

IF U. GO: Minnesota

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In a nutshell: Minneapolis is hands-down the best city in the Big Ten -- save our lovely burg, of course. It is eclectic and surprisingly cosmopolitan for a town so far removed from a coast. Prince rocks here. All four major pro sports play here. The Mall of America is right down the street. The University of Minnesota kind of gets lost, but after football losses to Bowling Green and Florida Atlantic, perhaps it's best that way.

DRIVERS' GUIDE

Getting there

You had better be reading this from the passenger's seat. Minneapolis is 760 miles, or about 12 hours, from Columbus. The 8 p.m. kickoff gives you a little extra time.

On the way

Madison, Wis.: No heckling the Badgers, please. Take a stroll through one of the nation's most eco-friendly cities. *Prevention* magazine rated Madison America's most walkable city.

Lake Minnetonka: The lake, just west of Minneapolis, first gained pop-culture clout in Prince's movie *Purple Rain*. It also made news several years ago for the boat scandal involving the Minnesota Vikings. It's known by fishermen for its ample supply of yellow perch, sunfish, largemouth bass, northern pike and walleye.

FLIERS' GUIDE

Last-minute planners can fly round trip on Northwest Airlines for about \$500.

FRIDAY NIGHT

Grub

J.D. Hoyt's (301 Washington Ave. N.) offers pork chops -- a pair weigh in at 26 ounces -- that could make Paul Bunyan loosen his belt. *Goodfellows* (40 S. Seventh St.) is best known for its pheasant and veal chops. *Mickey's Dining Car* (36 W. Seventh St.) features classic Americana food -- burgers, malts and apple pie -- served by waitresses who still call you "honey." *Oceanaire Seafood* (1300 Nicollet Ave.) is a 1930s supper-club-style establishment with red-leather booths and cherry-wood-paneled walls.

Suds

Nye's Polonaise Room (112 E. Hennepin Ave.) allows you to be livin' la vida polka. That's right, it's a polka lounge. *Esquire* voted it one of the nation's best bars. *Cafe Havana* (119 Washington Ave.) offers an atmosphere of pre-Castro Havana. *Famous Dave's BBQ & Blues* (3001 Hennepin Ave.) is a Chicago-style blues club that also attracts some jazz acts.

Music

First Avenue (701 First Ave.) is where Prince got his start. Parts of *Purple Rain*, which Morris Day and the Time dominated, were filmed here. Apparently '80s fashion is back, but that only makes for a more friendly and playful crowd.

SATURDAY

Breakfast/brunch

Al's Breakfast (413 14th Ave.) Located near campus, the greasy spoon is a favorite of students and alumni. You can gently remind Gophers: "You'll always have hockey." *French Meadow Bakery and Cafe* (2610 Lyndale Ave. S.) serves up breakfast burritos, quiche and fruit-and-nut pancakes.

No tickets?

Stub & Herb's (227 Oak St. S.E.) is a bar with Big Ten-themed foods on the menu. Favorites include Purdue Boilermaker barbecue burger and Clem Haskins grilled turkey.

SIGHTSEEING

Mill City Museum (704 S. Second Street), built within the ruins of the Washburn A Mill, is a best bet. An attraction for all ages, Mill City Museum chronicles the flour-milling industry that dominated world flour production for roughly a half-century and fueled the growth of Minneapolis. It also features a video of "Minneapolis in 19 minutes."

Nicollet Mall (920 Second Ave. S.) is located at the cultural and commercial heart of the city. More important, it's where the first scene of the *Mary Tyler Moore* show was filmed. There is a statue of the actress outside.

Midtown Global Market (Lake Street and Chicago Avenue) is an internationally themed public market, with more than 50 vendors offering the finest selection of produce, meats, delicacies, prepared foods, grocery items, unusual gifts and services.

Buckeyes win

Bulldog (401 Hennepin Ave. E.), also highly rated in *Esquire*, is a great place to get a Vienna hot dog, a burger and beer. The tater tots are world-class.

Buckeyes lose

Whitey's (400 Hennepin Ave. E.) is another burger-and-beer joint that is decidedly lower key. Buckeye fans would need it if they lost to the Gophers.

LOCAL FLAVOR

Minneapolis' famed skyway system connecting 52 blocks (almost five miles) of downtown makes it possible to live, eat, work and shop without going outside. ... The Metrodome is the only climate-controlled facility to play host to a Super Bowl, World Series and NCAA Final Four basketball championship.

UNIVERSITY TRADITIONS

Cheerleading was born here in 1898 after student Johnny Campbell offered to lead cheers as a way to end a three-game losing streak. The Gophers beat Northwestern 17-6 that day. ... Minnesota was tabbed the "Gopher State" in 1857 after a cartoon, showing nine gophers with the heads of local politicians pulling a locomotive, was published. The University later adopted the nickname. ... The *Minnesota Rouser*, one of two official school songs at the University of Minnesota, was written in 1909.