

Travel tips from  
our EIC Awards

# Porthole **Cruise**

06.2024

*Rainbow City*  
Party with Portland Pride

*Edinburgh Eats*  
Savor Sumptuous Scotland

*Go to Greenland*  
An Arctic Adventure

## and Travel



**JUNETEENTH  
IN GALVESTON**  
Texas port's proud  
holiday history

# *Crystal Serenity*

A LANDMARK SHIP,  
ELEGANTLY REBORN





comes that between employer and freed labor. The freedmen are advised to remain quietly at their present homes and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts and that they will not be engaged in business either there or elsewhere. General Order No. 3

bsolute Equality



It depicts a momentous event in one of the bleakest stains in American history. Emblazoned with a background of a swirling flag and seemingly battle-ready African-American soldiers, the *Absolute Equality Mural's* dominating image highlights that long-awaited day when Union Major General Gordon Granger presented the order of what's now called Juneteenth — when Texas' enslaved people were set free.

The giant public artwork spans a wall of a 19th-century building along Galveston's Strand, a busy retail street with New Orleans French Quarter-style balconies hanging over beachwear boutique storefronts, restaurants, and even a saltwater-taffy shop popular with locals and those about to board cruise ships. Yet the mural is

testament to how this island port city saw one of the final blows to American slavery take place on June 19, 1865, culminating in the enactment of a national holiday exactly 156 years later.

"It was decided that Galveston would be the place to end it — even though it took them a couple of years to get here," says Tommie Boudreaux, a Galveston Historical Foundation board member and chair of the foundation's African American Heritage Committee. That's because President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect January 1, 1863, but official word didn't reach Texas until almost two and a half years later, making Texas the last Confederate state to abolish slavery.

"While we're just a small island, we have a major story," adds Boudreaux.



## ART AS STORY

The mural portrays that story with likenesses of a bearded General Granger with the United States Colored Troops, Texas' first-known enslaved African in 1528, and also President Lincoln and abolitionist Harriet Tubman.

"She never came to Texas but we went with Tubman because we wanted to talk about the Underground Railroad in Texas which went south to Mexico, which many people don't know," points out Samuel Collins III, a historian and community activist. Known locally as "Professor Juneteenth," Collins was instrumental in the mural's creation.

There's also an image of Texas Representative Al Edwards who sponsored the 1979 bill making Texas the first state to enact Juneteenth as a

state holiday. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris signed a bill creating a national holiday on June 17, 2021, just two months after the mural's completion by Houston artist Reginald Adams and his team. "What really triggered Juneteenth becoming a national holiday, unfortunately, was the murder of George Floyd," says Collins.

The mural gets its name from a passage in Granger's General Order No. 3, which reads, in part, that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation "involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor."

**By coming to Galveston,  
you get to be immersed in the  
experience, to retrace the steps  
where the soldiers came.**

## A HOLIDAY WALK

To commemorate Juneteenth this year, residents have planned banquets, lectures, concerts, and other activities over two to three weeks, as they do every year. However, you don't have to visit in June to appreciate the holiday and to learn what happened here.

"I tell people you can read about swimming and watch a documentary on swimming, but at some point you have to get in the water. It's the same with Juneteenth," says Collins. "By coming to Galveston, you get to be immersed in the experience, to retrace the steps where the soldiers came, got off the ship, delivered the message of freedom and then moved throughout the State of Texas."

To do this, the self-guided Juneteenth Freedom Walk map and video presentation can be accessed on mobile devices through VisitGalveston.com. It highlights five key locations beginning at Pier 21. (From here, I could see Galveston's newest homeported cruise ship, Carnival Cruise Line's Excel-class *Carnival Jubilee*, docked within sight during my visit.) The pier is where a historic marker details the so-called Middle Passage trans-Atlantic slave trade route that reached Galveston's port.

The second stop on the tour is the *Absolute Equality Mural* on the outside walls of the Nia Cultural Center which, inside, showcases the works of local artists. The mural overlooks the city's Juneteenth Marker and the adjacent parking lot – the former location of the Osterman Building, which served as Granger's Galveston headquarters. A short walk leads to the tour's third stop, the columned 1861 U.S. Customs House, occupied by Union troops after Granger's arrival and where General Order No. 3 was also posted.

"This building, because it had been a Confederate office building, still had a functioning printing press," explains historian Edward Cotham, author of the book *Juneteenth: The Story Behind the Celebration*. "They were used to print multiple copies of the Juneteenth order, probably thousands of them. They were the freedom papers that many of these enslaved people always remembered as being part of the source of their emancipation."



Carnival Jubilee through the rigging of 1877 tall ship Elissa



**This island  
port city saw  
one of the  
final blows  
to American  
slavery take  
place on  
June 19, 1865.**

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# THE FIRST MARCH, THE FINAL STOP

The fourth stop on the self-guided tour is the Reedy Chapel-AME Church founded in 1848 along the island's central artery, Broadway, where enslaved people gathered and where they first marched as freed people during early Juneteenth celebrations. The march is reenacted every year.

The tour's final stop is just a few blocks away at the 1859 Ashton Villa on Broadway, one of the first brick private residences built on the island, and home to Galveston's Juneteenth exhibit, "And Still We Rise...." Since Juneteenth 2022, interactive screens with digitized newspaper clips, oral histories, and timelines have taken the visitor through the quest for emancipation, Granger's General Order No. 3, and beyond to the present day.

Visitors can listen to narrations drawn from written reactions and historical records when Juneteenth came to be – the jubilation of enslaved people and the new reality for those who had owned them, now realizing they no longer had free labor. "Many were already aware that the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed. Slave narratives indicate some heard their masters speaking about it. People were moving around state to state," says Boudreaux. "Many of them left, trying to find their families."

Says Collins: "What we're doing is flavoring up the history when you visit Galveston by telling you some of the unknown stories and places you need to visit. Hopefully, individuals will come get a taste of Galveston."

"The mural is our chalkboard, and this is our outdoor classroom."●

