

GREAT *Romantic* GETAWAYS

**LOOKING FOR A ROMANTIC
ESCAPE THIS SPRING?
WE ROUNDED UP 10 OF THE
AREA'S MOST CHARMING
BED AND BREAKFASTS,
ALL LESS THAN THREE
HOURS AWAY AND
UNDER \$300!**

SPRING IS HERE, AND IF IT'S got you itching to celebrate the arrival of fragrant blossoms, even-tempered days, and all the other heady, romantic strains of the season, we've got help. Love blossoms best under the romantic veil of a special place, so give in to the romantic season and fling in spring with one of these dreamy weekend getaways, all less than three hours away and costing under \$300. These bed and breakfasts and small inns nurture the great getaway feeling, giving guests the sense that, in their fairy tale bedroom-away-from-home, they're in another time and another



MANSFIELD PLANTATION, A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK, IS 900 ACRES OF ANTEBELLUM AUTHENTICITY. PRIVATE ENTRANCES, HANDSOME ANTIQUE FURNISHINGS, WILDLIFE WALKS, SPORTS AND HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES GALORE, AND A SUMPTUOUS ATMOSPHERE ALL MAKE FOR A WEEKEND RETREAT TO REMEMBER.

BY MARY SUE LAWRENCE

life. Missing are the televisions, fax machines, and crowds—enhancing the mood and minimizing, ahem, distraction.

SEASIDE SALUBRITY

Take that whole beach house family rental thing—with all the sunning, swimming, hammock-lounging, and home-cooking—but imagine it's just the two of you. At the Sea View Inn on Pawleys Island, the dream comes true. For \$140 to \$170 per couple per night, you get an oceanfront hideaway where sea breezes stir the white cot-

the hall and outside for swimmers. Meals are incredible affairs in a large dining room overlooking the sea; Oberlin offers menus inspired by her travels in Asia and Central America. (Beware, hot-bloods: Rooms in the main house are not air-conditioned, but a four-room guesthouse out back is.) We locals can easily take advantage of the two-night minimum stay in May, September, and October; from June to August, there's a one-week minimum. (803-237-4253)

BEACH MUSIC

If you've ever envisioned yourselves as a Scarlett-and-Rhett pair living deep in the southern coastal countryside, wake up at Cassina Point Plantation on Edisto Island. Getting there is half the fun: You pass tomato and asparagus fields, breathtaking Lowcountry scenes of winding creeks, and heron-inhabited marshland. This antebellum plantation house sits at the edge of a creek and offers four quietly decorated guest rooms, each with four windows overlooking the sprawling grounds and marshland. The details are impressive: beautiful cotton linens, antique lamps and light fixtures, a white-wickered porch, canoes, croquet, and fishing poles. Edisto Beach is



COURTESY OF CASSINA POINT PLANTATION



COURTESY OF THE SEA VIEW INN

ton curtains of your charmingly basic bedroom, featuring hand-painted furniture, handmade quilts on the bed, three daily meals served family-style, ocean- and marsh-front porches, beach chairs, umbrellas—and, says owner Page Oberlin, the “whole lot of nothing” that comes with beach life. The lazy days of summer live year-round in this 1930s beach house, where somebody's always stirring a drink on the back porch, books and magazines abound, and on cold days a fire burns in the main room. Rooms have half-baths; showers are down

GUEST ROOMS AT THE BEAUFORT INN COME WITH FIREPLACES, WET BARS, ANTIQUES, AND THE ODD JACUZZI.



RUSSEL REIDON

just up the road, plus there's kayaking, area tours, or examining the “graffiti” left by Union troops on the walls of the house's ground floor. (\$105; full breakfast, afternoon refreshments. Open Wed.-Sun., weekends only Jan.-Feb; 803-869-2535.)

Topping off your trip is dinner at the Old Post Office—without the long drive home! Try the pecan fried chicken with blueberry sauce and shrimp and grits with mouseline sauce in this bustling restaurant, formerly a general store and post office.

A CHARMING CHOICE

Beaufort is an elegant little town, and the Beaufort Inn, a peach-colored Victorian dating to 1907, is one of its newest jewels. Closed for more than 30 years, the inn recently reopened under the hometown hospitality of Beaufortonian Debbie Fielden and her husband, Rusty. Completely remodeled, the inn now sports a winding mahogany staircase, glassed-in sunroom, and small restaurant with outdoor piazza seating. Debbie has decorated each guest room differently: four-poster beds, stuffed chairs and sofas, reproductions and traditional English, French country, or Charleston Bermuda decor. Dinner at the gourmet restaurant is a must;

in the morning, complimentary breakfast includes mouth-watering choices such as French toast stuffed with brie and sun-dried peaches or Eggs Benedict with crab cakes. (\$110—\$185; full breakfast, afternoon tea; 803-521-9000.)

SMALL TOWN SECLUSION

Consider another perfect weekend in Abbeville, with a stay at the venerable three-story Belmont Inn (c. 1903). Actress Julia Roberts made Abbeville famous by complaining about its lack of much of anything—but it's just that sleepiness that makes this such a charming, relaxing experience. Grab a lemonade and a rocking chair and you might not want to budge from the inn's long veranda overlooking Abbeville's famous, old-fashioned town square. The lobby, sitting areas, separate parlors, and most guestrooms are decorated in traditional fabrics, hunting colors, reproductions, and Oriental rugs on the polished hardwood floors. For a Marie Antoinette-type evening, stay in the opulent red and gold Lafayette Room. (\$69-\$129; Continental breakfast, afternoon refreshments; 864-459-9625 or 888-251-2000.)

Next door to the Belmont is another Abbeville tradition—the Opera House, home of a thriving theater group. Planned spring and summer shows include “The Music Man” and Agatha Christie's “Murder on the Nile.” Pop back to the Belmont during intermission, where drinks await you at the Curtain Call Lounge. Before or after the show, the Village Grille, Abbeville's trendiest

CASSINA POINT PLANTATION (ABOVE) AND THE SEA VIEW INN PAMPER GUESTS WITH COOL BREEZES, OUTDOOR FUN, DELICIOUS MEALS, AND PLENTY OF HAMMOCKS.

ABBEVILLE'S BELMONT INN IS AS QUIANT AS THE TOWN ITSELF, JUST A STONE'S THROW FROM THE THEATRE AND OPERA HOUSE.



COURTESY OF BELMONT INN

house, pool, cabana, tennis courts, croquet, and championship golf course. Just a romantic stroll away

restaurant, serves rotisserie chicken, fresh pastas, and indulgent desserts.

THE GOOD LIFE

Driving down the oak-tree-lined road that ends in the white, two-storied manor house of Litchfield Plantation, you will suddenly feel you've arrived in life. That feeling will only strengthen as, having picked up the keys from the resort's offices down the road, you let yourself into the home and enter its light-filled, formal parlor. Off the parlor are two grand guestrooms; upstairs lie two more. All are spacious, and rife with antiques and reproductions of

stands the glass-walled Carriage House Club, where guests may dine on grouper and filet mignon, then retire to the fire-lit library for dessert and after-dinner drinks. In the morning, take the continental breakfast onto the patio overlooking rice fields framed by moss-draped oaks. (\$155-\$190; 803-237-4286 or 800-869-1410.)



LITCHFIELD PLANTATION, A 1750 GEORGIAN MANOR, OFFERS SPECTACULAR VIEWS, PLANTATION-ERA AND MODERN FURNISHINGS, GOLF, TENNIS, AND SOUTHERN SPIRIT.



COURTESY OF LITCHFIELD PLANTATION (2)

the rich, Orient-inspired and English decor of the plantation era. Behind the 1750 Georgian mansion stands a green lawn that sweeps out to the edges of old rice fields and the Intracoastal Waterway; views are predictably spectacular. Guests enjoy a beach club-

PLANTATION PASSION

If you'd like a closer look at real plantation life, Mansfield Plantation in Georgetown offers a more rustic experience. The property's road travels past slave quarters to the original 1812 main house, a modest but dignified plantation house,

according to Jim and Sally Cahalan, both professional historians who recently inherited Mansfield and now live there. Guest accommodations are in three red brick outbuildings: the former schoolhouse and kitchen, and a 1930s guesthouse. Rooms are charming and eminently comfortable, with hardwood floors, reproduction period antiques, soft linens, and coal- or wood-burning fireplaces.

In the main house, where Sally serves a full breakfast (including homemade venison sausage) in the dining room, are the Cahalans' impressive collections of 19th-century paintings,

Inn and Resort in Summerville will spoil you rotten. Though you won't travel far, you'll feel you're hundreds of miles away: A wooded trail leads to this columned, Greek Revival inn, where all the extras await you, including afternoon tea with homemade cookies; champagne or wine upon arrival; turn-down service with homemade chocolates—even a massage at the spa.

Dine like a king in the inn's five-diamond restaurant and, later, collapse with contentment in your posh* room. An executive chef, pastry chef, assistant pastry chef, charcutier, and poissonnerie put together a nightly, prix fixe menu. Breakfast in the light-filled restaurant or on the patio is light and delicious.

Woodlands' 20 guestrooms feature sleigh beds, armoires, sitting areas, gas fireplaces, French doors leading to balconies, whirlpool tubs, heated towel racks, robes—even motorized window blinds. The aura of the 1906 inn is, according to the designer, intended to be that of aristocrats "forced by hard times to open the home to paying visitors."

On complimentary bikes, explore the inn's tranquil locale, or venture into Summerville and its old-fashioned Main Street. Rock away time on the veranda, or check out the croquet lawn and two clay tennis courts. (\$175-\$325, including breakfast and tea; 803-875-2600 or 800-774-9999.)

EQUESTRIAN ESCAPE

Horse lovers will relish the escape of the Greenleaf Inn in Camden, where roads are left unpaved for hooved residents. Home to several large horse

portraits of ancestors, china, furniture, and books. Sally eagerly gives complimentary tours to overnight guests. (\$95; 803-546-6961 or 800-355-3223.)

LOWCOUNTRY LUXURY

For a more local—but still luxurious—getaway, Woodlands



HORSE LOVERS, REJOICE! CAMDEN'S HISTORIC GREENLEAF INN IS ALL BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY NEIGH TO.

training facilities, this charming small town also boasts many antebellum buildings spared by General Sherman during his infamous march to Columbia. The town's history/horse combo will surely ease you back in time; the Greenleaf Inn provides a magical shot of blue for your blood. This B&B is comprised of three buildings: the Reynolds House (circa 1805) has four rooms; the McLean House (circa 1890) has a small restaurant, Avanti's, on the first floor and four rooms on the second; and a guest cottage, which sleeps four. Rooms have four-poster beds, plank floors, Oriental rugs, and Victorian wallpaper.

A breakfast of pancakes or French toast, fresh-squeezed orange juice, and fruit salad comes complimentary with your room. (\$55-\$75; full breakfast; 800-437-5874.)

Stroll across the spacious, green lawn to Avanti's for pastas, seafood, veal, and steaks served with family-style bowls of manesta beans, tortellini soup, and salad.

MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN

Savannah drips with romantic mystery, and nowhere does it drip more sumptuously than the Gastonian Inn. This 13-room inn, comprised of two adjacent Regency Italianate mansions, has a hands-on antique baby grand piano, a sun deck, hot tub, afternoon tea and turn-down service with pralines and peach schnapps. In the Caraculla Suite, you can immerse yourself in an eight-foot whirlpool tub draped in gossamer curtains, then awake the next morning by the light of a stained glass window next to a similarly draped four-poster

bed. Each guest room is decorated with vivid colors, heavy draperies, Charleston rice or canopy beds, gas fireplaces, and welcome gifts of fruit and wine. Many of the bathrooms have whirlpool baths or Japanese soaking tubs.

Breakfast is a three-course affair beginning with fruit, then an egg dish, followed by a sweet such as pastry served on crystal or fine china. Or sleep late and request a Continental breakfast delivered to your room. (\$150-\$285; full breakfast, afternoon tea; 912-232-2869 or 800-322-6603.)

At lunch time, line up with the fans of the Mrs. Wilkes Dining Room for family-style eating: platters of fried chicken and bowls of collards, okra, mashed potatoes, and biscuits. Later, walk it all off: Square Routes offers walking tours of the city's architecture and gardens—one centers around the best-selling novel that made Savannah famous around the world, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

HORSE HEAVEN

Aiken is horse country, and you can almost hear the stomping of hooves at the Briar

Patch, a charming bed and breakfast in former tack rooms in Aiken's stable district. Hide away in one of the two guest rooms, which have private entrances, or settle in with a good book in the antique-filled living room. There's even a smart clay tennis court. And if you'd like, owners Tricia Hare and her mom, Martha, offer complimentary tours of the town. In the morning, treat yourself to fruit and homemade muffins at the oversized oak table in the home's huge, cozy kitchen, or on the brick patio overlooking the two-acre grounds. (\$50; Continental breakfast; 803-649-2010.)

Those mad to mingle with the horse crowd will head out for breakfast early—at about 4 a.m.—to the Track Kitchen, a small, cinder-block cafe where diners carry their empty dishes to a side sink. Since the 1890s, wealthy horse-lovers have wintered in Aiken, so there's plenty of hunting and racing activity and equine history. Be sure to catch a polo match, on Sunday afternoons from March through July and September through November, at Whitney Field. In late March and early April, plan around the Triple Crown, three weekends of steeplechasing, thoroughbred trials, and harness racing. On Saturday mornings, guided historic tours take visitors to historic sites and some of the local stables via bus. Or rent horses and canter through Hitchcock Woods, Aiken's 2,000-acre tract of forest etched with hiking trails and bridle paths.

Freelance writer Mary Sue Lawrence recently updated the S.C. chapter of Fodor's The South's Best Bed and Breakfasts. She is now at work on two additional Fodor's guides, The USA and The South.

THE ROMANTIC ALLURE THAT MADE MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF GOOD AND EVIL SO ENTHRALLING IS WELL REPRESENTED AT SAVANNAH'S GASTONIAN INN.

