unparalleled views of the Midtown skyline. The kids insist that we stop by the dog run, where the city's mongrels mix indifferently with its blue bloods, and that we pause to watch the inline skaters, who slalom through orange cones near the 12th Street entrance.

We've earned a brunch at the Flying Biscuit Café, where breakfast is served all day. Picture windows expose the bustling corner of Piedmont and 10th, site of Outwrite, as well Nickiemoto's sushi bar and Zocalo Mexican Restaurant (where even a second margarita may be ill-advised). The cafe's eponymous biscuits, served with cranberry apple butter, provide reason enough for the visit, but the menu also features an array of flavorful stuffed omelets and scrambles.

The lovely Atlanta Botanical Garden, just north on Piedmont, has quietly become a leading civic asset, sponsoring lavish sculpture installations and a concert series. Even on a chilly day, the Fuqua Conservatory remains tropical for the benefit of orchids, pitcher plants and visitors alike.

Our path takes us through Ansley Park, the city's most elegant in-town neighborhood, past the Greek Revival First Church of Christ, Scientist, and the new skyscraper at 1180 Peachtree Street, with a cantilevered top that looks like a futuristic missile silo.

We take an afternoon stroll through the High Museum of Art, where the recent addition of new wings by [Renzo Piano](#) to the white porcelain mainstay by [Richard Meier](#) has added a sense of scope and ambition. Currently on display is a three-year rolling exhibition of treasures from the [Louvre](#). Though the permanent collection remains uneven, the High provides a jubilant introduction to Southern folk [art](#), from Gees Bend quilts to Howard Finster's frescoed bicycle.

On to dinner at Pura Vida, a tapas bar that has earned raves for its chef, Hector Santiago. The bar, with its fanciful Boteroesque murals of zaftig musicians, serves mojitos worthy of South Beach, and a soothing

sangria as well. The menu includes ceviche made four different ways, empanadas stuffed with chicken and raisins, and smoky strips of grilled hanger steak.

We skip dessert, heading instead for a nightcap at our favorite spot down on Ponce, an Atlanta institution since 1965. The anticipation grows as we near. Will the circular beacon in the window flash its neon welcome?

“Hot Now,” it screams, and the whooping commences in the back seat. We watch as our glazed Krispy Kreme doughnuts rumble down the conveyor belt, knowing that a frosty night in Atlanta cannot end any more warmly than this.

Flying Biscuit Café, 1001 Piedmont Avenue NE; (404) 874-8887. Atlanta Botanical Garden, 1345 Piedmont Avenue NE; (404) 876-5859. High Museum of Art, 1280 Peachtree Street NE; (404) 733-4444. Pura Vida, 656 North Highland Avenue NE; (404) 870-9797. Krispy Kreme, 295 Ponce de Leon Avenue NE; (404) 876-7307.

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