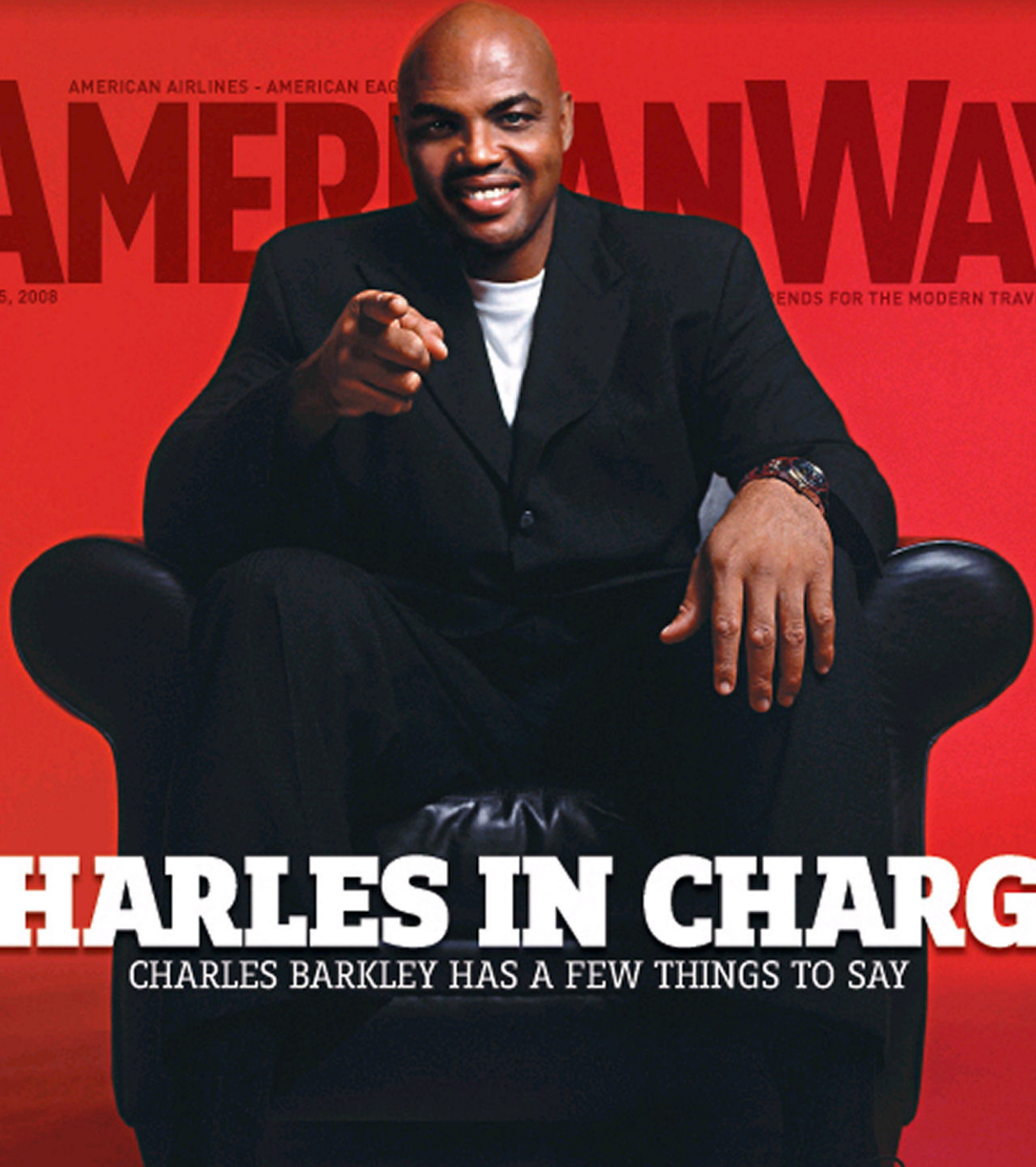


AMERICAN AIRLINES - AMERICAN EAGLE

AMERICAN AIRWAYS

APRIL 15, 2008

ENDS FOR THE MODERN TRAVELER



CHARLES IN CHARGE

CHARLES BARKLEY HAS A FEW THINGS TO SAY

Houston

The country's fourth-largest city and the largest city in Texas has more than 2 million residents, and it's easy to see why people flock to Houston -- it's culturally diverse (90 languages are spoken throughout the area) and packed with activities, from great museums (there are 15 institutions in the Museum District) to top-flight golf (165-plus courses call the Bayou City home).

Try out one of those courses by spending a day on the links at Lake Windcrest Golf Club (www.lakewindcrestgolf.com), an 18-hole course with unrestricted access to the public and great prices. The fairways are generous, the greens plenty green, and the holes challenging enough for all skill levels. If you're in more of a spectator mood, at state-of-the-art Sam Houston Race Park (www.shrp.com), the nation's fastest-growing race track, you can catch live horse racing, watch music performances during the summer on weekend evenings, and grab a bite to eat at one of two restaurants and eight bars.

Houston is known as Space City due to NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center ("Houston" was the first word Neil Armstrong spoke when he landed on the moon), so it's only fitting that a trip includes a drop-in at Space Center Houston (www.spacecenter.org), where you can simulate blasting off into space (with rocket boosters, billowing exhaust, and all), explore an exhibit of spacesuits, and discover what life is like for astronauts in a microgravity environment.

When you come back down to earth and are ready to walk instead of fly, a little shopping may be just what you need to keep you grounded. Those looking for the best steals would be wise to wheel and deal at Traders Village Houston (www.tradersvillage.com), an open-air market held each weekend, housing 2,500 dealers on more than 105 acres. Festivals and special events take place throughout the year, so there's always something more to do than just shop (although here, you may need all day for treasure hunting).

After all that bargain hunting, relax and savour something sweet at **Sugarbaby's Cupcake Boutique** (www.ilovesugarbabys.com). The name says it all -- this place has every cupcake your taste buds could crave. Try an old standby like Va-Va-Vanilla, vanilla bean cake with your choice of traditional vanilla or chocolate buttercream, or go out on a limb with the mouthwatering Chocolate Covered Strawberry, chocolate cake filled with strawberry preserves, topped with strawberry buttercream and dipped in dark chocolate, or Criss Cross Applesauce, light applesauce spice cake with cinnamon cream cheese frosting.

If you need something a little more substantial than a cupcake, try eating at the Grove (www.thegrovehouston.com), an urban dweller's paradise located in Discovery Green (www.discoverygreen.com), a 12-acre park with a lake, interactive fountains, Wi-Fi access, an amphitheater, indoor and outdoor reading areas, and much more. The Grove features chic décor and serves up rustic American cuisine like seared ahi tuna with Mississippi grits, charcoal-grilled ribeye, and braised Long Island duck legs.

After a busy day in H-Town, crash at Hotel Granduca (www.granducahouston.com), a Tuscan-themed hotel in the Uptown/Galleria area. Here, you're in for impeccable service and the feel of being transported to old-world Italy. Amenities include fully equipped kitchens, a billiard room, wireless Internet, and plasma high-definition televisions. Another good bet for a place to lay your head is Lancaster Hotel (www.thelancaster.com), a Theater District staple since 1926. European décor and charm combine with a prime location to make this boutique hotel a favorite in the city.

Haley Shapley is a freelance writer based in North Texas. She loves the plentiful shopping, sightseeing, and almost year-round sunshine that fill the state.



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