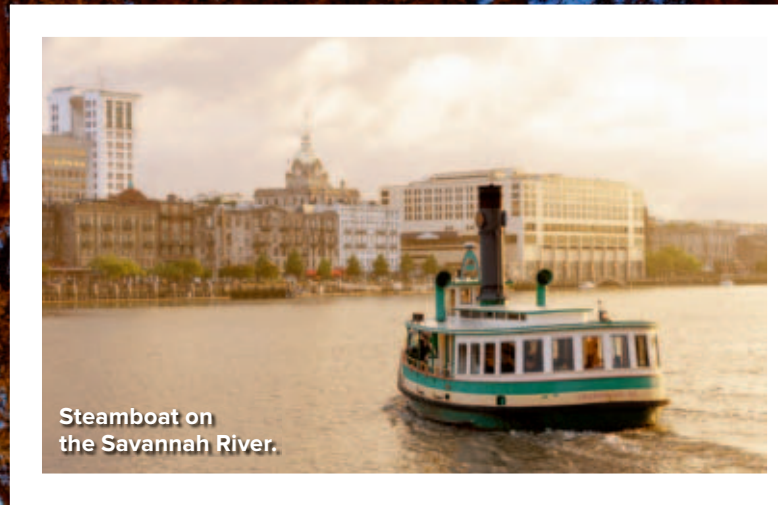


Savannah:

JEWEL OF THE SOUTH

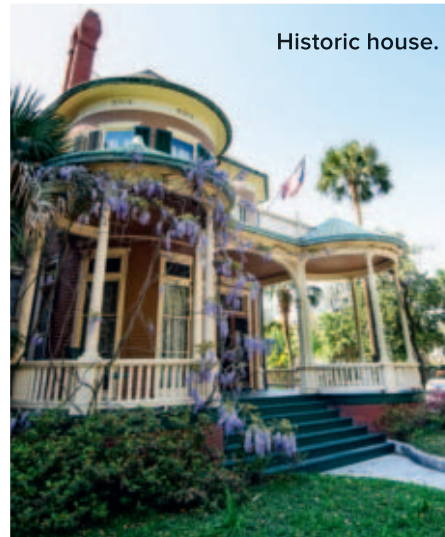
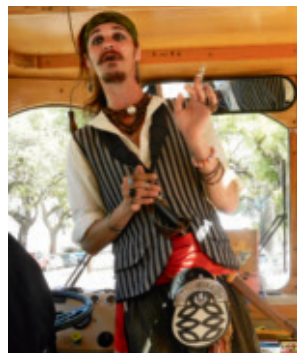


Steamboat on the Savannah River.

This is a city to take long walks in
By Rob and Wendy Lindsay

Forsyth Park.

Top: carriage and trolley tours. Middle: the infamous Mercer Williams House.



the mansion and we hear, "Yes, folks, this is the house where it all took place. This is the infamous Mercer Williams House featured in the novel and the film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. You can return and book a private tour." As the trolley pulls away, a horse-drawn carriage takes its place for a few minutes, and then it, too, moves off.

We've been here only a few days but have quickly learned that the 2.5-square mile (6.5-square kilometre) Historic District of Savannah, Georgia, is a living museum.

An Architectural Array

When founding father General James Oglethorpe laid out the fledgling city on the Savannah River in 1733, he planned central squares surrounded by dwellings. It was perhaps the first planned city

in what became the United States. Lower New Square (now Reynolds Square) and Upper New Square (now Oglethorpe Square) were the first two squares in the plans. Today the 22 squares that grace Savannah's Historic District have blossomed into a wonderful walkable venue for tourists. The squares are like a string of magnificent public gardens, each hosting a different statue in the centre. Each square is equipped with benches, and many have a resident busker to add to the ambience.

Before we began walking the squares, we were advised that a trolley tour would give us a good sense of the Historic District. We found we had many trolley companies and at least half a dozen carriage companies to choose among. Pedicabs and many ghost tours, including one in a hearse, are also available. We chose Old Savannah Tours because the company pro-

vided a shuttle from our hotel, had a hop-on, hop-off option, and had costumed historical interpreters. One of the most colourful historical characters to step aboard was the pirate who gave us insight into the shanghaiing of young men at the tavern now known as The Pirates' House. Having been plied with liquor, the unfortunate young men were dragged through a tunnel to the river and put aboard a ship, where they awoke to find themselves at sea and part of the crew. Apparently the practice inspired Robert Louis Stevenson to write *Treasure Island*.

and the surrounding Low Country. Savannah was saved from the fires of the Civil War in the 1860s when prominent local businessmen persuaded the city government to surrender rather than let their city be burned to the ground, as Atlanta had been. Thanks to years of restoration, dedication, and fundraising by members of Historic Savannah and like-minded citizens, we discovered a historic district with a wonderfully diverse array of architectural styles from the 18th and 19th centuries. The Davenport House, on Columbia Square, is an example of

the Federal style. The Olde Pink House restaurant, on Reynolds Square, is a fine example of the symmetry of Georgian architecture. Gothic Revival can be seen in the Congregation Mickve Israel temple (founded in 1733), in Monterey Square, while the First Baptist Church (built between 1831 and 1833), on Chippewa Square, displays the Greek Revival style. The Telfair Academy, on Telfair Square, has the columns and alcove entranceways associated with Regency. The Hamilton-Turner Inn, in Lafayette Square, is an example of Second Empire style. Finally, the impressive Cotton

Exchange building, on Reynolds Square, is a fine example of the symmetry of Georgian architecture. Gothic Revival can be seen in the Congregation Mickve Israel temple (founded in 1733), in Monterey Square, while the First Baptist Church (built between 1831 and 1833), on Chippewa Square, displays the Greek Revival style. The Telfair Academy, on Telfair Square, has the columns and alcove entranceways associated with Regency. The Hamilton-Turner Inn, in Lafayette Square, is an example of Second Empire style. Finally, the impressive Cotton

Map: Getty Images. Photos: Lyndsay Editorial (trolley and Pirates' House); Visit Savannah (house and square).

Photos: Lyndsay Editorial (Cotton Exchange); Visit Savannah/geoffphotos (house).



Owens-Thomas House.



Exchange building down by the river boasts Romanesque Revival. It is little wonder the famous Savannah

College of Art and Design has its flagship campus in this city.

The Waterfront

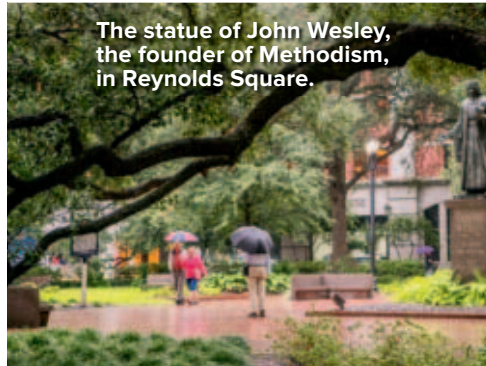
Thus inspired, we toured the Owens-

Thomas House, one of Savannah's most popular historic house museums. Completed in 1819, the splendid building of the English Regency period is a tribute to the genius of the young English architect William Jay, who completed the design before his 21st birthday. Jay included inventions ahead of his time, such as indoor plumbing, a rare interior bridge to access all second-floor rooms without the wasted space

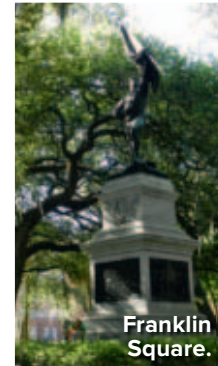
of hallways, and brass trim on stairway railings to improve visibility by catching the lamp-light. The house is beautifully furnished. The slave quarters are still intact and there is an interesting walled garden. Truly a one-of-a-kind place, it's a National Historic Landmark. We were delighted to be staying in one of Savannah's 2,500 historically significant buildings. The present Planters Inn began life in 1734 as a Church of England parsonage, at one time home to John Wesley, famous for founding the Methodist church and writing many of the hymns we still sing today. Not surprisingly, Reynolds Square, across from the Planters Inn, has a towering statue of Wesley. Also not surprisingly, it seemed a walking tour stopped by morning, noon, and night.



Planters Inn.



The statue of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in Reynolds Square.



Franklin Square.



Riverboats and the golden dome of City Hall in the background.



City Market.

A Port City

As we learned during a relaxing tour with Savannah Riverboat Cruises, the river and its port are still the lifeblood of Savannah—

Our hotel was a short walk from the waterfront, a good place to find an evening meal or a lively bar.

Savannah's waterfront has been important from the beginning, originally for importing goods and exporting cotton from the colony of Georgia. The ornate red-brick Cotton Exchange building is still one of the most impressive structures on the banks of the Savannah River. We learned from our waitress that the present-day Cotton Exchange Seafood Grill and Tavern was a restored building that had been a huge warehouse for bales of cotton awaiting shipment by boat.

The next day, we explored the historic Factors Walks she'd told us about. In front of the line of former warehouses, black wrought iron footbridges arch from the buildings over a cobbled roadway below to the present-day sidewalk, which had formerly been a seawall. It was on these "factors walks" that cotton merchants of yesteryear stood to survey and bid on loads of cotton being driven past below. As in so much of Savannah, the old and the new tumble together. Today the Factors Walks carry foot traffic to the offices, shops, and restaurants located in the old refurbished warehouses.

92 per cent of all goods move around the world in containers, and Savannah is the fourth-busiest port in the United States handling them. The port of Savannah contributes approximately \$100 million a day to the economy of Georgia. The lovely old city and its port sit in a protected location 22.5 kilometres (14 miles) inland, and most surprising, it's as far west as Cleveland, Ohio, a distinct economic advantage for importers and exporters.

The cruise turned around just past historic old Fort Jackson, where a cannon salute was fired, much to the glee of the children on board. On the way back, we got another view of the statue of the Waving Girl, which has become a modern symbol for this southern port city. Myth, history, and folk tale swirl around the story of Florence Martus, the girl who waved to every ship entering Savannah—and did so for 44 years, day and night. Some say she was waiting vainly for a sailor who had proposed to her—or was it simply her quirky obsession? Whatever the story, more than 1,000 sailors attended a birthday party at the Propeller Club thrown in her honour before she died.

The city of Savannah is a lovely sight

from the river, with its riverside parks, historic warehouses lining River Street, and the golden dome of City Hall towering above it all. As the cruise boat docked, a sweet smell wafted our way from River Street Sweets—their world-famous pralines. The young men cooking up batches of the pecan-and-sugar candy happily handed out samples to the tourists flooding the shop.

City Market, between Franklin Square and Ellis Square, is another spot to sample pralines and other Savannah goodies. Within the four blocks are cafés for all tastes, oodles of craft shops, and many art galleries tucked into restored buildings—all watched over by the casual bronze statue of local lyricist and composer Johnny Mercer.

Mercer is portrayed leaning against a fire hydrant and looking up from a catalogue of songs, perhaps mentally composing the words to one of his many hits—including "Blues in the Night," "One for My Baby," "Lazy Bones," "Fools Rush In," "That Old Black Magic," "Laura," and "Moon River." The soundtrack for *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* is like a Mercer tribute album, containing, as it does, 14 of his songs.

"Cradling Comfort"

We realized that Savannah takes food seriously when our hotel's concierge hefted her "dining directory" of local menus onto my lap—it was 13 centimetres (five inches) thick. It helped explain the lineups we had noticed middays and evenings at The Olde Pink House next door to our inn and the very long lines on Broughton Street every afternoon outside Leopold's Ice Cream. Leopold's is known for its tutti-

Photos: Lyndsay Editorial (garden, plaque, and tavern sign); Visit Savannah (facade).

Photos: Courtesy of the Planters Inn (hotel); Visit Savannah (Reynolds Square and City Hall); Lyndsay Editorial (Franklin Square and City Market).