

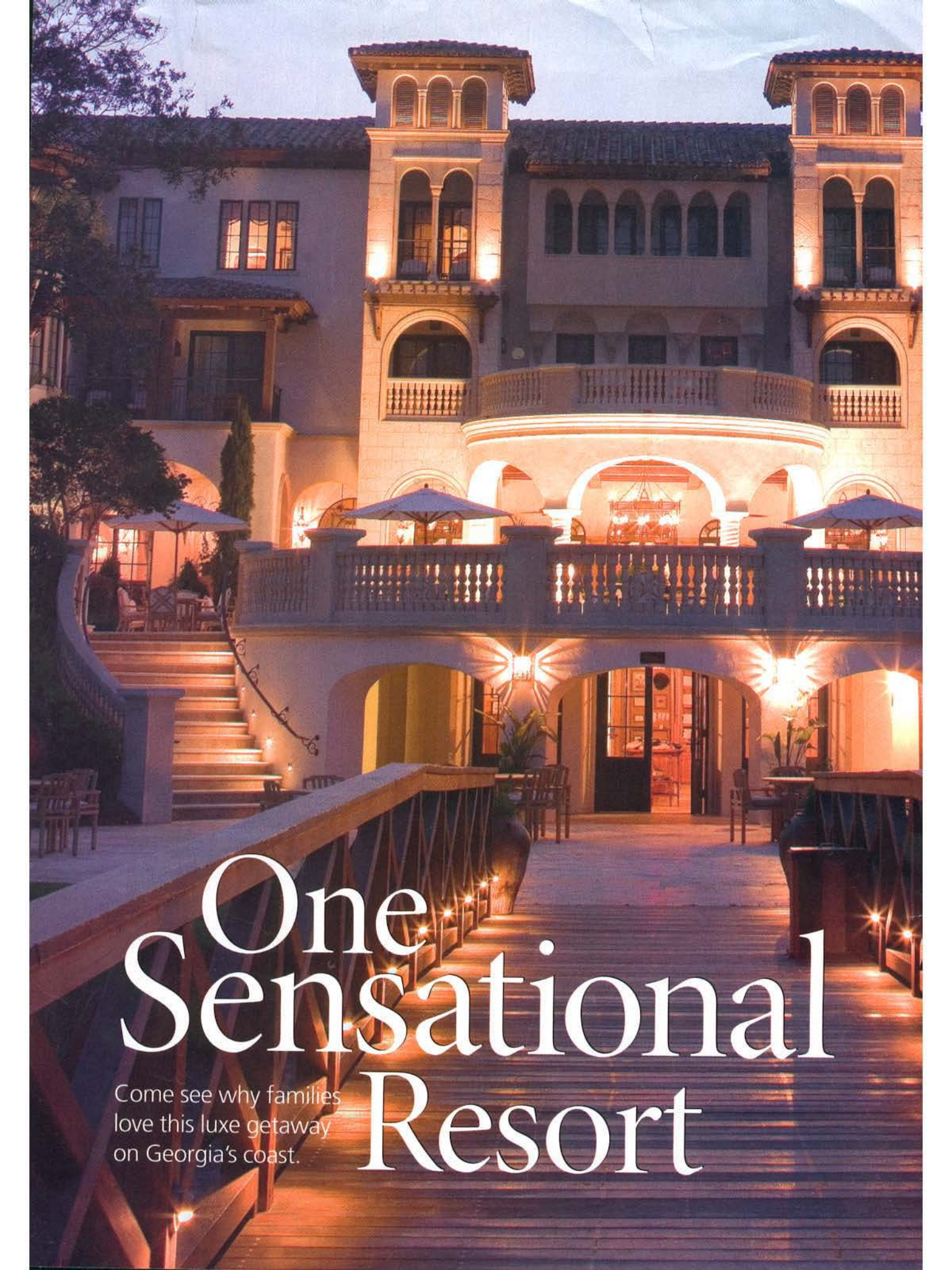
Southern Accents

The magazine of fine Southern interiors and gardens

November-December 2006

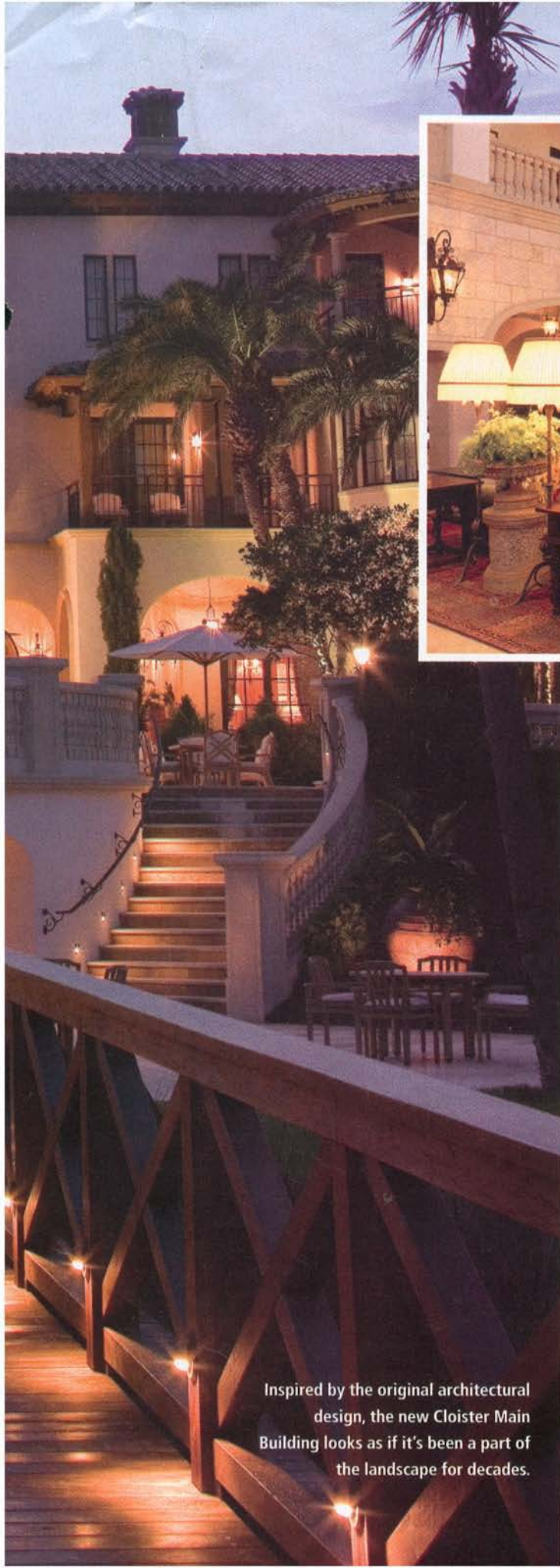
CELEBRATE
the
season

our best
holiday ideas!



One Sensational Resort

Come see why families
love this luxe getaway
on Georgia's coast.



Inspired by the original architectural design, the new Cloister Main Building looks as if it's been a part of the landscape for decades.



The Cloister is back. After years of tearing down and rebuilding, this treasured favorite has again taken its place among the finest resorts in the world. While it's stunningly updated, The Cloister is still all about hospitality, embracing guests as only the South can.

Once you cross the marsh from bustling St. Simons Island, Georgia, you enter Sea Island's dreamy universe. Situated between silvery sands and a tea-colored river, terracotta roofs peek over the land's greenery. Welcoming bent arms of live oaks shade perfectly clipped emerald grass, and palm fronds whisper in the breezes.

While the facilities may look different, one thing hasn't changed—the attitude of genteel service combined with lively family traditions. Everyone is treated equally, whether you are a once-in-a-lifetime guest or you never think twice about the hefty price tag.

The Next Generation

The 1928 Addison Mizner-designed hotel has been generously re-proportioned and re-created in the same Mediterranean style. It boasts 100 guest rooms in the main building, a spacious lobby, ballrooms, restaurants, and a library. Two areas harken back to the original: the Solarium and Spanish Lounge, which feature architectural pieces dismantled and lovingly replaced in these new rooms.

by ANNETTE THOMPSON

photography GARY CLARK, CARY JOBE



The Garden Atrium at the spa welcomes guests to relax quietly with a tea service.

Fine antiques, hand-loomed Turkish rugs, historic photos, and paintings of the island adorn the public spaces. Around the exterior, gardens surround a small chapel that hosts Sunday services and weddings. The back terrace offers strategically placed lounge chairs and tables facing the river.

The guest rooms indulge with plush yet livable furnishings. Dark wooden beams cross the ceiling, while hardwood floors are cushioned with thick rugs. Private porches look west for a view of the marsh and sunset.

The bath alone is the size of the entire hotel room at many lesser resorts. It sports a separate sink area complete with deep soaking tub, plus a huge shower, flat-screen TV, heated towel bars, thick robes, and soft slippers. If you can think of anything else you might need, a butler awaits your call.

Other accommodations around Sea Island provide different types of rooms. All are well-appointed. The Ocean Houses tempt guests with oceanfront rooms and suites. You can also reserve a cottage on a nearby residential street—anywhere from a three-bedroom bungalow to a nine-bedroom manse. Each comes fully equipped with kitchen, living area, and optional housekeeping service.

For More Information

The Cloister: www.seaisland.com or 1-800-732-4752.

Rates: Premium summer rates from \$725 a night, from \$595 in other seasons. Cottages rent from \$5,000 a week and include temporary membership privileges at the Sea Island Club.



The Outdoor Life

It's tempting to simply sit and take in the beauty here, but you'd miss so much fun. Every day, more than 30 activities invite you to explore the nature of this barrier island, including a children's program to fill your young one's hours.

Take the Jeep Train at low tide to the south end of the island to find cockleshells and whelks. Or arrange for an hour on horseback. At night, join a naturalist to hunt for signs of turtle nests. While The Cloister plans to open the new Beach Club this fall, this summer is an excellent time to enjoy the three pools and the beachfront covered arcade. It's still presided over by longtime employee "Big George" Drayton, who will remember your name every time.

Of course, the resort entertains with world-class sports, including tennis, golf, sea kayaking, onshore and offshore fishing, sporting clays, and sailing.



left: After all the shrimp, fried chicken, barbecue, and fixings are eaten, young visitors roast marshmallows for an extra-sweet dessert at the Plantation Supper.

Social Hours

The Cloister evening events glow brighter than a sparkler on the Fourth of July. You can choose from casual get-togethers to formal soirees.

Families love the Friday-night Plantation Supper out on Rainbow Island. Reserve a spot on the Jeep Train to ride out to the scenic picnic area that includes a kitchen house and a large screened porch. Delight in barbecue shrimp, fried chicken, corn on the cob, and bluegrass music for dancing and sing-alongs, as well as a marshmallow roast. Kids like to hunt for the local rabbits that hide beneath the island's sea grass. (Plantation Supper starts at \$45 adults and \$22.50 ages 4-12).

On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, guests spiff up in their best cocktail clothes to play bingo. The tradition is so popular that the 400 reservations fill quickly. They gather in the ballroom to hear "Billy Bingo." Meanwhile, children sip drinks named Big Bird and Batman and anticipate the last dance. Guests line up for a round of the Electric Slide before doing the bunny hop out the door.



Bring Your Appetite

Dressing for dinner may be one of the most favored Cloister traditions. Men still wear coats and ties, and ladies don finery for an evening in the Georgian Room, which serves Southern dishes enriched with international flair. The space borders on fussy, with rich fabrics and ornate fireplaces. The impeccable service and deft menu make up for the overly feminine feel. The Main Dining Room is more welcoming to children and stays open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

When you want a more casual experience, opt for the River Bar. You can dine inside or out on burgers, grouper sandwiches, and fried oysters.

Fit To Be Happy

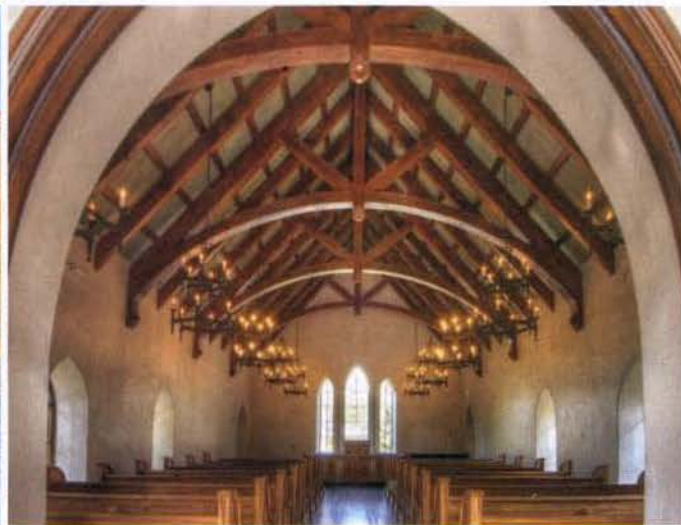
The most recent addition to The Cloister sits between the main building and the Beach Club. The U-shaped, 65,000-

square-foot spa and fitness center may be the best in the country. One side offers all manner of fitness activities, from yoga and spinning classes to free weights and circuit machines. The center also includes squash as well as a stunning indoor pool.

In between the two sides, you'll find a salon, a gift shop, and a waterfall pool.

The Garden Atrium serves as the centerpiece of the spa. A burbling stream passes through the tranquil area with upstairs hallways leading to treatment rooms. Typical wellness services fill the menu as well as bathing traditions, such as the two-hour Turkish Hammam and Japanese Basu soaking bath and massage combinations.

When leaving the spa and fitness center after a few hours at spirited play and soothing care, you'll feel content—just like on any day at The Cloister.



The Cloister at Sea Island, coastal Georgia's legendary grande dame, goes five-star without losing her warm hospitality



WHAT'S MAKING NEWS: After a multimillion-dollar renovation, The Cloister at Sea Island is acquainting guests with its many new charms, the centerpiece of which is the 100-room main building that, thanks to architect Peter Capone and designer Pamela Hughes, faithfully reflects the Mediterranean style of the original 1928 structure. From hand-loomed Turkish carpets to Irish tapestries and Paul Ferrante ironwork, old-world craftsmanship defines all the spaces and amenities.

THE ATMOSPHERE: While the new Cloister looks like a Moorish palace, the hotel has held fast to

the traditions that endeared its predecessor to generations of visitors. Bingo is still played in the grand ballroom, and you can still pore over a gigantic jigsaw puzzle (now in the library) or savor the deep serenity of the Spanish Lounge, with its stained-glass windows designed by Addison Mizner. Photographs from the resort's early years adorn the hotel's hallways, further enhancing the residential feel.

ONLY AT THE CLOISTER: If you must work, commandeer The Cloister's sumptuously paneled Summit Room, where you can sit at the same handcrafted, heart-pine table that accommodated

BY JOLEE EDMONDSON

President Bush and other world leaders during the 2004 G-8 Summit.

NOT TO MISS: At the new 65,000-square-foot Spa at Sea Island, located on The Cloister's grounds, enjoy the blissful Japanese 9-Step Bathing Tradition, a two-hour ritual designed to invigorate. During the holidays, the 12 Days of Christmas package, which includes a mini Christmas tree in your room and elf tuck-ins for the children, provides the comforts of home.

ACCOMMODATIONS: The central hotel houses 64 rooms and 36 suites, many of which have balconies with views of the marsh-laced Black Banks River. The Sea Island Suite features a spacious bedroom, dining room, library, and butler's pantry, while the Black Banks Suite (ideal for families) offers a fully equipped kitchen, two luxurious bedrooms, and an immense living room. Strung along the ocean are 56 guest rooms that provide sanctuary in seaside, marshfront, and wooded settings.

POSH PARTICULARS: Hughes furnished rooms with dark woods and rich, vibrant fabrics. Inviting beds are fitted with 500-thread-count sheets from Italy. Unexpected details include personalized stationery. Fine crystal, Bulgari toiletries, and fresh flowers dress up the vanities in the marbled baths, and 24-hour butler service is a push-button away.

GOLF: A game is a must at The Cloister. Resort guests can tee it up at the exclusive Sea Island Golf Club, which encompasses three historic championship courses—Seaside, Plantation, and Retreat—all of which have been updated by such celebrated course designers as Rees Jones and Tom Fazio.

THE FOOD: The Cloister's culinary crown jewel is the Georgian Room—all glimmering chandeliers, European linens, plush drapery, and luscious blooms from the hotel's rose garden. Standout dishes include Southern Fried Lobster with Potato Puree and Corn Sauce and Chilled Peach Soup. Table-side service, when such classics as Châteaubriand and giant hearts of palm are presented, accentuates the haute dining experience.

WHEN TO GO: Every season is high season at The Cloister. Golfers favor spring and fall. Families love the months between May and September; the week of July Fourth is particularly festive, filled with special events. Easter week is also popular, the focal point being a grand Easter egg hunt. Heavenly weather is a big attraction in fall, and winter brings such irresistible pleasures as brisk walks on the beach followed by hot cider by a blazing fire in the Colonial Lounge.

For reservations, call 800/732-4752, or visit www.seaisland.com. Rooms start at \$725.

