

# GEORGIA

## A weekend in Savannah

From its charming squares and antebellum architecture to its quirky museums and eclectic cuisine, Savannah seamlessly blends modernity and tradition. Words: Ally Wybrew

Anyone who's set foot in America's Deep South will know 'Southern charm' is no myth, and Savannah — Georgia's oldest city — embodies just this. Situated at the mouth of the Savannah River in the east of the state, the city has retained its 'olde world' atmosphere since 1733 through its well-preserved cobblestone streets, pre-Civil War architecture, horse-drawn carriages and manicured parks. Meanwhile its more modern array of offerings, including quirky ice cream parlours, moody speakeasies, cosy coffee shops and independent bookshops, have all helped earn its more recent nickname of the 'Hostess City of the South'.

Its urban beauty is also undeniable. Though ravaged by naval blockades during the Civil War, Savannah is said to have charmed Union general

William Sherman so much that he saved it from the fires being set by his soldiers during the battle, and instead offered the city as a Christmas gift to President Abraham Lincoln. Today, Savannah plays a much larger role than just being easy on the eye; it's a vibrant cultural and historical hub for the state and the perfect jumping-off point for various coastal adventures.

Begin your exploration in the city's downtown **Historic District** — an area where over 1,000 landmarks, including great, storied buildings and park-like city squares, set the quintessential scene of the American South. Various avenues are also famously lined with oak trees festooned with Spanish moss. While in the area, be sure to stop by the **Graveface Museum**, which specialises in true crime and eccentric oddities from around the world, as well as the **Jepson Center** for its forward-thinking

art exhibitions and interactive spaces. The **Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace Museum** is also well worth a visit for its rich stories, special collections and unique experiences recalling the life of Juliette Gordon Low, who founded the Girl Scouts.

Savannah's 22 squares are split across five streets and vary in size and features, with fountains, monuments, playgrounds and refreshment vendors. **Johnson Square**, the oldest and largest of Savannah's historic squares, is surrounded by some of the most magnificent buildings, including City Hall, the Christ Episcopal Church and several large banks. **Chippewa Square**, meanwhile, is the one for cinephiles. Soak up the location where Tom Hanks entered 'life is like a box of chocolates' into movie history, though don't hope for a Forrest Gump imitation photo: the film's iconic bench now sits ensconced within the **Savannah History Museum**,

a 10-minute walk away. Just eight streets on sits another movie icon: the red-brick **Mercer Williams House Museum**, made famous by its sinister history and starring role in the book and film of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

As you wend your way through this historic district, keep an eye out for the russet-painted doors and entryways. Historically, these signified open houses which offered food and shelter for weary travellers and escaped slaves.

Savannah is also replete with diners, bars and even converted movie theatres-turned-eateries. Fresh seafood staples can be enjoyed at **The Cotton Exchange Tavern** on East River Street, where crab chowder, fried green tomatoes and peel'n'eat shrimp top the bill. For that communal feel, pull up a pew and get to know the locals at **Mrs. Wilkes Dining Room** on Jones

Street, which serves fried chicken, okra gumbo and other Southern specialties in a cosy, homestyle setting. Plant-based diners should beeline for **The Sentient Bean**, while those looking for a sugar fix have no finer option than to head to **Leopald's Ice Cream**, which has been serving local sweet treats and bespoke sodas for over a century.

When a destination sports multiple nicknames, it usually bodes well, and there's a good reason Savannah's other appellation is 'The Forest City'. Its historic commitment to tree planting makes it a uniquely green metropolis. Beyond its downtown district, idyllic natural escapes such as **Wormsloe Historic Site** and **Skidaway Island State Park** offer oak-arched avenues and generous hiking trails. Further south, beside the Ogeechee River, visitors can camp, fish or rent a cabin in **Fort McAllister State Park**, home to old Confederate fortifications.



An aerial view of downtown Savannah  
Left: The fountain in Forsyth Park is one of Savannah's most well-known icons

### THREE MORE EXCURSIONS FROM THE CITY

#### 1 TYBEE ISLAND, GEORGIA

Just over 30 minutes by car, Tybee Island offers vast, golden beaches, warm waters and family-friendly activities, including dolphin-watching, kayaking and exploring the state's oldest lighthouse.

#### 2 BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA

Head over the state line to Beaufort in South Carolina, where antebellum architecture, church ruins and oak avenues make the state's second-oldest city a perfect Savannah pairing. Tour by foot, bike or even biplane, or hit the water on a cruise or a kayak.

#### 3 GOLDEN ISLES, GEORGIA

Georgia's Atlantic coastline has 150 miles of subtropical barrier islands all ripe for exploration. Beaches, expansive marshland and untouched forests offer a pleasing contrast to the bustling downtown area. Jekyll Island, St Simons Island and Sea Island are easiest to access on a coastal road trip replete with picturesque stop-offs.

### PLAN YOUR TRIP

Multiple airlines fly from the UK to Savannah via major US hub cities, including New York, Miami, Atlanta and Charlotte, in 10-17 hours. Within the city, taxis, rideshares and car rental services are available, though there's also a comprehensive bus system (a day pass is \$3/£2.36) as well as rental bikes. For more information, go to [visitsavannah.com](https://visitsavannah.com)

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