

## Riverfront

The northern boundary of downtown is marked by the surreal 32-story, 321ft Pyramid , two-thirds the size of the Great Pyramid, and taller than the Statue of Liberty. Completed in 1991, it was intended as a symbolic link with the Nile Delta with permanent displays; today its 22,500-seat theater puts on Memphis's biggest concerts and ball games (tours were suspended at the time of writing; call 901/521-9675 for updates). Around here nearby Main Street is generally an attractive pedestrianized mall (served by trolleys), with wide paved sidewalks and modern fountains, that is gradually rebuilding its retail activity. From Riverside Drive, monorail trains and a walkway reach Mud Island (April & May Tues-Sun 10am-5pm; June-Aug daily 10am-8pm; Sept & Oct Tues-Sun 10am-5pm; grounds are free; museum \$8, both free on Thurs after 4pm June-Aug) across Wolf Channel, which Tom Cruise had a hard time crossing in the movie version of John Grisham's *The Firm* . On the island, which formed in 1910 when the river began depositing silt alongside a stationary boat, the Mississippi River Museum is an enjoyable and ingenious romp through the history of the river. Highlights include a full-size reconstructed steam packet squeezed into the core of the building, a morbidly fascinating "Theater of Disasters," and little-known characters such as keelboatman Mike Fink, who in 1830 styled himself "half-horse, half-alligator"; there's also an overview of Memphis music, featuring the original sign from Stax Records and one of Elvis's Vegas-era white jumpsuits. Outside, the half-mile River Walk is a scale model of the river itself, complete with town grids, which ends in the "Gulf of Mexico" at a swimming pool and artificial beach. You can also visit the original Memphis Belle , a World War II B17 bomber, nearby. The small, tree-shaded Jefferson Davis and Confederate parks by the Mississippi River are popular lunchtime meeting places. When the Union took Memphis during the Civil War, thousands of dismayed residents watched from these sites as seven out of eight Confederate gunboats were sunk. The imposing buildings of Cotton Row , halfway along Front Street, might have seen busier days, but this is still the largest spot cotton market in the country. The Cotton Exchange Building at 84 S Front St contains a small historical exhibit on the cotton trade, but visitors are not allowed into the trading area. At the south end of downtown, Tom Lee Park , the venue for major outdoor events such as "Memphis in May," commemorates a black boatman who rescued 32 people from a sinking boat in 1925 - despite the fact that he couldn't swim.