



Rivers Run Through Them

Eight mid-size American cities that revitalized their riverfronts

BY BARBARA WYSOCKI

Rivers were once America's superhighways. People gathered along their banks. Settlements swelled into commercial and cultural hubs. With shrinking industries and urban flight happening after WWII, waterway traffic declined and riverfronts fell into disuse. Here's a look at some forward-thinking cities that have turned the process around, bringing riverfronts back to life with a vibrant mix of cultural and recreational opportunities.

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

One of the most successful American riverfront parks – indeed, a model for many others – is the San Antonio River Walk (previous page). The meandering walkway, networked with footbridges, shops, and open-air cafes, follows the San Antonio River all the way to the iconic Alamo. Art lovers will appreciate the San Antonio Museum of Art and the Briscoe Western Art Museum – both close at hand. Recently renovated on the Museum Reach section of the walkway, the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts hosts ballet, symphony, and theater. To step back a few centuries visit the Spanish Governor’s Palace – labeled “the most beautiful building in San Antonio” by the National Geographic Society. The Pearl Brewery and La Villita districts are prime candidates for history-linked shopping and dining. Finish (or start) with a relaxing Rio San Antonio Cruise.

DOWN BY THE WATER: Hop on a Rio Water Taxi for cool, rapid transit to 39 stops (riosanantonio.com/rio-taxi).
FOR MORE: visitsanantonio.com



The Alamo



Portland Japanese Garden

PORTLAND, OREGON

At the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia rivers, a spot once called The Clearing is now center stage in the TV series *Portlandia*. Eleven bridges unite this two-bank community where events such as the Providence Bridge Pedal invite bikers to race routes with up to 10 spans. Readers rest at Powell’s Books, a vast independent bookstore stocked with the latest and out-of-print literature. The Portland Japanese Garden is another peaceful pastime with tours and a teahouse. The Oregon Museum of Science and Industry turns thinking into action including a Science Playground. If underwater venues appeal, sink down into the *USS Blueback*. After patrolling the Pacific for three decades, the submarine is now tied up at the museum, but it’s also been a television and movie backdrop. The Eastern Esplanade and the Tom McCall Waterfront Park line the banks of the Willamette featuring sculpture, memorials, scenic lookouts, and intriguing landscapes. To traverse the water on foot, the lower deck of the Steel Bridge is perfect for eye-spying passing ships. For those who wish to walk on water, the Eastside’s floating walkway is the longest in the U.S. Weekend visitors, and lots of locals, come for the Saturday Market, crammed with arts and crafts on Sunday as well.

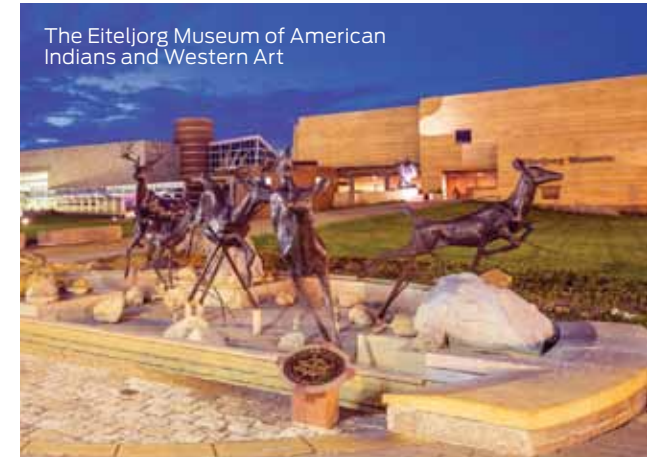
DOWN BY THE WATER: Pedal or walk through Oaks Bottom Wildlife Refuge where the eagle-eyed find many feathered friends (travelportland.com/article/wildlife-preserves).
FOR MORE: Travelportland.com



Portland Saturday Market

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

Selected as the state capital in 1820, Indianapolis was laid out on the banks of the White River. Today, spanning across 250 acres, White River State Park – located along the river of the same name – is a little piece of tranquility in a bustling capital city. Inside the park, take in a dolphin show or pet the sharks at the Indianapolis Zoo. Visit the Hall of Champions at the National Collegiate Athletic Association and shoot hoops in its 1930s replica gymnasium. For Native American history, don’t miss the Southwest-inspired adobe Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, featuring one of the world’s best contemporary Native art collections. Home to the Indy 500 and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, this state capital has many other modes of transportation. Stop by Wheel Fun Rentals to rent a bike then hop on the Indianapolis Cultural Trail – an eight-mile bike and pedestrian pathway that swoops past every major downtown cultural and entertainment venue. To get on water, rent a pedal boat, canoe, or kayak from Wheel Fun Boat Rentals then drift down the 1.5-mile Central Canal. Romantics opt for serenaded rides with Old World Gondoliers. Up at bat at the Victory Field Baseball Park, the Indianapolis minor league team is a hit. Every August

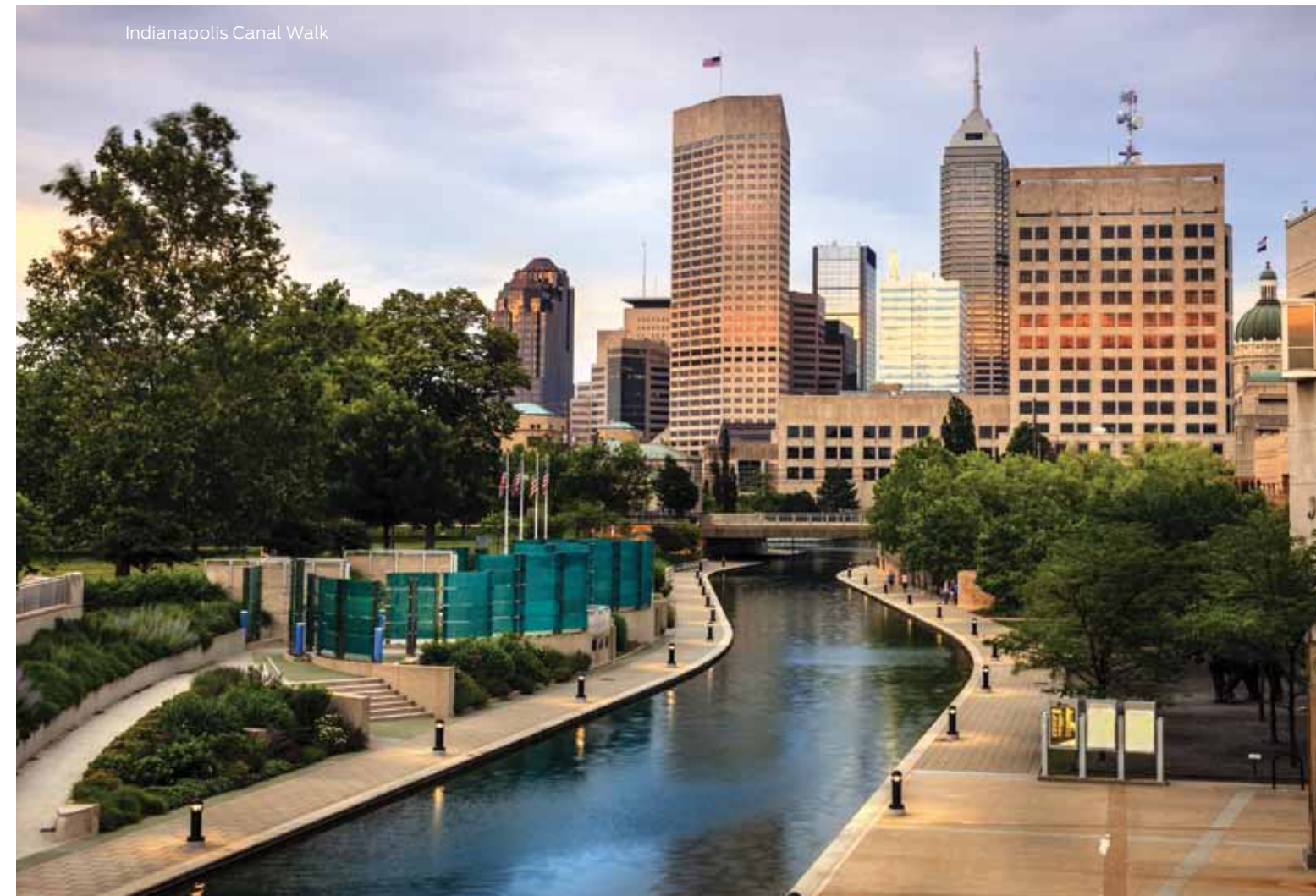


The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art

the Indiana State Fair is a blue ribbon combo of tradition and innovation.

DOWN BY THE WATER: Rent a bike to tour the Indianapolis Cultural Trail – a great way for visitors to get around in the city and hit all the high points in record time (indyculturaltrail.org). Check out the new International Orangutan Center at the Indianapolis Zoo (indianapoliszoo.com).

FOR MORE: Visitindy.com



Indianapolis Canal Walk

SHUTTERSTOCK

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

From its origins as a Connecticut River trading post in 1633, the state capital is home to a legacy of historic attractions. Explore the homes where neighbors Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, and Harriet Beecher Stowe shared literary interests. His home is reminiscent of his paddlewheeler days, hers defines a keen interest in homemaking. Head to the Wadsworth Atheneum, the nation's oldest public art museum, that houses one of the largest collections of Hudson River

School painters with works by Thomas Cole, Frederic Edwin Church, and Albert Bierstadt. The museum is just two blocks away from the Connecticut River, one of a dozen American Heritage Rivers. For a hands-on river exhibit go to the oh-so-interactive Connecticut Science Center designed by renowned architect César Pelli. Perch in a window seat or on the rooftop observation platform for great river views. Step back in time at The Old State House, built in 1796, where the 18th-century legislative chambers are reminders of America's foundation. Each summer the Mortensen Riverfront Plaza, a landscaped park in downtown Hartford, stages ballet, bagpipes, Samba and jazz shows.

DOWN BY THE WATER: The Dragon Boat Race and Asian Festival spin the globe for two August days filled with competition plus Pacific rim food and culture (riverfront.org/events/riverfront-dragon-boat-asian-festival).

FOR MORE: Centerofct.com/attractions/hartford



Dragon Boat Race



Mark Twain's House



Floodwall Murals

PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

A history hub that began when William Clark, of Lewis & Clark fame, laid out the town where the Ohio and Tennessee rivers meet. More recently named a UNESCO City of Crafts & Folk Art, Paducah is home to the National Quilt Museum featuring exhibitions of fiber arts drawn from around the world. Need more textile time? Each spring, the American Quilter's Society's QuiltWeek welcomes more than 30,000 stitchers and admirers. For harder surface art, explore the Paducah Wall to Wall Floodwall Murals that overlook the confluence of the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. Start by listening to a mobile device introduction, then stroll past 50-plus life-size panels depicting local landmarks and historic events. Continue on the self-guided phone tour through town or visit the River Discovery Center where its 24 Hours on the River and Pilothouse Simulator exhibits bring this watery confluence to life. For another glimpse of America's past, go to the Lloyd Tilghman House and Civil War Museum – the conflict's sesquicentennial ends this year.

DOWN BY THE WATER: Every September, more than 80,000 pounds of chicken and pork are smoked, grilled, and enthusiastically devoured during the three-day Barbecue on the River festival (bbqontheriver.org).

FOR MORE: Paducah.travel

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT, SHUTTERSTOCK; PHOTOS COURTESY THE MARK TWAIN HOUSE AND MUSEUM, PADUCAH CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

The Tennessee River sweeps through the heart of Chattanooga – established in 1816 as a trading post. Along its banks, the Tennessee Aquarium combines both freshwater and saltwater habitats in its River and Ocean Journey exhibits. Celebrate the aquarium's River Otter Falls, where visitors can get face to furry face with a romp of otters. Land lovers stroll, jog, or push the baby carriage on the Riverwalk past bright steel silhouettes, marshlands, and creeks all the way to the Chickamauga Dam. Head over to The Block to browse Rock Creek Outfitters and belay your way up High Point's interior and exterior climbing walls. From the waterfront, it's an easy climb up the hill to the Bluff View Art District where you can visit the Hunter Museum of American Art and the River Gallery Sculpture Garden – all with water views. Stroll across the Walnut Street Pedestrian Bridge to Coolidge Park to ride a restored 19th-century carousel, play in an interactive water fountain, or launch a kayak.

DOWN BY THE WATER: Amble aboard the River Gorge Explorer for a two-hour enclosed catamaran ride with a naturalist pointing out wildlife and historic sites (tnaqua.org/plan-your-visit/river-gorge-explorer).

FOR MORE: Chattanooga.fun.com



Tennessee River

SHUTTERSTOCK



Guthrie Theater

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Built around the Mississippi, Minnesota, and St. Croix rivers, the twin cities gleam with unexpected art and architectural gems such as the sapphire-blue Guthrie Theater complex where anyone can visit the Endless Bridge – a 178-foot-long cantilevered lobby that towers over the West River Parkway and offers great views of the Mississippi River and skyline. For more building cum riverside sculpture, check out the Science Museum of Minnesota built into the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River and Frank Gehry's equally eye-popping Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota. Visiting the Mill City Museum in the former Washburn A Mill flour factory is an invitation to local history on the riverfront with several walking tour options.

In search of food with a view, try the Mill City Farmer's Market. And don't forget to head downtown to smile at the sidewalk statue of TV legend Mary Tyler Moore tossing her hat in the air.

DOWN BY THE WATER: Though Purple Rain is unlikely in the hometown of the artist currently known as Prince, the Stone Arch Bridge Festival features colorful art and lively music (stonearchbridgefestival.com).

FOR MORE: Minneapolis.org and Visitsaintpaul.com



Weisman Art Museum

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