Travel Secrets of America’s Oldest City

Capturing unique experiences is a thrill for any travel photographer, and America’s Oldest City offers special moments for all who stroll its cobblestone streets with open eyes. Saint Augustine, the oldest continuously occupied European settlement in the USA, is a photographer’s dream.

- Flagler College and Hotel Alcazar are landmarks on King Street.

Plan Your Travel

So, plan your trip this year. [Note: Find the bold text places in a list of links at the article’s end]. While Saint Augustine’s downtown sights are easy to reach by car, make time to stroll the ancient city south of the central plaza (MAP). Wander into the days of Spanish colonial living as you step over the footfalls of Ponce de Leon and Pedro Menendez de Aviles.

Founded in 1565, today Saint Augustine is an intriguing Old City.

St. Augustine’s ancient city rewards you with intimate views of cobblestone streets bordered by walls of soft limestone of broken shells called coquina. Photographing, you can gaze at vistas of receding live oaks. You can inhale smoke from the cannon and artillery demonstration at the Spanish Castillo de

San Marcos. Low light at night, historical details and sculpture, and the feeling of a vibrant, walkable town offer possibilities for all kinds of photography.

At the entrance to The Bridge of Lions, the lions and the bridge itself are fine subjects for night photographing.

Carrie Johnson rides a bicycle with a plate that says World’s Greatest Grandmother.

Before You Go: Surfing, Parking, Charging

Before you explore America’s Oldest City’s secrets, download the **ParkStAug App** (iOS & Android, link at the end of this article). Pay for parking online with a credit card. Driving an electric car? You can charge at the electric car charger at the east end of DeSoto Place near King between King Street and Granada. For places to stay, see below, all items in bold are linked.

Take your lightweight travel photo gear bag. Go photo walking and chat with locals for their unique stories of Saint Augustine’s former times. You may get lucky and meet up with the World’s Greatest Grandmother as she bikes along St. George Street, an 84-year-old known as the Voice of Lincolnville, Mother Carrie Johnson.

Photo Walking America’s Oldest City

You might begin your photo walk with a snack. Two options are the Starbucks on King Street across from Flagler College or chat with the friendly baristas at **The Kookaburra Coffee** shop for caramel- flavored coffee. Both coffee shops and several

restaurants are located on or just off Saint Augustine's **Plaza De La Constitucion**.

While there, wander the plaza to see the oldest Confederate Civil War monument in Florida. It's a 30-foot high white Confederate Memorial Obelisk under the live oaks in the plaza, just West of the historic market, inscribed with this tribute:

> *"Our Dead. In Memoriam, our Loved Ones Who gave up Their Lives in the service of The Confederate States."*

By the way, if you choose Starbucks, meander to the **Lightner Museum**, a Spanish Renaissance Revival style building on the National Register of Historic Places across from Flagler College. To your north is a statue of Henry Flagler, and Ponce de Leon is the statue to the South.

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Saunter past the Ponce de Leon statue and prowl into the **Lightner Museum** courtyard. Stroll over to the koi pond bridge, a favorite among wedding photographers. Few people know the secrets of the bridge's construction. M. Francis Coate of Flora City, Florida donated this bridge. He built it out of material from his immense rock collection, and it has stones from all over America. In the 1940s, builders left no stone un-turned to fashion their constructions using historic rocks from famous places.

Coate's bridge was made of stones from battlegrounds, forts, caves, and mansions. There are pieces from a dueling ground in

Weehawken, NJ, where Alexander Hamilton was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr. And, there’s a stone from the grounds of the Wilcox Mansion in Buffalo, NY where Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as president in 1901.

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The Coates bridge in the Lightner Courtyard.

Now, if you choose The Kookaburra Coffee instead, stroll East across Avenida Menendez to the pair of lion statues at the base of St. Augustine’s Bridge of Lions. Look for dolphin in the Matanzas River. Then, walk back West along the South side of King Street, past the **A1A Brewery**, and at your second street take a left, go under the arch, and inhale the aromas from a Greek or Cuban restaurant along **Aviles Street**, the oldest street in America. You may have guessed we’ll often be saying the word “oldest” as we photograph the Old City, but we could easily also say “romantic” “spooky” and “evocative.”

Looking north up Aviles Street. Note: The Greek Restaurant, Gaufres and Goods, still serves awesome melitzanosalata eggplant dip , but it has moved a block East to 212 Charlotte Street, May 2019.

Continue South to 3 Aviles Street and explore the Spanish Military Hospital and Museum. You can learn how colonial period herbs formed some of today’s medicines. Inside, at the apothecary there. Dawn will give you a wonderful tour of historical medical practices. Take your kids, and your dog as you tour the Military Hospital. It is pet-friendly. Give the camera a short rest as you browse fine art galleries, enjoy the tendril inspired gold ring and pendant work of Joel Bagnal, a fine art goldsmith. Dine outdoors by blazing red bougainvilleas on this cobblestone paved road that is home to masters of pottery, jewelry, and the visual arts.

Got your web-enabled camera? Share one of your Aviles Street photos to the **Discover Aviles Street** page on Facebook.

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Residents of Saint Augustine go out of their way to help you get around and if you are respectful and patient, will tell you stories to enliven your visit. I heard one fine legend, after heading South along Aviles Street, at the **Father O’Reilly House**.

There, the Sisters of Saint Joseph tell of “The Hurricane Lady” who protects Saint Augustine from hurricanes. As the legend goes, in 1850, a heavily-laden cargo ship was sailing from Spain to Saint Augustine when a hurricane caught it. The Captain, fearing a sinking, ordered his mate and crew to throw stores overboard. The mate went below and came up with a statue he’d found in an unlabeled crate, saying: “I don’t know where it’s from, there was no mark on the crate it was in.” The statue was a beautiful Madonna with blue silks and pearls. Not knowing where “she” came from, the Captain and crew knelt to pray, swore to the Madonna that: “if you get us safely into port, we’ll give this statue to the first Christian family ashore.” The seas and winds calmed. Reaching Saint Augustine, the Captain kept his promise and gave the Hurricane Lady to a Minorcan family.

One of 25 obelisks, from renowned artists, in the Compassion Project. The artists interpreted the location and created work with four main values of the obelisk in the plaza: freedom, Democracy, Human Rights and Compassion. Location her St. George at Cadiz Streets, the Sisters of Saint Joseph courtyard.

A closeup of the Obelisk in the Sisters of Saint Joseph Courtyard, with quotes by Maya Angelou, Martin Luthor King and Florida novelist Zora Neale Hurston. Ideals in the Spanish Constitution inspired Compassionate St. Augustine member Joel Bagnal to visualize how replicas of the obelisk, in locations throughout St. Augustine, would use public art to promote a legacy of compassion.

The **Sisters of St. Joseph**, who've taken care of the statue for 170 years, regard her as an image of the Virgin Mary, and you can visit the Hurricane Lady at the Father Miguel O'Reilly House Museum, but there is more photography history there as well. Enjoy the "Then and Now" photo gallery at the O'Reilly House. Historical photographs from the 1870s (then) are displayed next to photos of what St. Augustine looks like now. The gallery includes "Then and Now" sketches and photographs of the twin-towered city gate, the Old City and the **US National Cemetery**.

US National Cemetery, the grave of Arthur Earnest Rogers, and pyramids of 1500 soldiers from 3 Seminole Wars.

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Continue your stroll and pause outside **The Oldest House** (the González–Alvarez House) at 14 St. Francis Street at the corner of Marine Street. Parking is free. Occupied since the 17th century, it is documented to be the oldest surviving house in St. Augustine. The home was erected with local coquina limestone (kōˈkēnə). Its grounds were oriented so that the thickest walls run East-West. A shaded loggia on the Eastern side of Gonzalez-Alvarez House invites the prevailing Southeast wind to cool the home. Massive walls shield

residents from the blazing Florida sun. If you like, tour the complex, open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. 7 days a week with tours every 30 minutes, adults $8, students $4, and a family of 4 for $18. BTW, if walking is not possible, you may want to ride a Trolley Tour through the Old City.

An obelisk and a statue of Saint Francis are in the park across the street from the Saint Francis Inn near the Oldest House. From The Oldest House, walk South on Marine Street to the **US National Cemetery**. At San Salvador Street, you'll see the burial of Medical Corps Captain Arthur Ernest Rogers (1870-1943). Look beyond his marker to the three coquina pyramids, placed over the graves of almost 1500 soldiers who died in the Seminole Wars. These were the longest and most costly First Nations Wars in American history between 1816 and 1858. The Seminole people were the only first nations tribes who were undefeated.

When to Go

The best time of year to enjoy Saint Augustine is March thru May when weather is often favorable. Yet, any time of year, colorful nooks and crannies can beckon to you. For instance, Treasury Street is the narrowest street in the city, paved just 7 feet wide so two men could carry a chest of gold from ships docked on the bay, but still so narrow that no pirate commandeered horse-drawn carriages could attack and ride off with the booty. As you walk, breathe in the memorable scents of jasmine. Whatever your interest, from "love trees" to haunted fortress, you'll find unique photography opportunities.

Places to Stay

There are so many AirBnBs and places to stay in Saint Augustine. The city Visitors Center online has the most up-to-date list. Another option is in the heart of the Old City, at the **Saint Francis Inn** at the corner of St. George and St. Francis streets. Built in 1751, the inn in the Garcia-Dummett house has the distinctive architecture of turned posts and porch brackets. The service is excellent, as the Saint Francis Inn received 5 stars with 1400 reviews on Trip Advisor.

An artillery officer walks inside the Castillo de San Marcos.

El Galeon de Andalucia, docked at the Saint Augustine Municipal Marina.

Links Mentioned Above

Full List of Places to Stay in Saint Augustine.
Saint Francis Inn

Visit Saint Augustine **APP** link

The Kookaburra Coffee

Plaza De La Constitucion

Hotel Alcazar/Lightner Museum

Aviles Street Saint Augustine

Discover Aviles Street Facebook Link

ParkStAug **APP** (to help you park your car)

Treasury Street

Spanish Military Hospital Museum

Joel Bagnal Goldsmith

Father Miguel O’Reilly House

Sisters of Saint Joseph

US National Cemetery

The Oldest House

Colonial Night Watch British Encampment (for visiting in December)

Wining and Dining Saint Augustine

Collage Restaurant (60 Hypolita Street)

Harry’s Seafood Bar and Grill (46 Avenida Menendez)

The Floridian Restaurant (72 Spanish St) Ann O’Malley’s Pub

Dog Rose Brewing Company

A1A Ale Works Restaurant and Tap Room

You’ll see a fort by the Matanzas River. It is the Castillo de San Marcos at 1 South Castillo Drive. A group of outstanding National Park Service employees and management will go out of their way to pleasantly share the history of the Castillo with you. Kids under 15 are free with a $15 adult admission.

Carl Rang, at the Spanish Bakery on St George Street in Saint

Augustine. Mr Rang is a fifer with the 60th Royal Regimental, Afoot and a founder of the Night Watch, the British Encampment in St. Augustine Florida, USA. To honor the British presence in St. Augustine, his fife and drum group secures the gates of the city and re-enactors camp for three days on St. George Street. A travel secret? Stay in the Old City during this British Encampment as 2019 will be the 45th Anniversary of the Night Watch, sometime around December 1st, 2019.

Other Sights Around Town

1. **Castillo de San Marcos** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castillo_de_San_Marcos)
2. **Lighthouse** (http://www.staugustinelighthouse.org/visit/main): a fine view and intriguing history of a group of women who raised funds and restored the light.
3. The **Face Fountain** (https://www.visitstaugustine.com/street-view-photo/face-fountain): sister fountain to a fountain on Aviles Street in San Francisco.
4. Saint Augustine **Alligator Farm** Zoological Park (https://www.alligatorfarm.com/)
5. St Augustine **Visitor Information Center** (https://www.visitstaugustine.com/venue/visitor-information-center)

For more, Google “Top 20 Things to Do in Saint Augustine, Florida.”

About the Author: Photographer and educator **Jim Austin Jimages.com**has stumbled on the cobblestones of Aviles Street, moored and anchored his boat in the Matanzas River, played folk music on Treasury Street, and fallen in love with the trees and people of Saint Augustine, Florida.

https://www.apogeephoto.com/travel-secrets-saint-augustine/