

It's a loaded question, one that, if you live in the Carolinas, you get quite a bit as a matter of course.



I personally have an extremely difficult time deciding such things. I'm naturally drawn to – and have spent a good portion of my life near – the ocean. I love the waves, the rhythm of the sea, the textured pastels of water and sunlight meeting at world's end. I love the feeling of warm sand and cool breeze. Hot sun and cooling waters. Dolphins at play in the spring and panicked bait fish exploding from cooling waters in the fall.

Food? If it lives in the sea, and it doesn't kill me before I kill it, I'm eating it. And there's a better than even chance that it doesn't even have to be cooked, too.

I even like a hint of salt and sand taste in my beer, which should be frosty cold and plentiful. That's not to invite everyone to drop a shovel full on my cooler, but it is part of the experience. But then again, there are the mountains...

When it's hot enough to melt old asphalt and you pop a sweat just getting in and out of the shower, it's time to head for the hills. Surely there is no more delicious feeling than high country temperatures in July. Surely there are few sights more beautiful than distant green tops shrouded by cloudy mists. And if you've been suffering down in the great sand microwave pad that is the South Carolina midlands in July, then you know there's something perversely wonderful about needing sweaters and blankets at night during that same July.

What do I like better? The mountains or the beach?

Tough question. I'm not sure. I like them both. I'm drawn to both. At this stage of my life, I love visiting either one. The point is, I love to go there to escape from here.

But I've also discovered I don't want to live either place. At least not yet, not until I am independently wealthy.

You see, I know, from having spent time in both places, that I don't want to have to go through the motions of day-to-day living in a place I really love to enjoy. In fact, that's a pretty good idea of hell – not so much a place of burning torturous eternity so much as a place of eternal humdrum envy.

Whenever I have lived at the beach, I have pretty much hated the experience, at least until after I left there. I hated having to be at work when everyone else was at play. I hated knowing great waves were rolling in and I was riding a time clock instead of a surfboard. I don't like watching people have the time of their lives when I'm having to spend time making a living.

Jealous? Of course. Envious? Absolutely. And I would imagine it would be the same in the mountains.

So I suppose, after all this time, the answer to the original question depends a lot on what is striking my fancy at the time, what I need to help distance myself from the here and now. We all have vacation spots we prefer; we all have situations we consider ideal; we all have dreams of winding up elsewhere. We're not sure where, but anywhere but here. Then we go anywhere but here, and we start looking for...something else.

But where? The mountains or the beach?

I'd say neither, actually. You see, coming home is nice. A great feeling, actually. There's a sense of reality – not be confused with the "real world" – that is comforting. It's that all-important idea of returning to something solid, real, permanent.

The beach house, the mountain cabin, the tent in the woods or the five star pamper park was a strong outpost against reality, and it was great.

But home is the true fortress.

Maybe someday I can call one of those places home, and that will be something, no doubt. Until that time, though, I can only visit. And that's not a bad thing, actually.