



DAWN AT CABIN BLUFF

Riverside Resorts

The perfect marriage of land and water

BY ALLSTON McCRADY

Cabin Bluff

“FISH ARE LIKE PEOPLE,” SAYS CAPTAIN TOBY. “THEY don’t want to work for a living. They just want to eat, drink, and be merry.”

We are anchored in a vast marsh separating Cumberland Island from the coast of Georgia—technically the Cumberland River. Bright clouds billow overhead, the sky a deep ultramarine blue, the breeze gentle. My five-year-old son, Ned, has fallen in love with a bait shrimp, named it “Sammy,” and is having imaginary conversations with his newfound friend as I cast my line again and again near the mouth of a creek where, if I were a fish, I would be hanging out. A stealthy heron, the lanky Ichabod Crane of the bird world, creeps along the shallows in barely perceptible slow motion.

I have come to Cabin Bluff to decompress, to

soak up land, water, and sky. The MeadWestvaco property covers some 24,000 acres of maritime forest. Nature is the architect here—canopies of towering longleaf and slash pines, dense low-lying carpets of saw palmetto, blankets of native grasses that thrive after controlled burns, soil churned by pigs rooting for nut sage. All interspersed with magnificent live oaks, branches cloaked in resurrection fern and dripping with Spanish moss.

This was once the hunting retreat of “Silent Cal” Coolidge, silent indeed while stalking the abundant deer. The property now caters to group buy-outs, often corporate, who come to relax and bond over hunting (quail, deer, wild hogs), fishing (inshore/offshore/pier), a ten-station sporting clays course (near a massive bald eagle nest), and even poolside lounging. It’s not uncommon to have the Davis Love-designed golf course all to



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yourself, under the semi-curious eyes of the pond alligators or giant wood storks.

We are here on one of the rare weekends when Cabin Bluff accommodates smaller groups, but I can see how this place makes a perfect spot for a multi-generational family reunion or group of friends. Guests stay in individual rustic cabins, disperse for adventures, then come together periodically for fresh, hearty meals.

Breakfast is a smorgasbord of eggs, bacon, grits, waffles, biscuits and gravy, fresh fruit, and hot coffee. A group of gentlemen chuckle about the trout that got away. Another group debates the agenda for the day. Golf? Fishing? They compromise, loading poles on top of the golf cart.

Lunch is served poolside: soft-shell crab sandwiches, fresh artisanal wraps, fried chicken to die for.

Dinner takes two forms on different nights, the more formal being the plated meal at Coolidge Tavern where Chef Podrasky works his wonders, sourcing the freshest catch from his go-to fisherman or cooking up a guest's catch to order (such as nine-year-old Thomas's mangrove snapper). The less formal dinner option takes place fireside beneath the trees and stars. Here, guests enjoy classic fish fries, Lowcountry boils, oyster shucking, or Miss Vicky's lightly battered shrimp (I suspect Miss Vicky is the genius behind the fried chicken, too). A circle of hand-crafted cedar tables surrounds the fire pit. Children skewer marshmallows on palm fronds for s'mores. A red fox waits politely in the shadows for someone to throw him a piece of cornbread. Kiki the cat eyeballs discarded crab legs.

The moon turns the Spanish moss a ghostly blue. We stroll out to the pier to find Thomas fishing once more. I can barely make out the distant shadowy mass of sixteen-mile-long Cumberland Island, a national seashore. This is the only pier on a thirty-mile stretch of coastline. A real haven.

In the morning, I rise early to catch the sunrise. Thomas beats me to it (this kid has a serious fishing addiction!). I stand on the dock, mesmerized by the shifting colors of the sky. Captain Toby pulls out in his boat and waves, "Another day at the office! The sunrises are even better offshore."

Suddenly Thomas yells, "Fish on!" I scurry up the ramp and grab a net to help scoop up his catch.

Palmetto Bluff

Palmetto Bluff residents and guests call the twelve-mile entrance road to this 22,000-acre property the "detox chamber." The transitional stretch whispers to you as you travel through: "Take a load off. Breathe. Slow down. You are



here." The road takes you, eventually, into the heart of a community and inn straddling the May River near Bluffton, South Carolina. It looks like it has been here for over a century, yet it was built less than ten years ago.

Incredible sensitivity went into its planning. Before any house is built, any ditch dug, any road laid, there is a meeting of the minds between the onsite archaeologist, naturalists, and wildlife management team—a passionate bunch. Historic cemeteries (including a marvelous little pet cemetery on the water) are preserved, ancient trees protected. Church pews have been lovingly crafted using reclaimed wood from 9/11. Even the golf course has green initiatives that are actually improving the health of nearby waters. What other golf course can claim that?

Guests can rent houses or stay in beautifully appointed cabins along the river or lagoon. Numerous mouth-watering eateries are just a walk, bike ride, or golf cart jaunt away. The resort offers special culinary packages year-round, such as wine dinners, foraging dinners, and special guest chef appearances, culminating in the fabulous Music to Your Mouth Festival every November (see page 116).

My cabin faces east across the river, a recipe for a perfect sunrise. I take my coffee out to an Adirondack chair to watch the dolphins (the area is one of the premiere breeding grounds on the East Coast). Waves of egrets and ibis fly over me, cued by the sunrise, leaving their protected island in the lagoon and heading out for the day's adventure. I am well fed, happy, and completely serene. How sweet it is.