



Daufuskie Island has captured my heart.

I must admit that some of this affection – maybe 5%? – arises out of pity. With the closure of Daufuskie Island's only inn and the concurrent demise of its most user-friendly ferry service, the island has fallen on tough times. To use an upstate analogy, it feels like a mill town without a mill.

Around 33% of my adoration of Daufuskie Island is based on the fact that most of the roads are made of dirt. I'm a big fan of dirt roads, as long as they are regularly graded. Dirt is picturesque. It keeps people in jobs because there is the perpetual need for maintenance.

And people here on Daufuskie Island are quick to point out that dirt roads are much safer than paved roads. That's because if you are driving drunk in your golf cart and take a spill, when your head hits a dirt road it's less likely to crack open.

Not that there isn't room for a few more paving projects to help maintain the island's living traditions. Like the one where, if you are drunk driving on asphalt, and are unfortunate enough to fall out of your golf cart and crack your head open, they mark the site of your humiliation by spray painting an outline of a body on the pavement. In a community famous for its DIY ethic, it's a DIY DUI.

Marshside Mama's: A Daufuskie Island Delight

Written by Laura Von Harten

Daufuskie Island's other major assets are its natural beauty, its people and its food. I had the opportunity to appreciate all three of these when I ate at Marshside Mama's recently. I liked it so much I posted a review on TripAdvisor. This is how it went:

Daufuskie Island is famous for its deviled crab, so that's what I had. My friend had the fried grouper sandwich. Both were delicious. In terms of clientele and atmosphere, think thirsty boaters and writers and artists in a sort of thrown-together, third-world looking slab-floor building with a tropical salvage nightclub vibe.

First, more about the crab. Deviled crab is nothing like the bland, pan-fried crab cake some people seem to expect. It's a piquant mixture of crab, peppers and spices that's been pressed into a crab shell and baked until it's piping hot. I grew up eating some of the world's finest deviled crab, produced by the Lubkin family at Coastal Seafood on nearby St. Helena Island. (I'm still bearing a decades-long grudge because they won't give out the old family recipe.) The Marshside Mama's version, much to my delight, was just as tasty. I would love to have bought a dozen deviled crab to bring back home to share with family. Or to devour myself.

My friend's grouper was yummy – fresh-tasting, not fishy. It was lightly breaded and deep fried in fabulous southern style, crispy on the outside and steaming tender inside. I rarely order fish at restaurants. I'm used to eating fresh fish (or well-packaged fish that's immediately frozen) caught by family and friends, so I'm spoiled. This grouper was really good. I might order it next time if I'm not in the mood for deviled crab.

Both dishes came with a cole slaw that was hearty and savory, with the slight warmth of freshly boiled cabbage. Or maybe they just let it get warm. Or maybe they stuck it in the microwave to take the chill off. In any case, I cannot bear to eat cold, refrigerator-temperature cole slaw so I was happy with the tepid state of my shredded cabbage delicacy.

The outdoor eating area has a tropical feel, with an eclectic variety of lawn chairs, patio tables, and picnic benches, all covered with colorful vinyl table clothes. The atmosphere in the indoor dining area is equally rustic. No AC, but nice big fans keep you cool. There are TVs for the sports lovers. And best of all, there's a little stage that's big enough to host rootsy bands that come from all over -- Athens, GA, to Austin, TX.

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If you like things fancy, this is not the place for you. Service is casual. You get a plastic knife and fork, and they're not packaged in a cute little cellophane bag either. They're just plopped down on the table, with nary a napkin to nestle in. Speaking of napkins, they come in the shape of a roll of paper towels on each table.

The atmosphere can be quirky and unpredictable. Right next to the outdoor dining area there's a children's playground, county boat landing, day dock, and an occasional farmers market. So even with no alt-country-rock band playing, there can be plenty of noise and activity. The inside dining area has an unstudied insouciance, too. For instance, despite everyone's best efforts to keep the screen door closed, every so often a dog might wander in looking for its owner.

Marshside Mama's is not for everyone. But if you are the easy-going, live-music-loving, fried-seafood-eating, plastic-utensil-using, adventuresome type, you will feel right at home there.

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