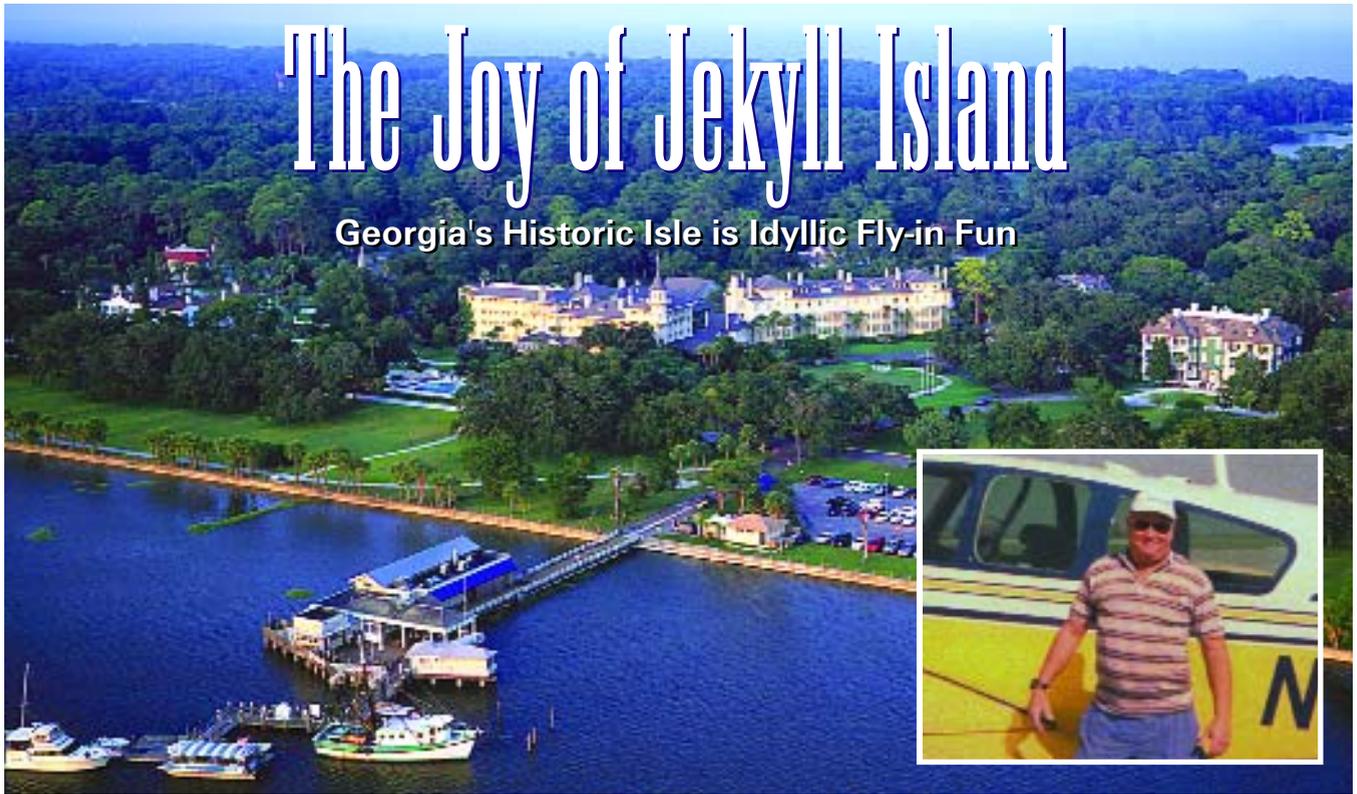


The Joy of Jekyll Island

Georgia's Historic Isle is Idyllic Fly-in Fun



Say this for the “gazillionaires of the 1800s,” says Norris Rickey: They knew how to build them. Hunting “cottages,” that is, that expressed something of the J.P. Morgan-William K. Vanderbilt-William Rockefeller-Joseph Pulitzer aesthetic that said if lavish was good, then mega-lavish was better. The tycoons’ Jekyll Island Club (now hotel) on Jekyll Island, an unhurried, oak-framed, palmetto-graced oasis off Georgia’s Colonial Coast, is one such glorious pile. And perhaps no one is better pleased by this national historic landmark where Queen Anne-style turrets and verandas and art glass reflect gorgeous Victorian grandeur, than aviator Norris Rickey, a retired government attorney who lives in St. Petersburg, FL.

“I love the place!” he raves. “Watching ladies and gentlemen in their whites play croquet on the lawn, hanging out at the Latitude 31 lounge gathering local lore, riding a bicycle all around the island....” Well, he raves, “here you are going to have a great day.”

Financiers and industrialists in their era would motor up to Jekyll Wharf in yachts unofficially in competition for the prize of being the longest, fastest and more beautifully appointed of the “season.” But Norris prefers to land his dual-yoke F-35 Bonanza

at the “excellent” Jekyll Island Airport (09J) a mere half-mile from the hotel. “The people here are truly from the ‘old South’ – genuinely friendly and fun to be around,” he says. “If you have luggage a hotel bellman will drive over to gather you.” Once gathered, Jekyll Island guests can expect an absolutely great getaway, says Norris.

Consider the accommodations. From the original Clubhouse, where J.P. Morgan and his ilk conducted such business as formulating a plan for the Federal Reserve Bank, to the Annex, originally private apartments, rooms woo with their original architectural charms. Ionic columns, 15-foot ceilings, oak wainscoting, marble fireplaces... “Beautiful!” says Norris. He adds: “Some evenings a lady plays the harp during dinner” in the majestically handsome Grand Dining Room, where classical low-country cuisine (Georgia White shrimp, fresh crab, sophisticated renditions of lamb and steak) is ever an elegant presentation. “How much closer can you get to a heavenly meal?”

Still, this is not your basic snooty escape. Says Norris: “There is also Latitude 31 (latitude-31.com), a great watering hole in the marina with top-notch seafood meals.” There are 13 “fast” clay tennis courts, including the country’s first built indoors (“Morgan and his cronies wanted

to get out of the weather”); 63 holes of golf on three island courses; horseback riding among the ocean sand dunes; picnicking on the deserted, idyllic beach – even guided moonlight nature walks to view, at a respectful distance, the sea turtles who lumber ashore to lay eggs. At Millionaire’s Village, the island’s showcase historic district, 33 original “cottages” still stand, and these spectacular mansions make for a walking tour of true architectural awe. On this, Georgia’s historic Golden Isle, Norris typically focuses less on the fishing charters offered, the dolphin-watching cruises possible, and the hotel’s legendary Victorian tea and Sunday brunch events, which are, indeed, events.

“When you do 15-20 miles on a beat-up old Converse bike,” says Norris, an avid cyclist jazzed by Jekyll’s miles and miles of (flat) bike paths, “life is good!”

On Jekyll Island, where the sea oaks grow wild on the dunes and the Spanish moss hangs from the oaks in gracious Southern splendor, the Jekyll Island Club Hotel is one fly-in favorite that never ceases to seduce Norris with its many blisses. “I have traveled extensively and stayed in some pretty nice places,” he says. But this? “This is truly magnificent.” jekyllclub.com (800) 535-9547. ✕