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Top 5 Sports Cities Every Fan Should Visit in America

Our Friends · Tuesday, July 21st, 2026

America gives sports fans more than games to watch. Each city built around football, baseball, basketball, or hockey carries its own personality, and visiting one means stepping into decades of loyalty, rivalry, and celebration that locals wear with pride.

This list ranks the five cities with the strongest game-day atmosphere, from packed stadiums to bars and streets that come alive before kickoff. Pack your team gear, because these stops belong on every fan's travel list.

Making the Most of Your Sports City Tour

Booking tickets early makes a real difference when planning a trip built around a specific matchup. Prices climb quickly once a rivalry game or playoff spot is announced, so locking in seats months in advance usually saves both money and stress.

Weather changes quickly across these cities, especially in Minneapolis, Boston, and Chicago, during football season. Packing layers and weatherproof gear keeps fans comfortable through a full afternoon outdoors, whether that means snow in December or sudden rain during a summer baseball game.

Also, pairing a stadium visit with the local food scene rounds out the trip. Cheesesteaks in Philadelphia, deep-dish in Chicago, and brewery stops in Pittsburgh all add flavor to a weekend that would otherwise revolve entirely around the game itself.

Using rideshare or public transit on game days avoids the worst of stadium traffic. Most of these cities design their transit systems around major sporting events, and skipping the parking lot lines leaves more time for the pregame atmosphere that fans came for in the first place.

1. Minneapolis: Home Turf for Every Major League

Target Field sits in the heart of downtown Minneapolis, and the Twins turned it into one of the most walkable ballparks in the country. Fans wander in from nearby breweries before first pitch, and the open concourse gives everyone a view of the game no matter where they sit.

U.S. Bank Stadium changes the entire neighborhood on Vikings Sundays. The glass exterior catches the winter light while purple jerseys fill every direction downtown. Tailgates start hours early in nearby lots, and the noise inside during a big play rivals anything else in the league.

When the game ends, the celebration moves indoors, and downtown Minneapolis has no shortage of places built for that energy. **The Rabbit Hole** draws a loyal crowd of fans who gather there before and after nearly every home game, with good food, cold drinks, and big screens, making it a natural stop on any sports weekend.

Basketball and hockey keep the momentum going once football and baseball seasons wind down. The Timberwolves bring a fast, modern crowd to Target Center, while the Wild fill Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul with some of the loudest ice hockey fans around. Rarely is there a quiet weekend in the Twin Cities.

2. **Boston: Where Championship History Runs Deep**

Fenway Park has hosted baseball since 1912, and the Green Monster still looms over left field the same way it did generations ago. Sitting in the bleachers here feels like joining a story that started long before anyone in the stands was born.

TD Garden hosts both the Celtics and the Bruins, often within days of each other during overlapping seasons. Fans switch from basketball chants to hockey horns without missing a beat, and the arena stays packed no matter which sport takes the floor that night.

You see, the North End turns into a second stadium once the final buzzer sounds. Pubs along the narrow streets fill quickly, pouring drinks for fans still wearing their team colors, and conversations about the game spill out onto the sidewalks well past midnight.

History lovers can walk the Freedom Trail during the day and catch a game that same evening. Several stops sit close enough to the sports venues that a single afternoon covers centuries of history and a few hours of live action.

3. **Chicago: A City Built Around Its Teams**

Wrigley Field remains one of the last ballparks with rooftop seating built right into the surrounding neighborhood. Homeowners across the street from the outfield rent out their rooftops for game day, giving fans a view of Cubs baseball unlike anything found elsewhere in the country.

Soldier Field turns into a sea of navy and orange every Bears Sunday. Tailgate lots fill hours before kickoff, and the lakefront setting adds a backdrop that few NFL stadiums can match once the sun starts to set over the water.

However, basketball and hockey fans have their own home at the United Center. The arena switches between Bulls games and Blackhawks games throughout the season, and both crowds bring an intensity that keeps the building loud from the opening whistle.

Deep-dish pizza spots near the sports districts stay busy on game nights, giving fans a place to refuel before or after the action. Grabbing a slice near the stadium has become part of the routine for locals heading to any Chicago game.

4. **Philadelphia: Passionate Crowds and Iconic Stadiums**

Lincoln Financial Field holds some of the most intense football crowds in the country, and Eagles

fans have earned a reputation for showing up loud regardless of the score. The noise during a fourth-quarter comeback attempt can rattle even the most experienced visiting teams.

Citizens Bank Park pairs Phillies baseball with a food scene that rivals the game itself. Fans line up for cheesesteaks and local specialties between innings, and the ballpark has built its identity as much around its concessions as around the action on the field.

Also, the Wells Fargo Center gives fans a chance to catch the Sixers and the Flyers under one roof. Basketball season overlaps with hockey season for months, and the arena rarely goes quiet during that stretch of the year.

South Philly sports bars fill up early on game days, especially when multiple teams play the same weekend. Regulars claim their usual tables, televisions line every wall, and the energy inside often matches whatever is happening at the stadium down the street.

5. Pittsburgh: Steel City Sports Tradition

Heinz Field, now known by a different sponsor name, still carries the same blue-collar spirit that built the Steelers into one of football's most respected franchises. Fans wave Terrible Towels from the stands, a tradition that has stuck around for decades without losing any of its meaning.

PNC Park offers one of the best views in baseball, with the Pittsburgh skyline rising just beyond the outfield wall. Fans watching from the riverside seats get sunset views over the water while the Pirates play, making it a favorite stop for baseball purists.

Moreover, PPG Paints Arena keeps the city's hockey tradition alive through the Penguins. The crowd here has celebrated multiple championships, and the arena's energy during playoff runs turns downtown Pittsburgh into a citywide celebration that spills well past the final horn.

Local breweries near the stadiums have built their own gameday rituals around Pittsburgh sports. Many release special beers tied to the Steelers or Penguins, and fans often treat a brewery stop as a required part of any trip to a game.

Conclusion

Every city on this list turns a single game into something bigger, whether that means a packed bar before kickoff or a walk through centuries of local history. Minneapolis leads the way with its mix of stadiums and gathering spots like The Rabbit Hole, but each of the five cities offers its own reason to visit.

Planning around a single matchup or a full weekend of games gives fans a chance to experience American sports culture at its loudest. Pack accordingly, book early, and let the city do the rest once game day arrives.

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The Most Common Fiber Internet Issues and How to Fix Them

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Fiber internet delivers blazing speeds and rock-solid connections, but that doesn't mean problems never pop up. From sluggish speeds during busy hours to routers placed in the wrong spot, small issues can chip away at the experience you're paying for.

This article walks through the most common fiber internet issues homeowners encounter and offers clear, practical fixes for each. Whether your connection drops without warning or your equipment feels outdated, you'll find real solutions here.

Slow Speeds During Peak Hours

Evenings tend to bring the heaviest strain on any home network. Once dinner wraps up and everyone settles in to stream a show, scroll social media, or jump into an online game, a dozen demands pull at your connection at once. This shared demand across the neighborhood can slow things down even on a fiber line built for speed.

Beyond neighborhood congestion, your own household often adds to the slowdown. Smart TVs, phones, laptops, gaming consoles, and smart home gadgets all compete for the same bandwidth, and that adds up fast. Providers of [fiber internet in Wisconsin](#) often note that the average household now connects far more devices than home networks were built to handle just a few years ago, and that this steady climb explains much of the slowdown people notice.

Many people assume slow speeds always mean their provider is throttling the connection on purpose. That's rarely the real cause with fiber networks, since throttling policies typically target data caps or specific traffic types rather than everyday browsing. Before pointing fingers at your ISP, it helps to rule out simpler explanations first, like router placement or device overload.

A quick speed test gives you a clear starting point. Run it at different times of day, with devices unplugged from Wi-Fi and connected directly through Ethernet if possible. Comparing those numbers against your plan's advertised speed tells you whether the issue sits with your equipment, your provider, or simple peak-hour congestion.

Wi-Fi Router Placement Problems

Thick walls, especially concrete or brick ones common in older homes, block Wi-Fi signals more than most people expect. Every wall a signal passes through weakens it further, so a router tucked away in a basement or closet often leaves upstairs rooms with a noticeably weaker connection.

Placing your router near appliances like microwaves, cordless phones, or baby monitors can also cause interference. These devices often operate on similar frequencies, and that overlap creates static in your signal. Moving your router even a few feet away from these appliances can make a real difference.

For larger homes, a single router sometimes can't cover every corner well. A mesh system spreads coverage across multiple access points instead of relying on one central unit, which helps eliminate those frustrating dead zones in back bedrooms or garages. Still, mesh setups cost more and need proper spacing to work well.

Ideally, your router sits in a central, elevated spot, away from thick walls and metal objects. Think of a living room shelf rather than a closet in the corner of the house. Small adjustments like this often solve signal problems without spending a dime on new equipment.

Fiber Cable Damage and Installation Issues

Fiber-optic cables carry light signals, and bending them too sharply disrupts the light path. A cable pinched under furniture or bent tightly around a corner can cause noticeable slowdowns or intermittent dropouts, even when everything else looks fine on the surface.

Outdoor fiber lines face constant exposure to wind, rain, and temperature swings. Over time, that exposure wears down the protective sheathing, especially at points where the cable connects to your home. Regular visual checks of outdoor lines help catch wear before it turns into a bigger problem.

Indoors, people sometimes route cables carelessly, running them under rugs, coiling them too tightly, or stapling them directly to walls. These habits stress the cable over time and increase the odds of a break. Running lines along baseboards with proper clips protects them far better.

Watch for visible kinks, exposed fibers, or a sudden change in connection quality after a recent home project. Any of these signs points to physical damage, and a technician can usually replace the affected section without much hassle.

Intermittent Connection Drops

Your ONT, the small box that converts the fiber signal into a usable connection, sometimes just needs a reset. Unplugging it for about thirty seconds and plugging it back in clears out minor glitches and often restores a stable connection right away.

Outdated firmware on your router or ONT can also cause random drops. Manufacturers release updates to patch bugs and improve stability, so checking for pending updates every so often helps keep your equipment running as it should.

A loose connector at the ONT or wall jack creates an unstable connection that comes and goes without warning. Gently checking that all fiber connections sit snug in their ports rules out this simple but common culprit.

When drops happen across an entire neighborhood at once, the issue usually lies with the provider rather than your home setup. Checking your ISP's outage map or contacting support helps you determine whether the issue is on your end or theirs.

ONT and Router Compatibility Issues

Older routers paired with newer ONT equipment sometimes struggle to communicate properly. This generational mismatch can cap your speeds well below what your fiber plan actually supports, even though the connection itself works fine.

Bridge mode lets your own router handle network duties instead of the ISP's equipment, but getting the configuration wrong causes more problems than it solves. A misconfigured bridge mode setup can lead to dropped connections or devices that won't connect at all.

Double NAT happens when two devices on your network both try to manage network address translation at once, usually the ISP's gateway and your personal router. This conflict often shows up as gaming lag, failed port forwarding, or devices that can't see each other on the network.

Sticking with ISP-provided equipment guarantees compatibility, but third-party routers often offer better features and performance once set up correctly. Checking your provider's compatibility list before buying your own router saves you a lot of troubleshooting later.

Outdated Equipment and Firmware

Routers age just like any other piece of technology, and older hardware simply can't keep up with the speeds modern fiber plans deliver. A router built five or six years ago may cap your connection well below its potential, no matter how strong your fiber line runs.

Firmware update notifications often sit buried in an app or dashboard nobody checks regularly, so people miss them all the time. Setting a reminder to look for updates every couple of months keeps your equipment running smoothly and closes gaps you might not notice otherwise.

Old firmware also opens the door to security risks. Manufacturers patch known vulnerabilities with each update, and skipping them for too long leaves your network exposed to threats that a simple update would have blocked.

If your equipment is several years old and updates have stopped coming, it's worth asking your provider about a replacement. Many fiber providers swap out aging equipment for free or a small fee, and newer hardware often solves several issues at once.

Wrap Up

Most fiber internet issues come down to a handful of common culprits: congestion, placement, cable damage, equipment mismatches, or outdated hardware. Once you know what to look for, most fixes take only a few minutes.

Keep an eye on your equipment, run occasional speed tests, and don't hesitate to reach out to your provider when something feels off. A little maintenance goes a long way toward keeping your fiber connection running the way it should.

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Argireline: Reframing a Neuroactive Peptide in Contemporary Research Landscapes

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Argireline, chemically identified as Acetyl hexapeptide-8, occupies an intriguing position within the expanding field of peptide-based molecular investigation. Originally conceptualized as a synthetic fragment inspired by elements of the SNARE protein complex, this peptide has gradually drawn attention for its potential to modulate vesicular dynamics and signaling pathways. While it is frequently associated with surface-level applications in popular discourse, a deeper scientific perspective reveals a far more nuanced and evolving profile. Emerging interpretations position Argireline as a candidate of interest not only for its interaction with neurotransmission-like processes but also for its broader relevance in cellular communication, molecular signaling, and biomimetic design.

At its structural core, Argireline is a short-chain peptide composed of six amino acids, designed to mimic the N-terminal end of SNAP-25, a key protein involved in vesicle docking and fusion. SNAP-25 itself forms part of the SNARE complex, a critical mediator of intracellular transport mechanisms, particularly in contexts where vesicular release is required. Research indicates that Argireline may interact with components of this machinery, potentially interfering with the formation or stability of SNARE complexes. This interaction has been theorized to influence vesicular release processes, although the precise molecular dynamics remain an area of ongoing exploration.

Investigations purport that Argireline might function as a competitive modulator within these systems. By resembling a segment of SNAP-25, the peptide is believed to compete for binding sites or alter conformational states of associated proteins. This hypothesis aligns with broader principles in peptide engineering, where short sequences are designed to disrupt or fine-tune protein-protein interactions. Within research models, such modulation is particularly compelling, as it opens the possibility of selectively attenuating signaling pathways without fully suppressing them.

Beyond its relationship with vesicular transport, Argireline has been theorized to intersect with calcium-dependent signaling cascades. Calcium ions play a pivotal role in triggering vesicle fusion, and any compound that influences upstream or downstream components of this process may indirectly reshape calcium-mediated communication. Research suggests that Argireline might influence the sensitivity or responsiveness of these pathways, thereby altering the dynamics of

signal propagation at a micro level. While these interpretations remain speculative, they contribute to a growing interest in the peptide's potential as a tool for studying finely tuned regulatory systems.

Another dimension of Argireline's relevance lies in its potential interaction with cytoskeletal organization. Vesicle trafficking is not an isolated phenomenon; it is deeply integrated with the structural framework of the cell. Microtubules and actin filaments provide the necessary infrastructure for vesicle movement, positioning, and release. It has been hypothesized that Argireline might indirectly influence cytoskeletal arrangement by modifying signaling nodes that coordinate these processes. Such an interaction could have implications for understanding how structural and signaling networks converge to maintain cellular functionality.

In addition, Argireline has attracted attention within the broader context of biomimetic research. The peptide represents a simplified model of a much larger and more complex protein domain, making it a useful tool for dissecting specific functional motifs. By isolating and replicating a small segment of SNAP-25, researchers may gain insights into how minimal sequences contribute to larger biological processes. This reductionist approach is particularly valuable in synthetic biology, where the goal is often to design streamlined systems that replicate or enhance natural functions.

The peptide's physicochemical properties are speculated to further contribute to its research appeal. Argireline has been hypothesized to exhibit a relatively stable structure under a range of conditions, which may facilitate its incorporation into experimental frameworks. Its solubility and compatibility with various delivery matrices make it a convenient candidate for investigations. Moreover, its small size has been proposed to allow for efficient synthesis and modification, enabling researchers to explore analogs and derivatives with altered properties. Such modifications seem to help elucidate structure-function relationships, shedding light on which amino acid residues are critical for activity and which may be altered without compromising functionality.

Research also suggests that Argireline might influence gene expression patterns associated with signaling and structural proteins. While the mechanisms underlying such influence remain unclear, it has been theorized that the peptide's interaction with membrane-associated processes could trigger downstream transcriptional responses. These responses might reflect adaptive adjustments within the cell, as it recalibrates its internal systems in response to altered signaling inputs. This perspective aligns with a broader understanding of cells as dynamic systems, constantly adjusting to internal and external cues.

Another avenue of exploration involves the peptide's potential role in modulating intercellular communication. Cells do not operate in isolation; they exist within complex networks where signals are exchanged continuously. If Argireline influences vesicular release or membrane dynamics, it may also alter the way signals are transmitted between cells. This possibility has implications for understanding how local changes at the molecular level might scale up to influence larger systems. In research models, such insights could prove valuable for mapping communication networks and identifying key regulatory nodes.

In conclusion, Argireline represents more than a simplified mimic of a protein fragment; it embodies a convergence of ideas in peptide engineering, cellular signaling, and biomimetic design. Its potential to modulate vesicular dynamics, influence signaling pathways, and serve as a model for synthetic constructs positions it as a valuable subject within contemporary research landscapes. While many questions remain, the peptide's properties continue to inspire inquiry, suggesting that

its role in scientific exploration is far from fully realized. Researchers may find more useful research materials at [Core Peptides](#).

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How to Keep a Workplace Move Low-Stress and Smooth

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Moving an office involves much more than transporting desks and computers. Without careful planning, businesses can face downtime, disrupted workflows, and unnecessary stress. Fortunately, a well-organized relocation plan can keep the transition smooth while allowing employees to stay productive.

Successful workplace moves depend on keeping people, equipment, and schedules organized from beginning to end. When the move is broken into clear steps, even a complicated transition can stay organized and limit disruption. Each stage of the relocation builds on the last, helping the business maintain productivity while reducing unnecessary disruption.

Plan the timeline

The first step in any office move is creating a realistic timeline. Without a clear timeline, every

task can seem equally urgent, making important details easier to overlook. Smaller offices often need at least two to three months to prepare, while larger companies with more employees, equipment, and records may need much longer.

Start by outlining major milestones. Confirm the move date, review the lease for the new location, measure the new space, and build a full inventory of what needs to be moved. Then assign deadlines for packing, disconnecting and reconnecting technology, transferring utilities, notifying vendors, and updating the company address.

A clear schedule also makes it easier to work with experienced **office movers**, who can help coordinate logistics and safely handle furniture, filing cabinets, and electronics. It also helps employees, managers, and vendors stay coordinated throughout the relocation. It helps uncover problems early, when they are easier to solve, instead of allowing them to turn into last-minute emergencies.

Sort what stays

Before packing starts, take time to decide what the office truly needs. A move is one of the best opportunities to reduce clutter instead of bringing it into a new workspace. Old chairs, broken equipment, outdated supplies, and extra cords often take up more space than people realize.

Go through the office one area at a time and sort items into categories such as keep, donate, store, replace, or discard. Review desks, conference room furniture, printers, archived files, kitchen supplies, storage cabinets, and supply closets. If something will not fit the new layout or has not been used in the past year, it is worth reconsidering whether it needs to be moved at all.

Paper files deserve special attention because they can consume a surprising amount of space. If documents must be retained, organize them before the move instead of boxing them up without a plan. The same goes for office supplies. There is little value in paying to relocate duplicate binders, dried-out markers, or old chargers.

Reducing clutter lowers moving costs, simplifies packing and unpacking, and helps the new office feel functional and refreshed rather than weighed down by unnecessary items.

Keep staff informed

An office move affects everyone, so communication matters. When employees receive scattered or incomplete updates, uncertainty grows quickly. Rumors spread, stress increases, and minor questions can become ongoing distractions.

Keep staff informed through simple, consistent communication. Weekly emails, shared checklists, or short team meetings can keep everyone aligned. Share practical details such as the move date, packing schedule, seating plans, and any temporary changes to work routines.

It also helps to assign responsibilities. One employee might oversee supply packing, while another gathers IT concerns. Team leaders can make sure personal desk items are packed on time. Delegating tasks keeps the entire move from falling on one person and gives employees a sense of involvement.

Employees should also have room to ask questions. They may want information about commuting,

parking, remote work options, storage, or shared spaces in the new office. When staff members feel informed and included, they are more likely to stay calm, cooperative, and supportive throughout the transition.

Protect daily workflow

Most businesses cannot stop operating just because they are moving. Customers still need support, emails still need responses, and projects still have deadlines. That is why the relocation should be planned around daily workflow instead of working against it.

Phased packing is often the best approach. Rather than boxing up everything at once, begin with items that are rarely used, such as archived files, seasonal materials, extra furniture, and decorations. Keep essential tools available for as long as possible. If teams depend on shared devices or systems, schedule downtime carefully and communicate it well in advance.

The moving date is also important. Many offices benefit from moving during evenings, weekends, or slower business periods. Before setting the date, consider customer demand, payroll schedules, key meetings, and major deadlines.

Backup preparation matters as well. Save copies of important files, confirm internet service at the new office, and make sure someone can reach key vendors if problems arise. Even a small technical issue can cause major interruption without a backup plan.

Pack with purpose

Packing should never be treated as a rushed final step. When done well, it becomes the first stage of setting up the new office efficiently.

Pack one room or department at a time and keep related items together. Label every box clearly with the department name, destination room, and a useful description of the contents. Vague labels are better than none, but detailed labels save much more time during unpacking.

Documents should be placed in sturdy boxes and grouped by team or function. Electronics need extra care. Before unplugging computers, printers, phones, or other equipment, take photos of cable connections so they can be reassembled correctly. Place cords, keyboards, and accessories in labeled bags so they stay with the right devices.

Employees should pack personal belongings separately from company property. Shared materials and frequently used supplies should be clearly marked so they can be unpacked first. Organized packing makes move-in day faster and far less stressful.

Set up faster

A smooth first day in the new office begins before the moving truck arrives. If possible, visit the location in advance and create a setup plan. Decide where departments will be seated, where shared equipment will go, and how people will move through the space comfortably.

Check essential services ahead of time. Utilities should be active, internet installation should be confirmed, access codes should work, and entryways, restrooms, and break rooms should be easy to identify. Even temporary signs can make employees feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar

environment.

Prioritize the areas that matter most. Reception, individual workstations, internet-connected equipment, phones, and meeting spaces usually need attention before decorative details. Artwork, plants, and finishing touches can wait until the office is fully functional.

A successful workplace move is the result of careful preparation rather than last-minute effort. By planning ahead, communicating clearly, and staying organized throughout the process, businesses can settle into their new workspace with minimal disruption and return to normal operations more quickly. When employees know where to go and where resources are located, the office can become operational much more quickly.

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Following Tolstoy and Dostoevsky: A Cultural Itinerary Through Russia

Our Friends · Tuesday, July 21st, 2026

There's a particular kind of traveler who plans a trip around a bookshelf rather than a beach — someone who wants to stand in the rooms where “War and Peace” or “Crime and Punishment” were written, not just read about them from a hotel armchair. Russia rewards that kind of traveler more generously than almost anywhere else, because so much of its literary and artistic history is still physically standing, preserved as house-museums, archives, and galleries rather than plaques on demolished buildings.

Where the Novels Actually Happened

Start in St. Petersburg, where Dostoevsky set much of “Crime and Punishment” within walking distance of the apartment where he lived and wrote it. The Dostoevsky Literary Memorial Museum recreates his final study almost exactly as he left it, down to the clock stopped at the hour of his death. A few canals over, the Hermitage occupies a different register entirely — one of the largest art collections on earth, housed in the Winter Palace, with enough Rembrandts, Titians, and Impressionist rooms to make a single afternoon feel absurdly insufficient.

Moscow answers with its own literary geography. Tolstoy's Moscow estate, Khamovniki, is where he wrote “Resurrection” and where visitors can walk the same garden paths and see the study

where he worked standing up, by choice, well into old age. The Tretyakov Gallery, meanwhile, holds the definitive collection of Russian painting — Repin, Serov, the icon tradition that predates the novels by centuries and quietly shaped their visual imagination.

Beyond the two capitals, Kazan offers a different cultural register altogether: a city where Orthodox cathedrals and the Qol Sharif Mosque share a skyline, reflecting a genuinely layered religious and artistic history rather than a single dominant tradition. It's an easy add-on for travelers extending a Moscow–St. Petersburg itinerary by rail.

Building the Itinerary Around the Art, Not Around Logistics

A cultural trip like this rewards slowness. Trying to compress the Hermitage, the Tretyakov, and multiple house-museums into a long weekend usually means seeing everything and absorbing very little. Ten to fourteen days, split roughly between St. Petersburg and Moscow with a rail excursion to a third city, gives the itinerary room to breathe — enough time to sit in the museum café rather than sprint past it, or return to a favorite gallery room a second time.

The practical groundwork, though, deserves the same advance attention as the museum tickets. Most visitors need a visa to enter Russia, and every standard tourist visa application requires an invitation letter before a consulate will process it. The good news is that this step, once the slowest part of planning, has become largely automated — a [russia visa invitation letter online](#) can typically be issued within minutes of submitting a passport copy and hotel reservation, since Russian consulates have accepted electronic invitations as standard practice since 2012. Sorting that early leaves the rest of the planning window free for the part that actually matters: deciding which [Russian visa](#) category and length of stay actually fits a slower, culture-focused trip, since tourist visas typically cap at 30 days — enough for an unhurried literary circuit, but worth confirming before building a longer itinerary around it.

For travelers still deciding how to divide time between cities, a rundown of the [best Russian cities to build a cultural itinerary around](#) is a useful starting point before locking in flights.

Why It's Worth the Extra Planning

There's something particular about reading a novel in the city where it was set, or standing in the exact room where a writer worked through a difficult chapter. It doesn't change the words on the page, but it changes how they sit in memory afterward. Russia's literary and artistic institutions have, for the most part, resisted the flattening effect that turns historic sites into generic tourist stops — the Dostoevsky museum still feels like an apartment, not an exhibit designed for photographs. That's rare, and it's worth the modest extra effort of sorting the paperwork properly to get there.

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The Dance Will Go On–National Choreographers Initiative Takes Its Last Bow

Ann Haskins · Tuesday, July 21st, 2026

A bittersweet curtain rings down this Saturday at *The Last Dance*, the performance ending the **National Choreographers Initiative** and its annually changing, four course menu of new ballet choreography. As of press time, NCI tickets at the Irvine Barclay Theatre are close to sold out, a sign of how this Saturday is a not-to-be-missed event.

Earlier this year, NCI founder/artistic director Molly Lynch announced that after 35 years cultivating new ballet choreography, she and her Board had decided the 2026 NCI would be the last. At that time, Lynch spoke with LA Dance Chronicle about the painful decision and plans for the final NCI [March 9, 2026 Molly Lynch on Ending NCI](#).



Molly Lynch, Artistic Director of NCI. Photo courtesy of the artist

What is National Choreographers Initiative? Since 2005, Lynch has assembled 16 professional ballet dancers and four choreographers for three weeks of unrestrained choreographic opportunity, offering freedom to choose music, style, subject. At the end, a performance gives the choreographers and an audience intriguing evidence of the alchemy generated when choreographers are given adventurous dancers, time and freedom to explore. A finished ballet is not the goal, though some works come close even after such a short time. More significant is NCI's afterlife. More often than not, dances begun at NCI later have gone on to full productions at national and international ballet companies. Even if never seen again, an NCI exploration or an enticing experiment that unlocks a new direction for the choreographer, has its own cachet.

For this final NCI, Lynch invited back four women choreographers–[Emily Adams](#), [Julia Feldman](#), [DaYoung Jung](#), and [Sarah Tallman](#), underscoring NCI's long commitment to female ballet choreographers who are often overlooked. Drawn from ballet companies across the U.S., the final 16 dancers are Iori Araya, Nicolas Bierwagen, Gabrielle Collins, Alyssa Eyster, Julian Goodwin-Ferris, Amelia Grubb Hillman, Logan Hillman, Rhys Hudson, Lucia Lorenzo, Marco Lorenzo-Giguere, Alyssa Manguiat, Darcy McLoughlin, Gabrielle Mengden, Trevor PinterParsons, Ian Rotheroe, and Michael Stadtherr.

Lynch began cultivating new choreography while artistic director of Ballet Pacifica. For 13 years, she brought choreographers through the Pacifica Ballet Project to work on new choreography with company dancers.



National Choreographers Initiative. Photo by Dave Friedman

In 2004, Lynch launched National Choreographers Initiative, forging a partnership with UC Irvine

to use dorms for housing and the dance department studios for rehearsal space during summer break, and also with the 750 seat state of the art Irvine Barclay Theatre for the final performance. Instead of company dancers, Lynch recruited dancers on summer lay off from professional ballet companies and selected four choreographers ranging from emerging to established.

Lynch's numbers over the 35 years are impressive: 136 choreographers and 185 dancers, representing 60 dance companies. Beyond the numbers, her singular assemblage of choreographers and dancers has had ripple effects throughout the national dance diaspora.

As the last NCI looms, choreographers and dancers who participated over the years, have offered backstage perspectives on Lynch's efforts and how NCI's impact extends beyond their individual careers with ripple effects throughout ballet. To learn more about the NCI that the audience does not see, I spoke with several California-based choreographers who participated at different stages of their careers and several dancers who participated in NCI for the maximum three years, including one who returned as a choreographer.



National Choreographers Initiative. Photo by Dave Friedman

In 2005, Val Caniparoli was an established choreographer as well as character dancer, teacher and ballet master at San Francisco Ballet when Lynch invited him for NCI's second year.

"Many, if not most commissions for choreography involve instructions such as to the length, whether it is the opener or middle or close on a mixed bill, which dancers can or cannot be used, how many or how few dancers can be used. Molly doesn't do that," Caniparoli said. "She explained it was really up to me what I wanted to do. There were no parameters. Also, other than discussing it with the audience after the performance, it was not judged. There were no critics. I had no idea what it was about when I accepted. It was one of the best things I've done, it's so rare to have that opportunity," Caniparoli recalled.

Caniparoli, whose career spans ballet, theater and opera, found NCI's workshop model provides something unusual in ballet.



Val Caniparoli. Photo by Eric Tomassen

"Ballets don't get try outs like theater productions. We're supposed to be geniuses right away, so it was so rare to be able to have what I considered a workshop on ideas, creating and not being judged. Afterwards it could be used as a stepping stone if you want to take it further with another company. As much as I had already been choreographing, it was an opportunity I'd never had before," Caniparoli admitted.

Caniparoli later expanded his NCI workshop piece, *Violin*, which went on to full performance by ballet companies, including San Francisco Ballet's second company and school. Earlier this year, he retired after 50 years with SF Ballet to concentrate on his choreography. He is in more demand than ever and remarked that he still draws on his NCI experience.



Val Caniparoli's "Violin" for National Choreographers Initiative.
Photo courtesy of NCI

While Caniparoli came to NCI by invitation, Lynch selected many emerging choreographers after they submitted video of their early work, something sometimes difficult to obtain.

When LA based choreographer Kitty McNamee was selected for the 2013 edition of NCI, she primarily was known as a contemporary choreographer for her company, Hysterica, and as a regular choreographer for LA Opera. Trained in ballet, its ethos informed McNamee's contemporary choreography, but her first venture creating for ballet dancers was a 2012 Los Angeles Ballet commission for its *Next Wave* series. The video of the LA Ballet performance proved her ticket to NCI.



Kitty McNamee. Photo courtesy of LA Opera

"I had that material to share with Molly to show I could do this. It was great that Molly would take a chance on somebody who wasn't a 'ballet person.' It was a challenge, she conceded. "Working with dancers who were primarily classically trained was really different than say dancers trained at Edge studio or who do a mixture of styles or who work commercially. But I had learned a lot when I worked at LA Ballet and I had all this experience with other dance and the opera."

McNamee echoed other choreographers' praise of Lynch's willing to experiment.

"I did two shorter pieces, because I thought, when am I going to have this opportunity again? Let me try two different approaches. One thing I did, that Molly was open to, was I had two guys partnering. This was what, 2013? It wasn't overtly romantic, but within the context of my piece, two guys were partnering. Molly was super open-minded about my process and about using the dancers in that way, which was a little less accepted or expected at that time."



National Choreographers Initiative. Photo by Dave Friedman

McNamee praised Lynch's unique ability to support choreographers and dancers while also creating dance in her own right. "It's very unusual for someone who is creative to also be really supportive of other creatives without feeling threatened or competitive."

McNamee continues to choreograph for LA Opera and last year directed the opera's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Her work with dance films will involve a partnership with Dance Camera West later this summer.

Several choreographers noted that in recent years, more workshop situations resembling NCI have sprouted, inspired in part by NCI's reputation and companies seeing the benefit of encouraging new ballet choreography by its own dancers. Few have drawn on NCI's model recruiting a mix of dancers from different companies during summer layoff. Dancers turn to temporary summer employment, dancing in operas and teaching. After it began in 2004, word quickly spread that NCI was not just a place, but THE place for dancers on summer hiatus looking to work with choreographers on new choreography.

Kelly Ann Sloan danced with NCI for three years starting in 2007, but first heard about NCI while she was dancing at Cincinnati Ballet in 2005.



Kelly Ann Sloan. Photo courtesy of the Colburn School

“Being in the room with work created on you was always my favorite part of company life. I enjoyed learning new choreography and being a part of that process. NCI sounded like a dream,” Sloan explained.

When she joined Los Angeles Ballet in 2006 she was close enough to audition.

“The audition was on a Sunday, right after an LA Ballet show. I was pretty exhausted, but drove down to Irvine and did an in-person audition. Molly taught a ballet class, then we learned a piece of rep from an outside teacher and performed that. I heard back pretty soon and I didn’t hesitate to accept. I was so excited to be a part of it,” Sloan remembered.

Lynch has a reputation for finding technically proficient dancers who were hard workers and also “good humans”, as one choreographer put it. Sloan concurred “Because of who Molly picked, there was very little ego or drama. Everybody was excited to be there, to work hard and to just be in that play process.”



National Choreographers Initiative (NCI) Photo by Dave Friedman

While a company may absorb a few new dancers each season, NCI assembled a three week company with 16 dancers drawn from different companies, often with different styles. Sloan admitted there were adjustments and a learning curve.

“Especially in a pas deux, dancers who had not worked together sometimes had to figure out difficult movement the choreographer wanted. Also, it took a little time to build the bonds needed for unison sections. Still, it was a lovely working environment.” Sloan recalled. “It was really such a magical experience all three years. I always felt very, very fortunate to be in the room. It didn’t matter who I was working with or what I was doing, I felt really lucky that I got my foot in the door with that, that I got to be a part of the process. And I’ve watched the successes enjoyed by choreographers I worked with at NCI, three of whom are now artistic directors of ballet companies—Edward Liang at Washington Ballet, Amy Seiwart at Smuin Ballet, and Melissa Barak now at LA Ballet.

In addition to dancing for Los Angeles Ballet and other companies, in 2014, Sloan joined the Colburn School where she is now Ballet Chair at Colburn’s Trudeau Zipper Dance Institute.

In 2019, Sacramento Ballet dancer Julia Feldman was an emerging choreographer at NCI and she is one of the four Lynch invited back for *the Last Dance*. But Feldman began with NCI as a dancer.



Julia Feldman. Photo courtesy of Sacramento Ballet

“NCI was my first time dancing somewhere away from Sacramento Ballet. I remember being really nervous in the beginning, but those nerves instantly went away as soon as we were working and creating. NCI is a very welcoming environment and a really safe environment for creativity,” Feldman said. “Sarah Tolman was a choreographer I danced for my very first year at NCI. I loved her process. I had what felt like a breakthrough moment, because she was one of the first choreographers to feature me. Sarah is one of the other choreographers this final time around which makes coming back for the final NCI and choreographing alongside Sarah feel very, very full circle.”

After her third year dancing for NCI, Feldman was an emerging choreographer when she was selected to choreograph for summer 2019.

“I was choreographing on other company members through Sacramento Ballet’s Beer and Ballet and Capital Dance Project, our dancer-created summer project in Sacramento. I had videos of those efforts, but I had not received any kind of outside opportunity like NCI. That first opportunity from Molly gave so much validation and affirmation. Once you have some more experience under your belt, more happens.”



National Choreographers Initiative. Photo by Dave Friedman

Feldman and Caniparoli both remarked that NCI offered an unexpected opportunity for interaction with the other choreographers. Usually with a commission, a choreographer is in the studio and then in the hotel, essentially on their own. At NCI, the four choreographers can mingle, have time with each other, and make connections.

“It may seem obvious, perhaps, but choreography can be a very isolating experience. Even if their style was very different, and their creative goals were very different, I found the NCI experience, the creative discussions with the other choreographers, built connections that have lasted long beyond the three weeks of NCI,” Feldman said. She added that a choreographer she met at NCI in 2019 recently recommended her for a choreography opportunity he wasn’t available for.

While the general rule limited dancers to three years, Feldman returned fourth in summer 2021, part of an atypical NCI structure coming out of the pandemic. With Covid rampant and the March 2020 statewide shutdown, the 2020 NCI was cancelled. In deciding to reopen NCI for summer 2021, Lynch took steps to maximize protections. Dancers were selected only from two California companies—San Francisco’s Smuin Ballet and Sacramento Ballet. Each company was kept in a separate pod and did not intermingle, with separate classes, rehearsals, and housing. Feldman was among the Sacramento Ballet dancers.



National Choreographers Initiative in 2021. Photo courtesy of NCI

“That year was socially different. Such a big part of the NCI culture is getting to meet and intermingle with artists that you’ve never met or worked with before. That pod year was different because we were with artists that we work with year round at Sac Ballet or Smuin. Still, other than that, the experience of working with new choreographers and the actual creative process was very much the same and stayed true to what NCI is all about.”

Feldman continues with Sacramento Ballet and Capitol Dance Project, as well as pursuing choreography commissions.

Beyond the three week experience and connections, the culminating performance with professional staff led by NCI’s award winning lighting designer Monique L’Heureux is presented in the state of the art 750-seat Irvine Barclay Theater. The professional photography and video record of their performance can further boost emerging choreographers’ careers. Another unexpected consequence for choreographers has been dancers returning to their home companies with reports about their NCI experience that led to commissions for the NCI choreographers the dancers worked with.

As ballets initiated at NCI have gone on to become full productions at ballet companies, workshop situations resembling NCI have sprouted. Inspired in part by NCI's reputation and the dance it has incubated, companies have seen benefits in encouraging new ballet choreography by its own dancers.

As a three-year NCI dancer who danced with multiple companies, who also choreographs, and who now runs a ballet department, Sloan views NCI from multiple perspectives and has particularly high praise for how Lynch structured NCI.

"The daily class was amazing. We would start the day with a really, really good company class with great teachers. Rehearsals were in the UC Irvine dance department, a great facility, a wonderful floor situation. Molly surrounded us with encouraging people, the chance to try new things, open our minds to different styles, and have that practice of having to pick up choreography quickly, get it in your body, and then turn it into art within a short deadline. For dancers and choreographers, that chance to experiment from day one to day two with a different way of moving or a different way to approach a work is rarely possible in a company setting, and makes NCI such an invaluable program, and I hope that something like it can continue in the future." Sloan is not alone in that hope.



National Choreographers Initiative. Photo by Dave Friedman

National Choreographers Initiative (NCI) – *The Last Dance* at the [Irvine Barclay Theater](#), UC Irvine, 4242 Campus Dr., Irvine; Sat., July 25, 8 pm, \$28-\$105.

For more information and to purchase tickets, please visit [NCI-The Last Dance](#).

For more on the 2026 choreographers: [Emily Adams](#), [Julia Feldman](#), [DaYoung Jung](#), and [Sarah Tallman](#).

For a complete list of the choreographers who have participated in NCI since 2004 [NCI choreographers now & past](#).

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Testosterone Support 101: What Really Works and What to Consider

Our Friends · Monday, July 20th, 2026

Testosterone influences red blood cell production, muscle protein synthesis, libido, mood, and bone turnover. Low readings can reflect aging, poor sleep, insulin resistance, opioid use, excess alcohol, or pituitary disease. A useful plan begins with evidence, not urgency. Symptoms deserve attention, yet numbers need context. Careful testing, steady routines, and medical review help men

separate normal variation from a treatable hormone problem. That order protects confidence and reduces unnecessary treatment decisions.

Start With Testing

Before choosing **testosterone support**, men should know where their testosterone levels actually sit. Morning blood work can assess total testosterone, free testosterone, sex hormone-binding globulin, luteinizing hormone, vitamin D, thyroid markers, and metabolic health. Those results provide a clinical baseline for our next steps, while a licensed professional can review symptoms, medications, fertility goals, and risks.

Sleep Comes First

Nightly rest is often the first lever. Testosterone release follows a circadian rhythm, with important output during deep sleep. Seven to nine hours suit most adults. A dark room, a steady bedtime, a cooler temperature, and an earlier caffeine cutoff can help. Snoring, gasping, morning headaches, or daytime fatigue may point to sleep apnea.

Train With Purpose

Strength training sends a clear mechanical signal to muscle and bone. Squats, presses, rows, hinges, carries, and pull variations offer broad value. Two to four sessions weekly fit many schedules. Recovery matters too. Persistent soreness, falling performance, and poor appetite may signal excessive volume or inadequate nutrition.

Eat Enough Protein

Protein supplies amino acids needed for repair after lifting and for daily tissue turnover. Most active men benefit from a serving at each meal. Eggs, fish, poultry, Greek yogurt, lean beef, tofu, beans, and lentils are practical choices. Severe calorie restriction can reduce drive, training quality, and sexual interest.

Do Not Fear Fat

Hormone production depends partly on cholesterol and fat-soluble nutrients. Olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, whole eggs, and oily fish can support a balanced pattern. Very low-fat plans may lower sex hormones in some men. Fiber-rich plants and enough fluids still belong on the plate.

Check Key Nutrients

Vitamin D, zinc, magnesium, and boron deserve attention because deficiencies can affect endocrine function. Testing is better than guessing. High-dose zinc may cause copper imbalance, stomach upset, or immune strain. Any supplement should align with a documented gap, dietary pattern, and clinician advice.

Manage Body Fat

Excess abdominal fat can increase inflammation and aromatase activity, which converts testosterone into estrogen. Gradual fat loss may improve hormone markers for some men. Crash dieting usually backfires. A modest calorie deficit, lifting, walking, and protein-centered meals can

help protect lean mass while waist size trends downward.

Reduce Alcohol

Alcohol can disrupt rapid eye movement sleep, liver metabolism, recovery, and testicular hormone signaling. Heavy intake carries the greatest concern. Cutting back often improves morning energy within weeks. Tracking servings helps reveal patterns. Alcohol-free days, smaller pours, and earlier stopping times reduce physiological strain.

Handle Stress

Chronic stress can keep cortisol elevated, which may disturb sleep, appetite, and sexual desire. No routine removes every pressure point. Regular walks, exposure to daylight, breathing exercises, and time away from screens can lower arousal. Supportive relationships also improve adherence to meals, movement, and rest.

Consider Supplements Carefully

Some formulas include vitamin D, zinc, fenugreek, tongkat ali, shilajit, taurine, vitamin K, or boron. Quality matters as much as ingredients. Labels should list doses, testing practices, and cautions. Claims should be modest. Supplements may fill gaps, but they cannot replace proper diagnosis, sleep, good nutrition, or training.

Know Medical Options

Clinically low testosterone requires both symptoms and consistent lab evidence. Repeat morning testing helps confirm the pattern. Treatment can affect fertility, hematocrit, acne, prostate monitoring, and follow-up needs. Men should avoid self-prescribed hormones. An experienced clinician can explain the benefits, risks, and monitoring requirements before therapy begins.

Track Real Progress

Progress should be visible in both records and daily life. Morning energy, libido, mood, waist size, strength, sleep quality, and training logs are useful markers. Repeat labs after a fair trial period to add clarity. One poor day means little. Several weeks of data show stronger evidence.

Avoid Common Mistakes

Changing ten habits at once makes cause and effect hard to read. Expecting pills to overcome short sleep or heavy drinking is another common trap. Skipping labs also leaves blind spots. A better approach starts with two or three actions, then adjusts based on the results.

Conclusion

Support for healthy testosterone works best as structured health care, not as a single purchase or habit. Testing defines the starting point, while sleep, resistance training, adequate nutrition, stress control, and lower alcohol intake shape the physiology behind long-term results. Supplements may help when needs are real and labels are transparent. Medical care matters when symptoms persist or readings stay low. With patient tracking, men can make clearer choices for strength, energy, sexual health, and aging.

Photo: Andrea Piacquadio via Pexels

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Review: *The Bicycle and the Soul: Prose on Poetry* by Michael Waters

David Rigsbee · Monday, July 20th, 2026

Michael Waters has been one of the most prolific and engaging poets of the Boomer generation and is widely admired as much for his technical mastery as for his forays into urban Americana and his dispatches from abroad. *The Bicycle and the Soul*, his first collection of “prose on poetry,” alternates between personal vignettes and hyper-focused readings of poems he wants us to know. It’s a brief romp at 95 pages, but its sidebars and obiter dicta are such that you sense wide-ranging sources of interest when it comes to poets and writing generally. We also get glimpses of a youth’s spots of time when the dotted outlines of the poet he would eventually become first emerge.

Readers will certainly come away with the impression that Waters can be partially viewed as a ’60s and ’70s New York-inflected culture dude, and he provides witty evidence for such a reading. On one occasion during summer vacation from high school, he mishears a line from the Dylan’s “Desolation Row” as “and every pound of T.S. Eliot/ fighting in the captain’s tower...” (an error he informs us is a species of mondegreen: look it up). Retreating to the 8th Street Bookshop, he discovers books by the still-living Pound and concludes, “He suddenly seemed...as vital a presence as The Beatles, as Dylan. ‘Ezra Pound,’ I mouthed to myself. Pop music was moving beyond me, and I had to be smarter to catch up.” Pop music would seem to provide minimal incubation for a poet, but in keeping up he began building a reputation as a poet who walks the line between rule-testing and linguistic discipline.

The title essay recounts his arriving late to confession as a teen in Queens when, having forgotten his bicycle lock, he explains to the Father why he is breathless, as he rattles off a list of convenient venial sins. The priest meets him by framing the dilemma: “And which concerns you more, your bicycle—or your soul?” We know the answer, as he bolts in time to save his ride from being snatched by random bad guys. Fittingly, the bike requires balance and alertness to terrain: it’s an intimate machine, both mighty and fragile like, say, a poem. As for the soul, you can always take that under advisement later. I note that Waters’ most recent collection is called *Sinnerman*. I note too that his forthcoming new and selected is called *Pagan Sky*.

He recounts meeting Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky when he was 16 and in the company of a young woman unfortunately named Linda Horr. After a reading at Town Hall, Waters goes up to

meet the celebrated author of *Howl*, whereupon Ginsberg invites Waters and his consort up to his apartment for [drumroll here]—soup. He notes with tenderness that beneath the persona of the bearded Beat and counterculture hero there seemed to be a Jewish mother. Ginsberg writes down his phone number, which Waters adds to his wallet. “I’d told my parents about the invitation, so whenever I was late coming home from a track meet or the library or a movie, my father, a fireman, would start shouting at my mother, ‘I bet he’s going to see that Ginsberg guy!’ and my mother would start to cry.”

He also writes that his teenage desire to be a writer got a boost when he realized you could get paid, even as you went about improving your skill level. All you had to do was answer an ad in *The Village Voice* and be willing to take up hack work, in this instance cranking out formulaic, porno novels. He arranges a meeting with the editor of C.A.D. [sic] books, who, as you would suspect, doesn’t conceal his bemusement at the eager young naïf he is presented with (“I wasn’t sure what ‘blow’ meant.”). Flushed in his research, yet undaunted in pursuit of his new career, he sets to work searching for the right tumescent terms, offering such bound-to-be immortal bits of erotica as, “[She had] breasts like scoops of vanilla ice cream topped with maraschino cherries.” His mother finds one of his first attempts in this genre and furiously confronts him for his “filth,” adding the usual clincher: what would the neighbors think? Moments like these take amusement from the vaults of humiliation and nudge them forward into pointillist autobiography.

In another portrait embedded in the title essay, Robert Lowell comes to his rescue at a reading in England in the early ‘70s by introducing “Skunk Hour” as a confessional poem, after this student poet, an American youth no less, had intruded on the sensibilities of haughty dons by suggesting this might be a genre fit for any poet.

Later at graduate school in Iowa, we find him trying to meet the approval of conservative maestro Donald Justice, who, in his Zen-ish way, meted out praise to his students by the teaspoon for phrases and lines, seldom for whole poems. No one ever got the full monty. While Waters’ reports of his path wouldn’t qualify as stations of the cross, exactly, they are nevertheless spot-on, and we see what it takes to embark on a career.

He begins his readings with “In the Museum,” a 6-line poem from Isabella Gardener’s first collection (*Birthdays from the Ocean*, 1955) which presents newlyweds who confront the bones of a female mummy. After setting the scene, he gets down to business as a reliable and insightful docent. Notice how he zooms in: “The six lines of ‘In the Museum’ are written in rhyming fourteeners, their loose iambic heptameter crossed with trochaic and anapestic gestures toward rhythmic phrasings that empathize each line’s musical surface, what the poet John Logan called ‘a ballet for the ear.’” Got it.

In the technical precision of his readings, we come to understand that we are being taken to school by one who understands the deeper mission such tools enable. I was reminded of following an old painter I knew, Arthur Hall Smith, who led me through the great Vermeer exhibit at the National Gallery in 1995 and explained in detail how the artist confabulated his own paints to manage luminosity, working with ground bone ash, lapis lazuli, garlic juice, even urine to invent his pigments. You felt here was a kind of studied love that emerged from the technicalities. Such material intelligence also comes to the rescue of the making and layering of verse. He gives similar forensic treatment to poems by Frank Stanford, W. C. Williams, Gerald Stern, Bill Knott, Jean Valentine, Alicia Ostriker, and Diane Wakoski.

When writing about these poets, Waters prefers to go straight to scansion and other prosodic, examination tools, rather than abstracting themes. Thematic readings too often take precedence over a poem's creation of experience. Sound comes first, and then words get their shape from ink trails, pencil lead, and laptop keyboards. They become malleable, symbolic vehicles to be reshaped as we go, creating a proper resonance.

While my own inclination has often been to approach poems through their thematic frameworks—their philosophical or emotional stakes, Waters reminds me that such interpretation only becomes valid when paired with X-ray vision into the innerds of old-fashioned craft. His readings of these poets return again and again to the shaping intelligence of the line, the modulation of tone, the architecture of both line and stanza. In other words, meaning and making start to become interchangeable. A poem is an object made under pressure: of line, cadence, image, and sonic control.

Nowadays we find ourselves in a prolonged historical moment when poems are frequently read as statements of identity, acts of witness, political interventions, and confessional disclosures. Nor are these things to be brushed aside hastily, and yet a poem's force, to borrow Christopher Rick's term, its authority, resides in the precise goings-on that account for its making in the first place.

The volume ends with an essay on his own poem, "Beloved," written about his wife, the Romanian-American poet Mihaela Moscaliuc, and her love of books, as she made her way from post-Ceausescu Romania to the States. It's a love poem, but Waters also puts on his jeweler's loupe to examine his own procedure in crafting and in the process presents us with a discourse on the benefits of syllabic verse, which many readers, he alleges, don't at first detect. For him, the form is not the net that turned Frost's grassy field into a tennis court, so much as a power mechanism for moving the poem along, both horizontally, discovering the music in the line, and vertically, to the story it tells. Trusting what he calls "the sound of verse," Waters asserts that "Such chiming effects help to keep the entire poem in the foreground, each word snug in its line, each equally important." The sound, as well as the meaning of a word, leads eventually to another sound (and a word) with which it resonates. From here it's phrase to phrase, finding newly emerging resonances on the go. He cites John Logan, Eric Pankey, and Theodore Roethke in the form's defense because of its seemingly inconspicuous nature, but he hands off the best summary quote to Brad Leithauser: "As systems go, syllabic verse has little going for it, except for one puzzling thing: it works."

I'm always eager to read a poet's prose, to peek under the hood to see how the wires are connected. To be sure, the essays here are products of a poet's left hand, not always reaching after the ideal of "a limited aesthetic whole," in Iris Murdoch's formulation, but offering something more immediate, less under the compression of *ars poetica*, but no less engaging in their own right. You come away with the impression of a poet who keeps among the artifacts of his memory images that clarify and expand how a career and the love evident in the pursuit of it, came about.

As the interweaving of anecdotes with readings suggests, Waters wishes to strike a balance between edgy curiosity and classical, even catholic, instincts, between staying in motion and staying focused. Fitzgerald famously remarked that "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." If this be the twinkling virtue I think it is, you will come away from *The Bicycle and the Soul* having spent quality time in the presence of one of our finest poets.



Purchase *The Bicycle and the Soul* by Michael Waters

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Adorning Yourself with Purpose: The Meaning Behind Gemstones

Our Friends · Sunday, July 19th, 2026

Jewelry is one of humanity's oldest ways to express ourselves. Long before we had written words, we were already decorating ourselves with shells, stones, and metals. These weren't just pretty things; they were symbols of who we were, our status, and what we believed. Even today, the gems we pick out continue this old tradition, weaving our personal stories and intentions right into our style. Choosing a piece of jewelry can be about more than just how it looks; it can be a deliberate choice.

Ancient Roots of Adornment

People have wanted to wear jewelry for a very, very long time. Digs by archaeologists show that early humans used things they found around them, like shells, animal teeth, and smooth rocks, to make personal ornaments. These items did a lot of different jobs. They could show someone's role in their tribe, celebrate a big life event, or even act as a lucky charm for protection.

In ancient civilizations like Egypt and Rome, people started using gemstones in fancier ways. Pharaohs loved lapis lazuli for its deep blue, which they thought connected them to the gods. Roman soldiers wore garnets into battle, believing the deep red stone would make them brave and keep them safe. This idea of the **spiritual power of jewelry** shows that right from the start, we've looked to these natural treasures for a meaning that goes way beyond how pretty they are.

Beyond the Sparkle: Gemstone Symbolism

Every gemstone comes with a rich history of old stories and meanings, passed down through different cultures and generations. This symbolism adds a deeper layer to the jewelry we wear, turning a simple accessory into something very personal. The bright colors and special qualities of these stones have always inspired tales and beliefs about their powers.

Take the deep blue sapphire, for instance. For centuries, it's been linked to wisdom, royalty, and divine favor. The fiery red ruby is a universal sign of passion, love, and life. People once thought its intense color was an unquenchable flame burning inside the stone. Emeralds, with their rich green color, are connected to hope, new beginnings, and nature. Knowing the symbolism of gemstones helps us pick out pieces that really speak to our own values or dreams.

Personalizing Style with Birthstones

One of the most popular ways we connect with gemstone symbolism today is through birthstones.

This tradition gives a specific gem to each month of the year, creating a personal link between the stone and the person born in that month. While the modern list was set in the early 20th century, the idea itself comes from ancient astrological beliefs.

Wearing your birthstone is an easy but meaningful way to make your style your own and carry a symbol of who you are. Each stone has its own unique story. For those born in the summer, the perfect birthstone is the **August birthstone: peridot**. Its bright green is thought to bring peace and good luck. Similarly, February's purple amethyst is linked to clarity and calmness, while April's brilliant diamond stands for strength and endless love. It's a tradition that beautifully mixes your personal history with the timeless charm of gems.

Modern Interpretations of Classic Gems

While traditional meanings give us a fascinating starting point, how we wear and understand gems is always changing. Today, many people choose stones based on a personal connection, what they like aesthetically, or the energy they feel the stone gives off, rather than strictly sticking to old symbols. This modern approach makes accessorizing with gems an even more creative and individual act. Learning **how to accessorize like a fashionista** can also help you combine meaningful gemstones with other jewelry pieces to create a polished look that reflects your personality.

Current jewelry designs show this shift. We're seeing more raw, uncut stones that celebrate the natural, imperfect beauty of the gem. Stacking rings or layering necklaces with different stones has also become a popular way to create your own unique story. You might put a stone for protection with one for creativity, making a combination that tells your personal tale. This freedom lets you decide what a gem means to you, making your jewelry a true reflection of your personality.

The gems you choose are more than just fashion accessories. They are tiny pieces of natural history, filled with cultural meaning and personal importance. Whether you're drawn to a stone because of its traditional symbolism or the personal connection you feel, you're taking part in a timeless ritual of decorating yourself with intention.

Photo: Edgar Soto via Unsplash

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