

Heron

**THE PLACE**  
**Blue Danube**

BEYOND THE POLITE boating party often pegged to central Europe's Danube River (think Strauss waltzes and sips of brandy) lies an Amazon-like wilderness, a labyrinth of oxbow lakes, secret sandbars, and flooded willow forests at the intersection of Croatia, Hungary, and Serbia where the Mura and the Drava join and then meet the Danube.

Last July UNESCO pronounced this riverscape a biosphere reserve—a boon for its rare indigenous species and for adventure lovers, too. In this area still healing from the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, ecotourism is rising from the abyss. A hike, bike ride, or—best of all—canoe paddle through the sprawling floodplain of **Kopački Rit Nature Park**, part of the reserve near the eastern Croatian city of Osijek (“ebb tide”), reveals a dazzling diversity that includes 293 bird species.

Reeds and ryegrass flourish among water lilies; purple herons and white-tailed eagles soar overhead; and, in spring, the tips of poplars poke out of the high waters. “After a serene glide through the maze of waterways,” says Jasmin Sadiković of Zlatna Greda, an eco-outfitter that leads day trips through the park, “wrap it up at a nearby tavern over *fiš paprikaš*, a spicy fish stew.” —*Anja Mutić*

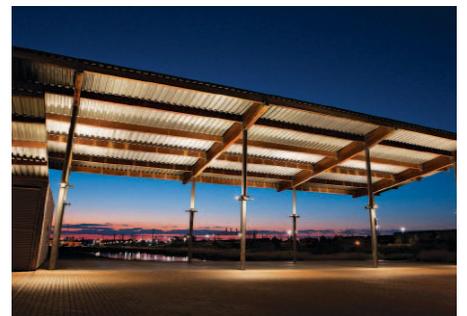


*All kinds pop up at the Good People taproom.*

**THE COMEBACK**

**Toward the Promised Land**

IN THE 1960s, **Birmingham, Alabama's** Redmont Hotel hosted politicians touting “segregation forever.” These days, young urbanites mingle over martinis at that hotel’s rooftop bar, called Above. Things are looking up all across the city, which in April marks 50 years since Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote his landmark “Letter From a Birmingham Jail.” Local printmaker Kevin Cleveland, whose father marched with King, embodies his hometown’s revival. “Birmingham is coming alive—it’s flexing its muscles,” he says. Streets that once reeled with riots now embrace community, from contemporary Art Folk Gallery to Second Avenue hot spots like El Barrio with its graffiti-style mural and tequila-spiked cheese dip. And a cross section of the city’s residents convene for sunset yoga classes, drum circles, and film screenings at Railroad Park, Birmingham’s open-air “living room.” Featuring a natural amphitheater and a pavilion (right), the green space trumped New York’s renowned High Line park for a design award and is propelling downtown’s renaissance, from the new Regions Field ballpark to the buzzing taproom of Good People Brewing Company. —*KELSEY SNELL*



WOLFGANG HOLZACKER (BIRD); JASON WALLIS (BAR; PAVILION)