

FIND AN

easy escape

TO
THE
COAST

By Liz Mitchell



photos ©2006 by Wendie Smith

Ediŝto Island is a little known family beach destination on the Atlantic coast of South Carolina. The barrier island, slightly larger than two miles, is just south of the well-known tourist destination of Charleston. Although it has been popular for many decades with South Carolina families escaping their routines of working life, it is still almost a secret find for Northern vacationers looking for a quiet change of pace. So little commercialization and lack of traffic characterize the island that newcomers proudly boast, “We don’t even have a traffic light.” The speed limit is 35 all through town, and that suits most folks just fine. There’s really nowhere to go in a rush. It’s about a ten-minute ride from one part of the island to another. Tucked off the main route, it is a refuge for those who frequent its beach homes and cottages during the summer, and builders now are creating a number of secluded upscale communities as well as classy new homes with marsh or ocean views. Some are offered in interval ownership programs for ease of travel for owners who

want their own place but only plan to use it for a week each month.

Tom and Linda Maguire looked for water for years while seeking to avoid the winter snow and ice in St. Louis and also working 80-hour weeks in demanding careers. They found their ideal choice in Ediŝto Island Beach. Both originally from Kansas, they loved the ocean and were determined to find the best beach. For years, they visited beaches along both the east and west coasts. Happening upon Ediŝto, they loved it so much that they vacationed here for several years, always renting the same house as many beach-loving families do. They could not even pronounce it for the first few years, she laughed.

The accent is on the first syllable, Ed. “e put all of our pennies together to buy a piece of the beach in the early 90s,” Linda said. They moved to Ediŝto six years ago and have bought and sold property and built several houses, beginning with that as a hobby before moving south. “We sold the big house we had in the heart of St. Louis and made a commitment. For six years we put everything we had into buying property here,” Tom said. They were building houses in Ediŝto, even though working and living

full time in St. Louis.” We called it our secret life for a while,” Linda said. “Nobody even knew what we were doing.” “Flexibility is the lesson we have learned,” Linda noted that they have moved several times since relocating to Edisto and can always “go with the tide.”

Now they are moving into their dream home, a third row beach house with a sunny bright view of the sparkling Atlantic. They find a sense of security and comfort in the small town feel of Edisto which is a community with the old-fashioned definition of the word. It’s a family beach where residents quickly accept those who come from off (as relocating residents are called), and families get back to the basics of togetherness. Tom calls it “listening to what the family is saying.” One of Tom’s two grown sons visited them in Edisto a couple of years ago and decided to stay. They’ve developed a closeness never realized while Tom was busy with his career. Tom

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was a city boy who does miss take-out Chinese food late at night, but Linda’s small town upbringing prepared her for the warmth of the family atmosphere, and both find no regrets in their choice to relocate. “In the city we didn’t know our neighbors,” she said. “We didn’t have time to see them,” Tom said. In Edisto, almost everyone knows everyone else. Tom told of being sick during a recent vacation in the Florida Keys, and upon his return home a young man he didn’t know approached him in the local grocery store to inquire about his recovery. “We were so easily accepted here,” she said. The church and the chamber of commerce created quick associations and friends were found. They wouldn’t do it differently if they could turn the clock back. “We wanted to do this when we were still young enough to enjoy it,” Linda said. She is continuing her career in dietetics and works part time in a dialysis clinic in Charleston.

“I love what I do, and the dialysis patients keep me grounded and appreciative,” she said. She also likes church work and volunteer work such as the turtle project on the beach in the summer. Tom was in sales during many busy years, and now

sells real estate in Edisto. “Where else could I go to work in shorts and flip flops?” he comments on his pleasure with the lifestyle afforded by this career. The island’s rich heritage rooted in Spanish discovery, American Indian settlement and Colonial history offers a wealth of discovery. Historic churches and plantations along back roads and the rural life following the demise of the cotton and indigo trade all are of renewed interest to travelers seeking a relaxing get-away with optional adventure.

The 1255-acre Edisto Beach State Park is a part of the ACE Basin buffer zone around the ACE Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve. The ACE Basin boundaries include the watersheds of the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto Rivers. The park was developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and retains many of the buildings from that time. The dense maritime forest and salt marsh border the beach of one and a half miles and include cabins and more than 100 camp sites which offer a popular retreat for families and outdoor enthusiasts. The park also includes an Interpretive Center with many educational programming opportunities for students of all ages.

Edisto Island is a favorite destination for the outdoor traveler as well as the upscale and educated traveler seeking a real escape for a second home or possibly a pre-retirement spot. Experiences are rich with learning opportunities as well as the active outdoor choices of fishing, boating, hiking, bird-watching and more. Canoe, kayak and fishing opportunities abound throughout the creeks, marches and rivers, or off shore. Guided tours, charter boats and rentals are easily accessible for guests who don’t bring their own transportation. Bikes and golf carts are offered with many rentals which range from high end town homes to villas or cabins. Events include a spring art show, a summer tasting plus plantation tours and a fall outdoor festival.

Activities bring local artisans to showcase their wares and they often demonstrate such specialties as sweetgrass basket weaving which is only seen on the South Carolina coast. Woodcraft, sea glass jewelry and quilts are other traditional featured items with low-key artists whose fine quality work seldom is seen outside the small coastal festivals. The beach is one of the main attractions with free public access and plentiful parking along the Atlantic shoreline.

Fresh seafood and locally grown vegetables are plentiful in roadside markets or served in restaurants, all of which are locally owned and casual style. Most visitors find a cookbook to take home more than memories of the Lowcountry delicacies.

Edisto offers an easy lifestyle with space to relax on island time. ■



In the gallery I want
the sense of Wonder,
new life, new light, revelation --
I feel present in my personal life.
I want the atmosphere to be still
And conducive to DISCOVERY

of art
of truth
of self.

I want the sojourner to be
CONSCIOUS of
things one doesn't see...an expanded
awareness.

I want HEALTHY and creative
interaction

and when our guest depart
with something in hand.

I want it to be with a sense of
all shall be well.

BRAILSFORD SUTTON-FOSTER SUBSCRIBES TO THE above statement of purpose for her Fish or Cut Bait Gallery in Edisto, with the tagline “Fishing for art and the art of Fishing.”

The amazing little spot was chosen for its creative location, according to Brailsford. It showcases a collection of oils, acrylics, watercolors, pottery, jewelry and textural arts, all representing the beauty of the island.

“It is the vernacular of the island,” she said. “Edisto doesn’t have gimmicky things here. People bring with them their boat or whatever they choose to spend their time with. The choices of art reflect the essence of the quiet spirit. It’s all about the natural beauty, trees, marshes, skies. It’s looking at life from one’s inner creativity.”

An artist herself, Brailsford painted in Charleston where she studied with William Halsey. Now her creative energies go into collecting for the gallery.

“Do we really see? Are we aware of clouds and sunsets and the funny little raccoons which make up our world?: She questions, and she introduces guests to a “heightened awareness of what we are seeing.”

Susan Roberts, the artistic director, is a photographer whose technical expertise and artistic ability enable her to “always capture the essence of the right moment at the right time,” Brailsford said.

Spring seasonal hours at the gallery beginning in March are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am until 5 pm. It’s easy to find on Jungle Road just beside the Edisto Chamber of Commerce office.

“Labradors, boats and water – that’s what we esteem in the South Carolina Lowcountry,” according to Brailsford, and they can usually be enjoyed in the warm welcoming atmosphere of Fish or Cut Bait.