

By Lisa Evans



PHOTO: LISA EVANS

Driftwood Beach is both eerie and beautiful.

Time Stands Still

Jekyll Island charms visitors into a state of tranquility

Imagine what it would be like to vacation among some of the world's richest individuals. You may be envisioning this holiday taking place in a medieval castle in Europe, but if you lived in the 19th century, you would be kicking back on Jekyll Island, an island off the coast of the U.S. state of Georgia, in Glynn County. One of Georgia's 13 barrier islands, Jekyll was once home to the cottages of North America's most elite families and the shapers of the Industrial Revolution. From the moment you drive off the Sidney Lanier Bridge, it's easy to see why.

A six-mile (10-kilometre) causeway separates the island from the mainland city of Brunswick, Georgia. Stunning vis-

tas of the Georgian River waterways and pristine beaches surround an island submersed in a legacy of leisure. The Marshes of Glynn, and several other islands, including the larger St. Simons Island, are nearby.

In the Historic District, sun-bathed Victorian-style homes painted in hues of blue, green and yellow with large bay windows and wrap-around porches summon feelings of nostalgia for a bygone era. Spanish moss droops over the branches of the tall oaks that line the island's walking paths, giving an almost eerie quality to this pristine island.

You may think an island that was once home to some of history's wealthiest families and marked financial events

(including the establishment of the Federal Reserve) would have a pretentious and formal air, but Jekyll is as casual and laid-back as mainland Georgia and oozes Southern charm.

While the island remains a place for those seeking a pampered holiday to indulge in exquisite dinners prepared by world-class chefs and luxurious spa treatments at the historic Jekyll Island Club Hotel, Jekyll is, for the most part, an affordable holiday that calms the soul and transplants visitors to a timeless world, miles away from the pressures of daily life.

Cottage life of America's elite

In 1886, Jekyll Island was purchased to become an exclusive winter retreat for America's wealthiest families. For more than half a century, the nation's leading families, including the Rockefellers, Morgans, Vanderbilts, Goulds, Astors and Pulitzers, came to Jekyll Island to escape, creating an exclusive island cottage retreat on the Georgian coast.

Before the construction of the island's private cottages, the Jekyll Island Club Hotel was where America's über-wealthy industrialists and bankers went to socialize and enjoy the simple pleasures of the island — the beach, tennis, golf and yachting. As the families grew in size, they built their own cottages in the area surrounding the Club. Notably, most homes didn't have kitchens because the families all dined in the Jekyll Island Club's Grand Dining Room.

In the spirit of community, architectural one-upmanship was discouraged. No cottage could be built grander than the clubhouse. Members insisted most of the island remain undeveloped; a vision that persists to this day. Only 35 per cent of the island can be built upon.

Jekyll Island was abandoned after World War II when these elites realized it had the potential to become an easy

target for foreign enemies. After all, one-sixth of the world's wealth resided here. Today, many of the island's cottages as well as the clubhouse have been restored, offering visitors a glimpse into the past lives of America's wealthiest families.

The Jekyll Island Club Hotel

Located in the centre of the Historic District, the Jekyll Island Club Hotel is a member of the Historic Hotels of America. Its famed Victorian turret can be seen peeking into the sky from almost anywhere in the District. Its 157 rooms embody the luxury and comfort of the Club's past life. Walking up the circular driveway is like stepping into a time portal. Queen Anne Victorian architecture, wide porches decked with wicker chairs, 12- and 15-foot (four- and five-metre) ceilings, detailed woodwork and ornately-detailed fireplaces immerse visitors in a bygone era, while modern amenities including a gym, in-room massage services and the Image Artisans Salon Studio offering hair cutting and styling for men and women, treat visitors to contemporary sophistication.

Photos of important historic events, including the first transatlantic phone call, which was placed on Jekyll Island by AT&T president Theodore Vail on January 25, 1919 with JP Morgan and William Rockefeller standing by, line the walls of the Club Hotel, reminding visitors of the island's important past.

You may expect the atmosphere here to be pretentious and formal — guests at the Club Hotel are still invited to enjoy a game of croquet on its manicured lawns — but the historic landmark is surprisingly casual and comfortable; a place for families and couples to delight in the repose the island beckons upon its visitors.

Even if you can't afford the couple hundred dollars a night to sleep in the same rooms as the titans who shaped

The Jekyll Island Club Hotel is the centrepiece of the Historic District and where America's elite went to socialize.

The Georgia Sea Turtle Center rehabilitates injured and sick sea turtles that become stranded along the coastline.

PHOTO: JEKYLL ISLAND TOURISM

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Rocking chairs line the porch of the Jekyll Island Club Hotel.

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America's Industrial Revolution, consider making a dinner reservation in the Grand Dining Room, formerly the site of social gatherings of these wealthy cottagers, or for a traditional Victorian afternoon tea. At \$14.95 per person, it's a simple extravagance that will give you a small taste of life in the early 19th century. For casual dining during the day, Café Solterra is the hotel's popular bakery-delicatessen. Pastries, muffins, pies and ice cream are served alongside Starbucks coffee. You can also purchase a picnic lunch from the café to take for a walk on the beach.

Things to do on Jekyll Island

Although Jekyll Island is often described as a place where time stands still, despite its tranquility, the island offers plenty to keep visitors entertained. One of the many pleasant surprises is the cost of activities. Because the island is now a state park, operated by the state's Jekyll Island Authority, recreational activities including cycling, golf and tennis are reasonably priced.

Golf

Jekyll Island has been a heralded golf destination since 1898 when members of the Jekyll Island Club created its first golf course. In the decades that followed, it's remained one of the premier golfing destinations in the southern

states. Using the island's natural landscape, the four courses offer not only a challenging game, but a striking coastal setting for play, with prices ranging from \$17 to \$34 per person.

Tennis

The Jekyll Island Tennis Center boasts 13 clay courts at rental fees of \$6 per person. The staff can arrange pickup games for single players and offer private and group lessons.

Bike trails

With over 20 miles (32 kilometres) of trails, biking is a popular pastime on the island. Cycle through enchanting forests of Spanish moss-draped oak trees and take in the stunning views of the surrounding marsh and river. Bikes can be rented next to the miniature golf course for \$5 per hour or \$13 for the day.

Historic tours

Proud of its heritage, Jekyll Island offers many ways for history buffs to delve into its past. Tram tours, carriage rides or e-tours will lead you through the 240-acre (97-hectare) National Historic Landmark District. The 90-minute tram tour includes entry into two restored



PHOTO: LISA EVANS

Contribute a dollar bill to the Wounded Warriors Project at the Rah Bar.

cottages. For those who want to go at their own pace, an interactive multi-media device can be rented for \$8. Tickets to both tours can be purchased through the Jekyll Island Museum. Horse and buggy rides are also available at Three Oaks Farm Equestrian Services, located next door to the museum. Although plaques in front of each of the island's historic cottages provide a detailed description of the families who once inhabited them, the island's tour guides are exceptional storytellers who live and breathe the island's history.

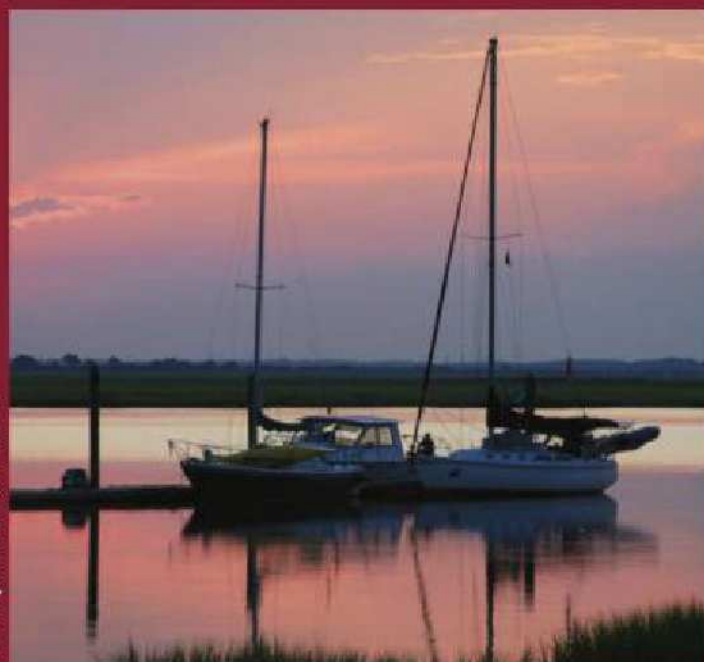
Through an act of the state legislature, the Jekyll Island Authority was created to oversee the conservation and development of the island.

Georgia Sea Turtle Center

Marine life enthusiasts will want to visit the state's only sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation facility. Stranded sea turtles are often found along Atlantic coast beaches. Jekyll Island has had an active sea turtle monitoring program since 1972, but the opening of the Georgia Sea Turtle Center in 2007 meant sick and injured sea turtles could be provided with emergency care. Visitors will learn about sea turtle conservation, rehabilitation and the journey from egg to adulthood. If you arrive during the nesting months of summer (June and July), you can have a more hands-on experience by joining one of the nightly turtle walks. Once the turtles hatch in August, guides take visitors on hatchling walks a few times each week to watch the baby turtles make their way into the water. (Entrance costs: \$7/adults; \$6/seniors; \$5/children four to 12.)

Nine miles of beach

Comb Jekyll's beaches for sand dollars and shells, watch for dolphins, or take in a spectacular sunset. Be sure to pay a visit to Driftwood Beach. Located on the north end of the island, the bare, twisted bones of sea-washed trees line the shore, painting an eerie silhouette that's as haunting as it is beautiful. A popular location for photography, you'll find many photos of Driftwood Beach adorning the walls of local restaurants, the art gallery and souvenir shops. Victoria's Carriages & Trail Rides leads daytime (\$58 for one hour, \$78 for 1.5 hours) and sunset (\$68 for one hour) horseback tours across Driftwood Beach. ■



Jekyll Island offers some spectacular sunsets.

If you go

Delta, United, American Airlines and Air Canada operate flights from Toronto and Ottawa to Jacksonville, Florida. Jacksonville airport (JAX) is a one-hour drive from Jekyll Island. Drive along Interstate-95, take Exit 29 and follow the signs east for approximately six miles (10 kilometres). Be sure to stop at the Jekyll Island Guest Information Center, located four miles (six kilometres) down the Causeway. A day-long parking pass costs \$6, while a weekly pass costs \$28.

Accommodation suggestions

From charming, restored historic rooms to rustic campgrounds, Jekyll Island offers a wide range of accommodations to suit all price points.

Campground: Pitch your tent or park your RV or camper under the tall oaks of 18 wooded acres (seven hectares) on the island's north end. Located near Driftwood Beach, opposite the Clam Creek Picnic Area, 206 campsites are available with electricity, cable TV, water and sewerage. Wi-Fi and DSL Internet is free. Camping supplies are available at the General Store. E-mail campground@jekyllisland.com or call 912 635-3021.

Hotels

Jekyll Island Club Hotel: Stay in the place that was once an exclusive retreat for America's most elite families in the heart of the Historic District. Call 855 219-7338 or visit www.jekyllclub.com. (\$219 to \$269 for a traditional room with a king bed.)

Reasonably priced accommodations

Oceanside Inn & Suites: call 912 635-2211; www.oceansideinnandsuites.com.

Quality Inn & Suites: 912 635-2202; www.jekyllislandquality.com.

Where to eat

The Grand Dining Room: Once the scene of social gatherings and gourmet meals of America's wealthiest families, The Jekyll Island Club Hotel's Grand Dining Room serves breakfast, lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch. Jackets or collared shirts and dress pants for gentlemen are requested at the evening sitting. Visit www.jekyllclub.com/dining/grand-dining-room.

The Courtyard at Crane: For a less formal dining experience, the courtyard of the historic Crane Cottage serves up local seafood, including crab cakes, jumbo shrimp, lobster and scallops. Check out www.jekyllclub.com/dining/courtyard-at-crane/.

Latitude 31: Located on the Historic Wharf, Latitude 31 serves up fresh seafood and breathtaking sunsets, perfect for a romantic dinner for two. Visit www.latitude31jekyllisland.com.

The Rah Bar: Located on the wharf, beside the Latitude 31 Seafood Restaurant, the tiny Rah Bar is not a fancy eatery, but it is a great place to grab a drink or order up some steamed shrimp. While you wait for your food, ask the bartender for a staple gun and join the thousands of visitors who have plastered dollar bills to the walls of the bar. Every year, the dollars are taken down and donated to the Wounded Warriors Project.

Jekyll Island transports visitors into a bygone era.

