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Annie, a mini goldendoodle, at home in Birmingham

The South

LONG WEEKEND

Life on the Tennessee

Chattanooga is a lot like the river that runs through it—pretty, lively, and always on the move

BY CAROLINE ROGERS

Waterfront Vistas The Hunter Museum anchors the Bluff View Art District.

PICTURE IT: You're strolling along Chattanooga's pedestrian thoroughfare, the Walnut Street Bridge, with an ice-cream cone in hand. On one side, the summer sun sinks over the city skyline, a view punctuated by the scoreboard of AT&T Field and the glass peaks off the Tennessee Aquarium's pyramid-studded roof. On the other side, the sky fades to pink and purple over the gently rolling Tennessee River. A few kayakers weave beneath the bridges. A paddleboarder pauses between pulls on a long, slow journey by the riverbank. On the bridge, people bustle by, taking their dogs on evening walks and pushing strollers into the warm night.

Chattanooga is a city on the move. On any given afternoon, you'll find plenty of locals and weekenders launching into the river with their boats and boards, biking up and down hilly streets through town, walking and running on the pedestrian bridge, and throwing a Frisbee at one of the city's parks, which are bordered by bike lanes and dotted with benches and public art.

While other stretches of the Tennessee River are busier, the waters curving through downtown Chattanooga are calm enough for small watercraft, ducks, and even swimmers. The fastest boats you'll probably see here are the racing shells of crew teams from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (and they really do fly).

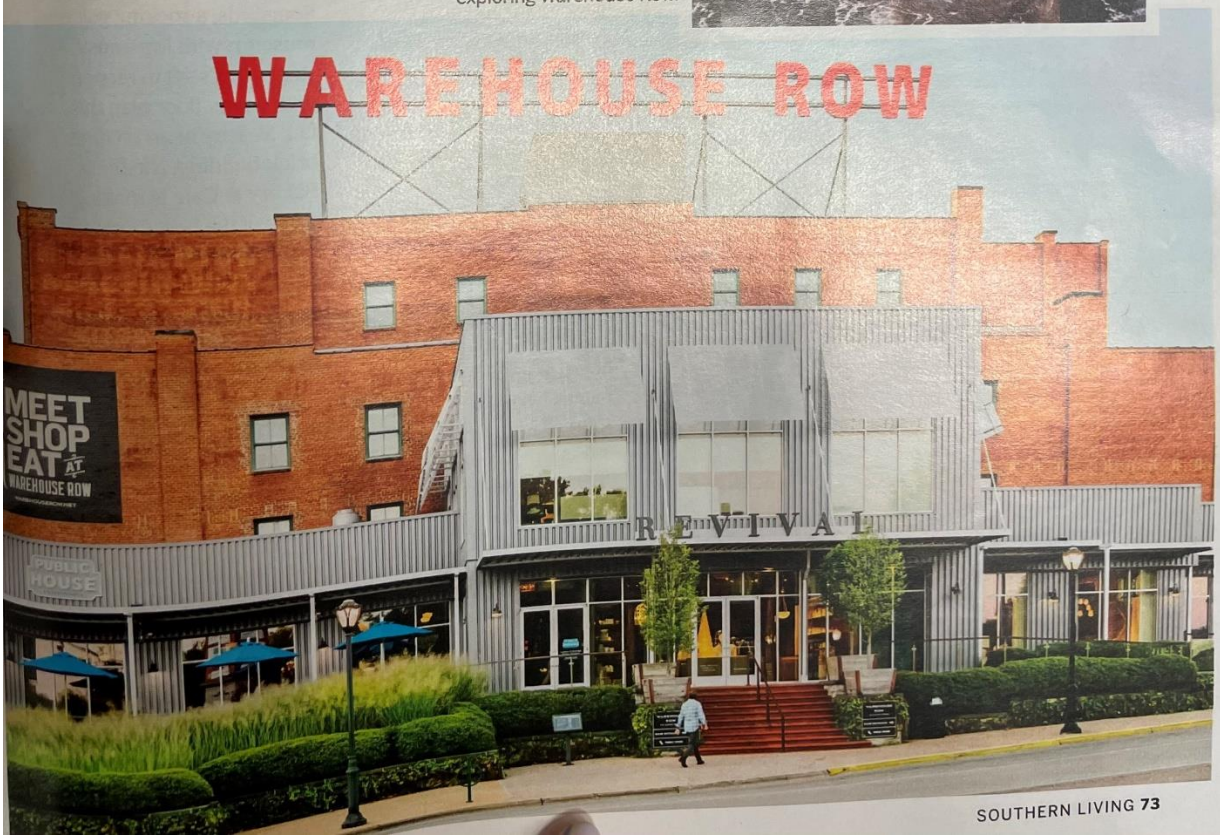
Walnut Street Scenes (From left) Near the city's famed pedestrian bridge, you'll find spots such as the Whitebird restaurant, a zigzag walk below the Hunter Museum, and The Edwin Hotel.

WALK THE WATERFRONT

In this city, access to the river is always top of mind. That's why you can stroll there from practically any point in town. Once you reach it, you'll find plenty of places to drop in, launch a kayak, or even take a swim. Chattanooga makes it easy to have fun outdoors. At Coolidge Park in the NorthShore neighborhood, steps lead across the rocky riverbank and straight into the water. You really don't get much closer to adventure than that.

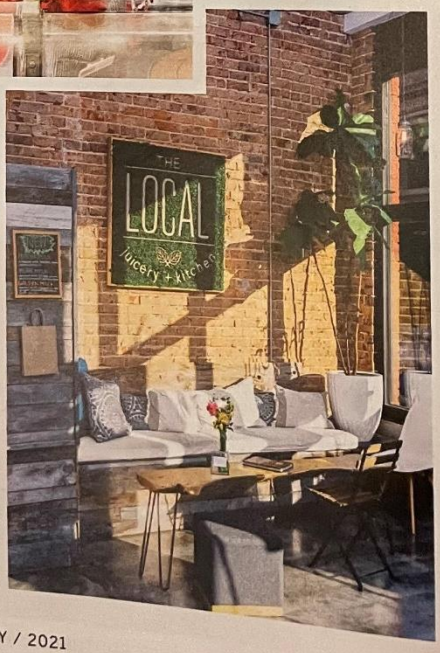
On the other hand, if your summer style involves perching on a rooftop deck with a cocktail, this town has a place—or two or five—for you.

The Edwin Hotel, a new art-filled boutique property, stands just steps from the Hunter Museum of American Art and the Walnut Street Bridge. (The hotel is named for local engineer Edwin Thacher, who designed the walking bridge.) You can leave your car with the bow tie– and suspender-clad valets (don't worry; you



Sips and Shops (From top) Ask for a cocktail menu at The Read House bar after spending an afternoon exploring Warehouse Row.

Treat Yourself
(From top) Recreation on the river is a favorite pastime. You can stop for post-paddle ice-cream delights on both the NorthShore and the Bluff View banks. Find The Local Juicery+Kitchen in the Southside Historic District on East Main Street near Niedlov's Bakery & Cafe.



won't need to drive again until you've packed up to leave town) and take the elevator to Whiskey Thief, the rooftop bar and hotel haunt where you can order something special off the seasonal menu and settle in to enjoy panoramic views of the city and its sunsets. The Edwin is also home to Whitebird, the ground-floor restaurant that serves up modern American cuisine—including a beloved Biscuit Board at brunch. Their menus feature ingredients sourced from farmers and artisans in the surrounding Tennessee River Valley.

EXPLORE THE CITY CENTER

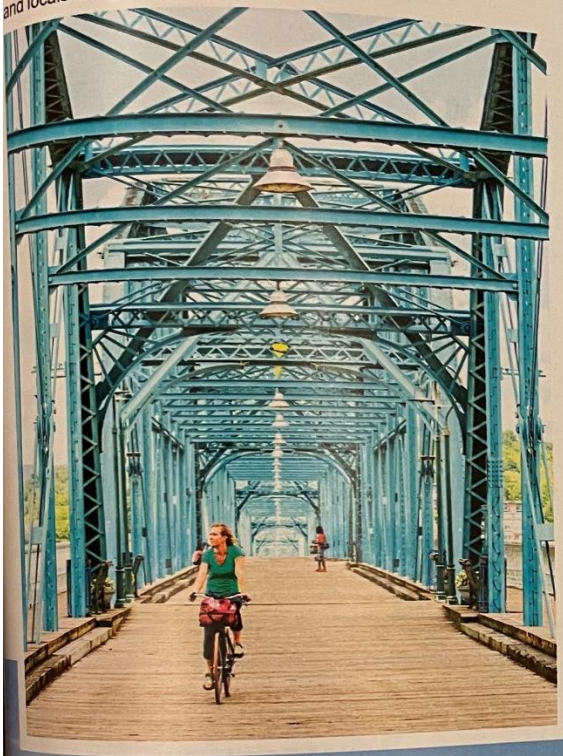
While new establishments like The Edwin have built themselves from the ground up, Chattanooga also has a flair for transforming existing spaces. Warehouse Row is a repurposed section of industrial downtown that has earned a reputation for being the coolest shopping spot around. It's a cavernous, beautifully appointed space filled with restaurants, stores, and countless artistic design features.

Nearby, the Chattanooga Choo Choo—which has long been the city's most recognizable claim to fame thanks to the 1941 Glenn Miller song of the same name—has had a top-to-toe refurbishment. The landmark is looking great, and it's also anchoring a busy block where visitors can do it all. Stay at the stylish Chattanooga Choo Choo Hotel; eat at the swank St. John's Restaurant or the cool oyster bar Stir; and play at Songbirds, a rocking guitar museum with live-music stages that's set to reopen with a new floor plan this fall. Nearby in an inviting brick building, Niedlov's Bakery & Cafe is making some of the best sandwiches, loaves, and pastries you can find. Down the street, The Local Juicery+Kitchen is fast becoming a popular stop for fresh smoothies as well as healthy grab-and-go snacks.

Besides longtime favorites, the city's newly opened restaurants are taking notes, learning from Chattanooga institutions, sourcing locally, and using the sights and sounds of the river town to inspire delicious dishes and memorable experiences in reimagined spaces.

The historic James Building, a multilevel office space with mid-century decor that

City Sights (From top) Whether cycling along the Walnut Street Bridge or lounging by the pool atop The Edwin Hotel, visitors and locals can get plenty of fresh air.



it comes by honestly, is home to a quiet java shop called Sleepyhead Coffee, which has repurposed two small rooms at the building's entrance. To the left, you can procure pour-over and drip coffee behind big, sun-filled windows. And to the right, you can lounge in the sitting room, a nook that's enveloped by wood paneling, accented with a gilded mirror, and illuminated by a neon sign that says, "Wake Up, Sleepyhead." Trailing ivy tumbles from pots on the ledges overhead.

Around the corner in the West Village, a towering, brutalist-style parking deck has been transformed into a charming, French-inspired shopping center. Stores and restaurants encircle the base, and lush green vines spill through openings in the structure. Eateries like Citron et Sel lure customers for long, open-air lunches, while across the street at the recently refurbished Read House hotel, the bar enchants visitors with its shimmering silver-and-gold Art Deco accents.

The city's cool outdoor adventures, new hotels, and innovative restaurants beckon, making a trip here more exciting than ever. Chattanooga is an invitation to explore, and it just keeps getting better.