

Tuesday September 8

We ate at a local iHop and then drove into town where we parked at the Visitor Center. Here we purchased a booklet containing the routes of five self-guided tours and which also contained information and photographs of all the important sites. So, we set out on the first tour which took us past the old Spanish fort and to the main plaza where the cathedral is situated. It turned out that we weren't the only ones headed towards the cathedral as today was the actual date of the 450th anniversary of the founding of St Augustine – the oldest city in the United States – and mass was to be celebrated to mark the occasion. We watched as dozens (hundreds?) of priests and other clerics filed by (many on the town's tourist trolleys) on their way to the cathedral. Also in the parade were the original Spanish conquerors (!) and a small high school band.

St. Augustine is in northeast Florida and the oldest continuously occupied European-established settlement in the continental United States. The county seat of St. Johns County, it is part of Florida's First Coast region and the Jacksonville metropolitan area. According to the 2010 census, the city population was 12,975.

Saint Augustine was founded on September 8, 1565, by Spanish admiral and Florida's first governor, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. He named the settlement "San Agustín", as his ships bearing settlers, troops, and supplies from Spain had first sighted land in Florida on August 28, 1565, the feast day of St. Augustine. The city served as the capital of Spanish Florida for over 200 years, and remained the capital of East Florida when the territory briefly changed hands between Spain and Britain. It was designated the capital of the Florida Territory until Tallahassee was made the capital in 1824. Since the late 19th century, St. Augustine's distinct historical character has made the city a major tourist attraction.

As we were in the city on September 8, 2015 we were there for the 450th anniversary of its founding. It was apparent that celebrations and events had been held over the entire Labor Day weekend (and probably for weeks prior) but the major event on the 8th was a mass at the basilica on the main plaza of the town. We saw the parade (with hundreds of clerics) to the cathedral and were also present as they came out after the service. Attendance at the mass was limited to ticket holders only and clearly was very well attended by civic dignitaries, tourists and local residents alike.





The Parade to the Cathedral

Eventually we got across the street and walked by the fort (we chose not to go inside) and along the waterfront to the Lion Bridge opposite the main plaza. The bridge and the lions guarding it at both ends have become something of a symbol for the city.

The **Castillo de San Marcos** is the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States. Located on the western shore of Matanzas Bay in the city of St. Augustine, Florida, the fort was designed by the Spanish engineer Ignacio Daza. Construction began in 1672, 107 years after the city's founding by Spanish Admiral and conquistador Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, when Florida was part of the Spanish Empire. The fort's construction was ordered by Governor Francisco de la Guerra y de la Vega after the destructive raid of the English privateer Robert Searles. Work proceeded under the administration of Guerra's successor, Manuel de Cendoya in 1671, although the first stone was not laid until 1672.

After Britain gained control of Florida in 1763 pursuant to the Treaty of Paris, St. Augustine became the capital of British East Florida, and the fort was renamed **Fort St. Mark** until the Peace of Paris (1783) when Florida was transferred back to Spain. In 1819 Spain signed the Adams-Onís Treaty which ceded Florida to the United States in 1821; consequently the fort was designated a United States Army base and renamed **Fort Marion**, in honor of American Revolutionary War hero Francis Marion. In 1942 the original name *Castillo de San Marcos*, was restored by an Act of Congress. The fort was declared a National Monument in 1924, and after 251 years of continuous military possession, was deactivated in 1933. The 20.48-acre site was then turned over to the United States National Park Service.





The Lion Bridge entrance

Once at the plaza, we started what was the longest of the five tours, covering about a six by three block area and containing many buildings from the early Spanish period as well as many built in both British and US occupation times – before St Augustine became a part of the new State of Florida in 1822.

It was a very interesting walk and took us past a number of very old homes as well as civic and military buildings.



Fine Homes in St Augustine.

Left: The Oldest House

The barracks (still occupied by the military) and an adjoining National Cemetery were reminders of Florida's conflicts since first being occupied by the Spanish – including against the Native Americans – right through to the latest deployments in Iraq.



After a stop for a cold drink (the weather was hot and humid but the forecasted rain had not materialized) we went on the third tour – this time of the Flagler Buildings (see opposite page). Many of the Flagler buildings, originally built as hotels and as homes for his executives, have now become Flagler College, a private liberal arts university. They are of a distinctive style (Spanish Renaissance), making much use of terra cotta decoration and have become the icon of St Augustine. He also built a number of churches, of various denominations, including the memorial Presbyterian which was built to commemorate his daughter who was drowned on her way to St Augustine. Both she and Flagler are buried in the mausoleum of the church (Bottom left)



Henry Morrison Flagler (January 2, 1830 – May 20, 1913) was an American industrialist and a founder of Standard Oil. He was also a key figure in the development of the Atlantic coast of Florida and founder of what became the Florida East Coast Railway. He is known as the father of both Miami and Palm Beach, Florida.

Henry Flagler dabbled in various businesses aside from building up infrastructure in Florida. When he envisioned successes in the oil industry, he and John D Rockefeller started building their fortune in refining oil in Cleveland, Ohio. Flagler and Rockefeller worked hard for their company to achieve such prominence. Not only did Flagler and Rockefeller's Standard Oil company become well known in Ohio, they expanded to other states, as well as gaining additional capital in purchasing smaller oil refining companies across the nation.

On the advice of his physician, Flagler traveled to Jacksonville for the winter with his first wife, Mary, who was quite ill. Two years after she died in 1881, he married again. Ida Alice Flagler had been a caregiver for Mary Flagler. After their wedding, the couple traveled to Saint Augustine. Flagler found the city charming, but the hotel facilities and transportation systems inadequate. Franklin W. Smith had just finished building Villa Zorayda and Flagler offered to buy it for his honeymoon. Smith would not sell, but he planted the seed of St. Augustine's and Florida's future in Flagler's mind.

Although Flagler remained on the board of directors of Standard Oil, he gave up his day-to-day involvement in the corporation to pursue his interests in Florida. He returned to St. Augustine in 1885 and made Smith an offer. If Smith could raise \$50,000, Flagler would invest \$150,000 and they would build a hotel together. Perhaps fortunately for Smith, he couldn't come up with the funds, so Flagler began construction of the 540-room Ponce de León Hotel by himself, but spent several times his original estimate. Smith helped train the masons on the mixing and pouring techniques he used on Zorayda.

Realizing the need for a sound transportation system to support his hotel ventures, Flagler purchased short line railroads in what would later become known as the Florida East Coast Railway.



Flagler

The Ponce de León Hotel, now part of Flagler College, opened on January 10, 1888 and was an instant success. This project sparked Flagler's interest in creating a new "American Riviera." Two years later, Flagler expanded his Florida holdings. He built a railroad bridge across the St. Johns River to gain access to the southern half of the state and purchased the Hotel Ormond, just north of Daytona. He also built the Alcazar hotel as an overflow hotel for the Ponce de León Hotel. The Alcazar stands today as the Lightner Museum next to the Casa Monica Hotel in St. Augustine that Flagler bought from Franklin W. Smith. His personal dedication to the state of Florida was demonstrated when he began construction on his private residence, Kirkside, in St. Augustine.

Finally, we took a walk around the plaza and saw the outside of the cathedral (closed as the mass had just ended) and then along the oldest street in St Augustine which leads to the old south end city gates and back to the visitor center. The street contains a number of original and reconstructed homes and businesses from the very early days of the city but today is the primary tourist trap of the town with its bars, ice cream parlors and souvenir shops.



The Cathedral Basilica of St Augustine
St George Street and the Old School House
The South City Gates
Mile Zero of the St Augustine
to San Diego (Old Spanish) Auto Trail

As we drove back to the hotel we went through a tremendous thunderstorm with some very heavy rain so we felt fortunate that we had finished our outdoor activities for the day. We stopped for a Starbucks coffee and then returned to the hotel until dinner time. We tried Schooners again – and this time were rewarded with catfish on the menu!

Wednesday September 9

We left St Augustine after breakfast and drove first to Jacksonville where we spent a little time on the waterfront. We had visited this area some years ago and enjoyed our stroll on the banks of the river but it would appear that the area is now a night time venue and at 10 in the morning it was almost deserted. Maybe the fact that it was over 90F and humid had



something to do with it but we didn't stay very long before getting back in the air-conditioned car and heading north to Savannah. With just one Starbucks stop en route we were checking in at the hotel by 2pm.

Jacksonville Landing and Riverside



Our first look at Savannah

We took a drive to the Savannah riverfront area and walked along the area that had been warehouses but is now restaurants, souvenir shops and the like. We checked on trolley and river cruise tours for tomorrow and made a dinner reservation at Vic's on the water front for tonight and then made our way back to the hotel, passing several of the beautiful tree-lined squares and huge houses. We should see a lot more of these tomorrow on our tour.

We left for dinner at 7:15 and had a great meal at Vic's.



Thursday September 10

We had breakfast at a local Starbucks and then drove to the Visitor Center for the start of our tour of Savannah. We booked on the Hop on/Hop off sightseeing bus and also got tickets for the 2pm cruise on the Savannah River.

Savannah is the oldest city in the U.S. state of Georgia. Established in 1733, the city of Savannah became the British colonial capital of the Province of Georgia and later the first state capital of Georgia. A strategic port city in the American Revolution and during the American Civil War, Savannah is today an industrial center and an important Atlantic seaport. It is Georgia's fifth-largest city and third-largest metropolitan area.

Each year Savannah attracts millions of visitors to its cobblestone streets, parks, and notable historic buildings: the birthplace of Juliette Gordon Low (founder of the Girl Scouts of the United States of America), the Georgia Historical Society (the oldest continually operating historical society in the South), the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences (one of the South's first public museums), the First African Baptist Church (one of the oldest African-American Baptist congregations in the United States), Temple Mickve Israel (the third oldest synagogue in America), and the Central of Georgia Railway roundhouse complex (the oldest standing antebellum rail facility in America).

Savannah's downtown area, which includes the Savannah Historic District, the Savannah Victorian Historic District, and 22 parklike squares, is one of the largest National Historic Landmark Districts in the United States (designated by the U.S. government in 1966). Downtown Savannah largely retains the original town plan prescribed by founder James Oglethorpe (a design now known as the Oglethorpe Plan). Savannah was the host city for the sailing competitions during the 1996 Summer Olympics held in Atlanta.



The trolley tour took us through many of the 22 remaining squares of the city (it was laid out with 24 originally) each of which has a green area, some large live oak trees, generally a statue or other monument – and is surrounded by beautiful, grand homes. A number of these have been converted to restaurants or other uses but apparently a large percentage remain as private homes. The city has undergone major renovation projects over the past forty years and a number of homes have been restored to their original grandeur – whether that be Victorian, Colonial or Confederacy period.



Savannah's Squares and Homes

.... And its oldest house

We also saw a number of very old districts from the start of the Colony of Georgia and heard a lot about its founder, James Oglethorpe, who settled the area for King George II. He eventually returned to England but while here he not only established Savannah but also instituted a number of rather progressive (some may say restrictive) provisions (called prohibitions). Amongst the most popular then and now was that there were to be no lawyers in the Colony! He also befriended an Indian Chief and it is said that they jointly governed the area.

James Edward Oglethorpe (22 December 1696 – 30 June 1785) was a British general, Member of Parliament, philanthropist, and founder of the colony of Georgia. As a social reformer, he hoped to resettle Britain's poor, especially those in debtors' prisons, in the New World.

In 1728, three years before conceiving the Georgia colony, Oglethorpe chaired a Parliamentary committee on prison reform. The committee documented horrendous abuses in three debtors' prisons. As a result of the committee's actions, many debtors were released from prison with no means of support. Oglethorpe viewed this as part of the larger problem of urbanization, which was depleting the countryside of productively employed people and depositing them in cities, particularly London, where they often became impoverished or resorted to criminal activity. To address this problem, Oglethorpe and a group of associates, many of whom served on the prison committee, petitioned in 1730 to form the Trustees for the Establishment of the Colony of Georgia in America. The petition was finally approved in 1732, and the first ship, led by Oglethorpe, departed for the New World in November.

Oglethorpe and the first colonists arrived at South Carolina on the ship Anne in late 1732, and settled near the present site of Savannah, Georgia on 1 February 1733. He negotiated with the Yamacraw tribe for land (Oglethorpe became great friends with Chief Tomochichi, who was the chief of the Yamacraw), and built a series of defensive forts, most notably Fort Frederica, of which substantial remains can still be visited. He then returned to England and arranged to have slavery banned in Georgia after being emotionally moved by an intercepted letter from Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, a slave in Maryland. Oglethorpe and his fellow trustees were granted a royal charter for the Province of Georgia between the Savannah and Altamaha rivers on 9 June 1732.

Due to the colony's primary role as a military buffer between English and Spanish-held territories, the original model for the colonization of Georgia excluded the use of slave labor, fearing that runaway slaves could internally weaken the colony and assist the enemy at St. Augustine, Florida. But, instead of slaves defecting southwards to the Spanish, runaways from the Carolinas found refuge in Georgia, thus irritating its northern neighbor. The banning of slavery also reduced the work force, and this was felt to be a constraint on Georgia's early economic growth. Many settlers thus began to oppose Oglethorpe, regarding him as a misguided and "perpetual dictator". Many new settlers soon set their eyes on South Carolina as a less restrictive and, they hoped, a more profitable place to settle. In 1743, after Oglethorpe had left the colony, the ban on slavery was lifted. Various forces united including the English who always urged it and as a result large numbers of slaves were soon imported.

We eventually got off the trolley at the river front and immediately sought out a coffee shop. We had a break and then strolled along the river until our 2pm departure for an hour cruise along the river. This, too, was very interesting and the narrator (captain) provided us with a lot of information as had the trolley driver. Certainly these individuals seemed to know a lot about their city and were enthusiastic about sharing that information – which makes for a good tour.

One of many cotton warehouses





*Top left: City Hall; Top right: Cross-river ferry
Bottom left: Convention Center and Westin Hotel;
Bottom right: Our river boat*

Savannah is the fourth largest port in the United States and is continuing to deepen the river channel to facilitate the largest of the world's container ships and tankers. Exports include cars (Georgia has several Asian and European car manufacturing plants), petroleum, iron alloys, gold and copper ore. The boat tour took just an hour during which time the overcast skies of



earlier in the day had cleared and it was now over 90F and quite humid. After the cruise, therefore, we soon took the trolley back to our car and started home – but made one last stop at the very ornate Catholic Cathedral. It looks a little “Disney-esque” on the outside with its tall twin steeples, but inside it could match many European cathedrals in both size and decoration.



Inside St John The Baptist Cathedral

We got back to the hotel about 4:30 and re-convened for dinner at Ruth's Chris in downtown. As usual for this chain, the meal was excellent. There was another heavy rainstorm this evening but once again we were not caught outside in it.

Friday September 11

We left Savannah after breakfast and drove north across the Savannah River and along I-95 for a while. We took a turn after about 30 miles to visit the old town of Beaufort. This historic town center has streets lined with live oak trees and Spanish Moss and has a number of large antebellum and earlier homes. It also has a very pleasant waterfront on the Intra-coastal Waterway and was first visited by Spanish explorers in 1520. Obviously no settlement took place at that time (or St Augustine would have lost its title of oldest city) but it is interesting that this was a full 100 years before the Mayflower and the New England settlements.



Historic Beaufort Homes



And the very pleasant waterfront



After about an hour in town we drove on towards Charleston but took a slight detour near the city to visit the Magnolia Plantation. This had been a rice plantation prior to the Civil War and was purchased by the Reverend Drayton, who lived there during and after the War. He apparently lost a lot of his fortune as a result of ending on the losing side but continued to live on the estate and rebuilt his home. He also converted what had been a formal French-style garden into a much more informal English garden where plants were allowed to grow in a more random and less-controlled fashion.





***Magnolia Gardens
Estate with its former
rice fields, now alliga-
tor lakes!***



Alligators sunning on logs and ramps

The huge estate is now home to a forest of magnolia and live oak trees (and other species) and has three sizeable lakes in which alligators breed and live. We took the Nature Trail tram and saw several alligators, some of which were (we were told) perhaps eight feet in length. The largest one on the estate is said to be 15 feet in length. We also saw a number of birds including peacock and egret. The tram ride and the walk around the garden ere very pleasant and we enjoyed our two hour stay.

We then continued to North Charleston where we checked into our hotel around 4:30pm. This being Friday we were unable to get a reservation at one of the downtown restaurants for dinner so we went to the Palm Tree Grille in the Embassy Suites hotel; even this was about 8 miles from our hotel, but it turned out to be quite a good meal.

Saturday September 12

It was overcast and much cooler this morning (below 80F) and there was a threat of showers for the rest of the day. Nevertheless we followed our plan for Charleston by driving to the Visitor Center and buying tickets for a city tour. Actually we bought a combined bus and boat trip so that we could see this beautiful and historic city up close as well as from the harbor.



Historic Charleston

Left: The last home built by the British



The bus tour (about 1 ¾ hours) took us along most of the streets of the historic district and allowed us to see many of the older, larger homes that had been built with rice and cotton plantation money. We also saw what seemed like dozens of churches of all denominations. Charleston since its founding has welcomed all sects and hence has earned the nickname of the Holy City. Indeed there are many fine churches and each seems to have a very tall steeple as its main external feature.



But Charleston is most famous for its history – from its formation as a British province in the reign of Charles II, its participation in the Revolutionary War and the signing of the Declaration, to its pivotal role in the Civil war. Both our tour guides (on bus and boat) gave us a lot of information on each of these facets of Charleston’s history and, indeed, on many more events of historical significance and importance. A Wikipedia summary appears on the following pages.



Top left: Fort Sumter

Top right: Aircraft Carrier Yorktown

Above: Modern Charleston Harbor

Right: Tourist recognizes his home town!

After the tours, we stopped for coffee in a downtown shop and then drove around part of the historic district on our own before returning to the hotel. This evening we had a dinner reservation at the Fleet Landing restaurant right on the waterfront. It was crowded and noisy (as most seem to be) but we had a good fish meal and it was a pleasant way to complete our visit to the coast.

Charleston is the oldest and second-largest city in the U.S. state of South Carolina, "where the Cooper and Ashley Rivers come together to form the Atlantic Ocean"

Founded in 1670 as Charles Town in honor of Charles II of England, Charleston adopted its present name in 1783. By 1690, Charles Town was the fifth largest city in North America and it remained among the ten largest cities in the United States through the 1840 Census.

After Charles II of England (1630–1685) was restored to the English throne in 1660 following Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate, he granted the chartered Province of Carolina to eight of his loyal friends, known as the Lords Proprietors, on March 24, 1663. It took seven years before the group arranged for settlement expeditions. The first of these founded Charles Town, in 1670. The community was established by several shiploads of settlers from Bermuda under the leadership of Governor William Sayle, on the west bank of the Ashley River, a few miles northwest of the present-day city center. It was soon predicted by Anthony Ashley-Cooper, one of the Lords Proprietors, to become a "great port towne", a destiny the city quickly fulfilled. In 1680 the settlement was moved east of the Ashley River to the peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper rivers. Not only was this location more defensible, but it offered access to a fine natural harbor.

Africans were brought to Charles Town, first as "servants", then as slaves. An estimated 40 percent of the total 400,000 Africans transported and sold as slaves into North America are said to have entered via Charles Town.

By the mid-18th century Charles Town had become a bustling trade center, the hub of the Atlantic trade for the southern colonies. Charles Towne was also the wealthiest and largest city south

of Philadelphia, in part because of the lucrative slave trade. By 1770, it was the fourth-largest port in the colonies. By 1708 the majority of the colony's population were slaves, and the future state would continue to be a majority of African descent until after the Great Migration of the early 20th century.

As the relationship between the colonists and Britain deteriorated, Charles Town became a focal point in the ensuing American Revolution. It was twice the target of British attacks. At every stage the British strategy assumed the existence of a large base of Loyalist supporters who would rally to the king's forces given some military support.

Although the city lost the status of state capital to Columbia in 1786, Charleston became even more prosperous in the plantation-dominated economy of the post-Revolutionary years. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 revolutionized the processing of this crop, making short-staple cotton profitable. It was more easily grown in the upland areas, and cotton quickly became South Carolina's major export commodity.

*On December 20, 1860, following the election of Abraham Lincoln, the South Carolina General Assembly voted to secede from the Union. On January 9, 1861, Citadel cadets opened fire on the Union ship *Star of the West* entering Charleston's harbor. On April 12, 1861, shore batteries under the command of General Pierre G. T. Beauregard opened fire on Union-held Fort Sumter in the harbor, thus starting the war. After a 34-hour bombardment, Major Robert Anderson surrendered the fort.*

In 1865, Union troops moved into the city and took control of many sites, including the United States Arsenal. As Gen. Sherman marched through South Carolina, the situation for Charleston became ever more precarious. On February 15, 1865, Gen. Beauregard ordered the evacuation of remaining Confederate forces. On February 18, the mayor surrendered the city and Union troops finally moved in.

Sunday September 13

We left Charleston after breakfast and drove almost 300 miles to Asheville, North Carolina. We made one stop in Columbia to view the State Capitol (from the outside only as it was closed today) and walk around the grounds and the quiet main streets. We had a coffee and then started the steady climb towards the North Carolina border. At one point we crossed the Eastern Continental Divide at about 2200 feet altitude but then descended to the city of Asheville.



South Carolina State House

Statue of George Washington with cane worn smooth by admirers



We checked in around 3:30pm and made arrangements for dinner at a local recommended tapas restaurant not far from the hotel. We enjoyed a good meal and concluded with a nightcap in the hotel bar. Tomorrow we go over the Smoky Mountains.

The Great Smoky Mountains are a mountain range rising along the Tennessee–North Carolina border in the southeastern United States. They are a subrange of the Appalachian Mountains. The range is sometimes called the Smoky Mountains and the name is commonly shortened to the Smokies. The Great Smokies are best known as the home of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which protects most of the range. The park was established in 1934, and, with over 9 million visits per year, it is the most-visited national park in the United States.

The name "Smoky" comes from the natural fog that often hangs over the range and presents as large smoke plumes from a distance. This fog is caused by the vegetation exhaling volatile organic compounds, chemicals that have a high vapor pressure and easily form vapors at normal temperature and pressure.

The highest point in the Smokies is Clingman's Dome at 6,643 feet.