

ROADTRIP | Ballroom Boxing

WHERE: Michael's Eighth Avenue, Glen Burnie, Md.

WHY: A 24-hour pool room, fighting, tattoos—all the things your mom told you to avoid.

HOW FAR: About 25 miles (30 minutes) from the intersection of the Capital Beltway and I-95.

Men drenched in sweat punch each other senseless while scantily clad women strut. We're not inside the Beltway anymore, Toto! This is Ballroom Boxing as conceived by Scott Wagner, owner of Michael's Eighth Avenue in Glen Burnie. Usually, his crystal-chandeliered banquet facility hosts wedding receptions. But six times a year—with the next event coming March 11—the Michael's staff sets up a folding-chair arena, creating a venue where raucous audiences can see pro fighters and bombshell "card girls" get down and dirty with their bad selves. Since its 1995 debut it's proven a knockout, luring more than 1,000 fans per six-bout event (plus, it's now televised on a few cable networks, including Comcast Sports Net). Headlining the next card: former world heavyweight champ Hasim "the Rock" Rahman. For full details, see www.ballroomboxing.com.

To get there, you'll trek down the main drag of Glen Burnie, the quintessential blue-collar Maryland town. Stop at Ann's Dari Creme, a modern-day version of a '50s malt shop, with cheese-steak subs, foot-long dogs, hot fudge sundaes, and gaggle of teens with cool clothes and hot cars. Shopaholics should take a moment of silence when passing Harundale Plaza—it's the former site of Harundale Mall, the first enclosed shopping facility in the eastern half of the country. Farther up Ritchie Highway, you can morph your ride into a multimedia machine at Audio Profile, which has MP3 players and high-res video systems (closed Sundays). Then, suit up in country duds at Carol's Western Wear, a 42-year-old, family-owned business where you can buy Lawman jeans or Native American turquoise jewelry.

Take a quick detour to Ferndale Oldies Records on Baltimore Annapolis Boulevard (closed Thursdays and Sundays), where owner Margie Coffey will help you track down hard-to-find LPs by rockabilly legends (Jack Scott) or local favorites (country crooner Ronnie Dove). And after the fight, wrap up the trip by grooving to good old-fashioned rock-and-roll at the Fireside Inn, where roots-conscious bands such as Mary Lou and the Untouchables blaze almost as hot as the buffalo wings.

— Tony Sclafani

