

>hotel picks: **southern escapes**

southern hospitality

By Jan Schroder

The Carolina Inn: Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Known as “the university’s living room,” this elegant property was built on the campus of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill in 1924, houses the largest collection of antiques in the state, and is just a short walk to the bars, shops and restaurants on Franklin Street. Dozens of historical photos are on display throughout the elegant lobby, although there are no photos of one of the most famous guests — the resident ghost, a well dressed portly man reportedly spotted by several guests. He, along with a reported 20 other ghosts, are responsible for the inn being named as one of America’s top 10 haunted hotels.

The inn welcomed a new chef in June. Chef James Clark is in the kitchen at the Carolina Crossroads, the inn’s fine dining restaurant, and having eaten a lunch he prepared I can attest to his amazing talent. His pimento cheese was the best ever, followed by truffled sweet potato bisque and sautéed local sunburst trout with boiled peanut arugula pesto, which sparked a lively conversation about the pros and cons of boiled peanuts. No denying we were in the South. www.carolinainn.com

Greyfield Inn: Cumberland Island, Georgia

We kayaked through a maze of bright green spartina grass, watched an osprey attack a bald eagle on a deserted beach, bicycled under canopies of arching live oaks and walked through the charming tiny church where JFK Jr. made his wedding vows.

Although there were no traffic lights, no retail establishments and no phone, TV or Wi-Fi in our room, we were hardly roughing it during our stay at the delightful Greyfield Inn. We dressed up for dinner then enjoyed cocktails and hors d’oeuvres in the living room before descending to the dining

While I have no desire to stop adding stamps to my passport from foreign lands, I’ll never tire of exploring my own region, the South, where warm hospitality is as much of a religion as college football, big hair and sweet tea.

I’ve savored the world’s best biscuits, ridden a bicycle on an unspoiled barrier island, enlisted a Fairy Godmother to celebrate an anniversary and marveled at a full rainbow while dining in a private cabana beachside at these award-winning accommodations.

room below for a four-course dinner in this former summer get-away turned inn and still run by the Ferguson family. Breakfast is a sit-down two-course affair, and we picked up our lunch in the kitchen, where guests are always welcome, neatly packed in a basket covered with a red-checkered cloth.

I was able to take home a memento of my trip in my favorite form — jewelry, as family member Gogo Ferguson is a renowned jewelry designer who uses objects found on the island for inspiration. She houses a collection in a small side porch on her home where I selected some gorgeous silver leaf earrings, a perfect reminder of a perfect weekend. www.greyfieldinn.com

The Breakers: Palm Beach, Florida

We may not be part of the one percent, but we felt like it during our weekend stay in the luxurious, sophisticated, Italian Renaissance-style The Breakers. We spent a morning in our own poolside bungalow, lounged on a private beach, enjoyed a huge buffet breakfast in the gorgeous Circle Room, dined on exquisite seafood at The Seafood Bar, and Asian cuisine at Echo.

The 200-foot-long cross-vaulted lobby of The Breakers was inspired by the Great Hall at the Palazzo Carrega in Genoa, but you’ll know you’re in Palm Beach instead when you are greeted by the lovely staff sporting Lily Pulitzer colors. This family-owned resort is more than 100 years old, has 540 rooms, nine restaurants, six bars, 36 holes of golf, two fitness centers and five heated pools. And of course, there’s shopping in 11 boutiques that include Lilly Pulitzer and Guerlain. The 20,000-square-foot indoor/outdoor spa was closed for renovation during our stay but I’d love to return for the Moonlight Massage, a 90-minute massage during the full moon at the Oceanfront Sanctuary. www.thebreakers.com



The Ritz-Carlton Palm Beach: Palm Beach, Florida

Continuing our theme of unbridled luxury, we spent one night in a gorgeous suite at the Ritz-Carlton Palm Beach, where we began our stay by lighting a candle and setting it afloat with a wish in the wishing well of Eau Spa, a charming start to any treatment there. Our lovely couples massage, with champagne of course, was followed by a “dry float,” a kind of individual waterbed experience but way classier, and post treatment relaxation in swings over a fountain in the Self-Centered Garden.

Our busy schedule of lounging by the sparkling blue pool was built around having the magnificent fish tacos at Breeze, an oceanfront bar. A highlight of our stay, really our entire year, was a seven-course dinner served in a private oceanside cabana. While dining on such delicacies as tomato basil bisque, ahi tuna tartar and lobster ravioli, my husband noticed a full rainbow shining over the Atlantic Ocean. The Ritz really does provide outstanding service and had timed it perfectly. www.ritzcarlton.com/Palm-Beach

Barnsley Gardens: Adairsville, Georgia

When I wanted to surprise my husband one year on our anniversary I whisked him away to Barnsley Gardens where the resident Fairy Godmother had set the stage for a romantic getaway. I had chosen a Hawaiian theme complete with grass skirts, a plastic fishing game for bathtub fun, coconut bras and buckets of fresh rose petals on the bed. Your wish really is her command when you stay here, whether you want to set up a proposal or host a children’s birthday party.

This European-style resort is just 60 miles from Atlanta and accommodations include deluxe guest rooms and charming cottages. Recreation opportunities include golf, horseback riding, shooting, fishing and hunting. The full-service spa is now also offering acupuncture in addition to traditional treatments. Dine at the delicious Woodlands Grill, or for a special romantic evening, order a four-course fireside dinner for two served by a private butler. www.barnsleyresort.com

Blackberry Farm: Walland, Tennessee

Nestled in the shadows of the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, this top-rated small inn offers a spa, yoga, wellness boot camp, cycling, horseback riding, fly-fishing and shotgun sports on its 4,200-acre property. Or you can do as we primarily did — hike and bike the gorgeous grounds in between enjoying the exquisite “Foothills Cuisine.”

The owners, the Beall family, take the cuisine at Blackberry Farm very seriously: the staff includes a chef, master gardener, cheese maker, chocolatier, butcher, baker and even a jam lady whose delicacies complement the best biscuits I’ve ever had in my life. (One guest even bought the exact same oven hoping to replicate the recipe at home.) A sommelier helps guests select from the 160,000-bottle wine cellar. Check out the cooking schools and epicurean events at this special Tennessee getaway. www.blackberryfarm.com

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Opposite page from left: Exterior of The Carolina Inn; The peaceful porch at the Greyfield Inn; The opulent lobby at The Breakers. This page top from left: A cottage at Barnsley Gardens; The Self-Centered Garden at Eau Spa at the Ritz; One of the well-appointed rooms at Blackberry Farm. Above: Tables set for a garden dinner at Blackberry Farm.

