



Island Escape

Eagle Island on the Georgia coast offers seclusion bathed in luxury

By Hope S. Philbrick

The tide rises, invigorating the water flow and shifting the current in Mayhall Creek. An egret swoops into swaying grasses. Skittish crabs dart across the diminishing mud rim. Whiffs of fresh pine, sun-roasted reeds and drenched soil drift in the salty breeze. Tied to the dock, a fishing line wavers and the crab trap rattles. In the nearby lodge, a fresh pot of coffee brews and the hot tub beckons. A kayak outing and then a bonfire are planned for later. But plans can change to satisfy any whim, so perhaps a long nap in an outdoor hammock will suffice. Aside from your travel companions, you've seen no other person for days. If you've ever fantasized about escaping to a private island, Eagle Island is a luxurious place to realize the dream.

Where Land Meets Sea

Eagle Island is one of nine islands that comprise the Private Islands of Georgia, a vacation rental company owned and operated by Captain Andy Hill and his wife Shannon. The 10-acre estate is located in one of the most secluded regions on the Atlantic Coast — and in a place *The Nature Conservancy* has named one of the “75 last great places left in the world.” Surrounded by 2,000



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRIVATE ISLANDS OF GEORGIA



(Opposite) The lodge at Eagle Island, Georgia. Eagle Island is a 10-acre estate in one of the most secluded regions on the Atlantic Coast. (Above) Accessible only by boat, the island is approximately 10 minutes east of downtown Darien, Georgia (180 miles southeast of Augusta).



(Above) Eagle Island's private dock. On any given day guests might see blue herons, egrets, bald eagles, otters, alligators, dolphins and deer in their natural environment. (Right) Inside the lodge.



If You Go:

Where: Eagle Island, a private barrier island on the Georgia coast. The island is a 10-minute boat ride from Darien, Georgia (180 miles southeast of Augusta).

How Much: Rates start at \$400/night (includes round-trip boat transportation)

More Info: (912) 222-0801 or privateislandsofgeorgia.com

acres of salt marsh, the island appears to rise out of the marsh. Though just a 10-minute boat ride from Darien, Georgia (180 miles southeast of Augusta), it offers true seclusion.

The westernmost coast on the nation's eastern seaboard, the 100-mile long Georgia coast boasts 1,600 back barrier islands and houses one-eighth of the East Coast's and one-twelfth of the nation's total marshland. The tide pushes in with more strength than anywhere south of Maine, causing a 6- to 10-foot difference in tides.

In the salt marsh, distinctions between water and solid surfaces blur: earth and water mingle to create a muck that houses dozens of creatures and plants that in turn nourish dozens more. On any given day guests might see blue herons, egrets, bald eagles, otters, alligators, dolphins and deer in their natural environment. Every day brings different scenery with the incoming and outgoing tide.

Five-Moon Luxury

Providing top-rate hospitality is Hill's objective. Ineligible for five-star designation, since certain elements common in the world's finest hotels (like 24-hour room service and a high staff-to-guest ratio) don't translate to a private island lodge, "We self-designated as five-moon," he says.

"We'll customize for each guest's needs," says Hill, who has been hosting guests on Eagle Island for more than eight years. Need extra kayaks? Paddling lessons? A stocked refrigerator and pantry upon arrival? A private chef? Hill's recipe for low country boil? Camping gear? No problem. Tell him what you need when booking your stay, and he'll make the arrangements.

While Eagle Island is secluded, absolute isolation is optional since cell phone service reaches the island and the lodge is equipped with wireless high-speed Internet and satellite TV service. What's more, whenever guests are on the island, Hill keeps his cell phone charged, turned on and nearby "24 hours a day, in case of emergency."



Eagle Island's outdoor hot tub and fireplace.

Since Eagle Island is only accessible by boat, each stay includes round-trip boat transportation. (Extra trips can be arranged for an additional fee; of course, guests with their own boat can come and go as they please.) Each day of the rental period includes the full day, so it's possible to arrive early morning then check out late evening to maximize your time on the island.

Comfortably designed and furnished to sleep up to 10, Eagle Island Lodge offers two

bedrooms on the main floor, a bedroom loft and a basement bedroom with its own private entrance. There are two full baths plus an outdoor shower. An indoor kitchen equipped with professional-grade appliances plus an outdoor kitchen stocked with a huge boiling pot, steamer, smoker and grill stand ready to prepare any meal. The great room features cypress-paneled walls and floors, vaulted ceilings and a handcrafted stone fireplace. Leather and teak furnishings invite

relaxation, as does the wrap-around screened porch with hot tub and fireplace. "We're sort of like a B&B," says Hill, explaining that staying at Eagle Island Lodge feels like visiting a friend's house more than a hotel. "But you'll be the only guest."

Time on Eagle Island is measured by high and low tide. Relax and unwind in any number of ways: Soak in the hot tub, linger in the outdoor shower or cuddle in front of the fireplace. Play horseshoes. Sing songs around the bonfire pit while roasting marshmallows for s'mores. Explore the surrounding marsh by kayak or rent a motorboat to visit Sapelo Island and collect sand dollars and knobbed whelks on Nannygoat Beach. Take a nap. Stage a ping-pong tournament. Wander the hiking trails and take photos. Read a book. Swing on the porch swing. Do nothing. The choice is yours. **TR**