Headline: Nashville park, campus are afternoon delights

Deckhead: Centennial Park, Vanderbilt University provide peace, culture

Nightlife personifies Nashville. It’s the primary reason millions of travelers visit.

But how does one fill a day in Music City?

Simple answer: Centennial Park.

The urban park sits a couple of miles from the heart of Broadway’s honky-tonks and across the road from Vanderbilt University. It’s a peaceful and stunning open area blessed with wide walkways, beautiful landscaping, a stunning lake and pieces of history.

Guests flock to find spots on its vast lawn to take in the sun, play sports or walk the Centennial Park Loop around Lake Watauga – a blissful waterway surrounded by lush trees, groomed shrubbery and colorful flowers.

Centennial Park is home to the Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument, recognizing a group of women who devoted their lives to fighting for women’s equality.

The monument is centrally located and highlighted by statues depicting Carrie Chapman Catt, Anne Dallas Dudley, Abby Crawford Milton, Juno Frankie Pierce and Sue Shelton White standing tall and fighting for voting rights. The sculptures are surrounded by plaques latched to stone walls, telling stories about which few people have heard.

The centerpiece of Centennial Park is a massive architectural wonder. Stone columns jut from all sides, highlighting craftsmanship so detailed you might believe you’ve been teleported from Nashville to Athenian Acropolis, Greece.

The Parthenon in Centennial Park is a full-scale replica of the Greek original. Walk its steps to experience its impactful exterior. Have a seat and appreciate the pinnacle of classical architecture.

Nicknamed the “Athens of the South”, it served as the centerpiece of the 1897 Centennial Exposition and was fully completed by 1925. It maintains its exquisiteness more than a century later.

A multi-floor art museum resides inside the Parthenon. The gallery is home to more than 100 paintings, exhibits and sculptures that include a full-scale replica of the statue Athena Parthenos. The gold and ivy structure stands between columns and rises 42-feet high while facing a pair of bronze doors that measure 24 feet in height and weigh 7.5 tons each.

The museum is open Tuesday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Admission is $10 for adults, and $8 for senior citizens and children.

Vanderbilt University, meanwhile, sits a short walk from the park. Explore one of the U.S.’s most prestigious schools founded in 1873 by Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. The business titan donated $1 million (the equivalent of $25.3 billion today) with the wish that it should “contribute to strengthening the ties which should exist between all geographical sections of our common country.”

A statue of the Commodore stands tall at the base of one of the entrances. It’s a popular spot to take photos and it opens a doorway into higher education.

The urban campus perfectly blends a collection of older and modern buildings highlighted by West End Tower. The structure rises 300-feet high, making it the second-tallest Collegiate Gothic/Gothic Revival building in the U.S., trailing only the University of Pittsburgh’s Cathedral of Learning (535 feet). Walk sidewalks lined by trees, cross quiet roadways and appreciate the splendor.

It makes for a quite fulfilling afternoon, proving Nashville is more than a one-trick pony – no matter how many pairs of cowboy boots you might see on Broadway.

Cutline: GOING GREEK – The Nashville Parthenon sits in the background of Lake Watauga in Centennial Park. Image: jbyard. Adobe Stock.