

# A Peach of a State

By *Patrick Jones*

IT WAS A REMARKABLE 50 TIMES THAT ARNOLD PALMER took the turn off Washington Road and onto Magnolia Lane, the main entrance to Augusta National Golf Club, to compete in The Masters Golf Tournament. His debut came in 1955, the same year that an unknown Mississippi crooner named Elvis signed a record deal with RCA. Ten U.S. Presidents later — Eisenhower to GW — Palmer chose to say his good-byes as a tournament competitor in 2004.

In between, Palmer won The Masters four times — 1958, 1960, 1962 and 1964 — while rivaling that singing Presley fellow for the unofficial “The King” title by the world’s adoring fans.

A ticket — or more accurately, badge — to The Masters is considered by many to be the toughest ticket to a sporting event. The Georgia city of Augusta hosts this major tournament each year in April. Golf fans coming out of winter hibernation consider The Masters as much a sign of spring as daffodils starting to bloom. Due to the demand, however, the closest most fans get to experiencing the flush of azalea blooms along Amen Corner, holes 11, 12 and 13 at Augusta National, is in front of a high-definition set tuned to CBS.

Some still make the pilgrimage, regardless, just to hang outside the gates and listen to the roars emanating from the crowd following great shots across the hallowed grounds of this Southern sanctuary.

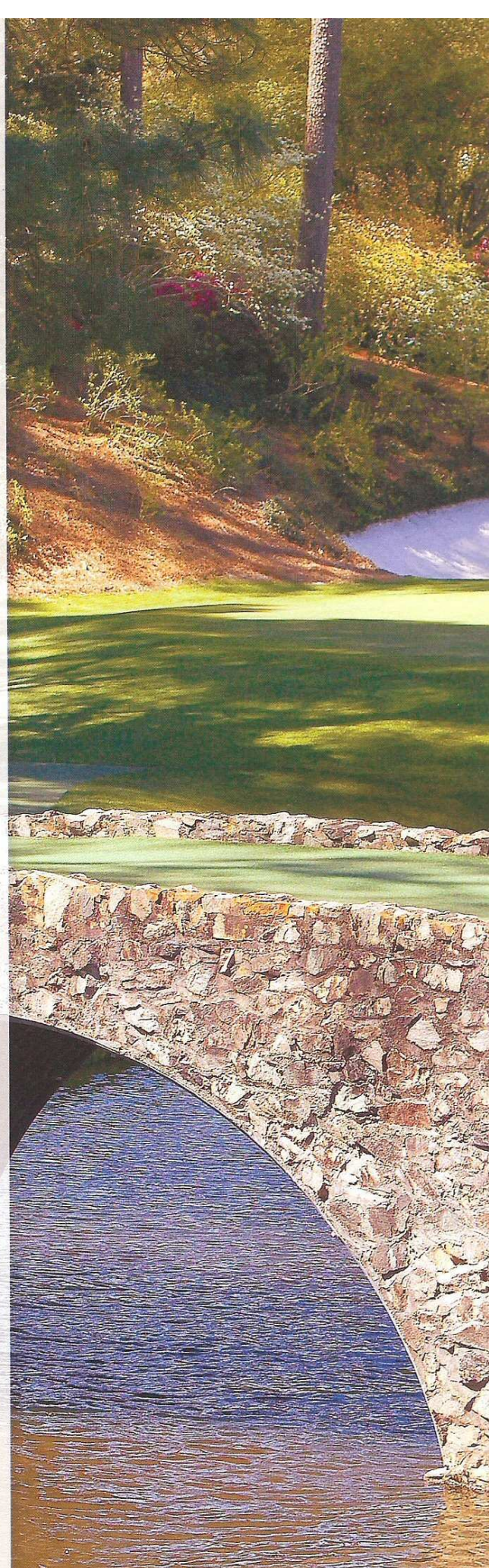
Masters badge — or not — Georgia is a mesmerizing state for visitors to partake. In fact, only one traveler ever documented, a Bill Sherman, plain hated Georgia on his initial pass through.

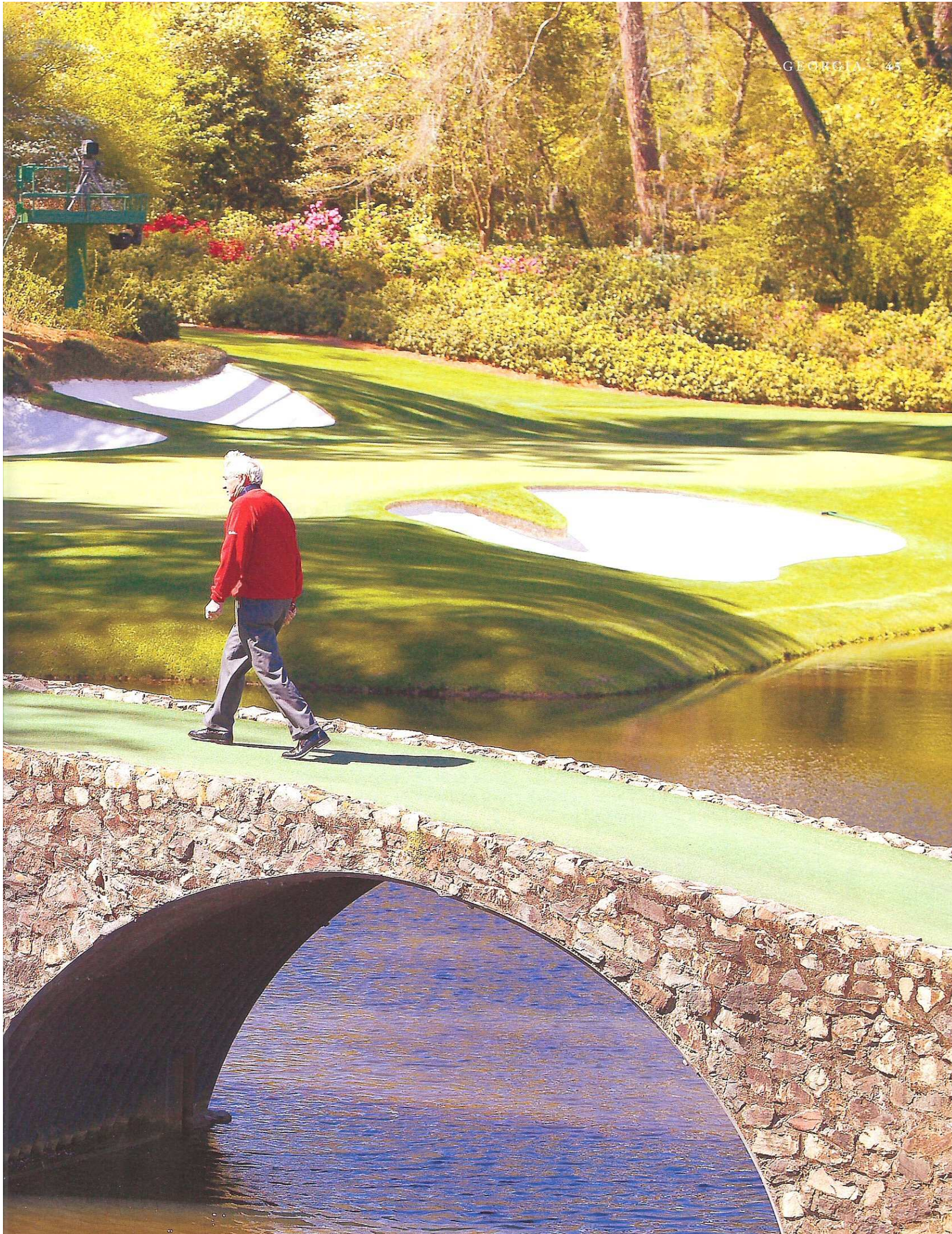
And it was his loss.

Sherman, an Ohio native, was in such a blinded rush on his programmed trip to the Georgia coast, and so incensed at the place, that he never considered slowing down to see the state’s roses, much less sniff any.

Did I mention that this assertive Northerner was also a serial arsonist? He tried his best to burn everything in the state to the ground during his frantic visit.

It is too bad that Union General William Tecumseh Sherman did not take time for a little sightseeing during his memorable Civil War junket through Georgia in





1864. General Bill, with a little rest and relaxation in Atlanta in the fall of that year, likely would have fallen for the city's charms and the state's numerous seductions. Perhaps Sherman would have reconsidered torching everything in his path on his historic March to the Sea. Maybe he would have rethought his tactic of capturing Georgia's port city of Savannah and effectively breaking the back of the Confederacy.

Nah. Probably not.

Fourteen decades have healed most — not totally all — of that spillover animosity.

Atlanta is now a vibrant cosmopolitan city and a worldwide business and vacation destination. General Sherman's flames, representing the region's embattled past, have been permanently replaced by the flames of possibility. The world watched as Muhammad Ali's unsteady hand lit the torch to open the 1996 Olympic Games and forever forge a new future for the city and the state.

Golf fans around the world know Georgia as the home of Robert Tyre "Bobby" Jones Jr. The Atlanta native is revered by most as the game's greatest amateur player.

Georgia proffers exceptional public and private golf opportunities across its broad geographical expanse. (The Peach State is the largest east of the Mississippi River.) Georgia also offers a plethora of other recreational, dining and entertainment options that can keep a tourist hopping from Ty Ty in the south to Tunnel Hill in the north.

For the sheer titillation of utilizing one ridiculous Georgia caricature, namely "The Dukes of Hazzard" television show, let's all hop through the car window into Bo and Luke Duke's bright orange Dodge Charger — nicknamed General Lee — wave goodbye to Daisy and Boss Hogg, peel some rubber and take a quick tour of the state.

First, let's tune in to the Georgia Artists channel on the muscle car's satellite radio. It's a mix of The Allman Brothers (Macon), Otis Redding (Macon), James Brown (Augusta), Atlanta Rhythm Section (Doraville), Ray Charles (Albany), R.E.M. (Athens) and Gladys Knight (Atlanta) without her Pips.

## AUGUSTA AND EAST GEORGIA

The starting point is Augusta. Kick it off with a round at Forest Hills Golf Course, where Bobby Jones made his Grand Slam of Golf in 1930. At dinnertime, if someone else missed that 2-footer on No. 18 and is footing the bill, head to Calvert's for elegant dining. The menu includes hand cut steaks, lamb and veal. Prefer barbeque and a beer? Stop by Sconyers. Some finger-licking fried chicken can be had at the aptly named Wife Saver Restaurant, which stands by the moral integrity of its slogan of "Put a Little South in Your Mouth." If Mediterranean cuisine is more to your taste, Luigi's is a top choice.

Be sure to take a stroll at Augusta's Riverwalk attraction, a tree-lined walkway that runs along the banks of the Savannah River. There are numerous restaurants, pubs, hotels, and historic sites along the way.

Broad Street is the city's most entertaining thoroughfare. Here you will find Artist's Row, a collection of studios, galleries and custom frame shops. Numerous antique shops can also be found on the upper portion of Broad Street.

If carousing is on your agenda, readers of Augusta Magazine voted Modjeska on Broad Street as the best singles spot, best dance spot, best late night spot and the best place to be seen.

OK, back in the vehicle and off we head west on Interstate 20 toward Georgia's capital city of "Hotlanta." Try not to salivate while passing by Reynolds Plantation on Lake Oconee in Greensboro. Put it on the checklist to stop back by on a later date to sample its 99 holes of world-class golf.

I hate to break it to "Gone With The Wind" fans, but Scarlet O'Hara's Tara Plantation was only an amalgamated creation in the mind of author Margaret Mitchell. That reality hasn't stopped countless Georgia visitors from trying to find it anyway. Authentic antebellum mansions do still abound in Georgia, however. Stop by the town of Madison, just off I-20, in the heart of Georgia's Antebellum Trail. The town bills itself as "The Town Sherman Refused to Burn." (General Bill must have been having a good day.)

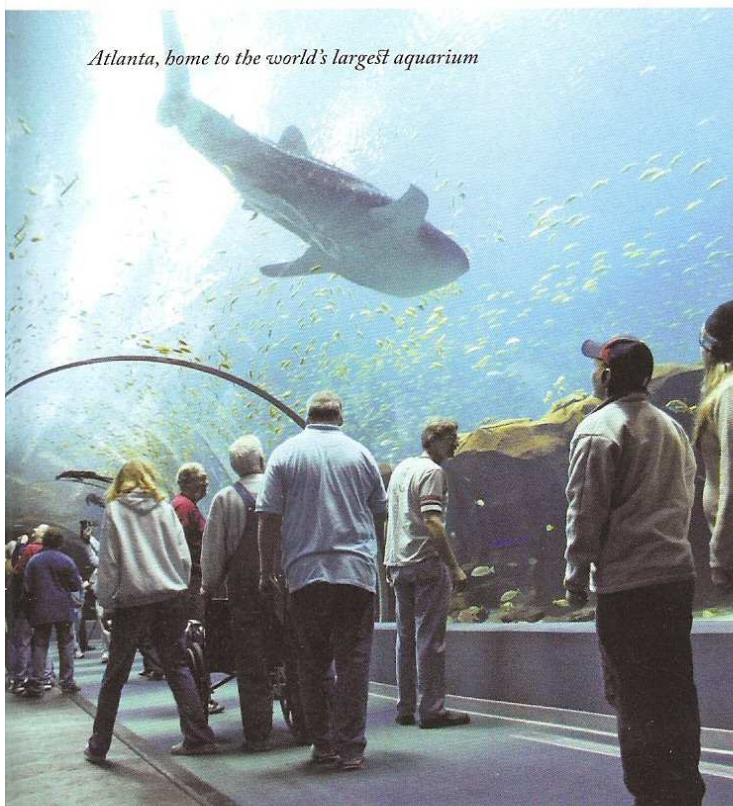
## ATLANTA

Rolling into Atlanta, it's time to quell those fast-food hunger pangs. First-time visitors must hit The Varsity on the edge of the Georgia Tech campus. It's the world's largest drive-in restaurant. Walk in or stay in your vehicle and let a car hop take your order. It's critical to know the lingo. A naked dog to walk with strings grants you a plain hotdog to go with a side of fries. The Varsity processes a mind-boggling two miles of hotdogs per day.

If you are interested in more exclusive dining, try Chops on West Paces Ferry or Bones on Piedmont Road. Sotto Sotto in Inman Park will satisfy the lovers of Italian food.

Want to relax with a libation and a fantastic view of the city? Ride the elevator to the Sun Dial Restaurant, 73 stories up on the top of downtown's Westin Peachtree Plaza. A slowly rotating cocktail lounge provides panoramic visions from atop the skyline.

A short walk away is the Georgia Aquarium, the world's largest aquarium with 8 million gallons of fresh and marine water. It features more than 100,000 animals representing 500 species from around the world.



*Atlanta, home to the world's largest aquarium*

Next, stroll through Centennial Olympic Park on your way to the CNN Center, hub of the world's largest news-gathering organization. Tours are available. Next up is a visit to Underground Atlanta, located at the heart of Atlanta's post Civil War reconstruction. It is now a bustling shopping, dining and entertainment district.

Atlanta was home to civil rights leader Martin Luther King. The King Center offers exhibits highlighting his life and teachings.

For some eclectic dining, shopping and nightlife, Atlanta's Virginia-Highlands district is a best bet, along with similar offerings in the trendy Buckhead area.

For golf, try the Palmer-designed Canongate at Eagle Watch, on the north side of the city. You'll have to make friends with a member to get on, but it's worth it. If a north-side friend proves hard to find, look on the south side. Another Palmer course at Whitewater Creek is also Canongate, also members-only, and also worth it.

A trip to Stone Mountain is also recommended while in the Atlanta area. Located 16 miles east of the city, it is the world's largest granite outcropping — rising 1,700 feet from ground level — with the world's largest bas-relief carving that features Confederate leaders Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis. (General Bill definitely did not fit into the picture on this one.)

Stone Mountain offers a multitude of recreational opportunities. Take the 1.3-mile hiking trail to the top or ride the cable car. Enjoy a laser show, held on scheduled nights from March through October. Play any of the immediate area's 36 holes of golf, including a Robert Trent Jones original. Or, just 20 minutes to the south, the Palmer-designed Cherokee Run Golf Club offers what Palmer himself has called, "one of the great golf courses of the world." Well worth a look.

### NORTHEAST GEORGIA

Heading out of Atlanta up Interstate 85 towards South Carolina, pull into Chateau Elan Winery & Resort in Braselton. Sip some cabernet and relax in the spa. Did I mention golf? The late Gene Sarazen once hosted his Sarazen World Open Championship on the Chateau Elan courses.

Next, it's time to shop 'til you drop at the Tanger Outlets, located a few exits north in aptly named Commerce. It is home to more than 120 outlet stores.

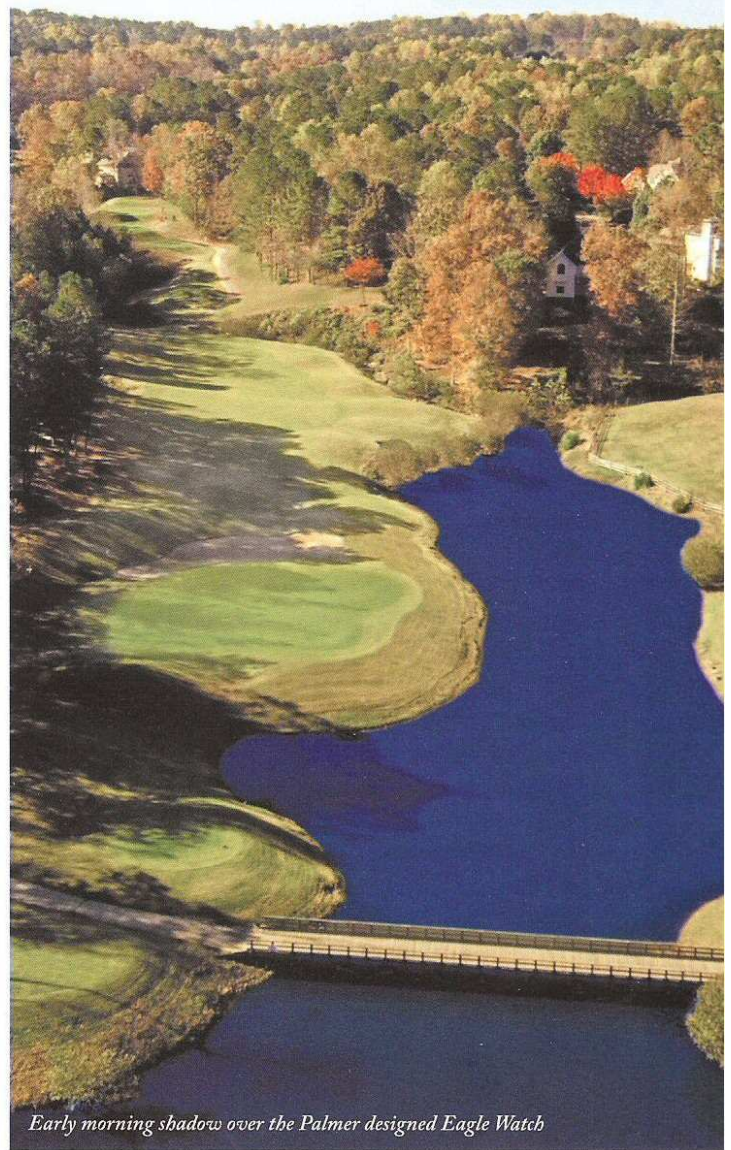
If you are interested in strolling across a bustling college campus, the University of Georgia in Athens is less than 20 miles south from Commerce.

### NORTH GEORGIA MOUNTAINS

North Georgia is dominated by significant geological uplift. The state's highest point, Brasstown Bald near the town of Young Harris, rises 4,784 feet above sea level.

Mountain lovers can spend days in this region. Dahlonega is a primary focal point. It is the site of an 1800's gold rush that preceded the more famous one in California. Get eats at the Smith House. There you dine at large tables with family-style platters piled high with fried chicken, sweet baked ham, roast beef, bowls full of dumplings and fried okra.

After a nap, take the short drive to Amicalola Falls, the



*Early morning shadow over the Palmer designed Eagle Watch*

highest waterfall along the Eastern Seaboard.

The Bavarian-themed hamlet of Helen is another mountain town worthy of a few hours of exploration.

Chickamauga National Battlefield and Cloudland Canyon State Park are alluring spots in the northwest corner of the state.

It's time to visit another neck of the woods.

### CENTRAL AND WESTERN GEORGIA

Macon and Columbus dominate the middle region of the state. The 18,000-square-foot Hay House mansion is one of Macon's top attractions.

Callaway Gardens Resort lies 30 miles north of Columbus in Pine Mountain. It is arguably the state's best all-inclusive destination. It offers guests a gamut of activities: golf, water skiing, tennis, skeet shooting, fly fishing, biking, hiking and even a flying circus. Guests with more tranquil goals can tour a world-class botanical garden, flutter inside one of North America's largest butterfly conservatories and meditate in a memorial chapel. The Callaway Gardens Mountain View course once hosted the PGA Tour's Buick Challenge.

Just a short drive away is Warm Springs, home to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Little White House cottage. It is where he died in April 1945. You can view his unfinished portrait.

### SOUTH GEORGIA

If you packed your Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, we'll head south and visit Plains, home of former President Jimmy Carter. President Carter still teaches Sunday School at Maranatha Baptist Church. He and his wife, Roslynn, pose for pictures with guests after the worship service.

Change into the boots and jeans to shoot across the bottom of the state to the Okefenokee Swamp. You can take a guided tour through this 438,000-acre wetland or rent canoes and kayaks. Alligators are abundant.

### COASTAL GEORGIA

Next up is Savannah, Georgia's renowned port city. Quench that traveling thirst with the city's best sweet tea at Carey Hilliard's. Locals rank Pearl's Saltwater Grill and Tybee's Crab Shack as the best seafood destinations. Need to cut a rug? Dance the night away at Deja Groove.

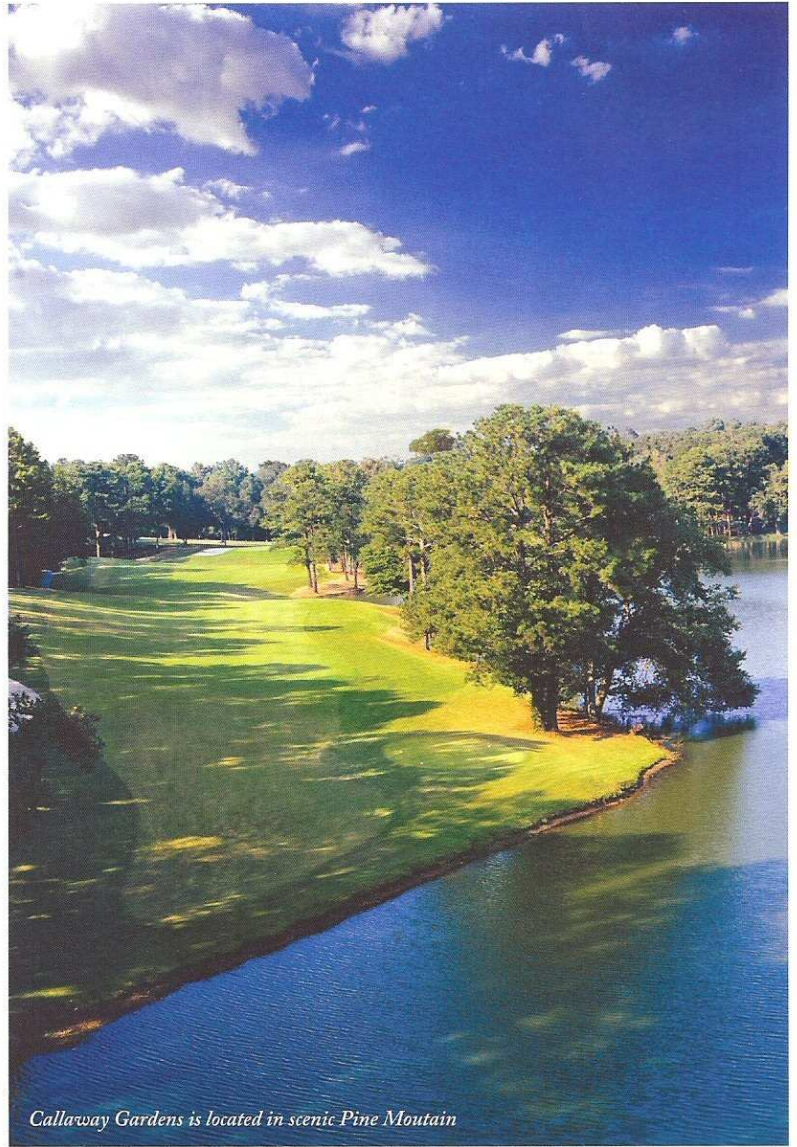
You must sightsee on Savannah's River Street, home to one of the nation's best St. Patrick's Day celebrations. Bars, nightclubs and dining options are numerous here.

Side trips to some of the nearby coastal islands, including St. Simon's Island and Jekyll Island, are highly recommended. Same with a trip to The Landings on Skidaway Island, which features a couple of Palmer courses. The great courses in this amazing community are members-only, but guests are allowed to try them out with a "discovery" package. Worth a call.

It's time to head back to Augusta. It's been a fun trip, and, yes, we missed a number of places worthy of a visit, but the General Lee is starting to burn a little oil. It's time to get him back to the garage so Cooter can start on a tune-up.

Hope y'all enjoyed the ride. ■

*Patrick Jones is an Atlanta native now living in Cary, North Carolina. He is not related to fellow Atlanta native Bobby Jones, which one swing of the club will prove.*



*Callaway Gardens is located in scenic Pine Mountain*

*Photo: Courtesy of Callaway Gardens*

*The pristine Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is home to a large alligator population*



*Photo: Ryan Hagerity*