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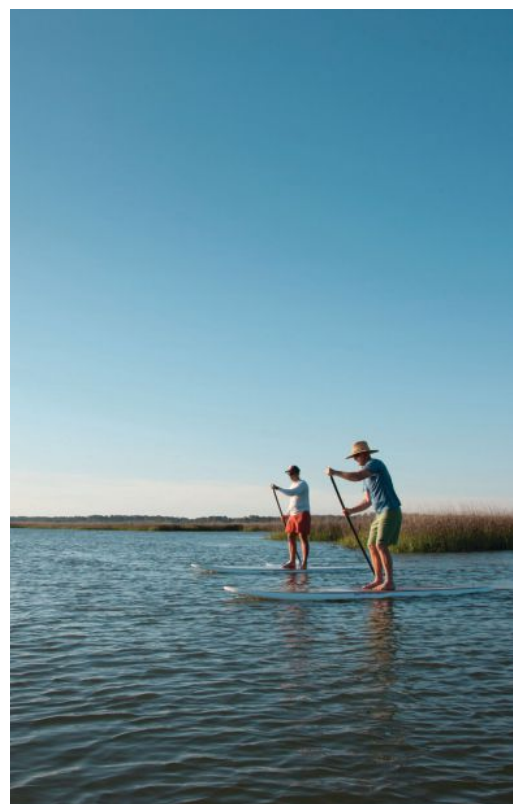
Laidback Luxury in the Lowcountry

Gentry's Amalia McGibbon explores one of South Carolina's gems—Palmetto Bluff.

Over the course of three days at Palmetto Bluff in South Carolina, I went for what felt like a hundred bike rides. Every chance I got, I'd hop on my rented cruiser and head out in some new direction. Not because I needed to burn off the calories from

a weekend of over-indulging (more on that in a moment), but because there's perhaps nowhere more pleasant to ride a bicycle than the velvet-paved paths of this property. With its stately homes, flickering gas lamps, and oak trees dripping with Spanish moss, Palmetto Bluff feels like a model village come to life.

Once home to Richard T. Wilson, a New York financier and brother-in-law of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Palmetto Bluff spans more than 20,000 acres of pristine coastal marshland. (That's one-and-a-half times the size of Manhattan!) Much of the land is protected by the Palmetto Bluff Conservancy, which monitors wildlife populations, reviews development plans, and seeks to educate residents on their surroundings. All of which might explain how a community that manages to squeeze in private residences, vacation rentals, and the 5-star Montage Palmetto Bluff resort can still feel so quiet





and untouched.

Well, except for one boisterous weekend each November, when Palmetto Bluff turns the volume way up at its annual *Music to Your Mouth* festival. It's a grand affair, for sure—last year featured 18 events, 33 chefs, and 37 vintners and brewers—but one that lets you leave your white gloves at home. Dressing for an event means pulling on a fleece and knowing that it'll smell like wood smoke by the end of the night (a plus in my book).

My festival experience began with the traditional "Big Carol's Big Dinner." Named after one of the earliest cooks on the property, it's an *al fresco* celebration with fancy food trucks, twinkle lights, and live music. I stayed out late before hitting the hay, and a mere 10 hours later I was on my way — via bicycle, of course — to a Culinary Salon on American Chardonnay. There, James Beard Award-winning writers Rajat Parr and Jordan Mackay chatted with Master Sommelier Larry Stone and grape-grower extraordinaire Lee Hudson about the differences between "old world" and "new world" producers, and how to distinguish between





the two when tasting (which we luckily got to do quite a bit of).

But I was most excited to experience the event so winningly captured in my itinerary as “the big show, the icing on the cake, the cherry on top.” That would be the Culinary Festival, a four-hour celebration of local ingredients, cooked by some of the best chefs south of the Mason-Dixon line. A few of my favorites included: a smoked tater tot with creme fresh and Cajun caviar, courtesy of Jamie Lynch, executive chef of 5Church in Charleston; a plate of braised rabbit raviolis from Bryce Knott, executive chef of aLure restaurant in Savannah; and BBQ Duck Confit Bao Bun with a sweet potato dipping sauce from Steven Greene, executive chef at The Umstead Hotel in Cary, North Carolina. And then—as if that wasn’t decadent enough—we closed the carnivorous weekend with the “Kiss the Pig” event, a traditional oyster roast and barbeque set along the banks of the May River.

Music to Your Mouth is just one of many parties that dot the events calendar at Palmetto Bluff, which can feel a bit like a summer camp for adults. There’s also a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, a shooting club, equestrian facilities, clay tennis courts, bocce ball, fly-fishing, and guided kayak trips (apparently sunrise is your best bet for a bottlenose dolphin sighting!). You can—and should—sign up for a cemetery tour with the on-site archeologist Dr. Mary Socci, or you might book a river cruise aboard The Grace, a restored 1913 60-foot community yacht (one of the last remaining pre-World War I gas-powered yachts).

There’s also the very respectable option of doing



THE CURRENT TALK

absolutely nothing. In fact, the folks at Palmetto Bluff have coined a term for just sitting on your porch, drink in hand: they call it “porching,” and I’m pleased to announce that I have become very good at it. Granted, it’s easy when the porch in question is attached to one of the beautiful homes at Palmetto Bluff. These residences—with their symmetrical forms, triangular gables, and Greek Revival columns—are inspired by historic waterfront villages along the East Coast. They are romantic interpretations of towns like Savannah, Georgia, and Beaufort, South Carolina.

They say you should never meet your heroes. Well, I consider it similarly risky to visit a destination for the first time that you’ve long romanticized. And the Low-country was one of those for me. I had an image in my head of what this corner of our country looked and felt like: biscuits and barbecue, verandas, and wild oaks. So, cheers—with a glass of unoaked Chardonnay—to Palmetto Bluff for making the reality even prettier than the postcard. ♦

—PALMETTO BLUFF IS LOCATED JUST 30 MINUTES FROM THE SAVANNAH AND HILTON HEAD ISLAND AIRPORTS. FOR MORE DETAILS, VISIT WWW.PALMETTOBLUFF.COM. TICKETS FOR THE 2019 MUSIC TO YOUR MOUTH FESTIVAL (NOVEMBER 20 – 24) CAN BE PURCHASED AT WWW.MUSICTOYOURMOUTH.COM.

