From the marshy lowlands of South Louisiana is a knoll of green where life revolves around the production of pepper sauce, the mining of salt and the drilling of oil wells.

It is an out-of-the-way place just nine miles south of New Iberia and it is called Avery Island.

Tourist brochures describe it as a family-owned "subtropical paradise...made of solid salt."

Actually, it is some 5,800 acres owned and operated by Avery Island, Inc., a corporation composed of the enterprising descendants of John Craig Marsh who began acquiring the property in 1818.

Avery Island is only a monographic "island" surrounded by marshes and bayous but it emanates a sort of islandish remoteness, seeming in some ways far distant from 20th Century civilization. The climate is subtropical. The roads are bordered by a tangle of plants and vines and swaying bamboo, and the woods are adorned by giant oaks whose limbs are gnarled and draped romantically with swaths of moss. Blowing Island from the nearby Gulf of Mexico, gossamer breezes whisper across the island setting the mist in motion and providing a measure of relief from generally high humidity. Sunshine and rainfall filtered alternately though a woody umbrella, which shades the island and bayous, and man-made levees line there.

Probably the best-known tourist attraction at Avery Island is Jungle Gardens, famous as a quiet retreat and a refuge.

To wander there is to walk in the footsteps of a man whose delight was the beauty of nature and whose efforts in life have given much pleasure to thousands of others in the years after his death.

These gardens are a carefully tended memorial to their founder, the late E. A. McIlhenny, whose desires for them have been realized both through his efforts and those of his descendants.

The fall is not the most colorful time of the year for a trip to Jungle Gardens—spring is the season for color—but the landscaping, the lazy drifts of swaying moss and the wildlife that abounds there, make it a visit worthwhile anytime.

This is a place that lends itself to a leisurely stroll regardless of the season. In the pleasant cool of fall it is a wonderful hillside, surrounded by mountains, and verdant and velvety green with just a touch of brilliance here and there.

There is the promise of fragrant blue beauty in archways of wisteria, and additional springtime delights are indicated in areas devoted exclusively to flowers and trees.

Everywhere in Jungle Gardens is a fragrant woody aroma, and there is an informality which achieves the atmosphere of a woodland refuge. Still, the careful maintenance retains a well ordered uncluttered appearance.

McIlhenny began the development of the gardens largely out of his interest in natural sciences, taking time from his duties in pepper sauce production to pursue this project.

He began by landscaping the hillside from the hilltop site of his home to the area below where he built Bird City, a sanctuary which is still frequented by the egrets and herons and other birds that he loved. Beautification project subsequently followed beautification project until the transformation was complete.

In bringing about the garden development McIlhenny supplemented a natural scenic setting with numerous types of plants and trees. The large moss-draped live oaks, magnolias and much of the plant life are native to Avery Island, but McIlhenny imported many plants and made numerous improvements for the pleasure and convenience of visitors.

From the paths and walkways is a giant umbrella bamboo from China. There is a waterway from the valley of the Nile, callaloo from Japan and Europe and bully from England.

There is a network of roads that have been built to facilitate sightseeing in the gardens. And there are man-made lakes and lagoons which serve as giant reflectors, mirroring their surroundings and accentuating the beauty.

In this pleasant "jungle" thousands of birds and numerous other animals, deer, alligators, muskrat, minks, fox and bobcats roam safely.

A small red fox startled this visitor as he darted across an Avery Island road. Several geese honked and flapped their wings at the edge of one of the small lakes. An alligator slid out of the water briefly to yawn sleepily, and a rabbit snuffled something or other alongside one of the roads.

Inquisitive deer were visible for a moment as they overcame their shyness and came curiosity across one of the open fields in rear curiosity at the photographer. Then they were gone in a flash of antlers and hooves, literally by leaps and bounds.

One of the most novel attractions is a large statue of Buddha which was made in China and was a gift to E. A. McIlhenny from his sons, who acquired it at an antique auction in New York. House in a daily painted panels, it has a picturesque location near one of the pools.

A trick of the imagination and the statue beckons the visitor to come back to Jungle Gardens.