

Tampa/St. Petersburg weekend trips for hipsters

Bob Jenkins, Special for USA TODAY 3:20 p.m. EDT March 10, 2014

Eating: For those who want to be a couple steps, or bar stools, ahead of the crowd, stroll this way:

Byblos Café – Founded by two brothers born in Lebanon, Byblos offers old-country traditions – plus hookahs and belly dancers. Yowsuh! The menu includes *mezah* – starters – such as *baba ghanoush* (a dip made from roasted eggplant, ground sesame seeds, lemon juice, garlic and olive oil) and entrees ranging from kabobs to grape leaves stuffed with spiced rice and tomato. On the weekends, diners may join the bellydancers.

bybloscafe.com

Ella's Americana Folk Art Café – Works of several playful American artists decorate the walls, and the menu teeters between healthful and decadent. How else to describe the bacon-wrapped meatloaf floating in root beer gravy and onion strings? Soul Food Sundays boast fried catfish, biscuits and chorizo gravy topped with cheddar cheese, and a zillion regional sides.

ellasfolkartcafe.com

Banyan Café – Crammed into a narrow room, the Banyan offers permutations of the locally roasted coffee or iced teas, Banyan-baked scones, burritos and egg-and-cheese breakfast sandwiches. The lunch menu varies from staples (turkey sandwich, BLT) to a spicy chipotle egg salad. Breakfast and lunch only.

banyancoffee.com

Activities:

St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club – Shuffleboard courts are no longer the realm of the elderly and staid. Way younger, energetic folks "re-discovered" these courts that first opened in 1924. Weather permitting, there is free shuffling Friday nights.

stpeteshuffle.com

Studio@620–This eclectic venue displays works by local artists in many media, plus occasional films, live performances and open-mic nights. It's vibe makes it hip to hold wedding receptions here, as well.

thestudioat620.org

Canopy Rooftop Lounge – 2013's hottest newcomer, this outdoor cocktail-and-nosh spot is a few floors above St. Petersburg's Beach Drive *paseo* and waterfront park. The Canopy features comfy couches, cabanas, upscale pub grub and fab views.

thebirchwood.com

Nightlife: If you seek adult beverages and pop music, take notes:

Old Northeast Tavern — Snuggled in a residential neighborhood, this casual place is a twofer: It has a rotating selection of more than two dozen drafts, microbrews and imports, wall-mounted TVs and darts in one room, and a small dining room through a doorway. Starters include fresh fruit quesadillas and beer and cheese soup served in a toasted pumpkinnickel bowl. Among the dozen-plus sandwiches is sliced turkey, slivered strawberries and brie on a croissant.

oldnetavern.com

The Mandarin Hide – For those with disposable income, this busy room serves the cocktails seen in those '30s films where the extras are in tuxes or clinging gowns. That's hardly the dress code *here* – there's a buffalo head on the wall. Across the room-length bar, the talk is of mixology and flavoring elements such as veggies, herbs, even a jalapeno. Dozens of beers and wines, and the whiskey list is serious. Live music Wednesdays and Sundays.

mandarinhide.com

Skipper's Smokehouse & Oyster Bar — Skipper's began life in north Tampa as a small fish market. It's grown, with additions reminiscent of abandoned this or reclaimed that. Near-nightly performances outdoors include rock, reggae, soul, bluegrass, folk, blues, Celtic and jazz. The food is Southern: black bean alligator chili, catfish, and shrimp.

skipperssmokehouse.com

Shopping: Want cool souvenirs? Take your plastic to these places:

Daddy Kool Records – For sounds new or vintage, this is *the* store. It stocks most genres on vinyl, CD or digital download. It also handles tickets to concerts at nearly 20 venues.

daddykool.com

Keys Country – Who can have enough dress-up cowgirl kicks? This south Tampa merchant carries clothing from nearly 40 designers, but a major draw are the half-dozen brands of boots: embroidered, tooled, in colors, priced from about \$240 to more than \$700 -- *howDEE!*

keyscountry.com

Under the Radar: Up and coming places to watch include:

Alesia – This Vietnamese-French bistro offers regional items such as *ratatouille nicoise* (stew of roasted vegetables) and *bun* (rice vermicelli noodles, herbs, crushed peanuts, and shrimp and/or pork).

alesiarestaurant.com

Brocante Vintage Market – Open the first weekend of each month, this is the Holy Grail for those seeking that (nearly) one-of-a-kind decorative item, conversation piece or simply kitsch.

brocantomarket.com