

In Search of The Bluffton State of Mind

Written by Mark Shaffer

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One of the great things about being The Backyard Tourist, apart from the lavish lifestyle and in no way being affiliated with any Rupert Murdoch enterprise, is finding the good stuff close to home. And trust me on this, there is never a shortage of good stuff to cover in the Lowcountry and lately a great deal of it appears to be concentrated in and around Bluffton.

This sleepy little historic fishing village on the banks of the May River isn't all that sleepy any more. New shops, restaurants, bars and galleries seem to appear over night, like mushrooms after a spring rain. History, culture and commerce flow along the shady moss-draped streets and lanes, often occupying the same space like the Cottage Café or the Heyward House Historic Center.

This is a place where restoration and preservation mingle



pretty well with the concept of sustainable, mixed-use development. There are treasures all around, treasures of all sorts – historical, natural, culinary, commercial, artistic and even spiritual. The events that would lead to this nation's greatest civil conflict first gained voice beneath the sprawl of the Secession Oak which still stands, just a short walk from the heart of town.

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Where townsfolk now fish off of the new public dock an idealistic young teacher named Pat Conroy ferried to his destiny on Dafauskie Island. From the dock it's a short swim or a longer walk to the century old Bluffton Oyster Company where the Toomer family continues to prove that the best seafood is fresh and local and sustainable



Meanwhile, the unofficial Calhoun Street annex called The Promenade boasts enough nightlife options to keep the young, single and tragically hip entertained. Long-term urban developments like Buckwalter Place seek to attract major corporate clients while at the same time fostering a respect for the environment with a detailed nature trail project. We're told an ultra-high tech bowling alley is also in the works.



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St. Patrick's day and Old Town Bluffton's Calhoun Street is crawling in green beneath a crystalline blue sky. The Farmers Market is officially re-open each and every Thursday and even if there were no other reason to celebrate, this gathering of local farmers, artists, craftspeople, cooks and characters is enough to wander about a bit slack-jawed. And not a parking meter in sight - in fact, not a single parking meter to be found at all. Just don't park on the sidewalks. The streets are bustling with all sorts of people. There really is something for everyone and just about everyone seems to be here.

or email backyardtourist@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you as we begin our search for the Bluffton State of Mind right here, April 13

- Mark Shaffer