

WORLD HOTELS:

WHAT'S HOT, WHAT'S HIP & WHAT'S HAPPENING

Travel writer and gourmet globetrotter Heidi Fuller-Love tells you where to head right now - and why you should do so

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Photography courtesy of Heidi Fuller-Love



THE HOTEL REVIEW

Atlanta: home to Coca-Cola, southern rap music and the world's largest drive-in restaurant - The Varsity (thevarsity.com). For a slice of that hip southern style, stay at Serenbe.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

I imagined a hotel twenty minutes from Atlanta's international airport to be a concrete block in the centre of an urban sprawl studded with drive-in hamburger joints, so Serenbe (serenbeinn.com) came as a big surprise. Built to resemble an old-world English hamlet (only with heritage-style Atlantan houses, instead of thatched roof cottages), this unique community project is like something out of *Gone with the Wind*. To escape the rat race, owners and couple Steve Nygren and wife Marie bought an old farmhouse in the 1990's, and moved in with their three daughters to create a sustainable community. The daughters now run the place and their community includes restaurants, art galleries, boutique craft shops, a spa and even a theatre, all surrounding the main farmhouse - the only original building, dating from 1905.

WHY GO NOW?

Apart from that relatively toasty winter weather (Atlanta is only a four-hour trip from Florida), there are some fab foodie festivals in Atlanta this February, including 'The Beer, Bourbon and BBQ festival', with seminars from barbecue pit masters and lengthy bourbon tasting sessions.

ROOM STUFF:

With furnished apartments and rooms dotted around the community there's plenty to choose from, but when the weather's bad you'll probably want to cosy up in one of six rooms in the old farmhouse. Right next to the restaurant where breakfast is served, these vintage-style rooms have beige walls, large plump beds



and lashings of lavender goodies in ample bathrooms.

I stayed in The Southern Swan, an apartment next to the Daisy café. With heavy luggage, the steep steps up to the Swan's lounge-cum-kitchen are a bit of a trial, but the gleaming modern space with wall-length windows makes the effort worthwhile.

Up another steep flight of stairs, I loved the bedroom with its thick carpet and quirky layout, including a king-size bed and walk-in shower set right in the centre of the room.

FOOD STUFF:

'We live on Serenbe time here', locals quip to explain the slow service at The Farmhouse, but chef Thaddeus Barton's farm-to-table-food is worth waiting for. Try the fried chicken, made to Marie Nygren's secret recipe: grilled, rather than deep-fried (so no oily fingers), served with homemade buttermilk chive biscuits and butternut squash purée.

DON'T MISS:

- Swimming with whale sharks at Atlanta's aquarium georgiaaquarium.org
- Taking a beltline bike tour with biketoursatl.com
- Shopping at North Georgia Premium Outlets shopping mall premiumoutlets.com

EAT AT:

- St Cecilia (stceciliaatl.com), an elegant, high-ceilinged eating space where you should order chef Craig Richard's flounder cooked in hay.
- South City Kitchen (midtown.southcitykitchen.com), the best place in town for traditional Southern food, including the iconic shrimp and grits.

READERS DEALS:

- Use the code 'GOOD THINGS' when booking at Serenbe and get a complimentary cocktail.
- Type the code 'Good Things Bike Atlanta' when booking your bike tour for a 10% reduction.

TOP THREE FOOD FESTIVALS IN FEBRUARY

Month of love, not to mention a lotta lust, February is also a lush month for loved up travel foodies seeking a place to snuggle.

GRAPE HARVEST FESTIVAL, MENDOZA

Founded in the 1930s, Argentina's biggest wine fest is a great excuse – if excuse you need – to visit one of the world's top wine capitals. Clinging to the eastern Andes, Mendoza produces some seventy percent of the country's wines. During this week-long vine fest you can expect to slalom past tango dancing couples as you swallow Malbec, Chardonnay and other local varietals.

Whilst you're there: Mosey around exhibits at Museo Nacional del Vino, take a tasting session with sommeliers at Vines of Mendoza Tasting Room, and check out buskers and food vendors along the pedestrian-friendly Peatonal Sarmiento.

Stay where? Sip, sup and snuggle up at The Cavas Wine Lodge, a blissful spa property surrounded by wineries.

TET NGUYỄN DÁN, VIETNAM

1ST day of the Vietnamese calendar

Vietnam's traditional celebration of spring, Tet is a tradition-packed three day festival where food takes centre stage – or table. Amidst the spectacular fireworks and traditional games, you'll have the chance to try unique Tet dishes, including Bánh Tet sticky-rice and bean-stuffed dong leaf cylinders or dried fruit Mut candies.

Whilst you're there: Take a boat trip in Halong Bay, soak up the old-style charms of Hoi An, and visit street markets and museums in lively Saigon.

Stay where? The opulent, ritzy, Italian-designed Reverie Saigon is a brand new haven in the heart of the city.

SAPPORO SNOW FESTIVAL

5TH-11TH February

A shimmering, sparkling fiesta of snow and savours, Sapporo's seven-day snow festival is a great excuse to discover some of the Japanese city's food. Stroll through illuminated ice palaces, try snowboarding and get lost in ice mazes, then head for one of the stands serving noodle soup ramen, grilled oysters and other specialities, washed down with Sapporo.

Whilst you're there: Take a tour of the Sapporo Beer museum, discover hot culture in the Sapporo Art Park and get an overview of the city from the JR observation deck.

Stay where? For a heady central spot to lay your head, check into the new JR Tower hotel with its natural hot springs and 35th floor restaurant.



FEBRUARY'S HOTEL INSIDER RECOMMENDS...

Of the month's myriad hip hotel openings, these are my tips for the top:

- Starwood are due to open multiple properties this month, but the one on my radar is The Grand Mansion, Nanjing, a plush sleeperie, ideally located right across from the Presidential Palace.
- Dubai has plenty of glittering palaces, but I can't wait to stay at the Palazzo Versace. With penthouses, suites, art-filled public spaces, mosaics and uniforms designed by the House of Versace, this waterfront property promises to be truly spectacular.
- Less opulent but eminently hip, Generator Hostel's venue a stroll from the Gare du Nord will offer an excellent option for lovers on a shoestring seeking a budget-friendly base in France's gourmet capital.