

8 Reasons Savannah Should Be Your Next Southern Getaway

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Courtesy of Visit Savannah

Elevated dining and a red-hot hotel scene, to name a few.

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With its Spanish moss-draped squares and stately antebellum architecture, Savannah oozes Southern charm. But thanks to the recent arrival of chic boutique hotels, edgy art galleries, and celeb chef restaurants, the river town is enjoying a newfound reputation as the South's capital of cool.

Rooted in 300 years of history, Georgia's oldest city has been slow to embrace change (hence its nickname, Slowvannah). There's a fierce pride among residents who don't want massive, multi-million-dollar projects to compete with the city's small-town appeal. And archeologists have raised concerns about the effects of large-scale development on the city's unearthed artifacts and historic sites, which landed on the National Park Service's "Threatened (Priority 1 List)" in March.

In spite of the city's longstanding battle between preservation and progress, the Southern town is soaring in popularity— just take our World's Best list, where readers have rated it one of America's top 10 cities for more than six years straight. In response to the tourism boom, luxury hotel brands, such as Aloft and JW Marriott, are moving in, along with a slew of new restaurants (Husk, anyone?!), galleries, and stores.

Here is what's to come in Savannah's next act.

Husk

Shrimp and grits, collard greens, seafood stew... Lowcountry cuisine is part of Savannah's soul (and stomach). And now, the city's vibrant food scene is finally getting its moment in the spotlight, owing to a wave of new restaurant openings—the most buzz-worthy being an outpost of Sean Brock's lauded Husk. The largest of the four locations, the glam eatery has a distinctly Georgian twist, with a raw bar and regionally inspired fare such as ham cracklin' cornbread with Georgia cane butter.

Perry Lane Hotel

Savannah is in the midst of a massive hotel boom; the city will see the opening of not one, but eight design-forward boutique hotels in the next few months. All eyes are on the much-anticipated Perry Lane Hotel, which debuted earlier this month. The dapper bolthole is a vision in understated elegance, with black-and-white marble floors, rich wood furnishings, roaring fireplaces, and vintage accessories. There are also plenty of slick amenities, including a rooftop pool with a bar and lawn games, a film screening room, a karaoke and arcade area, plus a wine market that offers tastings and cooking classes.

The Grove

Blink and you might think you're in Brooklyn. The Grove, a new three-story dining concept in the heart of the bustling City Market, is lending an air of sophistication to the touristy square. The buzzy bar is done up bright

white walls and plush teal seating, but with a terrace overlooking the Savannah skyline, we won't blame you for sitting outside. Your order: spiked sweet tea and the blackened shrimp, served on a bed of spiced turnip greens and gouda grits.

Laney Contemporary Fine Art

Home to the Savannah College of Design and SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah is an arts and culture powerhouse. Reinforcing its creative image is the city's newest art gallery, Laney Contemporary, from gallerist and private art dealer Susan Laney. Located on the outskirts of town, the gallery is well worth the drive to see contemporary photography, paintings, and immersive video installations from the likes of Jack Leigh and Katherine Sandoz.

Plant Riverside District

Hotelier Richard Kessler's \$275 million Plant Riverside District is at the forefront of the city's renaissance. The sprawling 4.5-acre entertainment complex, which is housed in and around a restored 1912 industrial power plant, is the biggest private development in Savannah's history. When it opens next spring, it will transform the iconic waterfront, creating 1.5 acres of parks, plazas, and public areas, as well as extending the riverwalk by a quarter-mile. At the heart of the project is a brand new JW Marriott, which will feature three rooftop bars, an art gallery, indie shops, live music venues,

natural science exhibits, and more than a dozen restaurants, all spread across three towers.

Artillery

Savannah has always been a popular drinking destination, due to its loose open container laws. Spend a Saturday night along Bay Street, the lively main drag, and you'll spot more than a few pub pedals and boozy bachelorette parties. Looking for a more slightly more sophisticated scene? Try Artillery, an intimate speakeasy housed in an 1896 Venetian Gothic building. Here, the standards are high, from the strict dress code (no flip-flops!) and noise limit (silence your cell phone) to the upscale interiors— all quartz countertops, bronze accents, and chartreuse banquettes. Cheeky tipples like Man The Guns—a mix of high west campfire whiskey, amaro lucano, absinthe, and 18.21 prohibition aromatic bitters—nod to the building's past life as a storehouse for the Georgia Hussars.

Cultural Arts Center

Although Savannah has a thriving arts community, it has noticeably lacked its own dedicated performance space. The \$24 million Cultural Arts Center, opening this fall, is set to change that. Spanning 39,000 square feet, the multi-purpose hall will have a 464-seat theater, five crafts studios and classrooms, a small-scale stage, and a gallery. Future events will include rotating art programs and a wide variety of shows, from Broadway to ballet.

Eastern Wharf

Just east of downtown, this 57-acre riverfront compound is one of the city's most talked-about developments. The \$600 million mixed-use project will feature four residential apartment buildings, seven acres of public parks and squares, a 200-room hotel, plus ample retail and office space. It's estimated to take eight years to finish, but the first phase (with the hotel, apartments, and offices) will be rolled out by 2020.

Our series Reasons to Travel Now highlights the news, events, and openings that have us scoping out plane tickets each day.