

Monday, November 17, 1980

I wish I was in
the land of cotton

Old homes there are not forgotten

Story and photos
By DORIS SCHARFENBERG

BATON ROUGE, La. — There are loads of pretty girls in Dixie but the reigning queens of today are the restored plantation houses.

Lovely in all proportions, they stand with the assurance of born beauties, surrounded by relics of oak trees and zealously protected by local historical societies.

More than 50 restored mansions and antebellum townhouses are open to the public in Louisiana. Although the myths of past bliss have been steadily exploding and the dreams are getting less starry-eyed, the houses built before the Civil War are showcases for incredible antiques, warehouses of historic information and examples of decorative art.

There is surprising variety in the architecture and most of the houses have gardens blooming with ideas for anyone with a trace of green thumb.

Many mansions are still lived in, still functioning as work centers for farms. They come in all sizes, although the wish to appear grander than one's neighbor often got out of control. The biggest houses are often the size of swank hotels.

It's an easy drive from Baton Rouge to more than half the plantation houses on the tourist department's list.

ROSEDOWN, at St. Francisville just north of the capitol, is a stunning place to begin. In 1835, when more than half the millionaires in America were amassing fortunes along the southern Mississippi valley, a cotton planter named David Turnbull and his garden-loving wife built Rosedown.

A canopy of immense oak trees covers the driveway to the house, an approach of such length that the features of the house are not easily seen from the front gate. The mansion from that point looks like a white altar in the apex of a great green cathedral and the whole vista is, understandably, a favorite of photographers.

Guides tell you how Rosedown was the glory of its day before the decades brought hard times and decay, and then how the place was rescued in true damsel fashion by a kindly godmother from Texas who began the restoration in 1956.

Rebuilt, repaired and replaced were the hand-carved mantels, wallpaper from Paris, china, silver, and items not often seen. On one dainty table sits a checker board that folds slyly into a set of books to avoid the tax once placed on games.

In a first-floor bedroom a 14-foot-high canopy bed glows with illusions of grandeur. It was ordered by his friends for statesman Henry Clay, to be a gift when he made it to the White House. Clay, however, never became president, the friendships soured, and poor Henry's bed was sold to Turnbull, who had to have a special wing with a high ceiling added to the house to accommodate the nightmare. Then, to assure Rosedown's symmetry, a wing was added to the other side.

If the gardens echo Versailles, it is because the Turnbulls toured Europe, taking notes and buying sculpture.

Rosedown is open every day except Christmas. Tickets are \$4 for adults for the whole house-garden experience.

CATALPA PLANTATION, just a mile south, is a cottage by comparison and one in which you can feel right at home. The house was set in the corner of about 30 acres of land — not a big layout even in those days. Its original owner, Mr. William Fort, was among the first to introduce into the parish, or county, "live" oaks, trees that shed leaves at intervals and thus remain green all year. Pathways of broken seashells and careful plantings lead to the ever-present veranda, an architectural necessity that helped keep the house cool.

Catalpa is closed in December and January, but open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from then on. Admission is \$3.50.

MAGNOLIA MOUND, on Baton Rouge's south side, is thought to be the state's oldest wooden structure. Built in 1791, it doesn't reach baronial dimensions either. But it is a modest white structure with a deep porch and dormer windows set among the oak tree close lawn. Inside are the original family portraits and gleaming tables set with heirloom china. Out back is a neat little white structure where the cooking was done.

Magnolia Mound is closed Mondays, but open for a small charge every week of the year.

OAKLEY PLANTATION was once the work place of master watercolorist John James Audubon, who was hired as a tutor by the owners. After giving his daily art lesson, he worked on his own priceless projects and painted many of

his famed "Birds of America" pictures in this house, filled now with original Audubon prints. The owners may be forgotten but the teacher certainly isn't.

The lovely antique-filled house is part of the Audubon State Commemorative Area, an expanse of moss-dipped oak trees, nature trails, gardens, picnic sites and a giftshop. Admission to the grounds is free but there is a small donation to see the house.

NOTTOWAY is billed as the South's largest plantation home and is certainly one of the most impressive. Well-preserved compared with many homes but still in moldering shape in 1970, Nottoway was purchased by Arlin Depee, who knows what he's about when it comes to putting these beauties back into debutante form. Dease's recently opened project is an all-American castle with 64 rooms under its slate roof and 22 enormous columns along the front and side.

The house blends Greek Revival and Italianate styles, boasts a white-floored ballroom with hand-carved Corinthian columns and dazzling plaster frieze-work. Crystal chandeliers, white marble mantels, Gone-with-the-Wind draperies; Nottoway is more real than the movies and you, too, can enter its state-by carved doors on any day but Christmas. Admission is \$4 for adults.

MOUNT HOPE PLANTATION, also the south side of Baton Rouge, was built around 1817 and radiates modest magnificence. The furnishings are Federal Sheraton and Empire and the lovely Mistress of the Manor is the sister-in-law of Nottoway's owner. You will find many family ties between these houses, just the way it once was. If you would like to try this life on for size, limited accommodations are available for overnight stays. Otherwise drop by any day you choose. Admission is charged.

For the names, addresses and exact locations of more than 50 of the great old houses of the South, write to the Louisiana Office of Tourism, Dept. LTX, P.O. Box 44291, Baton Rouge, La. 70804.

This Year....

GIVE A MOUNTAIN

3 DAY CHRISTMAS PACKAGES

BEGIN AT

\$131.25 per person, double occupancy

includes

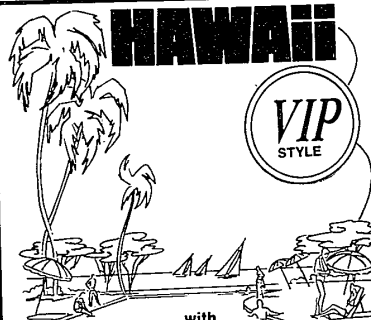
LODGING, LIFTS and LESSONS

Spend Christmas with us...

Your family will thank you all year.

Schuss Mountain

ACROSS THE BORDER FROM MANCENO, MI 49559
(313) 352-7676 or (600) 632-7170



with
CARTAN TOURS

**Vacation in Paradise
13 Hotel Nights**

- 2 Nights Naniloa Surf, Hilo
- 2 Nights King Kamehameha, Kona
- 3 Nights Royal Lahaina, Maui
- 2 Nights Coco Palms, Kauai
- 4 Nights Hawaiian Regent, Waikiki

Visit your Local Travel Agent to see why
Cartan is the Best

Cartan's Vacation in Paradise (VIP) is a trip of many extras. From the Lei Greeting when you arrive to the tipping and baggage handling that is taken care of, to the fantastic Aloha cocktail party as you leave this Vacation in Paradise. Find out the many extras you get with Cartan's Vacation in Paradise.

Contact any



Plymouth Travel Consultants
479 S. Main Street
455-6600

Rochester Suburban Travel
919 W. University
651-7762

ELLIOTT TRAVEL SERVICE

Farmington Hills 851-3900
Birmingham 642-1710
Fairlane 593-4600
Livonia 427-0820
Westland 522-4220
Greenfield 851-8822
Greenfield/9 Mile 569-2272
Troy 525-3680

West Bloomfield Travel Plus
6692 Orchard Lake Rd.
851-2402

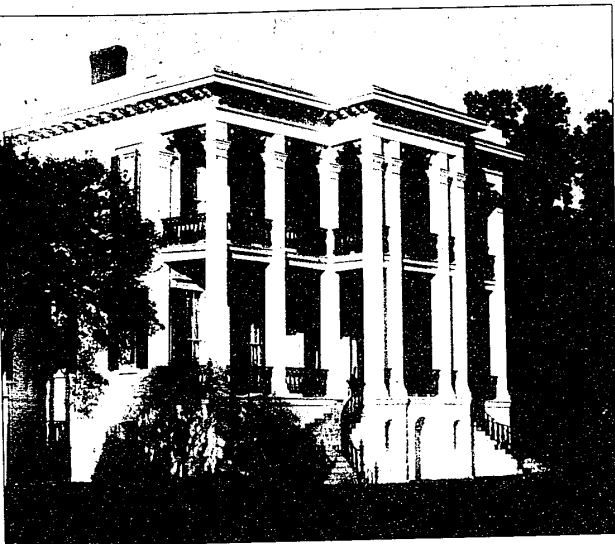
HUDSON'S TRAVEL SERVICE

OAKLAND 585-8020
WESTLAND 425-3386
NORTHLAND 569-5153
DOWNTOWN 223-2300
USE YOUR HUDSON'S CHANGE

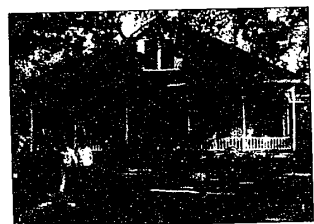
Birmingham Royal International Travel Service
31455 Southfield Rd.
644-1600

TRAVEL RAMA
TRAVEL AGENCY INC.

Oakland County
204 W. Fourth St.
548-2800 568-6338



Nottoway (above), billed as the South's largest plantation home, blends Greek Revival and Italianate styles and features Gone-with-the-Wind draperies. Watercolorist John James Audubon worked on many of his "Birds of America" paintings at the Oakley plantation (left). The Catalpa home (below) is one of the South's smaller plantation homes.



travel log
Iris Sanderson Jones
contributing travel editor

Save dollars when dialing abroad

Two years ago, a kindly European hotel manager warned me about the pitfalls of making long-distance telephone calls to the United States from his hotel.

Americans use the telephone without giving it a second thought, but they are often stunned when a hotel cashier presents them with a telephone bill for \$150 or \$200.

These outrageous bills for overseas calls occur because of surcharges and taxes added to your long distance call by hotels and governments, and because of higher foreign-dial rates.

I know that some effort has been made to change the system, but it apparently is still very much in operation.

CREDIT CARD charges are based on U.S. rates and those rates are much lower than most foreign telephone rates. The American Telegraph and Telephone Co. (AT&T) recently compared the cost of 14-minute calls from nine countries, not including any taxes or hotel surcharges. Their figures show how you can save telephone costs overseas by use of the credit card.

The most dramatic comparison was a call from Mexico City to Detroit, which cost \$64.43 when direct dialed and \$20.56 when made on an American

telephone credit card — a savings of 68 percent. Calls from France and Belgium cost \$58.96 and \$50.30, respectively, when direct dialed, but cost \$30.15 each by credit card, for a savings ranging from 40 to 49 percent. The same \$30.15 credit-card charge saved 43 percent from Norway and 40 percent from Spain.

South America showed less dramatic comparisons. A call from Venezuela showed a 13 percent savings. It actually cost slightly more to use a credit card from Argentina (\$33.10 direct dial versus \$34.25 via credit card).

WEST GERMANY, for unknown reasons, does not allow credit card calls.

The savings that I have mentioned are only the beginning because they only reflect the actual foreign telephone rate. Hotel surcharges can add up to 300 percent and taxes up to 50 percent to your call.

If you plan to call home from another country, take these two steps. Get a Michigan Bell telephone credit card, which is free. Pick up an AT&T publication called "Getting Around Overseas," which lists hotel participating in Teleplan, a program initiated by Ma Bell to limit surcharges. The pamphlet is available from Bell Telephone.