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COMPLIMENTARY ISSUE

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East Coast Getaways



Charming cottages are dotted about The Inn at Palmetto Bluff

Our stock portfolio is a nightmare. Our home value has been halved. The peanut butter in our kitchen may be poisonous. When the only positive news making headlines was a pilot landing a plane on the Hudson, we knew it was time to escape reality for a brief retreat. We described our getaway as a mental health investment or sanity stimulus plan to anyone who questioned the wisdom of traveling to two top resorts smack in the middle of a recession. There are times in this world when running away from home to rekindle the spirit is a necessary expense. This was one of them.

The Inn at Palmetto Bluff, Bluffton, South Carolina

Nestled along the banks of the pristine May River, in the picturesque South Carolina Low Country, The Inn at Palmetto Bluff quietly blends into 20,000 acres of serene wilderness. This vast land between Charleston and Savannah was once home to more than 20 working plantations. Today, it remains a glorious habitat to a diversity of wildlife with

forests enhanced by miles of freshwater trails that lead to hundreds of creeks and the salt marsh estuaries of three rivers.

We arrive on one of those picture-perfect days, the kind reserved for dreams. The air is still and silent. The only sound is a chorus of birds chirping in harmony as they flutter about moss-laden 17th century oak trees that punctuate a cloudless sapphire sky. The resort is actually a small village designed around

a Utopian Village Green, reminiscent of something straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting. The main lodge houses River House, its signature restaurant with a dazzling 4,000 bottle wine list, as well as a cozy Veranda bar and a wide wrap-around screened porch that overlooks the river. Two additional restaurants, a general store, waterside chapel, boathouse, barn, movement studio, pool, canoe club, world-class spa and

Jack Nicklaus golf course are seamlessly woven into the natural landscape. Accommodations consist of 50 luxurious guest cottages, strategically dotted along the banks of the river for maximum privacy and outstanding views.

My husband, Terry, and I arrive at “porching” time. Being from the north, we haven’t a clue what that means. We are led to a large screened porch where a tempting display of chilled lemonade and iced tea is paired with bowlfuls of mint leaves. Plates of fresh-from-the-oven cookies—crunchy peanut butter, luscious chocolate and crispy almond—convince us to linger. We learn that porching is an afternoon pause to relax and get acquainted with your neighbors. No wonder Southern belles are so skilled in the art of chatting.

Once we are sated, we are taken via golf cart to Cottage Nine. The sight of two white Adirondack chairs and two bicycles on our front porch (our only transport for four days) makes us love the place before we walk in the door. Inside, the mood is sophisticated yet charming. Crisp white walls and a high vaulted ceiling dramatize richly polished wide plank pine floors. Reflecting Southern hospitality in every detail, the furnishings are classic colonial—two comfy fireside chairs, a romantic window seat, a handsome mahogany bed topped with Italian linens plus French doors that open onto a massive screened porch. The oversized marble bathroom has oodles of amenities, including a steam shower with room for two.

While there are a variety of outdoor pursuits, there is no pressure to participate—the path to rejuvenation is a personal one, true joy is in the wandering. We can relax and do nothing or make s’mores by an outdoor fire pit. Go kayaking or play tennis on one of eight clay courts. Swim in two saline temperature-controlled pools, play croquet or just linger over lunch next to one of several outdoor fireplaces. Terry’s idea of R&R is golf and the course is a knockout.



The Inn at Palmetto Bluff



Kayaking is a favorite activity.

“The May River Course is a thinking-man’s golf course,” explains Jack Nicklaus, course designer. “What we created feels like a walk in the woods, an experience that completely fills the senses.”

While Terry experiences Nirvana on velvety fairways and challenging greens, I divert to the spa. Like a scene straight out of a storybook, a tiny footbridge leads me to a gracious manor home, the Inn’s award-winning spa. It is perfectly placed

on its own private island surrounded by a garden filled with roses, local flowers and herbs. The scent is intoxicating.

The spa is small and intimate. It has only eight treatment rooms, each with a soaking tub on a private screened veranda that reveals an awe-inspiring view. I await my treatment by a toasty fire, snuggled up in a cuddly white robe. Before I blink, a neck warmer is placed on my shoulders and tea or cool

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The Inn at Palmetto Bluff's stunning golf course is nestled in Georgia's Low Country.

cucumber water is presented. I don't want to budge but Angela, my attendant, whisks me away for a heavenly lemon and bamboo scrub followed by a custom massage. She explains the merits of the massage butter that is hydrating my skin and the value of Arnica oil penetrating my sore muscles. I am predictably bewitched. When my treatment ends, Angela opens a warming drawer (each treatment room has one) and hands me a warm robe. As they say, it's all in the details.

What constitutes an idyllic retreat?

A calming pace and therapeutic space. This Inn delivers both. It just may be one of the most beautiful natural retreats in North America.

Reynolds Plantation, Greensboro, Georgia

"Darling, I want to go to The Kingdom." When my husband whispered those eight little words in my ear, I figured our 401K had gotten the best of him. I thought he wanted to toss in his golf towel and head to the heavenly

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home of a higher power. But fortunately he had a different Kingdom in mind.

Terry's version is an exclusive, game-enhancement experience for serious golfers. There are only two Kingdoms in the world—one is in California and the other is at The Ritz-Carlton Lodge Reynolds Plantation. The latter is a high-tech facility, which was originally created for tour pros by TaylorMade, manufacturer of some of the world's best golf equipment. Many of the pros come here (Sergio Garcia, for one) to have their swing and equipment analyzed using the high-tech Motion Analysis Technology system (MATT). Recently, TaylorMade opened this facility to the public and Terry salivated at the thought of reducing his handicap by using the same testing and equipment fitting enjoyed by the pros. When he explained his version of "heaven," I was so relieved I agreed to go.

Secluded on the pristine shores of beautiful Lake Oconee, a pleasant hour's drive from Atlanta or Augusta, The Ritz-Carlton Lodge Reynolds Plantation looms before us like a Grand Dame hotel from another era. This AAA, five-diamond resort is part of an idyllic 10,000-acre golf and lake retreat that boasts 99 holes of golf on championship courses designed by Jack Nicklaus, Tom Fazio and Rees Jones. It was recently named North American Golf Resort of the Year.

This Ritz is unlike the other marble-and-crystal city hotels. This Ritz is a casual, rustic lodge. (Think immense wood beams on the lobby's cathedral ceiling and massive stone fireplaces.) Since I'm a non-golfer, I thought I might get bored. My concern was erased when I discovered the

spa, a peaceful retreat that focuses on health, wellness and refreshing the mind. My treatment—a Bourbon Vanilla Soak—smelled so delicious I couldn't decide if I should bathe in it or take a sip!

While I gravitate to simpler pursuits, other guests are busy horseback riding, canoeing, waterskiing, fishing, hiking or swimming in a huge lakeside infinity pool. No wonder this place was named “Best of the Best” by *Robb Report* and ranks No. 7 on the list of “Top Hotels and Resorts in America” by *Travel & Leisure*.

The Kingdom Experience

When Terry's day at The Kingdom arrives, he is as excited as a kid eyeing his first banana split. Jason Werner, master fitter, opens a heavy steel door and leads us into “the vault” where the state-of-the-art club testing and fitting begins. The huge soundproof room resembles a movie studio—nine high-speed cam-

eras are strategically placed to capture Terry's every move. Jason straps sensors on just about every part of Terry's body—head, feet, thighs, calves, chest, back, waist, elbows, arms and hands. Sensors are also on the golf club and balls. Terry is instructed to hit several shots as the cameras and computers record and process his data. The MATT system then creates a three-dimensional animated image of Terry on a screen that replicates his exact movements. Amazingly, this animated figure really looks like his body! This is far from the typical golf instruction video.

After the indoor session, several hours are spent outdoors where Jason changes club heads, shafts, even grips to evaluate the best equipment for Terry's swing. Once all the data is reviewed, Jason presents a report with his recommendations for clubs, putter and even the right ball to improve Terry's game. None of this

comes cheap, of course, but the thought of eking out another 20 yards on his drive or hitting more accurate bunker shots or reducing a few putts convince Terry to order a custom set. Prices for the Kingdom experience range from \$600 to \$9,000. But other than being a tour pro, this is the only way to be treated like one.

Back Home

Did our escapes from reality pay off? You bet. Months after we returned, the journey continues to pay a wealth of tranquility dividends. We try to enjoy each day and are grateful for our blessings. And, now that Terry's back to earth, if you're wondering whether those customized clubs reduced his handicap, let's just say, he's working on it.

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