



An Urban Whitewater Adventure In Columbus Georgia

By Debi Lander

Urban whitewater drew me to Columbus; imagine a place where you can raft tough rapids on the Chattahoochee River and then walk back to your hotel. In fact, USA Today picked the Chattahoochee Whitewater Park as one of the “Top 12 man-made Adventures in the World.”

Thirteen years ago the river and the city of Columbus, in western Georgia, were desperately in need of city-wide renewal. Somehow, the private and public sectors worked together to change the tide - literally. Today, the city boasts the longest urban white water course in the world.

I investigated a section of the 15-mile Columbus RiverWalk in the morning - a place where folks stroll, exercise, bike, and fish. When I got down to the area where rock-studded “big water” roared offshore, I nearly changed my mind. Recent rains have swollen the river and the cascading flow truly rushes by. This gnarly section of class 4 rapids (would have been class 5 if the course hadn’t been groomed to prevent rafts getting hung up in rocks) looked more powerful than I could handle.

However, when 1:30pm came and it was time to don a life jacket and helmet, I wasn’t about to let this opportunity slip by. My friend, Ruth joined me. We met Casey, our raft

guide from White Water Express Outfitters, who was confident and couldn’t wait to give us an exciting adventure. After a general group briefing, we hopped into the van along with our oars and were driven to the loading zone. No sooner did we enter the Chattahoochee River (I love saying that name) than we encountered our first series of rapids. “Dig,” hollered Casey and the four rafters on board attempted to stroke together.

We lazed through the next section, the river doing the work of pushing the raft forward. We enjoyed views of Blue Heron around the Habitat Pool, a man-made zone created by the river project engineers. Shoal Bass,

which spawn in rough water, have returned now that the river churns with rushing tides. In all, two dams were removed from the river along with any sharp rock formations.

Casey mentally prepared us for the challenging lower course and let those of us on the raft decide how we wanted to approach. No wimpy rafters here, we choose, as he termed it, the hot and spicy route.

Oh my gosh, we had more than Mr. Toad on his famous wild ride as our raft bounced along, waves crashing in and over the sides. I screamed - but with delight, not fright. I momentarily thought we would flip, as the raft seemed to fold up in the

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middle. Ruth fell forward while I slipped backward. But, with Casey at the bat, no one fell out and we soon recovered control of the course. Casey called for a high five of our oars and we were all elated.

Tour operators offered the option of running the course again, from a slightly shorter launching location. We all choose to return, so once again our raft rebounded by the old brick denim mills at river's edge and the newer convention center and historic downtown Columbus. How very cool to have what I think of as a rural adventure in the center of town. No need to drive hours to a park and camp out in order to get to a white water course. In Columbus,

the adventure waits just outside your hotel or restaurant door.

That night Ruth and I dined at Meritage, a locally owned restaurant with a superior wine and martini bar. Yes, the evening would be a splurge and was worth it.

Meritage is a grand addition to the walkable city of Columbus and after my meal I needed a walk. Ruth and I meandered through the historic house district and again along some of that 15-mile RiverWalk, which couldn't be a nicer way to end an evening.

Disclosure: Thanks to Columbus for sponsoring our visit and the Columbus Marriott for fine lodging.

