

## Trolley Tour, Savannah, August 2009



I've helped plan a number of trips to St Augustine for friends as well as people who tracked me down via the Internet. And now that I am working on getting my Savannah tour guide's license and helping friends plan trips to this beautiful city, I am spending a lot of time ~~falling hopelessly in love with it~~ getting to know it on an intimate level. I usually recommend a trolley or horse-drawn carriage tour for first-time visitors. I have done carriage tours in both cities but it occurred to me I had never done a trolley tour in either city. And if I am going

to recommend them, I ought to know what I am talking about, right?

Well, it's just freakin' time to fix that, isn't it? I swung into the Savannah Visitor's Center and took a look around. I chatted with representatives of several of the tour companies and chose the one that appealed to me most. This morning, my friend Carrie and I headed into Savannah for a day of "playing tourist."

I picked Oglethorpe Tours. I'm not sure why this company called to me more than the others, but I definitely chose wisely. I knew right away we were in for a delightful 90 minutes with Margie, The Coolest Tour Guide Ever. Her bubbly personality and outrageous sense of humor had us powering the trolley almost on laughter alone.

NOTE: This is not an "official" endorsement of one tour company over the others. This is simply an account of one "touristy" day I enjoyed in Savannah on the trolley I happened to be on and the people I happened to be with. I plan to take trolley tours with each tour company in the future, so I know what each has to offer.



When Margie realized I was planning to get my own tour guide's license, she immediately took me under her wing, so to speak, and took an extra few minutes explaining things and made an extra effort to get to know me and encourage me. I quickly realized Margie and I have a lot in common – primarily that it's not enough for us to merely know dates and names. We want to know more – we want to dig deep and find the life and breath in the past and bring it to life as best we can. Like me, Margie is almost obsessed with the desire to know things about Savannah's history. She presents the city in such a way that it becomes a thing of value to those who come expecting to see its beauty and charm but quickly realize there's so much more to it than beautiful architecture and blooming azaleas and live oaks dripping with Spanish moss.

Margie's rich voice and honest deep-South accent made her running commentary pure music to hear. Her big laugh is just contagious and her eyes are bright and direct, confirming the old saying that "the eyes are the windows to the heart." This is a woman who loves what she does and where she does it. How many of us are that blessed?



We began the tour at the Visitor's Center, which in and of itself boasts a fascinating past. We moved slowly through the Historic District while Margie pointed out landmarks and points of interest and kept up an intriguing dialogue about Savannah's builders, caretakers, and secrets. Not satisfied with simply pointing out interesting places and buildings, Margie took the time to point out details like Savannah's beautiful ironwork and tabby streets and a wall on Factor's Walk that, upon closer inspection, reveals itself to be the remains of an 18<sup>th</sup> century

fort! I wouldn't have noticed it had Margie not pointed it out! I adore this woman!

We saw the City Market, Juliette Low's birthplace, Mercer House, and countless other houses and buildings that are an integral part of Savannah's past. Margie gave a brief rundown of the Squares as we passed each one, pointing out monuments and interesting bits of history. Arriving at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist, she pulled off and allowed us a few minutes to disembark from the trolley and peek inside the magnificent building. Being a sucker for church-building architecture, I couldn't resist dashing inside. The interior did take my breath away, that's for sure.



We made a bit of a stop at the old Warren Candler Hospital. This is a building with a past so amazing that my heart beats a little faster just thinking of it. Such a vivid past this old charismatic structure has! Built in 1819, it has housed Savannah's poor, her freed slaves, a medical school, a nursing school, and operated as a hospital until 1980! The stories this building could tell – and I want to hear them all!

At the end of the actual tour, Margie let Carrie & me off at the City Market, where we found a café and a late lunch.

When your tour has ended, you can leave the trolley anywhere, and get back on again at any one of a number of stops around the city. So that's what we did – we took an hour or two to stroll about and then a different trolley, this one driven by Lucille, picked us up at the Juliette Low birthplace.

Here is the other reason I was so pleased with Oglethorpe Tours: customer service. After a guest accidentally left a camera on Lucille's trolley not only did Lucille make every effort to get the camera back to its owner, the other guests aboard the trolley were more than willing and eager to help and to wait while the camera's owner was tracked down. The guest turned out to be a man travelling with his wife and 84-year-old mother-in-law and two very small dogs. The mother-in-law had been optimistic about being able to stroll about in Forsyth Park but the heat had proven too much for her and she really

needed to step back aboard the air-conditioned trolley and ride with her family back to their car. The other guests aboard the trolley were happy to wait patiently while the family got the woman aboard and settled for the ride back to the Visitor's Center.

During the last part of the trip, everyone in the trolley chatted about places to go, things to do, and fun to have in Savannah and on Tybee Island. The warmth and friendliness of the atmosphere was the perfect end to a lovely day in a stately old beautiful city.

Thanks, Margie; thanks, Lucille; thanks, Oglethorpe Tours. Carrie and I had a great time and we're still talking over the events of the day and what we saw and learned. You guys rock, and we look forward to touring with you again!