



With Larry Mayran

(Larry is now a resident of Greene County)

Heavenly Digs, Golf & Culinary Delights on the Pleasant Side of Charleston



There are a hundred reasons for visiting Charleston and they all begin with "G." Gracious hospitality, golf courses, great harbor, gustatory delights, generous genteel people, and gorgeous antebellum mansions. You could also make a case for "R" romantic history and lodgings, and restaurants. Or "L" Low country cooking, lovely, lively---well you get the picture.

Crossing over the elegant Ravenel Bridge from Charleston is Mount Pleasant, a charming bedroom community of Charleston that has been drawing visitors since the late 17th century. I pulled up to The Cottages on Charleston Harbor, (843.849.2300) www.thecottagesoncharlestonharbor.com partly hidden among regal palms and immaculately groomed flowered walkways bursting with showy bougainvillea's, jasmine and azaleas.

The concierge led me to my cottage sited among a serene collection of 10- two bedroom cottages, all flanked by panoramic skyline views of Charleston and its harbor. My cottage named "Tender Twilight" sported luxuriously comfortable furnishings, a full kitchen with Williams Sonoma cookware, jetted tub, step in-shower, a plasma TV atop a gas fireplace, a library full of books and a private screened porch mere feet above the waters.

Staying at The Cottages, I had access to two outstanding Charleston golf experiences, the Arnold Palmer designed RiverTowne Country Club and Patriots Point Links. I skipped playing the tougher RiverTowne layout and chose Patriots Point Links, because of its unmatched views of Charleston Harbor, and Fort Sumter, its wide-open fairways, and waterfront finishing holes.

I met with Brandon Ray head professional on Friday afternoon who golf carted me around the Willard Byrd designed course so I could get a sense of the character and shot making strategies I would need for tomorrow's round. Scott said, "Just use the clubs that are going to get you on the widest part of the fairway but watch out



for the shifting winds that come in off the water. They can add or subtract two or three clubs on certain holes."

That evening I dined in Mt. Pleasant at the Old Village Post a restaurant and tavern housed in the Maverick Inn, a venerable building that dated back to 1888 when this was a gathering center for the small seaside community.

Amy Ballenger long time Charleston PR, joined me at my table to introduce me to the Low Country, Southern Bistro style dishes prepared by talented Chef Forrest Parker who has taken the reins of the kitchen. Chef Parker works with the local farmers for his fresh produce and village fisherman provide him the days catch within hours which is a centerpiece to his culinary dynamics.

My crab cake with shaved asparagus, avocado and mustard remoulade was served golden brown, and loaded with fresh crab and flavor. A pan seared Grouper was cooked firm and flaky atop a bed of English peas, mushrooms and ruffled vegetable broth. Paired with a New Zealand sauvignon blanc (Drylands Malborough) it was a very delightful dinner.

Early Saturday morning instead of the complimentary Continental fare I opted to display some culinary skills and whipped up a hearty tomato, bacon and cheese omelet, then dawdled over breakfast on my screened-in porch.

An enormous freighter flagged from Dubai, her bow hardly moving

the waves aside steered toward Charleston harbor. Heading the opposite way was a fleet of shrimp boats passing the storied island of Fort Sumter outlined against the near horizon. At this moment my upcoming game of golf had disappeared from thought, my mind was like a lens focusing on this scene of picturesque reverie. A glance at my watch revealed 8:20 and my tee off time with Ray was at 9am. Luckily, Patriots Point is only a five minute ride from The Cottages.

The first six holes on the 6,900 yard par 72 Patriots Point were pivotal for me. With the wide open fairways, I managed my drives with a slight fade and generally scored bogies and pars while Brandon Ray was long off the tee and sharp with his short irons.

I liked the open landscape arrangement and tidal creeks along the front nine with osprey, egrets, and blue heron's preening themselves along the marshlands banks.

Ray birdied #7, the 170 yard, par three, but bogied #8, a 388 yard, par 4 to an elevated green. I hit finally hit two fine shots back to back. A 210 yard drive into a stiff breeze and a 200 yard 3 wood that landed on the front edge of the green and I two putted for par.

Playing the par 3 #16, par 4 #17 and par 5 #18, three challenging holes with majestic views of Charleston Harbor were most rewarding. All were signature holes, and with a robust breeze coming off the water, a good test of intelligent club choices. My favorite was #16, 192 yards to the pin sitting on a beautiful island green surrounded by water and marshland. Ray hit a 4 iron spot on while my shot hung on for dear life at the edge of the marsh fronting the green. I hit a flop shot to within five feet and made par, my ball rimming the cup and dropping in. Ray nearly birdied and settled for his par.

With my modestly successful play I enjoyed myself immensely partnered with Ray who shot about even par for the day.

Downtown Charleston is blessed with an array of fine restaurants and Oak Steakhouse (17 Broad Street- 843-722-4220) was a name that came highly recommended. This 150 year old former bank building, now is a casually elegant, steak and seafood restaurant where the kitchen is commanded by eminent Chef, Jeremiah Bacon. His well-trained staff of young men and attractively dressed women provided a knowledgeable culinary path to the menu selections as well as splendid service.

Plump Prince Edward Island oysters, a wood-fired, 16 oz. steak topped with foie gras, paired with an Alexander, California cabernet plus a luscious cheesecake unworthy of calorie compromise brought a juicy, mouthwatering



experience toward the end of my weekend escape.

Remaining on my Charleston, Mt. Pleasant sojourn was just one half day. Time enough for a nostalgic trip to the historic Charleston Navy Shipyards. The last time I had been in this shipyard was during my service in the U.S. Navy during and after the Korean War. My ship the USS Glynn APA 239 had been in service since shortly after WW II and we steamed into Charleston Harbor to be decommissioned. I remember the decommissioning ceremonies as the old gal named for Glynn County, Georgia hauled down her commission pennant for the last time.

I had researched the demise of the USS Glynn and found it had been removed from its decommissioning pier in the navy yard and towed a distance away to join other US Navy warships rusting away, many being sold as salvage. Alas, that was true of the Glynn, who was towed to some salvage yard in Spain, her brave history over.

But there was another ship that I wanted to see, a destroyer, the USS Laffey DD 777 that was also decommissioned in Charleston, (renumbered 724) but preserved as a war memorial vessel. One of my skippers on the USS Glynn was Commander F.J. Becton who commanded the Laffey in

the Pacific during WW II at the battle of Leyte Gulf. During the battle, the Laffey was attacked by 50 Japanese planes and hit and crashed by no less than six Kamikazes, plus four direct bomb hits. Still the Laffey, though badly damaged fought on. I remember being on watch on the bridge of the USS Glynn with now Captain Becton on a voyage to the polar regions of the arctic toward Thule in Greenland. After much coaxing by a small group of officers, Captain Becton began retelling his dramatic wartime experiences on the Laffey. One officer asked if he ever considered abandoning ship because of the catastrophic damage. Captain Becton snapped "No! I'll never abandon ship as long as a single gun will fire." Captain Becton won

the Navy Cross for that battle. He later retired as a Rear Admiral. When I told my story to the guard blocking the Laffey gangplank he said, "The Laffey cannot be toured, she is old, leaking badly, and in danger of capsizing. He hesitated for a moment and then said, "OK you can go on board, be careful and just make a quick tour,"—which I did. I need not tell how haunting the tour was. The Laffey's guns, now silent, the copper bright work on the bridge housing the gyro compass, empty, dull, and corroded, the steering wheel locked forever. My eyes misted, I gave a quick salute, turned away, and departed down the gangplank.

You can contact Larry at larrymayran@bellsouth.net

