

July 5, 2009

36 Hours in Madison, Wis.

By [KATIE ZEZIMA](#)

[MADISON](#), a liberal college town that doubles as the capital of a politically complicated state, pulls its disparate elements together into a spirited reality all its own, a funky amalgam of hard-partying students, socially conscious activists, sports fans, outdoor warriors, politicians from both sides of the aisle, artists, foodies and more. Long pigeonholed as a hotbed for frat parties and activism, Madison has a vibrant but much more tempered side brimming with arts, culture and food. In a city with so many types to keep happy, it's impossible not to find something that suits your fancy.

Friday

3 p.m.

1) GLIMPSE OF GRIDIRON

[University of Wisconsin](#) football inspires obsession in Madison, and even in much of the off-season, you can share a little of the excitement with a tour of Camp Randall Stadium (1440 Monroe Street; 608-263-5645; www.uwbadgers.com/facilities). Walk on the field, glance inside the locker rooms, check out a luxury box and pose with a statue of the former coach Barry Alvarez. The free tours are normally for groups of 10 to 75 people, but individuals can latch on with a scheduled group; check for availability at least two weeks in advance. There are no tours from mid-November through late April, and dates are limited during the football season.

5 p.m.

2) BEER OR BOTANY?

Drink in views of Lake Mendota, one of the lakes that give Madison its miles of waterfront, along with your pint at the Memorial Union Terrace at the University of Wisconsin (800 Langdon Street; 608-265-3000; www.union.wisc.edu/terrace), an outdoor four-tiered space with candy-colored chairs, a lakefront path and live [music](#) in the warm months. Or for quieter outdoor relaxation, try the Allen Centennial Gardens (620 Babcock Drive; www.horticulture.wisc.edu/allencentennialgardens), 2.5 acres surrounding a Victorian building. Stroll Allen's 29 gardens from a path lined with day lilies by the dozens to a French garden where the shrubs are trimmed in the shape of fleurs-de-lis.

7 p.m.

3) PRAIRIE PROVISIONS

Madison's growing culinary scene pulls diners in two very different directions: far from the prairie with

dozens of ethnic restaurants and right back to it with an emphasis on the bounty of [Wisconsin's](#) farms. Harvest (21 North Pinckney Street; 608-255-6075; www.harvest-restaurant.com) offers sophisticated seasonal dishes and an extensive wine list in a soothing setting of soft lighting and buttery yellow walls. Try the porcini-salt-rub angus tenderloin with celeriac purée (\$36) or the house-made tagliatelle (\$18).

9:30 p.m.

4) WORLDLY REFRESHMENT

Restaurant Magnus (120 East Wilson Street, 608-258-8787; www.restaurantmagnus.com) has a cocktail menu that spans the world, from the Viking, a tincture of port, vodka and Giffard Blackberry Liquor (\$7.95) that pays homage to the Caipirinha (\$6.50), the national cocktail of Brazil. The cuisine is Scandinavian, and live music, mostly jazz, plays weeknights at 7 or 8, weekends at 9:30.

Saturday

9 a.m.

5) [BIKING](#) AMONG BADGERS

Centered on an isthmus between Lakes Mendota and Monona and surrounded by conservation land, Madison is a haven for outdoors types and one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the country. For some easy exploring, join the Madison biking crowd by picking up a rental at Machinery Row Bicycles (601 Williamson Street; 608-442-5974; www.machineryrowbicycles.com; \$20 a day), which sits on the bike path around Monona. Ride around the lake or head over to the 1,260-acre University of Wisconsin Arboretum (1207 Seminole Highway; 608-263-7888; www.uwarboretum.org).

1 p.m.

6) THE ARCHITECT

These days Wisconsin wants you to know it was the first and favorite home of [Frank Lloyd Wright](#), though in his lifetime the state wasn't so sure. Wright's vision for a sprawling civic center was rejected in 1938 by one planning-commission vote and though it later won approval, remained unbuilt. In the 1990s, Wright's design was resurrected, and Madison built Monona Terrace (1 John Nolen Drive; 608-261-4000; www.mononaterrace.com), a community and convention center, with a terrace that curves along the lake. Its open design and tinted windows reflect the water below, and its roof garden and cafe offer the city's best water view. One-hour tours begin daily at 1 p.m. and are \$3; \$2 for students. One group in Madison that did appreciate Wright in his lifetime was the congregation that hired him to design the Unitarian Meeting House (900 University Bay Drive; 608-233-9774; www.fusmadison.org), completed in 1951. It was built with native limestone, copper and glass. Tours, with a suggested donation of \$5 to \$10, are on weekdays and Sundays, but gawking from the outside is free anytime. It's unmistakable, with a dramatic triangle roof. The building itself is a triangle, symbolizing hands clasped in prayer.

3 p.m.

7) MAKE MINE CHEESY

The Old Fashioned (23 North Pinckney Street; 608-310-4545; www.theoldfashioned.com), serves the food

that “makes Wisconsin so Wisconsin,” so it’s no surprise that an entire section of the menu is devoted to cheese. The bar and restaurant is reminiscent of a late-19th-century saloon filled with Grandma’s antiques, but with a hipster flare. The cheese curds (\$6.95) are a must for sampling, as is the spicy bloody mary (\$7), which is served with at least three seasonal garnishes — one drink was festooned with a brussels sprout, a radish and an onion.

8 p.m.

8) ANDES EXPRESS

The Inka Heritage (602 South Park Street; 608-310-4282; www.inkaheritagerestaurant.com) is one of the brighter spots on the city’s culinary scene, and it’s not just because of its fluorescent walls and lively [art](#). Diners are transported to [Peru](#) via dishes like fire-roasted beef heart (\$8) and fried yuca (\$6). The sweet milk jam (\$6), made with cinnamon and port wine, is a sinfully sweet way to end the meal.

10:30 p.m.

9) SWING TIME

Madison is a late-night kind of town, especially for fans of live music. Check out a show at the High Noon Saloon (701A East Washington Avenue; 608-268-1122; www.high-noon.com), a large Western-tinged club with a balcony for catbird views of bands. The club opened in 2004 and is operated by the former owner of Madison’s well-known O’Cayz Corral, which was destroyed by fire in 2001.

Sunday

10 a.m.

10) DOUBLE COMFORT SCORE

Any restaurant that spells out its name in large Scrabble tiles near the front door is bound to have a funky-nerdy-vibe. Lazy Jane’s Cafe and Bakery (1358 Williamson Street; 608-257-5263) becomes crowded and loud but exudes the coziness that comes with a lazy Sunday poring over the newspaper or catching up with an old friend. The food is similarly comfortable, with scones, grilled cheese sandwiches and a seitan scramble, filled with peppers (\$6.50), onions and mushrooms and good enough to impress an avowed meat eater.

11:30 a.m.

11) PADDLE OR SHOP

Lakes Monona and Mendota are usually the first choices for fun on the water in Madison, but Lake Wingra, tucked south of the university arboretum and the Henry Vilas Zoo, is also an option. Rent a [canoe](#), [kayak](#), rowboat or paddle boat at Wingra Boats (824 Knickerbocker Street; 608-233-5332; www.wingraboats.com; starting at \$12 an hour). Or for something landbound and livelier, stay downtown and stroll State Street, which links the Capitol with the university. It’s a pedestrian thoroughfare brimming with boutiques, restaurants, museums and bars. Many shops are open by noon on Sundays. Check out Anthology (No. 218; 608-204-2644; www.anthology.typepad.com), a whimsical boutique filled with colorful crafts; the Soap Opera (No. 319; 800-251-7627; www.thesoapopera.com), a fragrant repository of soaps, lotions and potions; and B-Side Records (No. 436; 608-255-1977; www.b-sidemadison.com), a trove of vintage vinyl and CDs, and a showcase for many of the city’s bands.

THE BASICS

Delta and Continental offer nonstop service to Dane County Airport from La Guardia and Newark. Most major airports around the country link to Madison with connections. A recent search found round-trip flights from La Guardia on Delta, connecting in [Detroit](#) on the return, for \$279. Nonstop flights were \$363 to \$391.

The Doubletree Madison (525 West Johnson Street; 608-251-5511; www.doubletreemadison.com) is between the university and Capitol Square and offers airport shuttle service. Rooms for mid-July were available starting at about \$145 a night.

The Dahlmann Campus Inn (601 Langdon Street; 608-257-4391; www.thecampusinn.com) offers a touch of boutique refinement in the heart of the campus, with rich wood furniture and floral tapestries. Rooms are \$150 to \$180.

The Arbor House (3402 Monroe Street; 608-238-2981; www.arbor-house.com) features an environmental resource center, has [energy-efficient lighting](#), is cleaned with nontoxic and biodegradable products and boasts a lush native [garden](#). Rooms are \$110 to \$175 on weeknights, \$150 to \$230 on weekends and holidays.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: July 5, 2009

The 36 Hours column on Page 8 this weekend, about Madison, Wis., includes outdated information about Café Montmartre. After the section went to press, the cafe closed.

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