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## Ann Arbor, Michigan is Much More Than Wolverine Territory

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When you think of Ann Arbor you think of the University of Michigan but there is so much more afoot on the streets of this university town. Whether you are a Wolverine alum, parent of an incoming student or just traveling in the vicinity of Ann Arbor, one must stop and explore this vibrant and eclectic Midwestern community.

Doing Life Different is the slogan on the Ann Arbor Convention and Visitors Bureau website and yes, they do, and it is so refreshing. To spend time here was a breath of fresh air, literally. I came to realize how proud the people of Ann Arbor are of their community, how much they value sustainability and the environment and their entrepreneurial spirit is contagious.

First stop on my tour was Blimpy Burger, which is a landmark burger pit stop. Don't let the size of the establishment fool you. Small in comparison to other burger haunts but offering a seat in Ann Arbor history, it serves up its famous burgers in a sundry of ways and sizes.

The only way to not feel guilty after indulging in a fully loaded burger, fried onion rings and veggies was to go shopping. FYI, a woman can justify anything, so off to Main Street I went. Exploring downtown with its outdoor dining, sidewalk cafes and unique shops was a lesson in self-control. So many shops, so little time. Wandering down one of the side streets, I found myself in front of an old bookstore called West Side Book Shop that dates back to 1888. Venturing in, I made my way through the labyrinth of books to a room where the sound of typewriter keys broke the heavy silence. So sorry, I whispered, as eyes looked my way. A smile crossed his face and for the next hour, as I sat on a small wooden stool, he shared his bookshop stories. How an eleven-year-old girl walked in requesting a typewriter because she wanted to write a TV pilot and how she had saved up her allowance all summer to buy one. We shared our thoughts on many things and as I sat there looking at the prints that lined the old cream-colored walls, the sound of the keys, as he resumed his typing, lulled me back to a different time. Thank you, I said, as my time was drawing to a close with my newfound friend. Anytime, he answered and waved as I crossed the threshold of his little room. The energy in a bookshop is so magical, I thought, as the sound of the tiny bell above the door announced my departure.

Next, my travels brought me to a fabulously fun store called Rock, Paper, Scissors. Cupcake Station, where you can choose from 21 varieties of cupcakes (Hint to Moms of University of Michigan students) and Michigan Theater, a grand old theatre, built in 1928 with its opulent gold staircase, was the perfect venue for their showing of The Great

Gatsby, rounded out my walkabout. Making my way back into the center of town, the music from one of the bistros lured me into lingering just a bit longer than my watch told me I should.

A short drive away in Chelsea is the Purple Rose Theater. Founded in 1991 by Chelsea native and actor, Jeff Daniels, the theater is his vision of a company that develops acting opportunities for Michigan theatre professionals. Sitting in this intimate theater I wondered what the acting would be like as 33 Variations began. I only have two words to describe what I witnessed for the next couple of hours: Broadway quality. The acting was superb and the story was very moving. This coupled with dinner at Conor O'Neill's Irish Pub made for a memorable evening.

Enter through the doors of an Irish pub. Literally. This pub was designed and built in Ireland. The menu is authentic Irish fare with the flour to make their bread being imported from Ireland. I ordered, what else? Corn beef and cabbage and tasted some of their Shepherd's Pie along with the best bread pudding I have ever had. Ever. As I savored the last bite, I noticed this Irish saying painted on the wall, You'll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind. Food for thought.

Returning to my accommodations at the Hilton Garden Inn, I stopped for a bit by the fire-pit to recapture my first day in Ann Arbor. Having never been to Michigan, I was of no opinion but after being here for just one day, I have a very strong opinion of a place that truly does do life differently. I am excited for what unexpected surprises tomorrow will bring.

Up and out to the breakfast bar at the hotel early the next morning. What a great selection and it couldn't be a better start to a day than eating breakfast by the fireplace and stopping off at the coffee cart on the way back to my room.

Motawi Tile was my first stop and what a learning experience. I had no idea how tiles were made and found the tour quite interesting. I got to see first hand people working at different stages of the tile making process. Each tile is handmade and the selection and design of Nawal Motawi's tiles are very impressive. Her tiles are made with local clays and glazes using her own recipes for colors.



There was a stop at the well-known Zingerman's Deli and Morgan and York, both specialty food stores that have everything imaginable for the discerning palate. They both ship so you are not limited to experiencing their fare when only in Ann Arbor.

Lunch was held at Mark's Carts. Now, this is a man with that entrepreneurial spirit that seems to reign supreme in Ann Arbor. He owns Downtown Home and Garden, which is not your run of the mill garden store. He then decided that at night, when the store closed down, he would turn his little parking area into a community gathering place and Bam! The Beer Garden, self-described as a living room complete with TV, drinks and fire-pit, was born. I guess he felt that he had more time on his hands, so he took a very small, cement covered area on the side of his store and turned it into Mark's Carts, eight food carts with different styles of food. Passing by all the carts, I could feel my stress level going up as I couldn't decide what to get, it all looked and smelled so good!

The afternoon activities included a visit to The Brinery, where I was treated to one of David Klivenberger's workshops on fermenting. His store is one of many of the area's local shops and specializes in brine-fermented sauerkraut, kimchi and pickles, which are hand mixed, no machines allowed. This is a guy that lives his passion and it shows in his eyes and in his enthusiasm as he instructed us city slickers.

Microbreweries, and there are multitudes, were next on the circuit. Arbor Brewing Company, Original Gravity Brewing, Grizzly Peak Brewing Company and Wolverine State Brewing are just a few that make up an important part of the food scene in Ann Arbor. Pacing yourself is an art that you need to acquire sooner than later. Don't ask me how I know this.

Evening was settling in as I made my way to a very, very interesting restaurant, The Raven. Dimly lit with a gothic feel, I was escorted to my table where I was promptly brought a sandwich. Not just any sandwich. This was a smoky peanut butter, moribund cheese and date jam on toasted walnut bread that was from a Buddhist bakery. I hesitantly took a bite, sat there for a second and took another bite with a fabulous glass of wine

that was their recommendation. As I ate in the glow of a nearby oversized, standing chandelier, I was silently wondering how I could politely ask for one to go.

The dimming of the night sky ushered me into the Performance Network Theater to see the Michigan premiere of Katori Hall's play The Mountaintop. This is a play about Martin Luther King's last night on this earth. Not being a history buff I had my reservations as to my enjoyment level, all of which were quickly dispelled when the lights went up. I spent the next hour and a half glued to my set and wishing I could see an encore performance.

Dawn broke with me on the treadmill at the hotel. Let me digress for a moment here. I am not a foodie. My days are spent eating bland chicken with salads. This is not due to dieting but because I've never really cared about food, so when I tell you that the restaurants in Ann Arbor captivated my palate, I'm dead serious, hence, the hour on the treadmill. In my repertoire of restaurants, there was The Grange, The Earle that offered French and Italian Country cooking, Vinology with its fine wine tastings, Mani Osteria Bar where you are treated to a sundry of sharing plates and Frita Batidos which offers Cuban food like you will never have in Miami. The crisped plantains were exceptional. Now, back to the day at hand.

Antiquing in Ypsilanti brought me face to face with the most mesmerizing stain glass I've ever seen at Materials Unlimited. Roaming Schmidt's Antiques and Salt City Antiques made for a full afternoon. Kayaking on the Huron River brought me to a place of peacefulness I hadn't felt in a long time. As I kayaked down the river, I couldn't help but think how lucky I was to stumble across such an amazing place as Ann Arbor. Who knew?

My last night in town was a flurry of nightlife. I started out at The Ark, which is an intimate 400 seat club that presents performers from a wide range of genres. My last stop found me at the red door of The Last Word where I felt like I was walking into a 1920's speakeasy. Dim lighting and dark wood paneling with bookcases lent itself to a cozy, intimate feel. Taking my seat at the bar and striking up a banter with the bartender, I was transported back to a place where everyone knows your name. As the music played soft enough not to drone out my thoughts, I said a silent thank you for such a memorable way to end my stay in a place where time took a vacation.

For more information visit [www.visitannarbor.org](http://www.visitannarbor.org) or for a full list of websites of places mentioned in this article, visit my website [www.debbiemartinez.com](http://www.debbiemartinez.com) and click on Travel then Ann Arbor.

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