



# D U N H A M F A R M S

**I**t's no coincidence that for this column's first adventure, I chose to visit a place in my hometown. I couldn't wait to share this little known treasure just off interstate 95 and only a stone's throw from the Golden Isles and Savannah, Georgia. On a perfect spring weekend I hopped in the Jeep and drove about an hour there to one of southeast Georgia's most pristine and precious coastal environments. *(continues)*





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Dunham Farms is an exclusive bed and breakfast located on nine thousand acres in Midway, GA. Rich in history, the collective elements that make up Springfield Plantation create a serene atmosphere for lovers of nature, history and all things southern. The original plantation barn was transformed into a quaint country inn and opened to the public in 1997. Although the bed and breakfast at Dunham Farms is worth the trip alone, Springfield Plantation includes so much more for those who want to slow their pace and increase their sense of self awareness.

The long, winding road to Palmyra Barn is draped by a canopy of trees dripping with Spanish moss. With a marsh view on the right and outbuildings on the left, a sense of quiet encompasses this land as soon as you turn off the main road. The trail of gravel strewn dirt roads leads you past the enclosed pool and plantation cottage to a majestic barn. Sitting on a bluff, the barn is magnificent upon sight! One must tilt their head back, shelter their eyes and pause for a moment of appreciation before proceeding inside.

My arrival is perfectly coordinated with the serving of breakfast. All meals at Palmyra Barn are served family style in the appropriately named Feed Room. I'm greeted by a family of four visiting from North Georgia and the inn keepers, a mother and daughter duo named Laura and Meredith Devendorf. This is not my first visit to Palmyra, so I take a moment to catch up on the last three years. As Meredith begins serving our meal of fresh cantaloupe garnished with strawberries, homemade blueberry pancakes and turkey sausage, Laura and I let our conversation trickle from topic to topic, touching on everything from local politics to future plans for Dunham Farms.



*Remember...when dining tables weren't used for homework and paying the bills?*

We do. Come pull up a chair, eat your veggies, laugh, enjoy your company and don't worry Mom, we'll clean up.

*The 4th of May Cafe*

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I asked Laura, once an accomplished artist and art critic, what made her decide to turn the old plantation barn into a bed and breakfast. "I like to build things! Inside, I'm a tortured architect," she says with the slightest hint of an apology. She then proceeds to tell me the story of how she transformed the haylofts and horse stalls she once played in as a child when visiting the family's summer home into a nine room, two story inn. She points out the subtle elements that make this place so unique: rustic features like sustainable materials recaptured from the original barn, brick floor pavers and raw wood beams along the ceiling.

Laura and Meredith Devendorf give an intangible quality to Palmyra that is difficult to describe. They have the rare ability to make their guests feel like family, as they pamper you with well-placed southern hospitality. Conservationists at heart, these ladies are true scholars of wildlife, art and history. As I speak with them, I'm reminded of how truly precious the art of conversation can be to an experience. You forget about cable and cell phones. At Palmyra Barn things are quiet, partly due to the limited numbers it can accommodate, but mostly because of the vast acreage surrounding it that remains unspoiled. This makes it the perfect place for a retreat or an intimate getaway. I believe there is a healing quality to the peace this place encompasses.

Later in the morning, we set out on a two-hour kayak paddle from the dock that sits just below the bluff on which Palmyra Barn sits. Because everyone in the group is experienced at paddling, Meredith leads us on a demanding route, weaving through the salt marsh. The path was full short turns and tight squeezes, which made it all the more challenging. The group grew quite accustomed to hearing my voice from behind, as I got up close and personal with the marsh grass or "stuck" as some people may call it. On any given day you can see marsh

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## OTHER PALMYRA FEATURES

**MY FAVORITE MOMENT:** Breakfast on the day of my departure. I was delighted to find the tables set with a gorgeous rooster ensemble. It was the perfect way to start a day in the country. We enjoyed a three course gourmet breakfast that was slowly served over an hour. **Menu:** Chocolate hazelnut coffee (to die for!) Course 1- Fresh strawberries and grapes sprinkled with sugar and chopped mint. Course 2- Plain Greek yogurt with vanilla and granola. Course 3: Swiss cheese soufflé, baked bacon glazed with peach chutney, brown sugar and vinegars.

**NEARBY SIGHTS:** Seabrook Village. Just down the road from Palmyra, is another gem rich with the coastal heritage of Liberty County. Seabrook Village, the brainchild of Laura Devendorf, is a living history museum comprised of eight buildings, including a restored one room schoolhouse and two homesteads from the 1800s, donated and restored by members of the community. Tour groups can experience life in the life of African Americans in the rural south with many of the artifacts housed in these dwellings being original to the families that lived there.

Sunbury Crab Company is a great seafood restaurant located nearby. Their menu is centered around Wild Georgia Shrimp. My personal favorite is the buffalo shrimp.

**BEST MEMORY:** As I stood at the back door of my room at dawn watching the hues go from midnight blue to deep purple to pinkish-orange to blue, the view of the marsh over the bluff in the distance, and the stillness of the orchard just outside the door was magical.

**EXTRA FLARE:** Meredith Devendorf recently published a photographic history book titled *Images of America: Liberty County*. This is the first book of its kind for Liberty County and features rare and telling photographs that map out the changing landscape of this coastal Georgia from its settlement by Guale Indians to colonial settlers.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:** Sauce & Sass Cooking School on August 20: Learn from the innkeepers how to make some of the most popular dishes served at Palmyra Barn. The mystery of the perfect soufflé is solved! 2011 Holiday Festival of Lights & Music takes place the entire month of December.

**WEBSITES:** [www.dunhamfarms.com](http://www.dunhamfarms.com); [www.discoverlibertyga.com](http://www.discoverlibertyga.com)

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life in full regalia with birds flying overhead, terrapins dropping out of sight as you approach and fish jumping here or there. In the last stretch of the paddle, as you round the bend, you are greeted by the welcoming view of home. Two Adirondack chairs sit on the bluff, usually occupied by visitors who wave down to you as you pass by. It is the most beautiful sight of any kayak paddle I've ever experienced and one I look forward to experiencing again.

In addition to the cooking and management of the barn, which boasts nine rooms full of delicate decor, the mother-daughter pair is responsible for managing a variety of elements that make up Springfield Plantation. Available accommodations and activities include Palmyra Cottage (circa 1840), a historic camellia garden with some of the rarest varieties on record, swimming, kayaking and 25 miles of nature trails for hiking or riding on horseback. It is a huge undertaking for two people to manage, but the Devendorfs do so beautifully and with inspiring passion. There is no sense of complacency with these two, as they continually think of new additions and improvements to the operation. This fall, completion is much anticipated for a reception hall that will allow Dunham

Farms to accommodate larger weddings parties and host other special events.

Built in the 1840s, Palmyra Cottage is a former plantation house that sits on a bluff overlooking Jones Creek. It is the crown jewel of the property and regularly undergoes restoration efforts to keep it close to its original 1840s condition. The interior condition of this house is breathtaking with wall to wall, ceiling to floor wood paneling that boasts the beautiful lines associated with quality craftsmanship. With a fire place in each room, it offers comfortable quarters and ample living space. My favorite feature of the house is the ripple glass used in the paneled windows. This now rare glass slightly distorts the view of the outside environment, making it feel slightly as if you are gazing from inside a dream.

A visit to Dunham Farms and Palmyra Barn is truly a gift to self. As I drive away from the barn, I felt refreshed and recharged. Before I leave the property, my heart is already aching for the longing I know it will feel to return. I take my time following the winding dirt roads that lead back out to the highway. At the stop sign, a car speeds by and abruptly breaks the silence I've grown so accustomed to; and I make the turn to head ..."back."



**CANDICE TEMPLE** holds a degree in Public Relations from Georgia Southern University. She has recently made the Golden Isles her home, which provides her an opportunity to pursue her interests of painting and kayaking. She is also an avid beachgoer. She is employed with Glynn County Board of Commissioners as the Public Information Officer and serves on the Board of Directors for the YWCA of Brunswick.