



TYBEE TRANQUIL

BY DEBORAH R. HUSO



This laid-back Georgia island offers the chance to kick back and spend a week in flip-flops.

It's certainly not Jekyll Island or St. Simons There are no luxury hotels or pristine golf

courses and few high-class gourmet dining options. This is Tybee Island, Ga., a throwback to the 1950s, home to only 3,500 residents, and wonderfully offbeat and undiscovered by the jet set.

There is a quirky hole-in-the-wall restaurant called A-J's, with rustic seating on the dock overlooking Back River, where one can watch dolphins play while enjoying crab cakes or yellow fin tuna. And there are funky rental cottages painted in royal blue, neon green and bright pink that one can rent for a week or a month and live like a native, wearing flip-flops and a bathing suit to walk the dog.

Just east of Savannah and seemingly worlds away from the fast pace of modern life, this little island is the perfect getaway for doing absolutely nothing.

The best part about Tybee is its barrier island beach, which is wide, beige and littered with tiny shells. Wooden swings, where one can cozy up with a mixed drink from one of the many beach bars and restaurants, are positioned strategically along the way. A haven for dolphins, Tybee's beach is a great viewing spot for these marine mammals.

Local outfitters offer boat tours around the barrier island with promises of dolphin sightings and water views of the 1857-built Cockspur Lighthouse, which marks the mouth of the Savannah River. The tours also take in nearby Fort Pulaski, a former Confederate stronghold with 70-foot-thick walls made of 25 million bricks.

Another way to see Tybee is by bicycle. They're available for rent

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all over the island, and the best place for a leisurely ride is along Tybee's abandoned railroad bed, which once carried Savannah's elite to weekend cottages here. Known today as the Old Railroad Trail, this six-mile-long path leads through scenic marshland to nearby Old Fort Jackson, a crucial part of the defense of the Savannah River during the Civil War.



FORSYTH PARK

Hostess City of the South

The historic city of Savannah—graced with stunning architecture, live oaks draped in silvery Spanish moss, bumpy brick streets, and 21 beautifully landscaped squares and parks—is only a 20-minute drive west of Tybee.

The city's Landmark Historic District measures 2.5 square miles. Boasting ornate streetlamps, Doric columns, hidden alcove entrances, elaborate iron staircases, scrolled iron gates barring entrances to private courtyards and houses in colors ranging from rusty orange to pink, there is almost too much for the eye to take in.

Must-see landmarks include the Cathedral of St. John's Gothic facade, Colonial Park Cemetery's eerie statuary and 30-acre Forsyth Park, home to the oft-photographed cast-iron fountain modeled on the fountain at the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Among the historical houses one can tour is the Owens-Thomas House off Oglethorpe Square. Designed by English architect William Jay in 1816, the home is reportedly one of the premier examples of Regency architecture in America, with a brass-inlaid staircase and faux dome ceilings.

One of the livelier sections of Savannah is City Market, featuring dozens of shops and artists' studios and the sounds of blues and jazz emanating from balcony bars and street-side clubs. Most of the city's night scene occurs along Factor's Walk and River Street. Once the cotton warehouse district of Savannah, this riverfront section is now a robust, noisy shopping and dining district where one can find old stone and brick warehouses holding restaurants, candy shops and novelty stores. The upper floors serve as chic apartments and hotel rooms.

Kayaking is another popular way of getting around and the best way to see the Little Tybee Nature Preserve and the island's hidden inlets—rich with egrets, blue herons and ibis. Guided tours as well as kayak rentals are available from various outfitters.

MINGLING WITH THE LOCALS

One of the most charming things about Tybee is its friendly residents—some of them quirky, all of them incredibly relaxed. Artists and writers have flocked to this laid-back island, and some of their studios and galleries are open to the public. One might even catch a glimpse of Tybee's most famous resident—movie star Sandra Bullock, who owns a house on the island's north end.

Tybee has a rousing nightlife for such a little place. Jokingly referred to as “a drinking village with a fishing problem,” Tybee allows alcohol on its beach and streets, as long as it's in a plastic cup. Dining here ranges from super-casual dock-side eating at A-J's to the more elegant Hunter House Inn, featuring delectable specials like homemade seafood bisque.

SLEEP LIKE A NATIVE

The best way to stay on Tybee is in one of its unusual, renovated fishing cottages—perhaps one of designer Jane Coslick's rescued fishing camp shacks, which are all quaint and comfortable with sweetly sloping floors, mounds of pillows, beach-brights decor and lazy hammocks on screened porches.

Most cottage rentals and bed-and-breakfasts come with free bicycles to use during one's stay, and because the island is just under five miles long, there's really no need to use a car at all. Traveling by bike or on foot is just fine for getting around to the beach, the handful of eclectic restaurants and the ice cream shops.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Contact your AAA Travel agent or AAA.com for maps and reservations. For more information about Tybee Island, call (912) 786-5444 or visit www.tybeevisit.com. To learn more about daytrip adventures to Savannah, call (877) 728-2662 or go online at www.visitsavannah.com. **H&A**

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