

ATHENS

The 40 Watt Club is an indie rock touchstone in Athens.



HIT FAST-FORWARD FROM RECONSTRUCTION
TO GET TO ATHENS' QUIRKY POP SCENE

NOBODY'S WHISTLIN' DIXIE HERE

That twang in your favorite B-52's song was perfected in Athens, Ga., an unexpected alt-rock enclave in the heart of the South that nurtured music video-era talent like the B-52's, R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe and Matthew Sweet.

The city, pop, 100,266, wasn't always a New Wave hub, home to hipsters and coeds. The birth of its live music scene predates MTV, MP3s, college radio and everything that it thrives on today. Historians trace it to the Civil War, when Athens became a cultural bright spot in the defeated and deeply segregated South. But it would be more than a century until it cracked the modern music scene with the opening of the famed **40 Watt Club** on Halloween 1978.

The 40 Watt, a cradle of American indie rock, took the garage-grown sound out of the storied Athens house parties and onto the stage just as the genre was blowing up. Hall a lead-footed cabbie to 258 W. Washington Ave. to experience the 40 Watt, where the stage is aglow in a string of lights and patrons can receive a free *Rolling Stone* subscription just for showing up. Be prepared for a few surprises: The 40 Watt roster makes room for acts from 10,000 Maniacs and Counting Crows to The Killers, Kenny Chesney and country's it-band Sugarland, who headlines there in late February. Sustained by the college-town vibe, courtesy the University of Georgia, nightlife in Athens

leans toward the beer-drinking crowds that frequent the **Tasty World Gallery**—a bar that boasts live music, 16 beers on tap, pool, pinball and Ms. Pac Man machines on the second floor.

Not looking to revive your beer-bong days? No problem. Check in to the **Fountain Park Inn and Spa**, a boutique hotel set inside a restored historic property and minutes from major Athens attractions, including the Georgia Museum of Art, the Classic Center and Performing Arts Theatre, and the historic Morton Theater (even the 40 Watt is just a few blocks away). You don't have to go far for an evening of live music: **The Melting Point** restaurant and bar at the hotel hosts a weekly jazz series, blues and bluegrass acts. Check in to the Art Deco Suite, complete with zebra print bedding, 10-foot ceilings in the private bath and a wet bar to really roll like a rock star.

Before you leave this gem in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, do yourself a favor and have a meal at the **Five and Ten**. There's nothing particularly musical about this spot, unless you count the menu—a symphony of flavors from seasonal "snackies" and cheese plates to classic appetizers and dishes, all with a Southern flair. Consider the collard greens and red mule grits, housemade pickles and Low Country frogmore stew of Georgia shrimp. We rest our case.

» **40 WATT CLUB**
285 Washington Ave., (706)
549-7871, 40watt.com

» **TASTY WORLD GALLERY**
312 E. Broad St.,
(706) 543-0797,
tastyworld.net

» **FOUNTAIN PARK INN
AND SPA** 295 E. Dough-
erty, (706) 549-7020,
fountainparkinn.com

» **THE MELTING POINT**
295 E. Dougherty,
(706) 254-6909,
meltingpointathens.com

» **FIVE AND TEN**
1653 S. Lumpkin St., (706)
546-7300, fiveandten.com



ATHENS, GA. GET THERE FROM HERE

By Air: Economy/business class tickets will start at around \$1,200, round-trip. If you book on a discount travel Web site, booking directly with an airline could cost between \$600 and \$1,000, round-trip. Travel time with one stop is about four hours.

By Land: You'll need about 17 hours to make the 1,061-mile drive across four states. Estimated fuel costs is about \$75 each way. (If your car gets at least 25 miles to the gallon.) A Greyhound bus ticket will cost between \$65 and \$150 each way, and take one day for each leg of the trip.