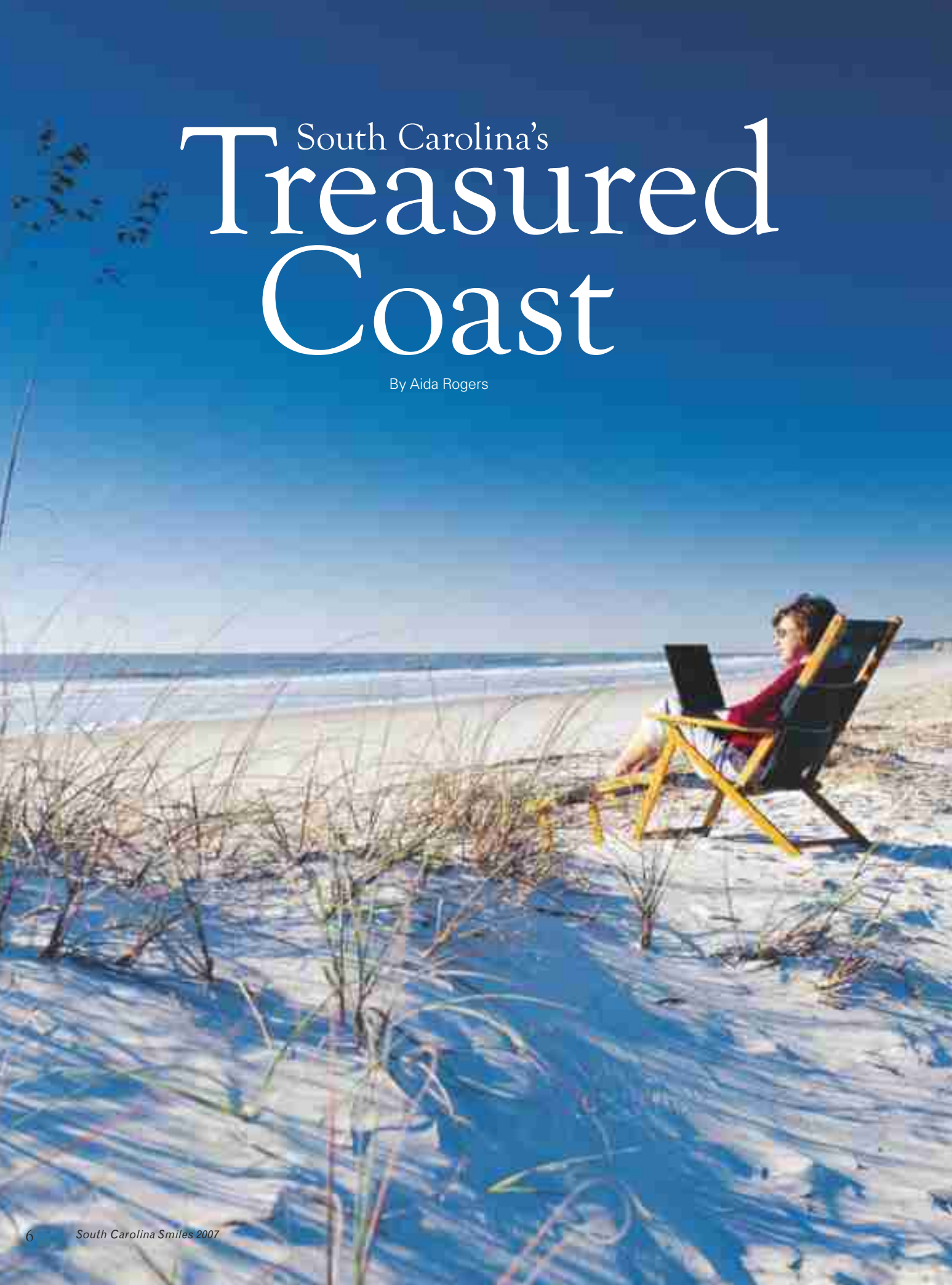


# South Carolina's Treasured Coast

By Aida Rogers



"Living in Beaufort is like falling in love." That's one of Tom Garrett's favorite sayings, and as if to prove his point, he'll squirt a little cocktail sauce on a saltine cracker and present this "Lowcountry hors d'oeuvre" to you as if it were the finest caviar. And it is, especially when you're waiting for that pot of steamed shrimp, corn and sausage to arrive at your table. This pungent mix—called Beaufort Stew, Frogmore Stew or Lowcountry Boil—defines South Carolina's Treasured Coast. It's casual, tasty and hands-on fun.

Garrett, a businessman, discovered years ago the area that extends down the South Carolina coastline from Beaufort to Daufuskie Island. And like many, he became enchanted with its offerings. Perhaps its chief one is water—flowing through marshes and rivers, spooling into lagoons and rushing under bridges to the ocean. Fish, fowl and humans have cohabitated here for centuries. The earliest proof is

began arriving in the 1520s, followed by the French in 1563. They struggled and left. It was the British settlement of Beaufort in 1711 that "took." Beaufort is South Carolina's second-oldest city, following Charleston (then Charles Towne), which was settled in 1670. Because the city was used as a Union hospital zone during the Civil War, Beaufort's 18th- and 19th-century homes weren't destroyed.

Today, you can take a relaxed carriage ride through Beaufort's nationally recognized historic neighborhoods and stroll through its inviting downtown. Boutiques, galleries and restaurants line Bay Street, and Waterfront Park beckons with its swings overlooking the Beaufort River. History lovers shouldn't miss the First African Baptist Church. Built in 1865, it's the first church in South Carolina built by freed slaves. Architecture fans will enjoy the Old Point neighborhood, where centuries-old homes are lovingly maintained.

leisurely fun. For a quiet moment, visit the Church of the Cross, built in 1854 in peaceful surroundings on the river.

Old churches are undeniably lovely in Beaufort County. Perhaps the most popular, though, are the ruins of two. Several miles inland, the Old Sheldon Church Ruins in the rural Sheldon community draw painters and explorers who marvel at the brick arches that survived fire and war. Those with more adventurous spirits can travel Land's End Road on St. Helena Island. A headless soldier supposedly haunts the ruins of the Chapel of Ease here in the evenings. Built in the 1740s, the chapel was destroyed by a forest fire in 1886. During the day, you can step around twisted vines and crumbling grave-stones. But mainly, you'll want to admire the ruins themselves. Made of brick and tabby—a now-lost recipe of lime, sand, oyster shells and water—the ruins seem to blend into the live oaks and Spanish moss.



Left: The Robert Trent Jones Golf Course at Palmetto Dunes. Center: Shopping delights in Bluffton. Right: Marsh, river and ocean offer options for kayakers.

the Shell Ring on Hilton Head Island, circa 1450 BC. Native Americans lived in a circular setting and tossed their used oyster shells behind them, thus creating a ring. Living here was good back then, too.

Daufuskie and Hilton Head Islands form the southernmost tip of the Treasured Coast. The towns of Beaufort, Bluffton and Hilton Head Island are the largest municipalities in Beaufort County. Also here are Port Royal, a historic waterside village, and St. Helena Island, home to farms of mouth-watering tomatoes and Penn Center, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began composing his "I Have a Dream" speech. Indeed, much of the Treasured Coast's treasure is history. The Spanish

A number of restored mansions, now operating as bed-and-breakfasts, provide an authentic "Old South" experience, with hammocks and cold drinks on wide porches. Romantic, it is.

Funky Bluffton, just south of Beaufort, overlooks the May River, and it's here where you can ramble down old roads canopied by live oaks shrouded in Spanish moss. "Bluffton is a state of mind" was a slogan coined years ago; somehow it perfectly describes the town's laid-back lifestyle. Small, independent publications represent this small, independent community. Today, there's the colorful *Bluffton Breeze* magazine; before, there was the quirky *Bluffton Eccentric* newspaper. Eclectic shops and unusual restaurants provide

But don't linger too long among the ruins. There is far too much to enjoy today. Try one of Hilton Head's many golf courses, take a horseback ride on the beach, rent a bicycle—and don't forget to jump into that beautiful ocean.

As Pat Conroy wrote in his prologue to *The Prince of Tides*, "My wound is geography." You'll understand why when you visit. This is a landscape so beautiful it hurts.

