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CALL OF THE COAST

The lure of the land combined with authentic Southern comforts make Montage Palmetto Bluff an unmistakable Lowcountry oasis. by Ashley Shaw | PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF Montage Palmetto Bluff

As the sun ascends and paints the morning sky with watercolor strokes, rays twinkle on the salty surface of the May River, while marsh grasses filter the briny blue-green water just like the delectable oysters that line the river's bottom in staggering heaps. We drift into a cirele with our knowledgeable kayak tour guide, where a mother dolphin and her hungry calf rise to the surface for what we wholeheartedly interpret as a friendly "good morning."

This is one snapshot among infinite picture-perfect opportunities at Montage Palmetto Bluff in Bluffton, South Carolina, a

luxury resort with a distinctive connection to its waterfront and woodland environs.

"There's something really special about it," says Public Relations and Marketing Director Christine Wrobel, whose ideal day commences after a peaceful sunrise rendezvous with nature.

In 1902, New York banker Richard T. Wilson, Jr. acted on a similar sentiment. He purchased nearly 20,000 acres of what had been prosperous plantation land before the Civil War, and he planned for an extraordinary family estate, naming the place Palmetto Bluff. Wilson built a mansion

and a hunting lodge to host countless guests, laying the groundwork not only for the area's reputation as a relaxing and recreational getaway destination, but also for its continuation of his legacy today.

With towering columns and a capacious front porch lined with rocking chairs, a quintessential Southern-style inn pays homage to Wilson's original mansion, which burned down in 1926. Inside, period antiques and commissioned replicas adorn the stunning entryway, a handsome library, and two of the property's eight dining locales. Photos of the early 20th-century structure

line the upstairs hallways, offering a peek into the extravagant 72-room manse Wilson is said to have been dragged away from twice as flames enveloped it.

The building's sparse remains form the centerpiece of the Village Green. While nature is the heartbeat of this coastal expanse, the Wilson Mansion Ruins and surrounding park create the epicenter of life at Montage Palmetto Bluff. Golf carts may be the most popular mode of transportation, but it's easy to see why bike riding beneath the Spanish moss-laden live oaks makes an equally pleasant alternative—both add to the leisurely pace and neighborly ambience the Montage fosters. "For people from the South, this place embodies everything they love about the South," says Christine. "People from other parts of the country want to experience it more and more."

For a decade after Wilson's beloved estate faded to memory, Palmetto Bluff hosted cattle ranchers and turpentine producers, and continued to attract wild game hunters. In 1937, Union Bag and Paper Co., which later became Union Camp, purchased the land with intentions to capitalize on its hunting heritage and also to set in motion a plan to protect the maritime forest environment. They fashioned a lodge that attracted sportsmen from around the world—including celebrities, elite businessmen, and prominent politicians—all the while carefully managing the timber and wildlife populations to ensure the land's prosperity for future generations.

Although ownership of Palmetto Bluff changed hands several more times, a commitment to conservancy has never wavered. "We honor the land to move forward," says Christine, who praises the nonprofit Palmetto Bluff Conservancy for working hand in hand with Montage developers and architects. Every new residence, village cottage, and resort amenity must be evaluated by the expert team, who proudly refer to themselves as stewards of this remarkable land.

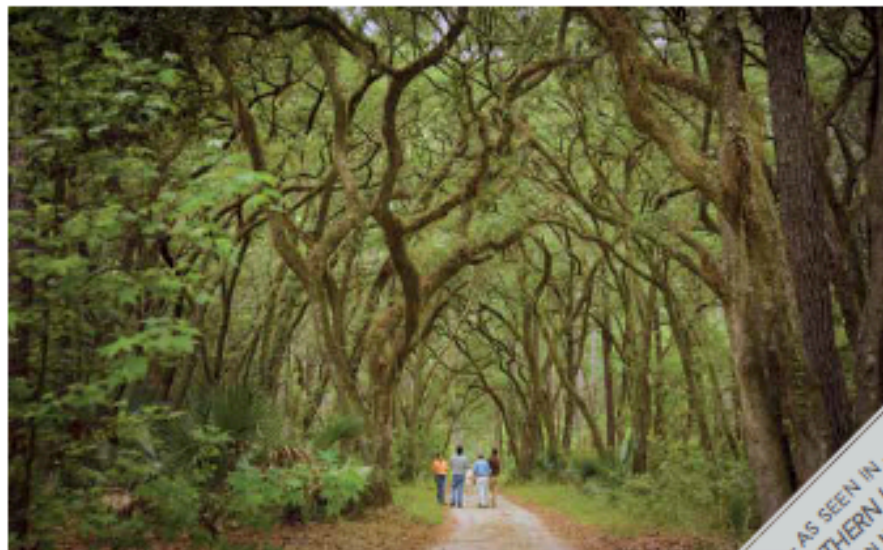
Yet, 32 miles of riverfront beckons to visitors and locals alike to leave the land behind for excursions on the water. Whether you're canoing, fishing, or cruising to nearby gems like Old Town Bluffton, Hilton Head Island, and Daufuskie Island, the resort's Wilson Landing happily accommodates an array of interests. Spot a plethora of native

bird species diving for dinner or a pod of playful Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, either at your own pace or in the company of a naturalist eager to share stories of the May River and its unique estuaries.

Time spent at the Montage ticks to the rhythm of the changing tides, consistently gentle and unhurried. Trading everyday distractions for simple pleasures feels effortless: roasting s'mores beneath a

cloudless night sky; sharing a locally inspired gourmet meal with a loved one; or playing bocce with new friends. Endless amenities and well-appointed spaces take their cues from the allure of this Lowcountry retreat. "I truly believe that this is why I am here, and this is why I have stayed," says Christine. "This land just calls people."

For information, visit montagehotels.com/palmettobluff.



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