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Twin Cities urban, homespun

They complement each other, together offer much to see, do
[Andrea Billups \(Contact\)](#)
Friday, August 29, 2008

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Welcome to **Minneapolis-St. Paul**. Yes, it's where Mary Tyler Moore tossed her beret into the air on her famous sitcom (and there's a statue in front of Macy's to prove it). Sure, it's a place where pro wrestler and former Gov. Jesse "The Body" Ventura and folksy author and "Prairie Home Companion" broadcaster Garrison Keillor can coexist peacefully. Also, in case you're doing the celebrity math, eminent native Minnesotans include novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald, baseball great Roger Maris and musical legends Judy Garland and Bob Dylan.

Beyond the famous names, however, a closer look at the Twin Cities reveals an urban area that works, offering convention-goers a glimpse into an oft-overlooked but thriving Midwest scene that, locals say, is both cityfied and homespun - a good place to hang out, see things and also raise a family. Picture a major metropolitan area with 929 clear lakes close by, thriving urban vistas where you can bike or jog safely, and a livable inner city that features outdoor cafes and a host of art museums, second only to New York City in the number of theater seats per capita.

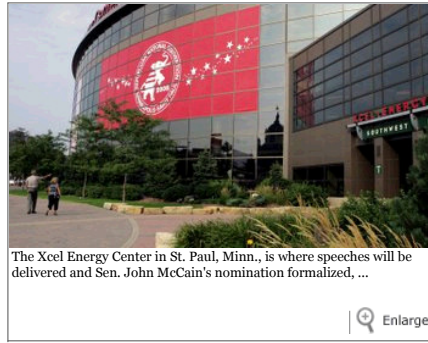
Did we mention the twins have the nation's largest shopping conglomeration, the **Mall of America**, a 520-store beacon to the retail-inclined? It would take you 86 hours to get through every outlet if you spent just 10 minutes shopping in each, the mall people like to say. If you're game for trying, the mall offers 50 restaurants and an indoor amusement park to keep you fortified and entertained during the quest.

Getting around is easy and environmentally friendly. Affordable light rail delivers riders directly to the Mall of America and just about any other stop within the metro area as visitors venture out away from the political convention. St. Paul and Minneapolis, two cities that at times display a testy fraternal rivalry, have come together, spruced up and put their best foot forward as the eyes of the nation turn upon them for next week's Republican National Convention.

The last time Republican faithful gathered here was 1892, so the locals are ready for a party. Plenty has changed in the intervening 116 years, but the cities' Midwestern spirit remains intact.

"We think that genuine friendliness will make an impression on the 45,000 folks who are coming to town," says Melvin Tennant, chief executive officer of Meet Minneapolis, who encourages conventioners to get out and discover the city. What's hot here? Minneapolis-St. Paul enthusiasts don't need Paris Hilton to tell you. The experts offer their ideas of a few things that are must-sees around the area:

- Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis. It is an expansive pedestrian thoroughfare and boasts a mix of boutique shops indigenous to the region as well as high-end anchor stores, including Neiman Marcus. Great open-air cafes are available for diners, and the mall tends to draw a local crowd. "People really enjoy getting out of the skyways in the spring and summer," Mr. Tennant says. "It's very walkable, with great restaurants and boutique hotels."
 - Seeking a scene to be seen? All bets are on the 27th-floor Prohibition bar atop the newly opened WMinneapolis Foshay Hotel, which offers broad vistas and a chic atmosphere for those seeking to take the edge off of party politics, says Brian Anderson, veteran editor of Minneapolis-St. Paul magazine. He also recommends the boutique Chambers Hotel, filled with art galleries, trendy bars and a world-class Jean-Georges Vongerichten restaurant, the Chambers Kitchen, which no doubt will be one tough reservation for convention foodies. If you're looking for political power, slide up to the bar inside the historic Saint Paul Hotel, just off Rice Park and a stone's throw from the convention headquarters at the Xcel Energy Center. "It's the grande dame of St. Paul hotels," Mr. Anderson offers. "It will probably be the hot spot for politicians."
 - CivicFest at the Minneapolis Convention Center. History rocks, right? So, while relaxing away from tedious state-delegation chores, why not stop in to see a replica of Air Force One and the Oval Office, on display at this massive exhibit dedicated to informing civic knowledge? CivicFest features displays and booths dedicated to **Minnesota** history as well, giving visitors a chance to dig in and learn something about the host state.
 - Minneapolis and St. Paul are split by the grand Mississippi River. Despite its length, there is only one area along its epic course that features a waterfall. Visit the city's Stone Arch Bridge, where you'll have the best view of the scenic St. Anthony Falls. The walk across will be good for the health - this is a green and fit region - and the roaring water will do wonders for the soul, say locals, who also encourage a stop in the nearby Guthrie Theater and Mill City Museum.
 - For those arriving early, there's still time to check out the Minnesota State Fair at the fairgrounds in St. Paul. It's the second-largest state fair in the nation, with an unforgettable theme, "Something on a Stick." With corn dogs, cotton candy and livestock galore, this is a family-friendly introduction to the area, but it ends Monday, so it's mandatory to schedule an early trip.
 - The Aquarium at the Mall of America. Quick, now: Where is the nation's largest shark-breeding program? Not Florida or California, but inside the giant Minnesota mall. The facility boasts the country's largest underground aquarium, featuring 1.2 million gallons of water and a transparent tunnel where you can watch the fish, stingrays and beastie white sharks swimming all around.
- "We have more sharks in captivity in Minnesota than any other place in the country," boasts MOA public relations director Dan Jasper. Certified scuba divers can climb into the tank and get up-close and personal with the giant predators.



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