



First of all, the ACE Basin Hospitality Association does not exist. It's an entity in a little game I call Imaginary Sustainable Tourism Initiatives.

It's kind of like Fantasy Football. But instead of selecting star players, you get to pick out star purveyors – independent establishments that excel at offering traveler basics like gas, food and lodging.

And of course, restrooms. These cannot be taken for granted. Like water in a desert, public restrooms in a place like the ACE Basin are as necessary as they are scarce.

Likewise, lodging is hard to come by in the ACE Basin. Because the area is so wild, and is for the most part privately owned by people who are hell bent on keeping it that way, there is little likelihood that the ACE Basin Highway will ever see a proliferation of Holiday Inn Expresses, Hilton Gardens or Hampton Innses.

Unless you are fortunate enough to be a guest of one of the plantation owners – or are trespassing – you will never have the experience of waking up deep in the heart of the ACE Basin. This means you'll have to settle for sleeping on the fringe: Walterboro, Yemassee, Point South, Beaufort, Edisto Island, or Charleston.

To get some idea of what I'm talking about, Google these words: Jacksonboro SC hotel. On the

map you'll find a magic fairy ring of lodging options springing up around the ACE Basin. In the sacred center, however – nothing. Which is as it should be.

The fringe of the ACE Basin has several hotel chain options, but the independent operations on which sustainable tourism initiatives depend are a little harder to find. The independents don't have the marketing and advertising budgets to power an ACE Basin feeding frenzy, with busloads of tourists elbowing their way through their doors. Nor would they want to. But they do require a steady stream of thoughtful travelers to make their operations work.

So with this in mind, I announce the inaugural members of my fictional ACE Basin Hospitality Association: Richfield Plantation and Sloman House.

Both of these properties are located in Yemassee, which lies off of I-95 at Exit 38. This exit is also known as the Le Creuset Exit because of the presence of an outlet for that fabulous French cast-iron cookware brand. And yes, I know that "the Le" is redundant, but that's English for you. We take our liberties with other people's languages and the results are not always pleasant.

Richfield Plantation and Sloman House are, I assure you, quite pleasant. I visited both in December, during the Yemassee Town & Country Holiday Home Tour. They are not hotels, they are houses. So you don't just show up expecting to crawl into a bed and spend the night and wash your hair with the little shampoos in the morning. When you stay there, you rent the whole place.

And what places they are! Richfield Plantation has five bedrooms, a kitchen with commercial appliance, and all the high-ceilinged glory you'd expect from an old plantation house. Rental includes use of an outdoor pavilion that provides perfect cover for special events beset by inclement weather.

Richfield Plantation is on the outskirts of Yemassee, near the village of McPhersonville.

The house itself was built for John White Gregorie in 1875. His great-grandsons now own it, and it is clear that they treasure the old family home. It's been skillfully restored and beautifully

furnished. There's enough stuff around to make it feel homey, but not so much that you feel like you're sleeping in a museum. When kicking back after a day of kayaking on the Combahee River, you don't want to be walking on eggshells worried about breaking someone's knick-knacks.

In addition to lodging for a small group, Richfield Plantation is available for weddings, reunions, receptions and other special events. The plantation also offers hunting memberships. Can't get that at a Super 8.

Sloman House, with two bedrooms, is smaller than Richfield but no less lovely. A railroad signal maintenance worker had the cottage-style house built in 1930, and it has been renovated and decorated with rich fabrics and fascinating relics of early 20th century domesticity. In the kitchen there are strange old gadgets about whose use I cannot even speculate.

In addition to being cozy and adorable, the Sloman House is also a family treasure. Its complicated chain of custody illustrates the interconnectedness of people in the Lowcountry.

It is operated by Paula Flowers, who also owns Fletcher's Finds Antiques in Yemassee, and here's how she's related to the building's original occupants: Paula Flowers is the wife of Eddie Flowers. Eddie is the son of W.H. Flowers, who was married to a woman named Vera. Vera was the daughter of the second Mrs. Sloman, who was Mattie Grace Mitchell from Beaufort.

Mattie Grace worked at the Greek restaurant in the Greyhound Bus Station in Yemassee (whoever knew that Yemassee ever had a Greek restaurant, never mind a bus station?) where she met Mr. Sloman, who was by that time a widower. This gentleman, Robert Sneed Sloman, Sr., was a freight clerk for the railroad, and he had purchased the house from Ottis Reddish, the signal maintenance guy who first owned it. So it's been lived in and loved for a long time.

To sum it up, if you have a small family that wants to explore the ACE Basin while sleeping and dining with the comforts of home (minus the Wii), Sloman House would make a killer base camp. For a slightly larger group, Richfield Plantation is the way to go.

As much as I would like for there to be an ACE Basin Hospitality Association (because it could better reify the ACE Basin as a eco-tourism destination) I sure hope it doesn't happen, because promoting a place like the ACE Basin is a tricky business. Casual, drive-by tourists who are used to all the conveniences start EXPECTING things. Things like fast food, cheap rooms, gas stations and clean toilets.

So the conundrum is, how do you create a peaceful flow of thoughtful travelers – without fostering the out-of-control commercialization that results from mass-market tourism?

Places like Richfield Plantation and Sloman House provide a precious liminality, a betwixt and between lodging experience that allows visitors to explore and appreciate the ACE Basin – from a safe distance.

Richfield Plantation
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Yemassee, SC 29945
(843)200-5065
www.richfieldevents.com

Sloman House
48 Salkehatchie Road
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