



SMART

COLLEGE TOWNS

By Barbara and Jim Twardowski, Guest Contributors

You don't have to be a student to enjoy the perks of living in a university community. College towns emit a youthful energy and offer a myriad of sporting events, theatrical productions and musical performances. Although university programs and facilities are designed for students, many colleges make them available to the public for free or at greatly reduced prices. The next time you are choosing a new destination, consider a college town. To give you an idea of what you'll find on college campuses, Escapees found seven college towns that get an A+ for ambiance and attractions.

ATHENS, GEORGIA

Population: 100,000

College: University of Georgia

Sixty miles northeast of Atlanta, nestled below the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, is Athens, Georgia. In a community where one-third of the residents are college students, the town is going to the "dawgs." Bulldogs are the University of Georgia mascot. Local artists painted the three dozen larger-than-life pooches that are displayed throughout the Victoriana-era downtown's trendy shops, art galleries, nightclubs and restaurants. Don't let the traditional architecture fool you—Athens is hip. *Rolling Stone* magazine named Athens



the #1 College Music Scene in America. Athens has attracted bands including the diverse sounds of B-52s, REM, Pylon and Widespread Panic. Up-and-coming musical acts perform at the 40 Watt Club and the Georgia Theatre.

The visual and performing arts are also well-represented in Athens. The University of Georgia Performing Arts Center's superb concert halls showcase ballet, classical music, jazz and folk dance. Last-minute tickets can frequently be purchased. The Canopy Studio is a nonprofit community art center specializing in flying trapeze performances and classes. The Georgia Museum of Art (www.uga.edu/gamuseum) on the UG

campus houses 9,000 works of art and traveling exhibits. Currently, the museum is closed as it undergoes expansion that will triple the space. It is expected to reopen in early 2011.

ATHENS, OHIO

Population: 22,000

College: Ohio University

Ohio magazine calls Athens "Ohio's Best Home Town" and describes it as a place where the Sixties never left. The residents are progressive and community-oriented. Home to the state's oldest public college, Ohio University's Georgian-style buildings are set amongst the rolling hills. Exceptional academics and an environmentalist spirit have earned this lovely university the title, "Berkeley of the Backwoods."

Art lovers will find Athens County an appealing destination. The Dairy Barn, built in 1914, houses changing fine arts and crafts exhibits. Every year, the Quilt National and Bead International attracts artists from around the world. Less than



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15 miles from Athens, the Nelsonville’s Historic Square Arts District has the county’s largest Appalachian artist community. Many of the galleries and shops offer classes, workshops and tutorials. Stroll across Rt. 33 and hop aboard the meticulously restored passenger cars of the Hocking Valley Scenic Railway, which runs on select weekends April through November.

BURLINGTON, VERMONT



Population: 40,000

College: University of Vermont

Burlington, Vermont, is on the shores of Lake Champlain with the Adirondack Mountains as a backdrop. The award-winning Church Street is reminiscent of a European marketplace that sells everything from vintage clothing to violins. Spend an afternoon at one of the area’s factory tours. You can see a moo-vie at Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream Factory, sample more than a dozen beers on the Burlington Brew Tour or pick up a packet of seeds at the Vermont Sunflower Farm.

Seven miles south of Burlington is one of the most unconventional museums in the country—the Shelburne Museum. Current exhibits explore nature in Tiffany-designed Art Nouveau objects, the quest for speed’s aesthetic influence on the art of the motorcycle and the contemporary folk art of Warren Kimble.

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA



Population: 54,904

College: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill is the quintessential college town and is located about 30 minutes from the state capital, Raleigh. Called “the Southern Part of Heaven,” the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) was the first public university in the nation to open its doors. Situated in

an idyllic setting, the 729-acre campus is one of the most beautifully landscaped spots in the country, according to the American Society of Landscape Architects. Every Saturday, visitors meet at the stone gathering circle at Totten Center for free guided tours of the North Carolina Botanical Garden.

A not-to-be-missed indoor attraction is the nonprofit, professional PlayMakers Repertory Theatre, which performs in the Center for Dramatic Art on the UNC campus. *American Theatre* magazine said PlayMakers Repertory Theatre is “one of America’s leading theatre companies.” More eclectic entertainment is found at the Carolina Performing Arts. From *Swan Lake* by the Bolshoi Ballet to the New Orleans Radiators fish head music, diverse venues are shown year-round at the historic Memorial Hall on the UNC campus.

CORVALLIS, OREGON



Population: 54,890

College: Oregon State University

The local convention and visitor bureau boasts that Corvallis “is the Pacific Northwest’s most beautiful college town.” Ranking as one of the smartest, eco-friendly and safest communities in the country, more inventions are dreamed up in Corvallis than most any other city in the country. Located in the heart of Willamette Valley, with a dozen wineries scattered throughout Benton County, the weather is mild and the scenery stunning.

Outdoor enthusiasts will find plenty to do in Corvallis with four golf courses, a weekly farmer’s market, miles of hiking and biking trails and acres of parks. You can play in the snow nine months of the year in the Cascade Mountains. Or vacation in the summer and celebrate the arts, science and music at the da Vinci Days Festival. The third weekend in July, the festival features Grammy-

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CROSS REFERENCE BY STATE

Smart college towns listed in the article are in alphabetical sequence by town. Here is a cross-referenced list that is alphabetical by state:

Georgia, Athens

College: University of Georgia

Watson Mill Bridge State Park

www.gastateparks.org/WatsonMillBridge

650 Watson Mill Road, Comer, GA 30629

(19 miles from Athens)

Mississippi, Hattiesburg

College: University of Southern Mississippi
(known as Southern Miss)

Cullen's RV Park

3536 U.S. Highway 49 South

Hattiesburg, MS 39401

601-466-7890, if no answer call 601-582-8084

cullenjanis@aol.co

www.cullensrvpark.com

North Carolina, Chapel Hill

College: University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Spring Hill RV Park

3500-1A Old Greensboro Road

Chapel Hill, NC 27516

Office Phone: 919-967-4268

Toll-Free: 800-824-8807

Ohio, Athens

College: Ohio University

Strouds Run State Park

11661 State Park Rd.

Athens, OH 45701

740-592-2303 or 740-767-3570

Oregon, Corvallis

College: Oregon State University

Benton County Fairgrounds

110 SW 53rd Street

Corvallis, OR 97333

Phone: 541-766-6521

Fax: 541-766-6865

Vermont, Burlington

College: University of Vermont

Lone Pine Campsites

52 Sunset View Rd

Colchester, VT 05446

802-878-5447



Morehead Planetarium and Science Center. Photo courtesy of Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau.

winning musicians, a riveting poetry slam, human-powered kinetic sculptures racing over a rigorous terrain, a battle of the bands and mind-challenging sci-tech games.

FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS



Population: 68,331

College: University of Arkansas

Surrounded by the Ozark Mountains, Fayetteville is in the northwestern portion of the state. It's only 35 miles from Missouri and 26 miles from Oklahoma. The pride of the state is the University of Arkansas Razorbacks, affectionately called the Hogs. If you go there, you will quickly learn how to call the Hogs. In one year, over a million fans attend the home events of Razorback teams. Some of the finest sports facilities in the country can be found at the UA. The football stadium seats 80,000 and has the largest LD video display in either college or professional football. Spectators are dazzled by the graphics on the 30-foot-high and 107-foot-wide display.

If you prefer participating in recreational activities, head for one of the nearby lakes or rivers. Beaver Lake, with more than 480 miles of natural shoreline, is great for water skiing, fishing, swimming and scuba diving. After, hike beside the towering limestone bluffs or explore a natural cave. Buffalo River is popular with campers, canoeing and spotting elk. If you are more adventurous, try whitewater rafting on the Mulberry River in the spring.

HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI



Population: 50,233

College: University of Southern Mississippi
(known as Southern Miss)

Hattiesburg is known as "Hub City" because of its easy proximity to Mobile, New Orleans, Jackson and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. This year the University of Southern Mississippi will celebrate its centennial with special lectures, oral histories and even a rodeo.

While you are on campus, stop and smell the roses. The All-American Rose Garden features 750 bushes that bloom in late spring and summer. The USM's Museum of Art presents a range of regional to international and historical to contemporary artwork. The museum draws some 20,000 visitors annually.

Continue enjoying the picture-perfect views on the Longleaf Trace. You can bike, walk or birdwatch along the 39 miles of historic railway that have been converted to a paved nature trail. A 23-mile equestrian trail parallels the trace. Water enthusiasts can canoe down Black Creek while enjoying the beautiful scenery of DeSoto National Forest. The Paul B. Johnson State Park just south of Hattiesburg has a 300-acre lake with cabins, camping, boat rentals and fishing.

No Grades Are Given

College towns attract people from around the world. Usually, the environment is quiet and no one feels like an outsider. It is a smart decision to visit college towns. 🏠