



Taking in Tybee Island

You may start to understand the character of Tybee Island even before you set foot onto this unique vacation destination. Various people making our reservations and arranging our tours were warm and very accommodating, but even from our initial conversations, there was something special, there was something more.

Tybee Island's character and charm offer a welcoming, relaxing refuge for families of all ages and sizes to unplug, unwind, and reconnect, and even perhaps, take a part of the Tybee charm home with them.

Driving into Tybee Island immediately takes you back in time. Lining the salty back rivers are old fish camps and large family cottages—all beautifully preserved and brightly painted with the colors of summer. As you turn, and the road takes you to the Atlantic Ocean, you won't find the extravagant high-rises you typically find lining the coastline. Instead, you'll see unpretentious hotels and condos modestly complimenting the ocean side. Entering the town, you'll find the modern conveniences, among others, of a pharmacy, doctor's office, and grocery store that are especially important when traveling with children.

Continuing along the beachside, you reach the south-end pier and pavilion. This has been the hub of Tybee Island for years, with live music at the pavilion, ocean breeze strolls along the pier, delightful dining on the splendors of the sea, and numerous stores for your shopping desires. From children's souvenirs to the latest beach fashions and home décor, you can find it all. Browsing through one of these shops, I come across a phrase, which jumps out at me from a plaque. It states the Rules of "How to be a Beach Woman." One of the rules is, "The Opposite of Perfection is Character." I wonder, then, if it could be said that sometimes in our aspiration for perfection we might sometimes lose our character? Anyway, you can be certain, through the years of development and growth on Tybee Island, Tybee has retained its character—in its structures and in its people.

To truly experience the character of Tybee Island, you have to start by looking at its history. Even this past month at Tybee Island's Beach Bum Weekend, as the community gathered to crown their new Beach Bum Queen at the annual Beach Bum parade, they continued to honor their history, as they crowned ninety-nine year old former swing band performer, Ms. Sylvia Worth Whitney Gott. This "Beach Woman," is adored and admired and does not even a single injection of Botox. The elegant Ms. Sylvia can still be seen playing music on her tambourine at Doc's on Tybee's main drag. She is a living illustration of beauty and character and a part of Tybee Island's perfection.

It seems the older we get the more important history is to us; so getting our younger kids to soak in this history may take some creativity. A trip to see the Tybee Island Lighthouse Station is not only a perfect start to see the whole island from 154 feet up, but a good place to plant a couple of seeds of historical knowledge. In the museum, kids can see depictions of the first known inhabitants of the island, the Euchee Indians. Interestingly, the description of these people is gentle and accepting, as the explorers brought a new religion to them. Even the origin of the name "Tybee" derives from the Native American Euchee Indian word for "salt." Kids also love the tales of Pirates, and the museum offers artifacts found on the island from decades of Pirate visits. Our seven year old liked the collection of guns so much that he "needed" his own from the museum's gift shop on the way out. The museum display details how the Pirates would come to the Island for fresh water and game to replenish their own supplies, and that they would find great hiding places for their treasure. Kids, shall we get our shovels? In fact, Pirates continue to resurface every October in Tybee (www.tybeepiratefest.com).

Tybee Island Museum is housed in Fort Screven's Battery Garland. The battery served as part of America's Coastal Defense System, until it was decommissioned in 1945. To pass through and observe the Light Station and Museum is only part of the experience. Having my kids connect with one of Tybee's treasures outside the Head Keeper's house was memorable. She engaged the kids with stories and questions about the Keeper's children's rooms and their toys. For us, she brought life and character, making the structures around her come to life. Her personality was larger than the lighthouse.

Of course, if you have kids, a big part of your Tybee time will be spent at the beach. The fascination with the beach for children is amazing. They can spend countless hours jumping over waves, finger painting in the sand, building sand castles, running, jumping, and just being kids. Their fascination also conjures up loads of questions for us parents. We try our best to come up with some fairly accurate answers to their inquiries, but in the end, many questions are answered with, "Honey, I'm not quite sure." A short walk down to the Tybee Island Marine Science Center is a wonderful place to learn answers to these aquatic questions.

Inside, you will find marine life indigenous to the Georgia coast. The aquariums and exhibits are home to a variety of fish, reptiles, invertebrates, corals, and other interesting sea creatures. We signed up for the "Beach Walk," and followed our guide, Alisa, to the shore. She started with a brief explanation of the tides, and moved to the barnacles that were attached to the pier pilings. The kids had found a washed up piece of wood with barnacles on it, so they immediately tuned in. She explained that barnacles would plant their heads into the wood and sift microscopic organisms with their legs for their entire lifetime. With walking stick in hand, she then led us down the beach. Immediately, she picked up a dead jellyfish. What was she doing? Had she spent too much time in the sun? I had taught my kids to "steer clear" of the dangerous jellyfish. We have always made wide detours around them, as if they might suddenly come back to life and start chasing us. She then endeared herself to my children by asking, "If it's OK with your mom, you can touch it." Alisa explained that Cannonball Jellyfish only had a small "stinger" on the very bottom and that they were harmless, if you picked them up from the top.

In no time the kids were gleefully running down the beach, picking up the jellyfish and flinging them back into the sea. I'm sure the delight with which they did this had nothing to do with the fact that a life-long mom rule of steering clear of the jelly fish had been proven wrong. Alisa portrayed her passion for marine life and Tybee Island. She made a connection with my kids that left them with a new appreciation for all things dead and alive in the sea and at the beach.

If you want to get out to the water for your nature exploration, step aboard a nature tour to explore Coastal Georgia by boat. Captains Rene and David Heidt offer twenty years of experience in the waters of Coastal Georgia. As part of Sundial Tours, they offer a wonderful variety of eco-adventures, such as visiting local dolphin and alligator families, bird watching, beach combing on remote beaches, light tackle fishing for trout, bass, and flounder, fossil hunting for prehistoric sharks' teeth and fossilized bones, crabbing, cast netting, and even children's fishing lessons. All trips are planned around the tides and weather, and are customized to your interests and schedule. Most trips are for a maximum of 6 people, so it's an intimate nature cruise. You will find Rene and David to be very knowledgeable. They not only answer your questions, but also ask a few of their own to keep you thinking.

Capt. Rene likes to find out a little about your story, too. So you board her boat as a guest and at the end of your cruise, you depart as a friend. In addition, she is an exceptionally talented wildlife artist. While you're there, you might get to peak in her gallery. To find out more, go to www.sundialcharters.net.

After a fun-filled afternoon of flinging jellyfish or exploring nature, be sure to stop in at Fannie's on the Beach for a Shrimp Burger. We can't be absolutely sure, but to SpongeBob's chagrin, we think it might just top a Crabby Patty. Another great family restaurant is The Crab Shack. The restaurant is located on the Back River side and their seafood is served low-country style. A Low Country Boil includes 1/2 lb. of seasoned shrimp, sausage rounds, new potatoes, and corn. The kids will love the food, and so will the parents, but the kids come for the alligators. Yes, they have lots of alligators, all securely confined, of course. The kids can even feed them, and the parents can threaten to feed the kids to the alligators, if they don't behave during dinner. It's all good. And speaking of good, you should take a trip to Cafe Logo for some "fresh off the boat" Wild Georgia Shrimp. These shrimp are amazing. It was explained to us that the

area's strong tides, combined with natural filtration through Georgia's expansive marshland, give the shrimp a sweet, succulent taste and a good firm texture that can only be produced in the wild. You can find them nestled under the Lazaretto Creek Bridge.

After experiencing the wonderful adventures of Tybee Island, a home away from home, where you can relax and reenergize, is essential. With a family of six, we have come to prefer vacation rental homes. There are hundreds of properties from which to choose on Tybee Island. Two companies, who provide these privately owned vacation rental homes, are Mermaid Cottages (www.mermaidcottages.com) and Tybee Vacation Rentals (www.tybeevacationrentals.com). They have made our experience a pleasurable one from the very first phone call by providing tour assistance, and even concierge service. From luxury to easy-living, ordinary to extraordinary, traditional to modern, adorably decorated cottages to comfortable condos . . . they have it all! Again, the hospitality and charm that are Tybee Island is apparent in their personal service and immaculate vacation homes. We stayed in Shore Leave, a Mermaid Cottage Vacation Rental. Our very spacious "cottage" was a beautiful home with all of the modern conveniences we have come to rely on. If you can't quite completely unplug, you'll be happy to find WIFI, a 50" Plasma with surround sound, plus a fully updated kitchen. Shore Leave is nautically decorated with a marine signal flag theme. It honors the owner's father, who sailed with the British Fleet. Mariner's flags welcome you as you drive up and inside the house. It's great fun for kids to decode the messages that the mariner flags spell out.

Tybee Vacation Rental's concierge is happy to assist guests and other visitors to Tybee Island with travel information, tour tickets, directions, recommendations, and anything else needed to make your vacation the best possible. The concierge center offers Free WIFI, copy and fax services, newspapers, UPS, and more! And speaking of tours, we were privileged enough to get to take a tour of Tybee with Mary Anne Street, another treasure of Tybee Island. One of the many hats Mary Anne wears has been as a part-time teacher, and her love for kids really shows. She gave us a great overview of the island, but made time to share stories that even our 5 year old found fascinating. She told us about Spanish moss, that's not Spanish, and not actually moss, but is where the saying, "Don't let the bed bugs bite" came from. She advised that a microwave would have come in handy to kill the bugs in the Spanish moss before they used it for stuffing for their mattresses in the 17th century. Among the highlights of the area, she took time to introduce us to the subtleties of Tybee like the heavenly scent of Confederate Jasmine that drapes balconies and fences. As you can see the hospitality is superb and vacation home rentals make welcoming stays for families, multi-generational families, and reunions. For larger groups, several houses can be rented side by side.

To make your trip complete, you should meet up with Tim from Tim's Beach Gear. Tim provides wonderful bike and beach rentals, and is equipped to meet all your baby gear needs! With families trading in Suburbans for smaller vehicles, it has become impossible to pack up the baby's room and take it with you. Just call Tim before or after you arrive, and he will deliver your baby essentials right to your door. From high chairs to cribs, and jogging strollers to baby cabana beach tents, Tim's got it all!

Today, kids are often overly entertained, but not necessarily making real connections. Taking in Tybee combines entertainment, fun, education, and connections with highly interesting and colorful characters. At only 4 1/2 hours from the south side of Atlanta, Tybee Island provides a perfect destination for weekend get-aways, vacations, and reunions of all kinds. Visit their website at www.tybeevisit.com for more information.