

River Street—revitalized with shops, restaurants, and year-round festivals—anchors Savannah’s historic waterfront.

take one part Southern history, one part outdoor concert, one part carnival, and a smidgen of the Fourth of July. Mix well and you have Savannah’s River Street.

At the time of the city’s founding in 1733, the cobblestone street was a stomping ground for pirates and rogues, until cotton became king and Savannah its queen. Worldwide cotton prices were officially set on Factor’s Walk, just above the River Street cotton warehouses.

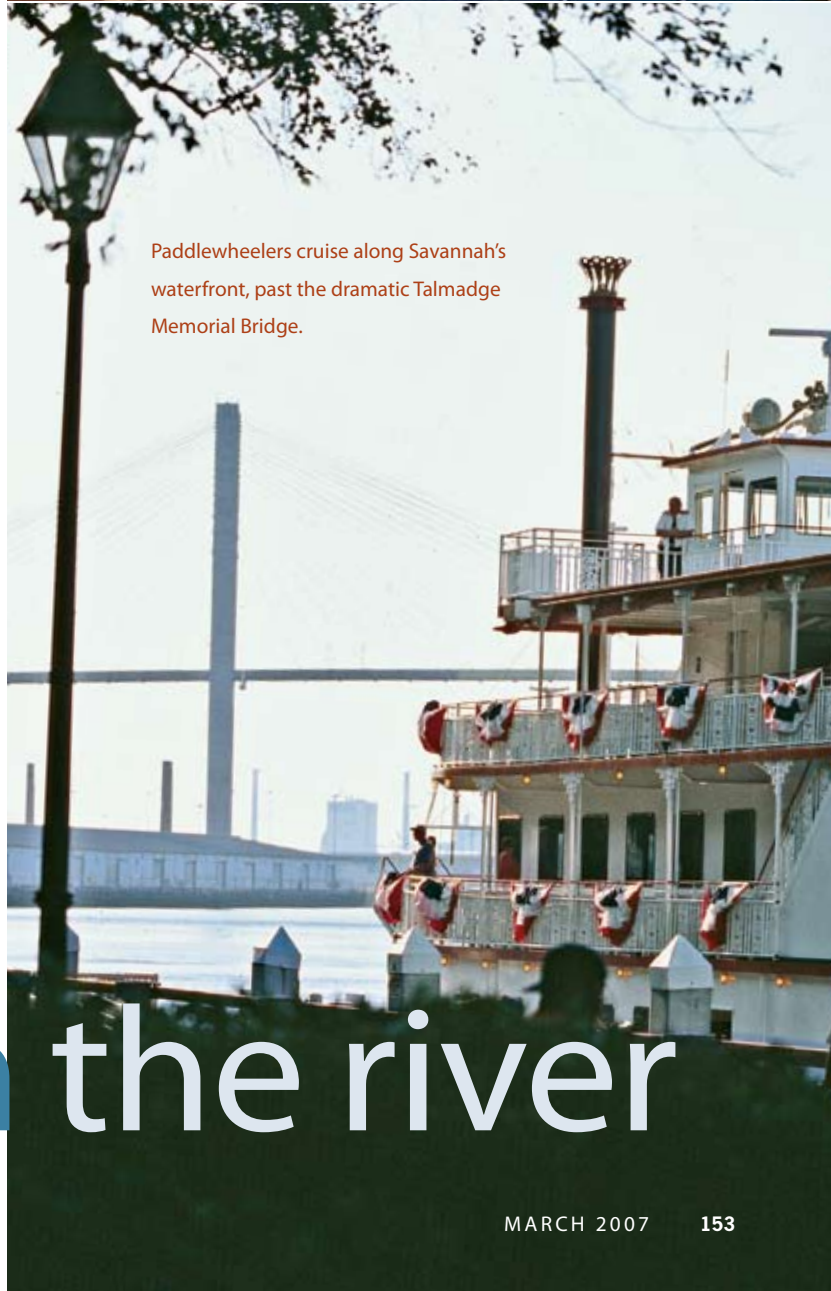
Today, the thoroughfare boasts 20-some restaurants, four art galleries, 84 shops, and six hotels. “River Street is ‘New Orleans lite’—all of the culture, minus the raunch,” says Carol Hixson, who moved here to attend the Savannah College of Art and Design (known locally as “scad”).

Any weekend from March through December, you’re likely to find a celebration on River Front Plaza. Take St. Patrick’s Day, when the population swells by the thousands for a party bested only by New York’s. “Our St. Patrick’s Day is everything you have heard—and then some,” says Kenny Hill, associate director of the Savannah Waterfront Association. Or consider Oktoberfest, when almost 200 canines compete in weiner-dog races.

The fun extends to smaller festivals as well. The Waterfront Association plans more than 20 events, including First Friday (of the month) celebrations capped off by fireworks over the river. First Saturday festivities feature music and artwork made and sold by juried artists. All the events are free, but a portion of proceeds from sold items goes

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rollin’ on the river



Paddlewheelers cruise along Savannah’s waterfront, past the dramatic Talmadge Memorial Bridge.

back to the community through nonprofit groups such as Second Harvest, a hunger-relief group.

Just walking around on a festival weekend is an invigorating experience. You can sample fish on a stick, watch pottery being made, and listen to a mariachi band play “Blue Suede Shoes.” The pirates of old wouldn’t recognize today’s River Street, and they probably wouldn’t know what to make of the street performers. But they’d still have a good time—and they’d definitely enjoy the fireworks🎆



on the street

WHERE TO STAY: Rates at The Olde Harbour Inn start at \$169; 800/553-6533 or oldeharbourinn.com. Rates at The River Street Inn start at \$149; 800/253-4229 or riverstreetinn.com. Rates at The Hyatt Regency start at \$145; 800/233-1234 or hyattregency.savannah.com.

THE PERFECT MEAL: Seafood bisque followed by a half-pound of peel-your-own shrimp at The Shrimp Factory (313 East River Street). Finish with a slice of Key lime pie; 912/236-4229 or theshrimpfactory.com.

WHERE TO SHOP: Check out Savannah Candy Kitchen (225 River Street), a kid’s paradise; 912/233-8411 or savannahcandy.com. For trains, flags, and unusual toys, step into Savannah Sails & Rails; 912/232-7201. Washed Ashore carries a variety of nautical and coastal gift items; 912/234-6100. True Grits is for the kitsch-inclined shopper; 912/234-8006. River Street Marketplace houses 30-some vendors; 912/220-9100 or riverstreetmarketplace.com.

MORE INFORMATION: Visit River Street Hospitality Center near the Hyatt on the west end of River Street, or call 912/651-6662. For online information, visit riverstreetsavannah.com or savannahvisit.com.