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BOATERS GET IN ON ALL THE
FUN FOR THE ECLIPSE

LOOKING FOR A COOL WEEKEND GETAWAY FROM ATLANTA? There's a surprise jewel, less than three hours north - Capital City Lake Murray Country.

We were invited by the Capital City Lake Murray Tourism group to come to view the eclipse from Lake Murray, one of the primo spots in America along the Path of Totality. What we experienced was more than just an incredible eclipse. We stayed and experienced what they affectionately call The Jewel of South Carolina.

At one time, Lake Murray was the largest manmade lake in the United States but her beauty is why it's referred to as "The Jewel of South Carolina." This jewel was the perfect place to view the celestial event of our lifetime.

The day was also perfect. Not a cloud in the sky. Sean Deese, owner of Mountain Top Marine in Lexington, graciously picked us up at the Marina. Sean supplied us with a spacious pontoon boat from his huge selection of boats and we cruised the lake snacking on our "eclipse" goodies...Sun Chips, Milky Ways, Moon Pies, and Oreo cookies made to show the various stages of the eclipse. Many boats as well as thousands of eclipse viewers gathered at the dam and all around Lake Murray partying and waiting to experience this once-in-a-lifetime event.



SIX YEAR OLD CONNOR DEES VIEWS ECLIPSE
THROUGH SPECIAL GLASSES



BOATS GETTING READY FOR ECLIPSE
ON LAKE MURRAY

PURPLE MARTINS

Another phenomenon we felt blessed to witness also took place on Lake Murray, on the site of North America's first officially designated Purple Martin sanctuary. Tens of thousands (maybe hundreds) of purple martins flew in to roost on Bomb Island, a small uninhabited island in the middle of the lake. It truly is a sight to behold and you don't have to be a bird nerd to enjoy this spectacular natural phenomenon. I'm told it takes place every July and August.

TO THE NEWBERRY OPERA HOUSE PLEASE

Our adventure continued as we spent an afternoon exploring the charming historic town of Newberry. Once a sleepy little Southern town, Newberry has a downtown area is now bustling with lovely antique shops, boutiques, restaurants and, of course, beautifully preserved historic buildings, most of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

One of those so listed and the focal point of the town is the Newberry Opera House. This French Gothic beauty was built in 1888. It soon became the entertainment center of the Midlands with theatrical troupes, burlesque acts, musical groups and members of the famous Barrymore family.

The Opera House has now become nationally and internationally known and respected. So much so that other performing art centers are watching how a small town of around 10,000 can bring entertainment and educational programs that include the likes of Sawyer Brown, The Coasters, The Marshall Tucker Band, Arlo Guthrie and The Atlanta Pops. (An interesting tidbit is that a Japanese businessman flew over this year just to see the Atlanta Pops Orchestra



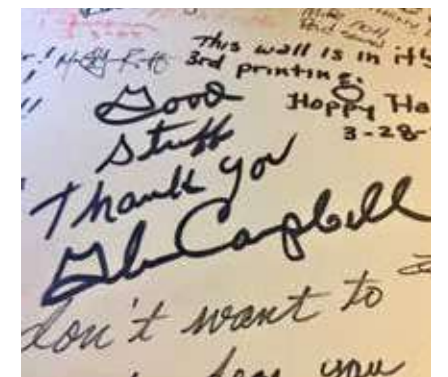
HISTORIC OPERA HOUSE IN DOWNTOWN NEWBERRY



FUN IN DOWNTOWN NEWBERRY IN FRONT OF OPERA HOUSE

in that magnificent building.) Each February the Opera house actually brings in an opera.

Entertainers love performing there and leave their signature on an autograph wall. The Drifters, Glen Campbell, Jack Klugman and Tony Randall and hundreds of other famous celebrities have penned their signature. MORE ►



GLEN CAMPBELL ON SIGNING WALL
AT OPERA HOUSE

PENELOPE'S SEAT – A REAL GHOST STORY

As is the case with many historic buildings, the Opera House apparently has a ghost — named Penelope. The story is told that young Penelope fell in love with a traveling vaudevillian, “The Professor.” They exchanged messages to each other in a book at the local bookstore and their love bloomed. Excited to see the world and young and in love, Penelope decided to run away with him. In his last note he tells her to wait for him at her seat in the balcony after his last performance. Penelope snuck out of her parent’s house and waited. As time went by she realized that he is not coming. She died soon after but, even today, there are those who claim to have seen the ghost of Penelope waiting for her beloved at Balcony Section A Seat 111. The seat can always be found turned down every performance no matter how many times it is placed back up.



PENELOPE'S GHOST SEAT AT NEWBERRY OPERA HOUSE



CHEF JOHN PERSONALLY SERVED US HIS BLACKENED TILE FISH WITH PINEAPPLE SALSA AND FENNEL SALAD



ONCE A BANK, ITS VAULT IN BACKGROUND NOW HOUSES FINE WINES. FLOWERS SIT ON BEAUTIFUL WOODEN ORIGINAL TELLER WINDOW.

FIGARO, FIGARO, FIGARO!

Tell me I didn't have one of the best meals ever in that charming little town. Just across the street from Newberry Opera House is an outstanding restaurant named Figaro! Chef John went off menu and prepared a five-course meal for us paired with wines for each course. It was over-the-top delicious.

Figaro-the Dining Room used to be an old bank. However, rather than money, its vault now houses a fabulous wine selection.

From the time you walk into this charming restaurant you're greeted pleasantly and the well-trained wait staff serving at just the right pace. Kudos to Chef John whose approach to fresh foods is to get the best possible products to serve his customer — from eggs to grain — from herbs to meat/seafood.



FIGARO BAR

He then prepares the dishes to perfection! You may well see a James Beard award someday for the chef of this delightful restaurant.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Figaro-the-Dining-Room/247509745415068>

HAVE A SODA – AT SODA CITY

Every Saturday the vibe of downtown Columbia is changed as four city blocks in town center are closed off. Artisans and other vendors come together to bring an upscale carnival/park-type atmosphere for what they call Soda City Market. You can have breakfast or lunch at one of the dozens of food vendors as numerous corner musicians entertain. Dog friendly!

THEN HAVE BOURBON

While downtown, meander over to Bourbon, a happenin' whiskey bar and Cajun-Creole restaurant. The establishment has more than 350 whiskeys, most of which are bourbon, rye or Tennessee whiskey. Each concoction comes with a unique name. I'm not usually a bourbon drinker, but being from Atlanta I had to order the “Frankly, My Dear,” made with Maker's Mark, vanilla syrup, black walnut bitters and flamed orange. Yes, it was delicious. When you find your special drink make sure you get an order of Jalapeno hush puppies. They go great with everything. I'd love to have them send me an order right now! MORE ►



FRANKLY MY DEAR, BOURBON GOES GREAT WITH JALAPEÑO HUSH PUPPIES AT BOURBON BAR



YUMMY HOMEMADE COCONUT CAKE AT FIGARO



ARTISANS SELL THEIR CRAFTS AT SODA CITY



SATURDAYS MEAN SODA CITY. STREETS ARE BLOCKED OFF FOR FUN ATMOSPHERE IN DOWNTOWN COLUMBIA.



ONE OF THE HOUSE BOURBON SPECIALS – MINT JULEP

LITTLE MOUNTAIN ANTIQUE MALL – ANOTHER NUGGET IN THE JEWEL

I admit it — I'm partial to small towns and quaint stores. So our host, Miriam Atria, arranged that our last experience to the Lake Murray area be to Little Mountain Antique Mall and Café. I don't have enough space to tell you how special it was, but suffice it to say I knew I was going to love it the minute we drove up.

A number of local items such as May's Vinaigrette and other specialty salsas and jellies were featured and sampled as you walk in, but turn the corner and you're immediately surrounded with beautiful antique furniture, vintage quilts, china, silver and other collectable nuggets.

Doug and Karen Quinn came to Little Mountain with nothing but a dog and very little money. No job, no relatives. They are now the owners of this fabulous antique store with more than 50 dealers displaying their merchandise throughout about 15,000 square feet.

Shop and Eat. I was blown away with the little café on the lower level (where they also have some select vintage cars and instruments for sale). It is almost worth the drive from Atlanta just to have their "Southern PB&J" and I don't mean peanut butter and jelly. That first bite of this grilled pimiento cheese, bacon and raspberry-jalapeño jelly sandwich on sourdough bread and you are hooked. Jim opted for the Quiche Lorraine — very tasty and cooked to perfection. For dessert, I opted for yummy cheesecake with blueberries but they have a variety of homemade goodies.

So what was going to be a short visit to Little Mountain Antiques on our way home turned out to be a half-day of browsing, eating and yes, making a purchase. Even half-day wasn't long



A FEW LITTLE MOUNTAIN FINDS



PBJ – PIMENTO CHEESE, BACON AND RASPBERRY-JALAPEÑO JELLY – WORTH THE DRIVE

enough, but now that I know about this little nugget, I bet I can entice a few girlfriends to go up for shopping and lunch.

littlemountainunlimited.blogspot.com

It's a short drive from Atlanta up I-85 to I-26. Take the toll around Greenville. Lake Murray is surrounded by Newberry, Lexington, Richland and Saluda counties. Visit: lakemurraycountry.com



QUICHE LORAINNE AT LITTLE MOUNTAIN ANTIQUES CAFE



The Julia, in SoFi MIAMI'S HIDDEN GEM

BY BRETT LANE

MIAMI CONJURES UP VISIONS OF SUN, sand and exciting nightlife, but travel south of Fifth, fondly known as the SoFi district, and the world quiets down just a bit. Still mere steps from the beach (where they offer free sunrise yoga 365 days a year), and close to the nightlife, the SoFi district is full of rich history and amazing places.

Enter **The Julia**, a small boutique hotel built upon the foundation of the oldest hotel in Miami Beach and named after the founder of Miami, Julia Tuttle. Stepping into The Julia is like visiting a friend's place. With a cozy lobby, decked out with Turkish pillows on comfy sofas, and artwork depicting Julia Tuttle's life, it feels as though you're visiting an acquaintance, not staying in a hotel.

Staying at The Julia provides a great jumping-off point to do so many activities. From visiting the beach to delicious dining and serious shopping, **SoFi** has it all within walking distance. A favorite place to dine any time of day is **Big Pink**. With omelets as big as your head and coffee cups

to match, Big Pink is a favorite breakfast spot.

After stuffing yourself, hop into an Uber and make your way to **Brickell City Center** to shop till you drop. With stores like Sephora, Apple, Cole Haan, Saks Fifth Avenue and more, there's something for everyone. And with its open-air, four-story design, you're protected from the elements but still feel as though you're outside. Wind down by having lunch at **Big Easy**. The menu is fresh, creative and reasonably priced. I had the special of the day, which was a surf and turf salad, including lobster and filet mignon in a delicious salad. Very tasty.

Back at the hotel, enjoy a freshly ground cup of Starbucks coffee (it's self-serve, so you may enjoy any time of day or night), or enjoy happy hour with wine and light bites in the lobby with other guests. The lobby becomes an interesting place around happy hour as travelers meet and share drinks; what a great way to meet future travel friends!

If you're looking to be amazed, visit **Cibo Wine Bar** and witness the two-story wine room equipped with 3,500 bottles of wine and a harnessed wine angel who soars up and down and all around to find your perfect bottle of wine. Serving big bold Italian dishes created from the open kitchen counter, it's a treat for the eyes as well as the taste buds.

Another fun thing to do is visit Miami's **Frost Science Center and Planetarium**. With four buildings, the Frost Planetarium, Aquarium, and North and West Wings, the entire family can immerse themselves in core science, learning about physics, light, human biology and, of course, the solar system and beyond. The Frost Planetarium is only the second of its kind in the United States, right behind Texas, so taking an afternoon to visit will be a memorable experience.

And last, but certainly not least, if you love art and food, check out the **Miami Culinary Tour**. The group begins at the Wynwood Walls, where you'll learn about

how the walls came to be, which artists' works are permanent as well as which are rotating. It is simply breathtaking to see these gigantic walls painted as the artists envisioned them.

There, you'll be met with a leader who will take you on a walking tour of **Wynwood**, and then you'll trek by foot throughout the district, stopping at five or so places, each providing a sample of something off their menu. It's a fantastic way to check out the district as well as check out a few spots to dine in one evening. My favorites were R House's Tuna Tartare and GK Bistronomie's Mahi-Mahi Ceviche. And at the end, we wound up at **Fireman Derek's World Famous Pies** for a slice of Key Lime Pie. What a sweet way to end the evening and the trip.

RESERVATIONS CAN BE MADE AT thejuliahotel.com, bigpinkmiamibeach.eat24hour.com, brickellcitycentre.com, cibowinebar.com, frostsience.org, miamiculinarytours.com, thewynwoodwalls.com



FROST SCIENCE CENTER AND PLANETARIUM



ASHLEY, A MIAMI CULINARY TOUR GUIDE



THE JULIA – FLAGLER KING



CIBO WINE ANGEL



BIG PINK TAKEOUT



THE JULIA – BREAKFAST