

[New York Post](#)

This once bleak Tennessee town is going full steam ahead

By [Chris Bunting](#) April 3, 2019 | 6:54pm | [Updated](#)



A perfect Tenn.: Training day at UT-Chattanooga's Finley Stadium. Charles Mitchell/Icon Sportswire via Getty Images

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So you're plotting the greatest belated Spring Break getaway ever ... might I suggest sultry southern Appalachia?

Wait. Why are you running away? Just hear me out.

Fun facts: At 10 gigs per second, Chattanooga boasts the [fastest internet in the Western Hemisphere](#), if not the world — plus, it even has its own bespoke, crowd-sourced and government-recognized font, [Chatype](#).

No, come back! I'm not crazy, I swear.

More to the point, Chattanooga also has enjoyed one of the fastest and extreme turnarounds in America.



The Moxy is a draw for hip Chattanoogaans and visiting Chattanoogaobies alike. Moxy

Don't be fooled by its cutesy, cartoonish name. Chattanooga — with its whimsically Siamese-twinning Ts, and mischievous double Os — was a pretty violent place not so very long ago. As recently as 2015, it of “Choo Choo” big-band fame ranked No. 10 on a list of the country's most dangerous cities with populations under 200,000, according to [Law Street Media](#).

You'll hear it said by everyone in town from local comedians at the Comedy Catch & Giggles Grill to its myriad Uber drivers: If you needed to go shopping or dine out or whatever, you did so before the sun set. After 7ish p.m., you stayed home and locked the doors.

But thanks to billions of dollars being pumped into the downtown area and beyond over the past two decades, the city is in full G-word mode. Its particular form of gentrification includes the usual trappings: craft breweries, a city-wide bike share program, [a sculpture park](#) (it has the biggest in the southeast), more festivals than community calendars can keep up with, even with that fast-ol' 10 gig internet of theirs.

However, it has a decidedly unique 'Noogan take on it. The sheer beauty of the surrounding mountains and ridges. The proudly multi-bridged Tennessee River that runs through it. That perfumed smokey fog that hovers above on a drizzly day — with all that red brick everywhere, it's like the entire city turns into Mother Earth's chimney.

And you might even see Terrell Owens mobbing a Bentley convertible around town (he's an alum of UT-Chattanooga).

Plus, there's a burgeoning tech boom in the city and, smartly, [Delta](#) launched a new nonstop to Chattanooga from LaGuardia last year on which to capitalize (sample fare from \$229/RT). While it's anecdotally utilized mostly by business travelers, I sat next to a civvies-wearing tourist.



Scenic and mountain-snuggled Chattanooga is erasing its gritty past with an influx of downtown investments, tech companies and a new nonstop flight from LaGuardia.

Getty Images/iStockphoto



FreightWaves, which "delivers data analytics" among other fun cryptic things expanded into Chatt last year, creating 260 new jobs. Arrive Logistics will add 500. Local startup Branch Technology plans to build a 3D-printed house this year. There's also Bellhops Moving (above), Coyote Logistics and VaynerMedia in town.

Bellhops Moving

Tech-minded "Freight Alley" companies might very well turn Chattanooga into a quasi-Silicon Valley of the South, luring in startuppy upstarts from all over.

Which isn't to say the city has lost all of its edge. On my way to gorge on some late-night "buff-a-que" wings at the Honest Pint, I ran across a poor, bloodshot-eyed bloke, on hands and knees, fastidiously rifling through cracks in the sidewalk with the aid of a flashlight looking for a dropped something or other. Yes, could've been a wedding ring. Who knows? I'll let the reader decide.

But enough preamble. If you're going to roll your eyes like so many bowling balls at Southside Social, I can't stop you. But if you're smart, heed these five ways that make Chatt all that.

Thanks a brunch!

Brunch is the most important meal of the day in Chatt, right boy? That's a good boy. State of Confusion

When diplomaniacs and late-risers converge, brunch manifests. Tennesseans are hardly phobic nor immune to this beautiful phenomenon, especially those Chaco-clad fanboys and girls waiting in line for a good hour on a Sunday for a desiderated table at the Southside District's [State of Confusion](#).

Opened in August of last year, jugs of bloody Marys and screwdrivers, bacon and good vibes pervade the open-air space. And, bonus: It's right across from a mega-adorbs outdoor dog park.



A sleepy little town



The Edwin exudes elegance.

The Edwin Hotel



Someone spilled a hogshead of Spanish Fly on the lot of a former light bulb factory and, *voilà*, the Moxy Downtown was born.

Moxy

The two best hotels in town are also two of the freshest.

The September 2018-born upscale [Edwin Hotel](#) is a five-star, five-story wonder sitting right next to a [one-time bad news bridge](#) turned renovated and scenic pedestrian walkway. Its chief engineer, Edwin Thacher, who built it in 1891, is the hotel's namesake. Elegant and rife with local artwork (there are over 100 pieces spread throughout), the Edwin has an exceptional restaurant, Whitebird, and a buzzy rooftop bar (literally the city's first) which serves up, among many other spirits, Lass & Lions vodka by the Moscow mule load (from \$202).

In the Downtown District, [the Moxy](#) (yes, the neon-pink brand you already know and love), which opened here in November of last year, oozes sexiness like the [Overlook Hotel oozes blood](#) — just call the elevator and see who pours out. Even the check-in ritual is sexy — it's done at the lobby bar. There are no closets in its 108 minimalist rooms (but there are “sex swings” ... it's just a headboard, people), so the rates are more modest, starting from \$139/night. And, as such, the clientele skews younger. A local humor blog lovingly trolled that the Moxy [wasn't meeting its sex quota](#) as promised. By the looks of things, it's actually doing just fine.



String theory

The Songbirds Guitar Museum has \$250 million in rockin' instruments. Songbirds/Damien Rogers

Once upon a time an aloof, reclusive billionaire who shall not be named introduced himself to his professional drummer neighbor after hearing him hittin' the skins.

One thing lead to another and they decided to amass and curate the world's largest collection of rare and classic electric guitars (even, say, finding some of them hidden away in barns, and the like). Yadda,

yadda, now their quarter-billion-dollar collection is the [Songbirds Guitar Museum](#), nesting-dolled inside the larger Songbirds live music space at the massive [Chattanooga Choo Choo hotel/event/restaurant campus](#).

Here, you'll gaze upon the rarest Stratocasters, Telecasters, Gibsons and Flying V's from the '30s through the '70s, all chronologically in order.

Oh, and it has more than 1,700 permanent and rotating fretted instruments to its name.

In the very, very, very back of the museum is where they have The Vault — home to only the rarest of the rare guitars. The Vault also sports a security system where if you try and steal any of them (they're behind locked glass), the vault door will lock and all the air will be sucked out of the room and you'll die. So don't.

Do the rye thing



A flight at Chattanooga Whiskey Experimental Distillery is a barrel of laughs. Rachael Crowe/Chattanooga Whiskey Experimental Distillery

Be you whiskey plebe or god, you're gonna get tiddly at [Chattanooga Whiskey Experimental Distillery](#). You're gonna want to learn why "high malt" is the ish. You're gonna want to buy one of their empty

barrels they sell. You're gonna want to pass out in the temperature-controlled cellar which fluxuates 50 degrees in temperature each and every day.

You're just gonna wanna.

Its main riverfront HQ pays the bills — but this place basically lets really smart people fly their blue-corn malted freak flags as they attempt to create the next big thing in boozery.

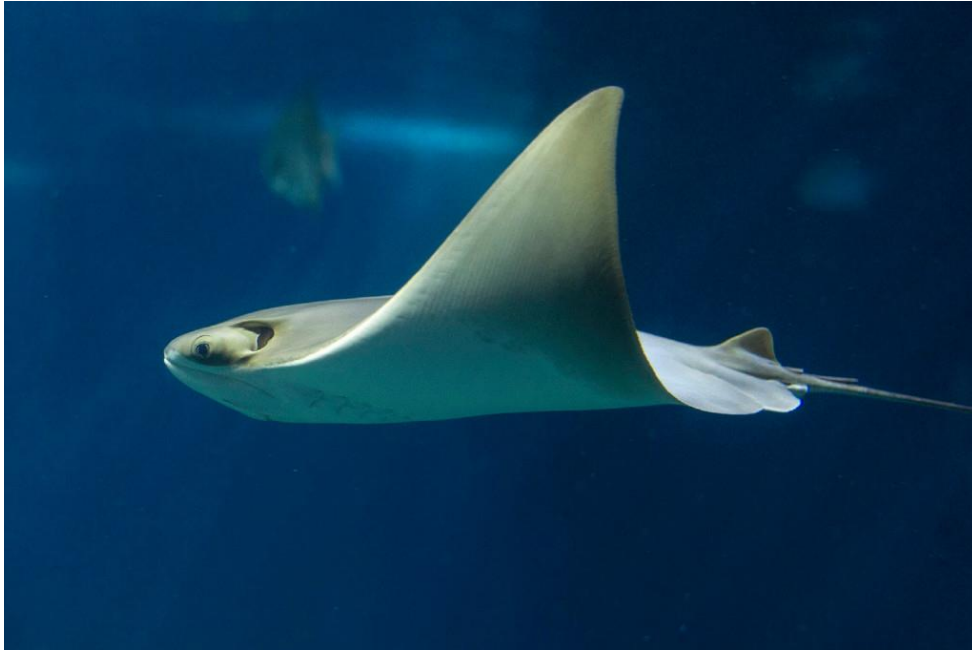
If you're on the mend from all that mash, head over to the [Yellow Deli](#), an oddball cafe with handmade art and furniture which my new Chattanooga friend describes as “a cult-run eatery where ‘Lord of the Rings’ meets Germany meets a mom-and-pop deli meets Jesus.” In other words, to visit it is the only way to understand it.

Mind the classics



If you like your head in the clouds, Lookout Mountain is 2,388 feet up in the air.

Chattanooga Convention & Visitors Bureau



Or, mutatis mutandis, if you prefer life below sea level, there's always the Tennessee Aquarium.

Casey Phillips/Tennessee Aquarium

Former junk yards are now bruncheries, former light bulb factories are now boutique hotels. Yes, a lot of Old Chattanooga is gone, making way for Chattanooga 2.0 (a k a, Snap Chatt?).

But not all.

The nearly 30-year-young [Tennessee Aquarium](#), mostly popular with field-tripping kids (and the occasional mind-tripping adult) was renovated in 2005, much to the delight of critter and visitor alike.

And of course, there's [Lookout Mountain](#), home to the world's steepest passenger railway (which lollygags its way up a mile-long track). This is where the "[Battle Above the Clouds](#)" was hosted, one of the Civil War's major turning points. Cannonballs were literally falling out of their respective cannons and rolling down the high-grade slope of the ridge.

I'm not saying I snuck a souvenir Lookout keychain pocket knife through airport security on the way home — but I'm not saying I didn't.

The author was a guest of The Edwin Hotel.