

.10 Great Places You Won't Forget in the Twin Cities

Beyond the RNC, don't miss the landmarks and natural beauty of St. Paul-Minneapolis.

Aug. 31, 2008

Politics won't be the only game in town when Minneapolis-St. Paul hosts the Republican National Convention next week. Local resident Rudy Maxa, host and executive producer of the public television travel series Rudy Maxa's World (rudymaxasworld.com) has a whole list of must-dos in the Twin Cities. He shares his favorites with Kathy Baruffi for USA TODAY.



Minneapolis' skyline and bridge over Mississippi
(Gary Randall/Getty Images)

Chambers Hotel

"Rooms were booked up months ago, but visit this swanky Minneapolis boutique hotel for the modern art," Maxa says. "Chambers' owner, Ralph Burnet, displays millions of dollars worth of his contemporary art collection 'everywhere there's a wall,' including in the downstairs restaurant that's run by chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten." Tour the new, politically charged Important If True (Hootenanny in E) gallery exhibit, then soak in the sights along with a cocktail on the rooftop bar. 612-767-6900; chambersminneapolis.com

Mill City Museum

In the late 19th century, flour mills built Minneapolis -- 2 million pounds of flour were made daily at just one mill during the industry's salad days between 1880 and 1930. Some of those original mills still line the Mississippi River at St. Anthony Falls. "While most are pricey condos, the Mill City Museum offers a fascinating look at an industry that grew a city," Maxa says. "The region is a leader in the manufacture of prosthetic

devices, an industry born long ago from the number of industrial accidents in the mills." 612-341-7555; www.millcitymuseum.org

Restaurant Alma

The region serves up a cornucopia of fresh produce and game in the summer that local chefs are increasingly incorporating into their menus, making Minneapolis-St. Paul a great gourmet destination. "This is the top of the top, perhaps one of the best restaurants in the entire Midwest, including Chicago," Maxa says of Restaurant Alma in Minneapolis. Among Maxa's other favorites are Meritage and Osteria I Nonni, both in the St. Paul area. 612-379-4909; restaurantalma.com

James J. Hill House

"Summit Avenue is St. Paul's grand, residential promenade, leafy and lined with homes of notable architectural quality," Maxa says. "The James J. Hill House, a five-story sandstone mansion built by the self-made millionaire who founded the Great Northern Railway, is now a museum." Get a glimpse of what life was like in the Gilded Age. The Museum has walking tours of Summit Avenue. 651-297-2555; www.mnhs.org/hillhouse

Riverboat cruise from Harriet Island

A block or two from the site of the Republican convention, the Wabasha Street Bridge crosses the Mississippi and leads to Harriet Island, where you can catch a Padelford Packet Boat Co. riverboat cruise. "You'll view river life -- watch for bald eagles -- and buildings built by lumber and railroad barons who developed the region," Maxa says. "Some of the caves in the rocky bluffs along the river were speakeasies frequented by Al Capone and other mobsters." 800-543-3908; riverrides.com

Guthrie Theater

"This is the best place to take in a view of the Mississippi River," Maxa says. "A dramatic, cantilevered 'endless bridge' thrusts a half-block out of the theater building, and the public is invited to enter the Guthrie to walk out for the spectacular river view." Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt named their daughter Shiloh Nouvel because Dad so admired Jean Nouvel, the architect of the Guthrie. With or without a ticket to the many live performances offered here (Little House on the Prairie is now playing), the building is a destination unto itself. 612-377-2224; guthrietheater.org

The Mississippi National River and Recreational Area

"Even some local residents don't know it, but a 72-mile stretch of the Mississippi River that includes St. Paul and Minneapolis is a national park," Maxa says. During the convention, the National Park Service will provide "Bike With a Ranger" tours along the Mississippi River in an area boasting miles of great bike-riding trails. 651-293-0200; nps.gov/miss

Nye's Polonaise Room

Long before Esquire magazine named it the best bar in the USA two years ago, Nye's in northeast Minneapolis was party central for every age group. On weekends, the "World's Most Dangerous Polka Band" makes everyone a polka expert — "I've been asked to dance by a daughter and her mother," Maxa says. "On the same night." 612-379-2021; nyespolonaise.com

Lake Calhoun

The Twin Cities' best-known urban lakes are Calhoun, Harriet and Lake of the Isles, the so-called Chain of Lakes near Uptown in Minneapolis. "Rent a canoe, kayak, paddle boat or gondola," Maxa says. "Paved paths that circle the Chain of Lakes provide plenty of opportunities for exercise with a view. If the gently rolling hills, lush landscaping and neighboring large homes look familiar, you've watched too many Mary Tyler MooreShow episodes -- exteriors for the series were filmed there." 612-230-6400; minneapolisparcs.org

Historic Fort Snelling

At the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, this fort started as an isolated military post in 1820. "Indians and fur traders did business there," Maxa says. "Union soldiers trained there during the Civil War, and in World War II, Japanese-Americans were secretly moved from the West Coast to serve as translators, monitoring Japanese shortwave broadcasts and hastening the end of the war." 612-726-1171; www.mnhs.org/places/sites/hfs