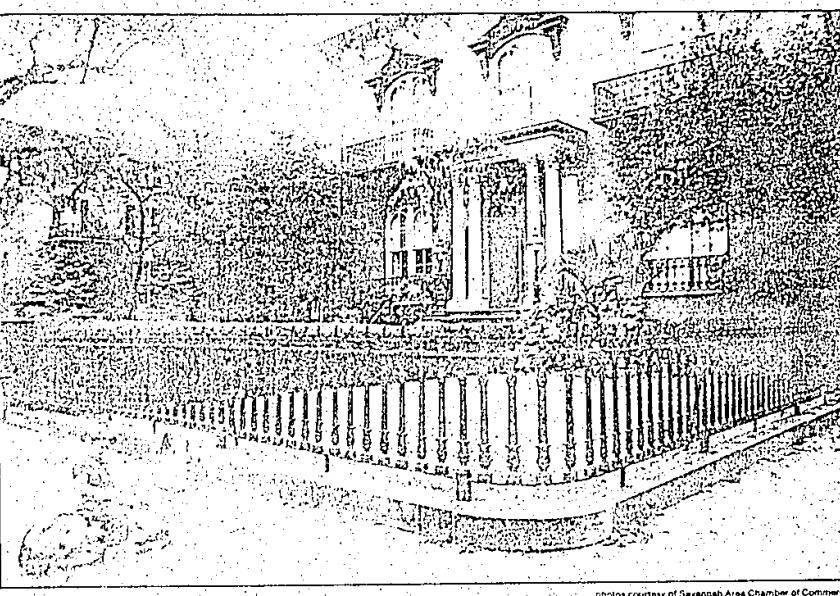


TRAVEL

Monday, April 27, 1992 \$0.65

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAVANNAH AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Above, the historic Mercer Wilder House in Savannah is a classic example of gracious Southern architecture. At right: Savannah's Madison Square park is a beautiful place for a picnic in the spring.



By Peter Applebome
New York Times Syndicate

Early spring, when the azaleas and wisteria embroider the elegant grid of downtown squares of Savannah, Ga., may be the best season to visit one of the South's most historic cities.

Founded in 1733, Savannah began

as a rather audacious vision — an

attempt to create a vibrant urban

environment built around a

symmetrical network of urban

squares out of Georgia swampland.

Today the city is still a work in

progress. It has not gone as far as

neighboring Charleston in putting all

the pieces together, but its inviting

urban geometry, rich sense of

history and compact downtown

make it an exceptionally inviting

place to visit.

This is a good time of year, before

the summer heat really sets in, to

explore Savannah on foot.

There are at least four focal

points for visitors: the restored

waterfront, scene of music and arts

events; the first Saturday of each

month, the leafy grid of squares full

of intriguing architecture and

history; the restored City Market,

where old warehouses have been

restored into restaurants and shops;

and Tybee Island, 18 miles east of

downtown Savannah, which offers

boating, fishing and boating for

those who have had their fill of

downtown.

For a city its size, Savannah has

an extraordinarily rich selection of

inns and hotels to choose from.

Repeat visitors who have liked

where they've stayed in the past

would do well to take a chance on

another place they might like even

more.

EVENTS

One of the best sunset views can be found as part of the Castle Garden Days of the Tybee Lighthouse, at 30 Marine Drive. Held May 1 and the first Friday of June, July and August, the tour goes to the top of Georgia's oldest (1773) and tallest (15 feet) lighthouse.

The tour is \$3, \$2 for children aged 6 to 12. The lighthouse is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., closed Tuesday. Admission is \$1.50, 50 cents for children. For more information call (912) 786-5801.

The waterfront is the focus for a number of events all year. On May 2, and the first Saturday of every month, the First Saturday Festival offers food and crafts booths from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

On May 9 and 10 is the annual Arts on the River Festival with music by arts organizations and groups throughout the city, ranging from classical to jazz and folk. There is no charge for either.

Also downtown is the annual free Shakespeare on the Square. This year the City Lights Theater is presenting "The Comedy of Errors" May 1 to 10. Tickets \$10.

At the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, at 21 Barnard St., "The Fine Arts in America" — selections from the academy's collection of American paintings, drawings, prints and sculpture — continues to June 21.

Until June 14, the museum will display "The Cutting Edge,"

an exhibition of contemporary American Folk Art, a collection of work by 20 folk artists. For more information call (912) 232-1177.

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SIGHTSEEING

You don't need a tour guide to see Savannah. All you need is a sturdy pair of walking shoes and a good guidebook. For the latter the best source for reading material on the city is E. Shaver Bookseller, at 326 Bull St., on Madison Square. Call (912) 234-7257.

The best way to wander around is to view each square as a discrete community with its own personality. Johnson Square is the city's commercial center, with symbols of power ranging from the major banks to the commanding Christ Church.

Madison Square may be the most vibrant, full of students from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Troup Square feels the most like a friendly neighborhood park.

Be sure to meander over to Forsyth Park, with its moss-draped oaks and riot of spring color, and to Colonial Park Cemetery, Oglethorpe Avenue and Abercorn Street, with its weathered headstones and monuments of the colonial days.

For those interested in a tour, one of the most popular is the two-hour excursion along the waterfront and historic district with Green Trolley Tours. The price is \$15, \$5 for children under 12. For more information call (912) 233-0084.

Square Routes offers intimate, sophisticated looks at historic Savannah, including a breakfast, walking tour of \$16, an afternoon architecture and gardens tour (\$12).

and an evening haunted house tour (\$15, \$10 for those under 12). For more information call (800) 858-6857.

For a more grand experience there is a cruise on the Savannah River Queen, a 325-passenger reproduction of a historic riverboat. Tours range from one-hour daytime cruises, \$7.50, to a two-hour dinner special, \$27.95. For more information call (912) 232-6404.

Among the buildings particularly worth seeing downtown is the Isaiah Davenport House, at 324 East State St. Admission is \$4. Its restoration in 1955 gave birth to Savannah's historic preservation movement. For more information call (912) 236-8097.

The Owens-Thomas House, at 124 Abercorn St., is considered one of the finest examples of Regency architecture in America. Admission is \$5. For more information call (912) 233-9743.

The King-Tisdell Cottage, at 514 East Huntingdon St., is now a museum of African-American history and the Sea Islands. Admission is \$1.75. For more information call (912) 234-8000.

Most people gravitate toward the waterfront, but better shopping and browsing can be found at the City Market on Ellis Square, which offers antique and crafts shops, art galleries, a sports cafe, Hard-Hearted Hannah's jazz club and three restaurants. For more information on Ellis Square call (912) 232-3470.

Travel between the pages of a new guide

By Everett Potter
special writer

Summer is the busiest time of the year in the travel business. It's no surprise to find a new crop of travel guides waiting for eager readers.

Here's a selection of the best.

A series called "Access Travel Guides" has long been distinguished for "sucinct writing and a savvy insider's grasp of local color."

The first nine titles include New York City, Mexico, Hawaii and the Caribbean. They range from \$10.95 to \$14.95 per book.

Just in time for the summer Olympics is "Slow Walks in Barcelona: A Visitor's Companion" by Michael Lettich (HarperPerennial 1992, \$13), a series of 16 detailed walks throughout the city.

They include strolls to Antonio Gaudí's Sagrada Família church, to the Miró and Picasso museums and to the bird, flower and food markets of the Rambla.

Those who love the outdoors will enjoy "Exploring Colorado's Wild Areas" by Scott S. Warren (The Mountaineers, 1992, \$14.95). The guidebook advises readers to 65 backcountry areas. Each area is assessed for hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing and kayaking.

"Hikes with Children: San Francisco's North Bay" by Bill McMillion, with Kevin McMillion (The Mountaineers, 1992, \$12.95) is the latest entry in that popular series. It lists 90 day hikes that encompass such places as Mount Tamalpais and Point Reyes National Seashore.

What is different is the expanded range of moderate- and low-priced hotels and restaurants.

For London, for example, where it's difficult to find a room for less than \$200 a night, the guide lists hotels and guest houses ranging from about \$52 to \$165 per night.

There is also detailed information on public transportation for travel within cities and on day trips, the assumption that rental cars will not be needed.

Anglophones should also check "Cottages, B&Bs and Country Inns of England and Wales" by Elizabeth Gandy (Fodor's Travel Publications, 1992, \$15).

Published in England as "Staying Off The Beaten

Path," this popular guide to more than 500 properties is in its 11th edition in England and has now been published for the first time in the United States.

If the new series of Berlitz Travelers' Guide books seems familiar, it's because the entire group was originally published as the Penguin Travel Guides.

Last year Berlitz bought the series from Penguin and brought along general editor Alan Tucker. While the covers have changed, the books continue to be written by a committee of writers who really know their destinations.

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The Lonely Planet travel series has a mission to cover the planet. These books appeal to youthful, adventurous and budget-minded travelers. One of the latest entries is "Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia" by Deanna Swaney and Myra Shackley (Lonely Planet, 1991, \$16.95).

For the traveler who has always dreamed of going to Victoria Falls, meeting the "bush people" of Kalahari and viewing African wildlife without an organized safari, this is the guide.

A 32-page section of color photographs and illustrations of wildlife is especially helpful.

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