



TYBEE ISLAND, GEORGIA

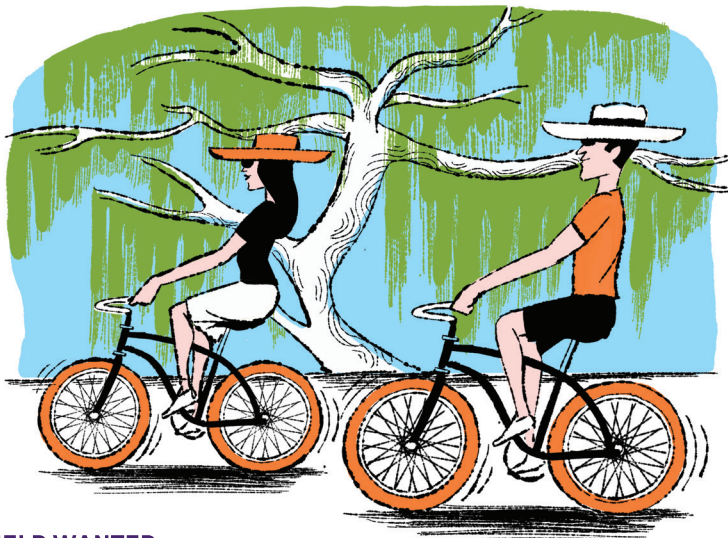
A barrier island off historic Savannah, Tybee features a lighthouse built in 1732, when Georgia was still a colony. Construction on nearby Fort Pulaski began in 1829 and was completed under the guidance of a young West Point grad named Robert E. Lee. Rent a kayak to explore the salt marshes, home to endemic species that thrived long before the colonists arrived.

MOUNT DESERT ISLAND,

MAINE The island is home to Acadia National Park, but before the park existed there was already Balance Rock Inn (*from \$275*), a “cottage” (mansion might be more apropos) built as a summer home for wealthy tycoons in 1903. The property boasts breathtaking views of Frenchman’s Bay, and each room is uniquely adorned (ask for a fireplace).

DAUPHIN ISLAND, ALA-

BAMA It’s the simple things here, like top-notch fishing and birding. And visit Fort Gaines to learn the story behind the famous command, “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”



HELP WANTED:

Bedraggled Parents of Toddler Seek Solace on Private Island

BY ALISON MILLER

SOMETIMES I LIE AWAKE at night, mind numb, the words to “If You’re Happy and You Know It” swirling in my head. If you’ve raised a toddler (or visited a friend with one), you’ll recognize the scenes that lay the groundwork for this addled state: Pebbles of Play-Doh transforming to cement on the dining room table. Pools of milk formed by strewn sippy cups. Pools of tears shed over invisible boo-boos. The days are long, they say, and the years are fast. But these days were moving. Very. Slowly.

For a few months, my husband, Dan, and I had been stay-at-home parents of our two-year-old daughter. I work from home; he was between jobs. It was two-on-one, and the one always won. We were exhausted. So when my in-laws told us they were planning a trip to Orlando, Florida, we casually suggested they take Avery along and leave us behind. The only way to make the Magic Kingdom more magical is to see it through the eyes of a toddler, right? They were ecstatic, but their excitement

was no match for ours. With a kid, even simple things like personal hygiene disappear into the time-lapse abyss of potty-training and tortoise-paced walks to the playground. The other day, I hiked three blocks in the wrong direction because I forgot where I parked my car. If there was ever a time to disappear to an island, this was it.

I already had my eye on one—Little St. Simons Island—11,000 acres of private, preserved land on the Georgia coast with a maximum of 32 overnight guests. A lodge and a handful of cabins were constructed there in the 1920s and 30s, and not much has changed. Internet is spotty, there are no TVs, and meals are served family-style. It was everything our lives weren’t: quiet, calm, and inhabited by grown-ups. So began our 48 hours of kid-less adulthood.

Every trip to Little St. Simons starts with a ride on a small passenger ferry. As the boat weaved through the aqueous path formed by the

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54 Hampton River at high tide, skirting shores of rippling spartina grass, the wind tousled my hair and the morning sun warmed my skin. I couldn't shake the feeling we were bandit parents, on the run from diapers, Disney movies, and macaroni and cheese.

After arriving and being handed a paper map of the island, we jumped on cruiser bikes, pedaling deep into the expanse of giant magnolias and live oaks cloaked in Spanish moss. "It's like that scene in *Wedding Crashers*," Dan yelled back at me, referring to Owen Wilson and Rachel McAdams gleefully riding down a dirt path to the tune of Mungo Jerry's "In the Summertime." A funny thing had happened: In the absence of our own kid, we got to be kids.

We biked to the northern tip of the island and back—a 7-mile round trip—stopping only to peer into

the featherweight animal when bumps lie ahead on the sidewalk. And how sometimes when we're sitting on the couch, she leans over, lays her head on my shoulder, and says, "I love you."

Eric, the resort's bearded naturalist, interrupted us to announce the afternoon's activity: a hike on Backbone Trail. As we rode through the woods safari-style in the back of a pickup outfitted with bench seats, a second bearded naturalist,

Bayard, spotted birds along the way: great egret, wood stork, red-bellied woodpecker. We entered a thicket of old-growth hardwoods that shared the landscape with ephemeral wetlands. "That little thing poking up from the ground that looks like a canoe paddle? That's a black earth tongue," Eric explained. We set up a scope to peer at a nesting bald eagle, and on the walk back to the lodge we spotted an alligator not 20 feet from the trail.

"Avery would love this," I whispered to Dan.

Norm's Pond, named for its resident alligator, and to stare in wonder at an armadillo, oblivious as he nosed around in the dirt. We returned just in time to hear the lunch bell—yes, a staffer really does clink an iron triangle—and ravenously tore into curried chicken salad-stuffed croissants and carrot-ginger soup.

As we exchanged introductions with the others (most of them twice our age), it didn't take long for them to sniff out that we were parents, and soon we were swapping stories about life with kids. Less than 24 hours in her absence, we found ourselves remembering more of the sweet than the unsavory. Like how she carefully buckles her stuffed rabbit into a toy stroller, warning



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“Avery would love this,” I whispered to Dan as I pictured her lining up her collection of miniature horses, cows, pigs, and ducks on the edge of the bathtub and lovingly addressing each one.

At dinner, over pinot noir and prime rib, guests regaled one another with tales of wildlife encounters. A room full of sun-kissed, windblown adults—including a judge, an architect, and the former dean of a prominent business school—bubbling over like boy and girl scouts.

Afterward, Bayard announced a special evening activity: the owl prowl. Dan’s eyes grew wide. He downed what was left in his glass and sprinted outside.

We wound the evening down by staring up at the blanket of stars. The new moon had left the sky especially dark, and we recalled as best we could the constellations we were taught in elementary school. We were in a world so pristine, so idyllic, so real, that at times it felt fake. The next day as we kayaked on the creek, a bald eagle flew directly overhead.

Seven miles of unadulterated sand make up the Atlantic-facing side of the island, and on our last day we took a walk on the beach at low tide. There were no inflatable toys, no beach chairs, no boardwalk, just the quiet lapping of the ocean on the smooth, packed sand. As we walked along, a handful of other guests, who by now had gotten to know our daughter quite well through mealtime tales, picked up shells and handed them to us—gifts for Avery.

We spent the 10 minutes before lunch swaying on a porch swing set up beneath a giant live oak, the sun seeping through its branches. “I miss her,” I said to Dan. To which he replied, in his best toddler-speak, “If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands.”

Alison Miller is a writer in Charlotte. Tell her your favorite island escape at alisonlynmiller@gmail.com.

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