

Cornell University

## Cornell's Adult University (CAU)

**CAU Study Tour:**  
**Celebrating Gullah Geechee Culture in Georgia and South Carolina**  
**October 9 - 13, 2026**

Led by Ambre Dromgoole, Assistant Professor of Africana religions and music in the Africana Studies & Research Center



# A Letter From Our Expert

## Dear CAU Travelers:

My interests in Africana religions, music, and culture did not begin in a classroom, movie theatre, or Broadway production. They began with childhood summers spent anticipating family reunions held on the Georgia coast between Savannah and St. Simons Island. My family, those of us based in Nashville, TN, would pack up our 15-passenger van and make the eight-and-a-half-hour journey - a drive that inevitably stretched to ten with pit stops and bathroom breaks - to reconnect with our southern-most loved ones.

As one of the younger cousins, I trailed behind my older counterparts with feet trudging through sandy beaches and eyes peering suspiciously at low-hanging vines that provided no clue as to their possible poisons and dangers. At times we ferried to another nearby island, Cumberland, where wild horses roamed free, stories of indigenous settlement were told, and vestiges of their cultural influence remained despite involuntary displacement. When back in Savannah and St. Simons Island, the cross-pollination of Afro-diasporic traditions and indigenous ritual surrounded me, from the rice and seafood rich culinary offerings to the embodied engagements with space, spirit, and sound.

Suffice it to say, my excitement for this trip is not simply animated by a distant interest in this culturally rich coastal landscape, but in my desire to return to a home-like place that shaped and molded who I am today as a scholar, artist, and person in elemental ways. Though this is not my first go-round at the helm of a marvelous CAU adventure, I have taught courses for several summers and accompanied last year's transformative trip to Havana, Cuba, this is the first for which I share both scholarly and intimate connections to the physical, geographical location and its dynamic offerings. Excited is an understatement. I am honored, truly. Throughout the course of the trip, I will share lectures that act as bridges to learning experiences and activities that will be life changing.

While in Cuba, I began to say the phrase "you will have experiences here that make your world bigger through exposure and knowledge. It is my job to make it smaller again by connecting these experiences to the places that you call home, whether that be Ithaca or elsewhere."

So, welcome home.

Sincerely,

*Ambre Dromgoole*

Assistant Professor of Africana Studies and Music, Cornell University

**Celebrating Gullah Geechee Culture in Georgia and South Carolina**

To register, contact Distant Horizons at [emilyw@distant-horizons.com](mailto:emilyw@distant-horizons.com) or 562-983-8828

# Celebrating Gullah Geechee Culture in Georgia and South Carolina

*The Gullah Geechee region stretches along the Sea Islands and coastal Lowcountry from North Carolina through South Carolina, Georgia, and into northern Florida, defined by a fragile landscape of barrier islands, tidal marshes, estuaries, and winding rivers shaped by the Atlantic's rhythms. This geography—isolated by water and rich in rice-growing wetlands—allowed enslaved Africans and their descendants to preserve African languages, agricultural knowledge, spiritual traditions, and communal lifeways with exceptional continuity, creating one of the most distinctive African American cultures in the United States.*

## Exploring Gullah Geechee History and Living Culture

**Butler Island Plantation:** Explore a former tidewater rice plantation, now owned and operated by The Nature Conservancy, where enslaved West African expertise in water management and rice cultivation generated immense wealth for coastal planters. Walking the remains of dikes, fields, and industrial structures reveals how African agricultural knowledge shaped both the Lowcountry landscape and the foundations of Gullah Geechee culture.

**Sapelo Island & Hog Hammock Community:** Visit one of the most intact living Gullah Geechee communities in the United States, guided by master basket maker Yvonne Grovner. Through homesteads, churches, and shared meals, experience how land, kinship, foodways, and artistry sustain a vibrant culture rooted in ancestral continuity.

**Ring Shout with the McIntosh County Shouters:** Encounter one of the oldest surviving African American spiritual traditions in the nation. The ring shout—combining call-and-response singing, rhythmic movement, and devotion—offers a powerful expression of African spiritual survival and communal worship preserved for generations in coastal Georgia.

**The “Weeping Time” & Gullah Geechee Storytelling in Savannah:** Reflect at the site of the 1859 mass slave auction that violently fractured families from Butler Island, one of the largest such sales in U.S. history. Guided by a Gullah Geechee truth-teller, this experience connects historical trauma to living cultural memory through storytelling, song, and place-based interpretation.

**St. Helena Island & the Penn Center:** Visit the most important institutional center of Gullah Geechee education and political life, founded during Reconstruction as the first Southern school for formerly enslaved people. From early landownership and literacy to civil rights organizing, the Penn Center reveals the Sea Islands' central role in shaping Black self-determination in American history.



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# FACULTY EXPERT:

CAU adventures are accompanied by some of Cornell's most engaging faculty members. During your tour, these experts will provide lectures on the subjects about which they are most passionate; their enthusiasm shows in the rave reviews we receive from travelers. With extensive experience in both the focus and location of your trip, and access to behind-the-scenes tours, our faculty experts will help you delve deeply into the culture and history of the places you visit.



## Aambre Dromgoole,

Assistant Professor,

Africana Studies & Research Center

Hailing from Nashville, TN, Ambre Dromgoole is an experienced music scholar, artist, curator, and consultant who specializes in subjects relating to music, religion, race, gender, performance, and popular culture, all of which she brings to her role as Assistant Professor of Africana Studies and Music at Cornell University. Dr. Dromgoole received her B.A. in Religion and Musical Studies from Oberlin College and Conservatory, her M.A. from Yale Divinity School and Institute of Sacred Music, and Ph.D. from the Departments of African American Studies and Religious Studies at Yale University. Her current book project *There's a Heaven Somewhere: Sound and Sanctuary in the Lives of Gospel Blues Women*, documents a collective of twentieth century Black women sacred musicians whose transgressions led to innovations, which were bolstered and animated by their relationships with each other in and out of time and institutions.

She has published and presented work for the Association of Black Women Historians, Journal of Popular Music Studies, Society for American Music, American Academy of Religion, and the Society for Ethnomusicology. She was awarded a Ford Dissertation Fellowship for the 2022-2023 academic year and has previously held fellowships with the Louisville Institute, Center for Lived Religion in the Digital Age at St. Louis University, the Sacred Writes project, and the Center for Material and Visual Cultures of Religion at Yale University.

Dr. Dromgoole serves as Performance Review Editor for *Ecumenica: Journal of Performance and Religion*, sits on the board of the Journal of Africana Religions, and is a steering committee member for the Afro-American Religious History Unit of the American Academy of Religion. She frequently collaborates with the Forum for Theological Exploration and Cornell's Center for Racial Justice and Equitable Futures. Dr. Dromgoole strives to ensure that her work is accountable and accessible to her communities. In so doing, she has been featured as an expert scholar for the PBS series *Ritual* and in Religion News Service. Her writings can be found in *Reveal Magazine* and her voice can be heard on the *Classical Ideas Podcast*. Additionally, she has and continues to collaborate with both local and national organizations such as The United Methodist Church, Sound Diplomacy and the Center for Music Ecosystems, the National Museum of African American Music, and the Nashville Symphony. For the past several years she has collaborated with the Oral History of American Music Project (OHAM) and the Program for Music and the Black Church at Yale University to conduct in-depth interviews with luminaries of Black sacred music. Her interviews with The Clark Sisters, Tramaine Hawkins, Bebe Winans, Richard Smallwood, and Kirk Franklin are featured in the OHAM archive. She is a board member for the Ithaca Social Service League and More Than A Walk, Inc. as well as the co-chair of the Oberlin Alumni Association of African Ancestry (OA4).

In her spare time, Dr. Dromgoole enjoys reading, writing, boxing, auntie-ing, and performing around Ithaca with her band *The Ambre Lynae Project*.

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# YOUR ITINERARY

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## Friday, October 9 - Darien, Georgia

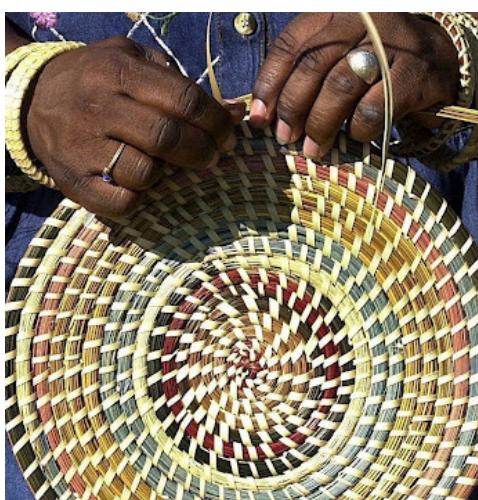


Arrive at Brunswick Golden Isles Airport and transfer to Darien, one of Georgia's oldest coastal towns. Settle into ***Oaks on the River Resort***, overlooking tidal marshes and moss-draped oaks.

This afternoon, visit The Nature Conservancy's recently acquired **Butler Island Plantation**, a former tidewater rice estate whose wealth depended entirely on the agricultural knowledge and labor of enslaved West Africans. Walk among the remains of dikes, rice fields, and industrial structures while exploring how African expertise shaped Carolina Gold rice cultivation—and how isolation allowed Gullah Geechee language, crafts, and spiritual traditions to endure. Meet with descendants and local preservation advocates who continue efforts to protect Butler Island amid environmental threats and recent losses.

Meet your fellow travelers over a glass of wine and a dinner featuring local cuisine this evening. **(D)**

## Saturday, October 10 - Darien, Georgia



Travel by ferry to **Sapelo Island**, one of the most intact Gullah Geechee communities in the United States, shaped by plantation agriculture established after Thomas Spalding acquired the island in 1802. More isolated than most Sea Islands, Sapelo remains a living cultural landscape where African-descended families have sustained language, land stewardship, foodways, and spiritual traditions from enslavement through Reconstruction and into the present.

Guided by **Yvonne Grovner**, a master basket maker and nationally recognized cultural bearer, explore **Hog Hammock**, the island's historic settlement, where kinship networks and ancestral landholdings continue to define community life. Visits include the **Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society** and **First African Baptist Church**, enduring institutions at the heart of cultural preservation and worship.

At the ruins of the **Spalding plantation**, including tabby structures and the Reynolds Mansion, learn how enslaved West Africans powered one of the coast's most experimental and profitable estates while shaping the foundations of Gullah Geechee culture.

Return to Darien for an evening with the **McIntosh County Shouters**, whose ring shout—recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts—offers a powerful, living expression of African spiritual resilience in American history.

**(B,L,D)**



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## Sunday, October 11 - Beaufort, South Carolina



Depart north through **Harris Neck**, once a thriving Black coastal community displaced during World War II by federal seizure of land. Meet with descendants engaged in long-term advocacy for restitution and recognition.

Continue to Savannah to reflect at the site of the 1859 **“Weeping Time,”** one of the largest slave auctions in U.S. history, which violently dispersed families from Butler Island. Join a Gullah Geechee storyteller for an interpretive walk exploring West African cultural survivals in Savannah’s historic landscape.

Transfer to the **Beaufort Inn**, located in the heart of downtown Beaufort with locally inspired interiors throughout.

Enjoy an introductory walking tour of the **Old Point district**, highlighting Reconstruction-era history and Sea Islands culture.

(B,L)



## Monday, October 12 - Beaufort, South Carolina

Travel this morning to **St. Helena Island**, a cornerstone of Gullah Geechee history where landscape, memory, and community illuminate the educational, political, and spiritual evolution of post-emancipation Black life.

Visit the **Penn Center**, founded as the first Southern school for formerly enslaved Africans and now a National Historic Landmark, where Reconstruction ideals, Gullah cultural preservation, and Civil Rights organizing converged, including meetings led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Enjoy lunch at **Gullah Grub**, where seasonal, locally sourced dishes reflect traditional foodways and the enduring relationship between culture, land, and sustainability.

Continue to the **Mary Jenkins Praise House**, a rare surviving example of sacred community spaces that nurtured African spiritual traditions, communication, and justice in an era of enslavement and segregation.

Return to Beaufort for a farewell dinner, concluding a day that traces resilience and self-determination from slavery through Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement, fittingly observed on Indigenous Peoples’ Day.

(B,L,D)



## Tuesday, October 13 - Departure

Transfer to Hilton Head Airport for flights home.

(B)

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# Your Accommodations

## OAKS ON THE RIVER RESORT, DARIEN

Oaks on the River Boutique Hotel offers elegant, boutique-style accommodations set on a high riverfront bluff in historic Darien, Georgia, with scenic views over the marshes and Altamaha River that define the Lowcountry landscape. Guest rooms range from charming historic views to spacious riverfront balconies, all designed for comfort and relaxation amid refined Southern hospitality. The property features an acclaimed on-site restaurant and bar, curated local art, and a welcoming ambiance that blends modern luxury with the natural beauty and heritage of coastal Georgia.



## BEAUFORT INN, BEAUFORT

The Beaufort Inn in Beaufort, South Carolina, is a charming historic boutique hotel nestled in the heart of the town's nationally significant Historic District, offering easy access to cobblestone streets, antebellum architecture, and waterfront vistas. The inn combines timeless Southern hospitality with a variety of thoughtfully appointed accommodations—from classic guest rooms in the original 1897 mansion to garden-view suites and cozy cottages set among lush courtyards—each reflecting Lowcountry charm and comfort. Guests enjoy amenities like complimentary breakfast, inviting outdoor spaces with rocking chairs and fire pits, and a central location perfect for exploring local history, art galleries, and Lowcountry cuisine on foot.



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# Terms And Conditions

## Prices

A deposit of \$1,000 per person to Distant Horizons is required to reserve a space on this trip. Deposits are applied to your full program charge.

Register now as spots are limited!

Prices for this program are as follows

- Double occupancy: \$3,600
- Single supplement: \$810  
(limited availability)

Full payment will be due 60 days prior to departure. If registering after this date, payment of the full program charge is due at time of registration.

## Unless otherwise specified, program charges include

- The full educational program
- Expertise of CAU faculty
- Distant Horizons tour manager who will travel with group throughout
- Pre-trip reading materials
- All accommodations during the program
- Meals specified on the itinerary with wine included at the welcome and the farewell dinner. All other days, alcohol is "pay as you go."
- Site visits and entrance fees
- Transportation in a private motor coach throughout.
- Basic gratuity to guides and drivers

## Unless otherwise specified, program charges do not include

- Airfare to and from your destination
- Trip Insurance
- Arrival or departure airport transfers
- Meals and beverages not specified in the itinerary
- Personal expenses such as laundry, telephone calls, and email service
- Any item not listed

## Refunds and Cancellations

If you need to cancel your registration, you must send written notification of your wish to withdraw to Emily Whitson from Distant Horizons at [emilyw@distant-horizons.com](mailto:emilyw@distant-horizons.com). Your official date of withdrawal will be the date on which this email is sent.

- For cancellations at or more than 60 days prior to departure, the cancellation charge is \$500.
- For cancellations between 59 days and 30 days prior to departure, the cancellation charge is 50% of the trip cost.
- No refunds shall be issued for cancellations received less than 29 days prior to departure date.
- No refunds shall be issued after the tour has commenced.
- No refunds shall be issued for occasional missed meals, added sightseeing tours, or any unused services.

Refunds do not include the cost of airfare.

We strongly advise you to purchase trip cancellation insurance in case you must cancel your registration after you have made full payment. Tour operators can rarely recover money paid in your name after the program's refund deadline.

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## Cornell Travel and Safety Policy

While Cornell is pleased to facilitate travel opportunities for its alumni and friends with tour operators that specialize in high-quality educational travel, please be aware that Cornell does not conduct, manage, or operate these travel experiences, or act as an agent for travelers interested in tours. Tour operators and travelers are responsible for making their own safety decisions concerning this travel, and, as a facilitator between travelers and the tour operators with whom travelers make arrangements for completing travel, Cornell's role and liability are strictly limited. Specific tour operator and national health and safety protocols will apply to each trip, and travelers should review all protocols and trip terms and conditions, including terms and conditions regarding cancellations, refunds, health and safety, and insurance prior to making a reservation. Cornell is not responsible for changes to trips or travel arrangements or for losses, expenses, damages, or injuries resulting from travel.

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