



The Andrew Low House was built in 1848. Low's son, William, married Juliette Gordon, founder of the Girl Scouts of the USA.

## Stylish Savannah

Genteel Southern hospitality, antebellum homes and Old-World ambience beckon visitors to this Georgian coastal charmer

By Pam Windsor

**S**avannah, Georgia, exudes the charm of the Old South with moss-draped trees, historic homes, and city squares with decorative monuments and fountains. You'll be pleasantly surprised by the many architectural styles of homes, buildings and churches along Savannah's streets. Preservation is a priority here with many structures designated National Historic Landmarks.

Gen. James Edward Oglethorpe and a group of English settlers established Savannah in 1733, and it soon became a vibrant trade

hub for cotton. In fact, much of the city was built on those early cotton profits. Today, you can tour the original homes of some of Savannah's most successful cotton merchants. On Abercorn Street, the Owens-Thomas House, built between 1816 and 1819, is an exceptional example of English Regency architecture, and has period furnishings, an extensive art collection and one of the earliest intact urban slave quarters.

"I am very interested in early architecture," noted Joe Wood of Vinton, Iowa. "As a carpenter by trade, I was impressed by what they could do with the tools they had to work with. And the house had indoor plumbing before the White House did."

You'll hear countless stories about famous guests. Revolutionary War hero Marquis de Lafayette stayed at the Owens-Thomas House in 1825 and even gave a speech from the south balcony.

The home of another cotton king, Andrew Low, is also on Abercorn Street and open for tours.

Photo: Colin Douglas Gray



📍 **Getting Here** Savannah is located along Georgia's coast and is easily accessed via Interstate 95 (from the north or south) or via Interstate 16 (from the west). Parking in the city's historic district is limited; use your dinghy or public transportation.





Built in 1848, the Andrew Low House is a fine example of Italianate-style design.

"He was the wealthiest man in Savannah when the house was built," explained tour guide docent Mary Ann Scott. "He made his money as an international cotton factor dealing with England. These men were far more than brokers or middlemen; they really controlled the business and helped make this the biggest cotton port on the East Coast."

Andrew Low was also the father-in-law of Juliette Gordon Low, who founded the Girl Scouts. She lived at the home after she was married.

Carol Wilder of Houghton Lake, Michigan, says seeing the house and learning how people lived so many years ago helps bring history alive.

"I wanted to see it because I love historical homes. I love stories about the South, Savannah and Charleston, and historical novels. I've loved history ever since my parents took me to Fort Sumter back in the 1950s."

Stephen Bohlin is Executive Director of the Andrew Low house.

"One of the things that makes Savannah unique is that you can actually travel through time because we have such a rich background in houses. For instance, you can go to the Davenport House and see a standard house in 1820, the Owens-Thomas House and see a high style 1820s house, come here and see a house in 1840, and

From above left: The Girl Scouts' first headquarters in America was originally Andrew Low's carriage house. Designed in 1816, the Owens-Thomas House is a one of the finest examples of Regency architecture in the country. The Davenport House was built in the Federal style.

then Juliette Low's birthplace is the house that interprets the high Victorian period of the 1880s."

Civil War buffs may also want to visit the Green-Meldrim House, which served as headquarters for Gen. William T. Sherman. (You need to plan ahead as tours are only offered on certain days.) Sherman was invited to stay here by the home's owner, Charles Green.

"Charles Green had warehouses down on River Street bulging at the seams with cotton he was unable to export because the Union blockade went up at the mouth of the Savannah River at the beginning of the war," explained Rencie Schmidt, who gives tours through the home. "He thought perhaps if he wine and dined the general and showed him a good time, Sherman would be too embarrassed to confiscate his cotton."

She describes a significant historical event that took place shortly after Sherman's arrival.

"It was from this house on Dec. 22, 1864, that Sherman sent his telegram to President Abraham Lincoln saying, 'To His Excellency, President Lincoln, I beg to present you, as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah, with 150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 bales of cotton.'"

In addition to its many historic homes, you can visit Civil War sites like Old Fort Jackson and Fort Pulaski National Monument.

Savannah is also full of beautifully designed parks, gardens and cemeteries. Some of those picturesque spots may look familiar. In the film "Forrest Gump," the scenes of Tom Hanks sitting on the bus bench were shot in Chippewa Square. The bench is now housed at the Savannah History Museum.

You may recall the best-selling 1994 book "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil." The story, set in Savannah, led to an influx of tourists who came to see the different sights, including the Bird Girl sculpture featured on the book's cover. People still come seeking the statue more than 20 years later. When the book was published, the "Bird Girl"

The Georgia Queen is one of two riverboats offering scenic tours on the majestic Savannah River.

Photos: Pam Windsor





was located in Bonaventure Cemetery. It has long since been moved due to the book's popularity.

Michelle Riley is the Marketing and Public Relations Director for Telfair Museums.

"That was a memorial for the resting place of a member of the family that owned the Bird Girl statue. After a few years, they decided to take it out of Bonaventure Cemetery and we were very, very pleased that they asked Telfair Museums to be the guardian of the Bird Girl statue and that is why we have her today." You can see it in the Jepson Center for the Arts.

Savannah has quite a collection of interesting museums highlighting art, ships, the city's railroad history and much more. A good place to stop for an overview is at the visitor center at 301

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Madison Square, one of Savannah's 22 city squares, was designed in 1837 and named in honor of President James Madison.



Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. It's located in the same building as the Savannah History Museum.

While in town, you'll also want to stroll along River Street, where you'll find various attractions, shops and restaurants.

And after seeing all that downtown Savannah has to offer, be sure to visit Tybee Island. Twenty miles to the east, the island has pristine beaches, water sports, bird watching, dolphin tours and Georgia's oldest lighthouse. If you hear someone refer to Savannah Beach, they're talking about Tybee Island.

You can stay on Tybee Island at River's End Campground and RV Park. Rick Fudge of Deland, Florida, said he and his family enjoyed being so close to the water and were pleased with the facilities.

"We have a full-hookup site. It's a decent-sized park, nice and clean, and it's peaceful at night. We've had great campfires."

RVers Mike and Karen Hinkle of Cleveland, Tennessee, chose to stay at Skidaway Island State Park about 15 miles from downtown.

"We like the vicinity and location to Savannah and it's more private than River's End on Tybee," noted Karen.

"The sites are larger than most," added Mike. "You also get 50-amp service so you can run both air condi-

tioners, the microwave and refrigerator. You also get a sewer hookup."

This was their second trip to Savannah.

"We like the historic area. And we like to go down to the riverfront," explained Karen. "There are a lot of good places to eat."

It's a classic Southern city with a lot to offer. You're sure to have a good time in Savannah. **M**

## ☎ FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Andrew Low House**  
912-233-6854  
[www.andrewlowhouse.com](http://www.andrewlowhouse.com)

**Biltmore RV Park**  
912-236-4065  
[www.biltmorerv.com](http://www.biltmorerv.com)

**Green-Meldrim House**  
912-233-3845  
[www.stjohnssav.org](http://www.stjohnssav.org)

**Jepson Center for the Arts**  
912-790-8800  
[www.telfair.org](http://www.telfair.org)

**Owens-Thomas House**  
912-790-8800  
[www.telfair.org/visit/owens-thomas](http://www.telfair.org/visit/owens-thomas)

**River's End Campground and RV Park**  
800-786-1016  
[www.riversendcampground.com](http://www.riversendcampground.com)

**Savannah History Museum**  
912-651-6825  
[www.chsgeorgia.org](http://www.chsgeorgia.org)

**Skidaway Island State Park**  
912-598-2300  
<http://gastateparks.org/SkidawayIsland>



Tybee Island Light Station and Museum is only a 20-minute drive east from Savannah's Historic District, and a five-minute walk from River's End Campground and RV Park, the island's full-service campground.