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## **Cheap eats, grown folks karaoke, and more secrets of Fort Greene**



*Fort Greene Park is 30 acres on a hill that, at the top, has dramatic views of the city. cisc1970/Flickr*

Fort Greene is currently getting its close-up: The Brooklyn neighborhood is the setting for Spike Lee's Netflix show, *She's Gotta Have It*, a reboot of his 1986 film. The director famously grew up in the area, and one of the series' themes is how much things have changed.

There's no question that Fort Greene is heavily gentrified. The New York Times was documenting the neighborhood's "revitalization" as early as 1985. It's not difficult to figure out what draws moneyed newcomers: There are historic brownstone-lined blocks, a 30-acre park that's about to get \$5 million in upgrades, abundant transit options (Atlantic Terminal is close by, and you'll find the C at Lafayette Avenue, the G at Fulton Street, the 2,3, 4 and 5 at Nevins Street, and the B and Q at Dekalb Avenue), arts venues, and an array of bars and restaurants.

The past is still present in Fort Greene in many ways. In the heart of Fort Greene Park is a monument commemorating the thousands of men and women who died aboard British prison ships during the American revolution. A park bench is dedicated to the author Richard Wright, who penned his novel *Native Son* in the park many decades later. Not far from the park is the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts, which celebrates the contributions of people of African descent, and has hosted exhibitions highlighting Brooklyn artists.

By way of further intro, here are some neighborhood basics:

**Neighborhood boundaries:** Flushing Avenue to Atlantic Avenue; Vanderbilt Avenue to Flatbush Avenue

**Median rent:** \$2,700

**Median sales price:** \$1.8 million

**Housing stock:** You'll find historic low-rise townhouses, more co-ops than condos, and plenty of new construction rentals, says Martin Eiden, a broker with CORE.

"There's a glut of rentals now, so you can definitely find a two-bedroom with all the amenities you could imagine and some you never thought of, like doggie day care, going in the low to mid-4000s," he says.

Here are some insider tips from locals, and some of what I've learned as a new arrival.



*Take yourself on a walking tour of the area's many historic brownstones. Teri Tynes / Flickr*

### **Fort Greene is a haven for history buffs**

Fort Greene Park, once the site of the Battle of Long Island, later became Brooklyn's first public park and was designed by the same men behind Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. The neighborhood is also home to the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the country's oldest performing arts venue. Also architecturally impressive is the Brooklyn Masonic Temple, built in 1909. The temple's website notes it was built as a replica of King Solomon's Temple. Today you can rent it out for functions.

In addition to Richard Wright, a number of other notable authors have lived in the neighborhood. Walt Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass* at 99 Ryerson St., and John Steinbeck, Truman Capote, and more recently, Jhumpa Lahiri have called the neighborhood home. Today, you can pick up the books of all these literary lions at Greenlight Bookstore.

The neighborhood also has its own historic district, including the park and buildings dating back to the 1800s.



*The Masonic Temple sits at 317 Clermont Avenue. cisc1970 / Flickr*

### **The neighborhood has a rebellious streak**

"A group of renegade artists made a bust of Edward Snowden. Some people think he's a renegade, some think he's a hero, but they chose Fort Greene Park to put it up. It took them six months—they practiced in someone's yard and then put it on top one of the other statues in the park, then they put his name on it. It looked as if it were something that had been in that park for 100 years. It was up for 3 hours or so before the city caught wind of it and threw this big tarp over it."—Shawn Wilson, agent with CORE (Read more about the caper at DNAinfo)

### **Fort Greene is a major cultural destination**

"BRIC has a large exhibition hall, usually featuring local artists. They also have free yoga and dance classes. BAM is great for any kind of performance: Plays, music, speakers. The cinema is good for independent films. Theatre for a New Audience is great for relatively cheap tickets [New Deal tickets are \$25 for full-time students and people under 30.] You can see Shakespeare and other classical plays, as well as physical performances."—Tami, rents

"The Mark Morris Dance Center has affordable dance classes for kids through adults, all levels, many of which are taught by [Mark Morris Dance Group] dancers. A real community hub."—Helen, rented in Fort Greene for nine years

"There's also Steiner Studios, a film production company [in nearby Navy Yard]."—Martin Eiden



*Head to BAM for live theater and music, as well as art-house movies. Jeffrey Bary / Flickr*

### **There are still cheap places to eat and drink, if you know where to look**

"Farmer in the Deli is at the corner at Adelphi and Myrtle. It is open 24/7. Their slogan is 'We don't make sandwiches: we build them.' You choose your sandwich ingredients and tell them you want them 'chopped' and they chop them with these huge cleavers into a delicious paste. It owns."—Alex, rents (Sasha Frere-Jones sang the bodega's praises in the *New York Times*)

"Alibi is what a dive bar should be—not a place that's trying to seem scuzzy."—Dvora, rents

### **You can eat your way around the globe—and there's no shortage of brunch options**

"When I lived in Fort Greene my favorite neighborhood spots were Black Iris on Dekalb—just really tasty, affordable Middle Eastern food, and BYOB—Olea, for excellent and unique brunch, and Madiba, for a fun atmosphere and vibe, good South African food and drinks."—Shira, former Fort Greene renter

"Check out Rustik Tavern. What a pleasure to find a place that has unlimited mimosas (with a generous pour) *and* fantastic food—usually you only get one."—Jeanette, rents

### **You may spot some celebrities**

In addition to the strong likelihood that you'll eventually bump into Spike Lee, Erykah Badu also has an apartment in the neighborhood, as does Wyatt Cenac. And Olivia Wilde and Jason Sudeikis own a townhouse in nearby Clinton Hill.

"The chef at La Rina, Silvia Barban, was on Top Chef. The restaurant has awesome pasta and a very local crowd that definitely epitomizes Fort Greene."—Shawn

### **Fort Greene comes together for the NYC Marathon**

"The marathon runs right through the neighborhood, and it becomes like a block party. All the people in the community are on the street and you can see the diversity. People are cooking, selling stuff, there are bands playing. It's one of the most festive times to be there."—Shawn



*New York City marathon runners follow a route down Lafayette Avenue in Fort Greene. Alanna Schubach*

### **There's karaoke—for grown-ups**

"Frank's Lounge for karaoke—just an old school, unpretentious, grown-'n'-sexy joint that has decent drink prices and really good karaoke on Wednesdays. Grown-n-sexy refers to an establishment that draws a generally more mature and refined crowd that wants to turn up without being sloppy, obnoxiously rowdy. It tends to connote no one younger than 25 will be admitted."—Alex

### **You may still be able to find (relatively) affordable townhouses**

"The new 'hot' area is a small patch of Fort Greene [north] of the BQE. It's been pretty much ignored for last few years, but now [the] Navy Yard is starting to happen, Wegmans is coming in, and that area has come to fruition. Townhouses there have asking prices in the mid-500s per square foot. Elsewhere in the neighborhood it's \$1,000-\$1,200 per square foot. The only issue is it's a 12 -15 minute walk from the subway."—Martin Eiden