

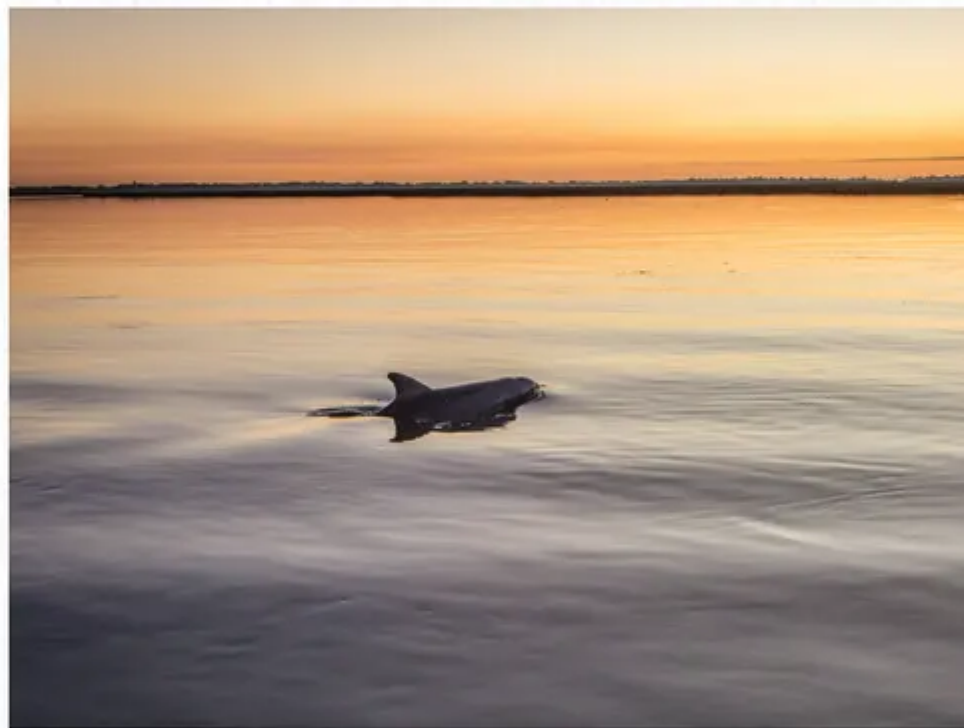


SPOTLIGHT ON TYBEE ISLAND

By Caroline Eubank

Outside the cobblestone streets and Spanish moss-covered oak trees of historic Savannah, Georgia, is the charming and quirky seaside community of Tybee Island. In a less than 30-minute drive from Savannah, visitors can be soaking up the sun on its white sand beach. The island was claimed by the Spanish in 1520 and it became a popular spot for pirates who roamed the Atlantic Ocean.

After the Civil War, tourism began in earnest as travelers came by steamship and railroad for Tybee's warm climate, which was then believed to have healing properties. Today, pirates are still part of the island's culture, as seen during the annual Tybee Island Pirate Festival, which brings together aspiring seafarers and landlubbers alike. The SCAD Sand Arts Festival is another fun event, which turns the shore into artwork with incredible sandcastles. Walking down Butler Avenue, you'll also find colorful murals and funky boutiques.



COASTAL CHARMS

Most travelers come to Tybee Island for the three miles of coastline where you can settle into your spot on the sand for a day of fun. There are five public beaches in total with easy access points. The Tybee Island Pier and Pavilion is one of the island's most iconic features. The original was a longtime gathering place, built in 1891.

It was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1996 for the Centennial Olympics, appearing in the Nicholas Sparks book-turned-movie *The Last Song* and the *Baywatch* reboot. You can pick up supplies there for dockside fishing.

Another must-see attraction is the black-and-white-striped Tybee Island Lighthouse and Museum, the oldest in the state. The first light station was built in 1736 to guide ships to safety.

The current version dates to after the Civil War and is now a museum with exhibits on the keepers and island history. If you're up for it, climb the 178 steps to an incredible view of the island.

MORE TO SEE

The Tybee Island Marine Science Center is the island's educational facility where visitors can learn about the coastal ecosystem as well as habitats with fish and reptiles. The center also works to return injured sea turtles to the ocean. Detour to Fort Pulaski National Monument, which was built in 1847 to protect the nation from overseas enemies.

It was attacked by Union troops during the Civil War and was later a location on the Underground Railroad. You can also bring your furry friends to roam the grounds, who can earn the title of "Bark Ranger" through Georgia State Parks.

If you're looking to connect with sea creatures, take a trip on one of the many dolphin-spotting boat tours that operate from the island, including Captain Derek's Dolphin Adventures.

Outfitters also rent out paddle boards if you're interested in going on your own. Head to Little Tybee Island, a remote stretch of land only accessible by boat, perfect for a private picnic or night of camping. Tybee Island is also where you might find highly prized megalodon teeth, the fossilized chompers of prehistoric sharks. Companies like Sundial Charters take you to the best spots in hopes of unearthing them.

WHERE TO EAT

You can't get any closer to fresh seafood than on Tybee Island, where restaurants source straight from the ocean. The Deck is the island's only beachfront restaurant, serving coastal cuisine from Australia, Hawaii and beyond on an open-air patio. At Sea Wolf, go for the oysters, hot dogs and craft cocktails. The Original Crab Shack is a Tybee Island staple, hosting the annual Buccaneer's Ball and serving up large portions of crab legs and other seafood.

Salt Island Fish and Beer serves creative takes on Southern and seafood dishes like blue crab poutine and oyster po boys.

And when you're ready for a dose of caffeine, there's no better place to start than Tybean Art & Coffee Bar, which serves coffee from a roaster in Atlanta, along with frappes and smoothies. For a cool-down during the summer months, grab a sweet treat at the Sugar Shack, a Tybee favorite for three decades.

