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TRAVEL

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PHOTOS BY KATHERINE FREY/THE WASHINGTON POST

BY DINA MISHEV
Special to The Washington Post

I've never fallen in love with a place as quickly as I did with Greenville. This was a surprise, because I arrived in South Carolina with low expectations. In the late '80s and early '90s, I spent most childhood school vacations and several weeks each summer visiting grandparents who lived elsewhere in the Palmetto State. On many trips there, we would take time to explore a new area recommended to us by a local. Someone once recommended a frog jumping competition in Springfield, but no one ever recommended Greenville, in the Appalachian foothills about halfway between Atlanta and Charlotte. But when I arrived last spring, the city of

YOU'RE GOING WHERE?

Greenville

Residents of this aging South Carolina mill town knew it still had life in it. It took decades of hard work, but today it surprises visitors with its low-key culture and high-wattage charm.

70,000 had me at the first "Hey, y'all" I heard. (This happened before I had exited its airport.) In that greeting, and echoed in dozens of other interactions over the following days, were vibrancy and pride: The Greenvillians I met lived there because they loved the lifestyle the city gave them. While Greenville in the 1980s was not a best bet for family vacations, today it has a wide-ranging (and well-priced) food scene; quirky boutiques; outdoor cafes on bustling, tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly streets; art galleries; bike trails; ample urban green space; a public art collection with more than 70 sculptures; and the fastest-growing population of any city in the state. No wonder its branded social media hashtag is #yeahTHAT-Greenville.

GREENVILLE CONTINUED ON F6

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: In Greenville, S.C., the Hampton Inn & Suites Greenville Downtown RiverPlace is situated on the banks of the Reedy River. Henry's Smokehouse is one of the stops on a popular tour of barbecue joints. Fluor Field is the home of the Greenville Drive minor league baseball team. Jeni Fletcher puts the finishing touches on a Rosie the Riveter — with rose petals — at Vault & Vator. (There's some mescal involved, too.)

In Tasmania, miles of exclusive beauty

BY A. ODYSSEUS PATRICK
Special to The Washington Post

Hilly, forested and wet Tasmania is regarded by many Australians as their most picturesque state, a kind of Vermont of the Southern Hemisphere. It is also the most economically depressed, which is one of the reasons the Tasmanian government has upended a great walking tradition — that natural beauty owned by the state should be open to all, at minimal cost, in the spirit of democracy.

Less than two years ago, the state's Parks and Wildlife Service finished construction of the Three Capes, a 29-mile track that starts at one of Australia's most important historical sites and

takes in some stunning coastline.

The project includes custom-designed accommodations, a spectacular boat ride and miles of boardwalks smooth enough to skateboard on. Visitors can borrow books, binoculars and even yoga mats.

Such luxuries aren't cheap. There is an entrance fee of nearly \$400 to access a track which used to cost only blisters, sunburn and time. The venture has been a huge success. Almost 10,000 people paid to take the walk in its first year, funds that the state badly needs.

Open for less than two years, the track is already developing a reputation among Australians for fostering a kind of exclusive camaraderie. Tasmanian authori-

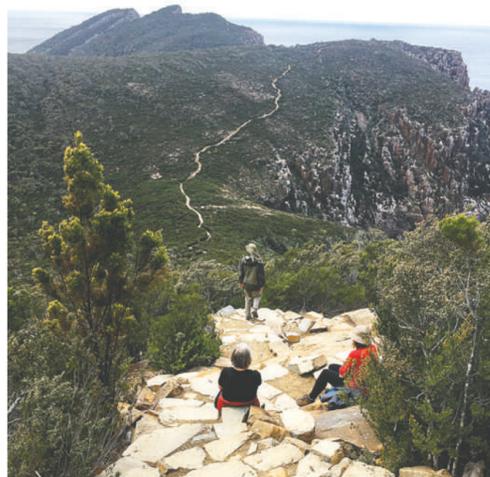
ties haven't started marketing it overseas, and only 2 percent of walkers are foreigners, a park ranger told us.

As a consequence of the hefty charge, the walk is full of professionals and young families in fashionable hiking apparel, toting the latest in sleeping-bag technology. There are few, if any, hardcore hikers to be seen.

The trail begins at Port Arthur, a village on the Tasman Peninsula, which juts out into the Southern Ocean from Tasmania proper. A tragic site in both history and modernity for Australians, Port

TASMANIA CONTINUED ON F3

At Cape Hauy, in Tasmania, Australia, the Three Capes Track ends at sheer cliffs.



A. ODYSSEUS PATRICK

NAVIGATOR

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Meet National Park Service shutterbug Jarob Ortiz. F5

In S.C., a city of vibrancy, pride

GREENVILLE FROM F1

Go

Guidebook musts

Anywhere, 32-acres of manicured lawns and gardens, public performance spaces, private benches, sculptures, food trucks, trails and a 355-foot-long cantilevered pedestrian bridge with unobstructed views of 40-foot-tall waterfalls would be remarkable. In downtown Greenville, **Falls Park on the Reedy** is almost unbelievable. Decades before the state built a four-lane concrete bridge directly in front of the falls (in 1960), mills had polluted the river that fed them. Starting in the late 1970s, groups that had realized what downtown had lost began to reclaim the river and its banks until, finally, in 2002, the bridge was removed. Falls Park was opened to the public the following year. Every year since, locals and visitors have found more ways to use the park, including food festivals, art shows, concerts, outdoor movies, races, the summer-long upstate Shakespeare in the Park festival and just quietly feeding pieces of leftover biscuits to a family of ducks.

Two of the three joints on John Nolan's 3.5-hour weekly **BBQ tour** — Henry's Smokehouse and Bucky's BBQ — are rated as no less than "100-mile barbecues" by the South Carolina Barbecue Association: worth driving 100 miles for. All three are so unassuming (and often hidden behind stacks of hickory, which is used in the smokers) that you could easily miss them. The third stop, Mike & Jeff's BBQ, didn't get SCBA's highest honor, but its meat is just as juicy and flavorful as the 100-milers. Owner Jeff Little, who chops about 400 pounds of pulled pork every morning, might be the world's most passionate proponent of low and slow smoking, which he'll vividly and happily talk your ear off about until Nolan shuffles everyone back onto the bus.

Local faves

The Greenville Drive, the Class-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox, plays more than 70 home games every year at the 5,700-seat **Fluor Field**, modeled on the Red Sox's Fenway Park and built using bricks salvaged from nearby mills. Fluor even has its own version of the Green Monster in left field, albeit, at 30 feet tall, dwarfed by Fenway's 37-foot wall. Despite the similarities to Boston, at Fluor there's no mistaking you're anywhere but deep in Dixie: When spectators sing Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" in the middle of the eighth inning — another nod to Fenway — it has an unmistakable Southern twang. If you can't catch a Drive game, "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, the disgraced — and deceased — former Chicago White Sox player, was a Greenville native. (He and his wife briefly ran a barbecue joint here after he was banned from Major League Baseball.) Across the street from Fluor, the "Shoeless" Joe Jackson Museum and Library exhibits some of his personal effects as well as more than 2,000 baseball-related books.



TOP: In Greenville, S.C., chef Michael Kramer prepares an order at Jianna, a farm-to-table Italian restaurant.
ABOVE: The distinctive, 32-acre Falls Park on the Reedy, with 40-foot waterfalls, opened in 2003 in the city's downtown.

For an interactive map with addresses and contact information, visit wapo.st/greenville

Seventeen-time Tour de France rider George Hincapie trained on the area's undulating and sometimes steeply climbing back roads. Everyday cyclists prefer the mellow, mixed-use, 10-mile **Swamp Rabbit Trail**. Built on an abandoned stretch of Greenville & Northern Railway track, the paved pathway links different downtown neighborhoods and also helps you escape the city as it winds through wetlands, woodlands and gardens, past more than 400 species of plants en route to the village of Travelers Rest. Break at the cozily eclectic Swamp Rabbit Cafe & Grocery, which makes its own breads and

baked goods, including strawberry pecan scones.

Eat

Guidebook musts

It's not just the cocktail menu at **Vault & Vator** that hearkens to the Prohibition era and the Golden Age of Cocktails. In a windowless space that was formerly a Dr Pepper bottling plant, and with a front door that faces a basement-level parking lot, this speakeasy isn't easily found. Inside, Edison bulbs weakly illuminate high-backed velvet chairs, tabletops covered in faux alligator skin, a zinc-topped bar and a bartender

in a Jacquard vest. This could be intimidating and pretentious, but bartender Kirk Ingram patiently answers my questions about esoteric flavors such as beer-jam syrup and black walnut bitters before helping me settle on a Melancholy Ninja (fernet branca, bourbon, Ninja Warrior cold brew coffee and habanero honey).

It doesn't need to be a game night for the line at **Funnel Delicous**, just across the street from Fluor Field, to be out the door. See 16-inch Mega Danny Funnel Cakes — named for a founding partner and proclaimed to be world-record size — carried out in pizza boxes. The Mega Danny seems amazing until a plate of foughnuts (doughnuts battered in funnel-cake mix, deep-fried and rolled in cinnamon sugar), fried cookie dough balls or a maple cake topped with bacon and syrup go past.

Local faves

Exactly 12 steps down from the intersection of Main and Coffee streets, **Coffee Underground** has been around, and at this location, since 1995. Styles and spaces, including the divisive Red Room — people love it or hate it — have been added over the years. While you'll probably come here for the smoothly roasted beans and non-acidic brews, consider staying for a concert, art opening, play or comedy night. The latter is anchored on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. It's also worth staying for a slice of strawberry cake.

Carl Sobocinski opened his first restaurant, Soby's New South Cuisine, in 1997 in Greenville. Last year, he opened his 10th. On the second floor of a new RiverPlace building, **Jianna** could be a modern, farm-to-table Italian restaurant serving freshly shucked oysters and cut-to-order prosciutto di Parma in any foodie destination. Except Falls Park is out Jianna's front window —

don't be shy about asking for a window seat — and, looking down on the menu, flank steak tagliata costs only \$27.

Shop

Guidebook musts

In 1883, the original **Mast General Store** opened in Valle Crucis, N.C., and is still open. Mast's Greenville outpost — the first outside North Carolina — opened in 2003, but it hides its relative newness well. Its oak floors have at least a century's worth of wear and creak in them and the variety of the inventory is matched only by its timelessness: enamel coffee mugs, hiking canes, camp hammocks, flip-flops, bandannas and, in the back corner, 500 different types of old-fashioned candy — everything you never thought you needed until you see it.

The chandelier in the entryway should give away that **Pedal Chic** is not an ordinary bike shop. Miss that clue and you probably will trip over the next: a runway, complete with cutely styled mannequins on bikes. There's also the elegant drapery on the changing rooms. One of the few bike shops in the country owned by a woman and catering to women, Pedal Chic just moved into new, larger digs last fall, so there's even more room for fashionable bike clothing such as a bolero top by LG, which can be used for sun protection (or just for style), and accessories such as wicker bike baskets, in pastels, with Pedal Chic's logo. The new shop stocks the first generation of Pedal Chic's bike brand, too.

Local faves

Jeans shopping will never be the same after you've been to **Beija-Flor** denim salon. The Brazilian-inspired, Greenville-based brand for women has developed denim fabrics and cuts that really do fit everyone comfortably. I

wouldn't have believed that their jean miniskirt was stretchy enough to wear while biking unless I'd seen the store manager riding around town wearing hers. (Built-in shorts make it modest, too.) Maybe — fingers crossed — the brand's Emana denim collection will live up to its claim of reducing the appearance of cellulite thanks to its "bio-active micro-crystal technology."

Caviar & Bananas offers a compelling argument that your souvenirs from Greenville should be edible. Before you start shopping though, fortify yourself with a crispy chicken buttermilk biscuit, lemon-oatmeal pancakes or a prosciutto and fried egg sandwich. Tables are marble-topped and helpfully communal. Before I finished my biscuit, tablemates had given me the names of several South Carolina specialties I couldn't go home without: Callie's Charleston Biscuits and Cheese Crisps, gummy piglets, almond toffee cookies from Grey Ghost Bakery and Geechie Boy Mill stone ground white grits. I found Charleston-made Burnt & Salty's Coconut Suka — a vinegar sauce — on my own.

Stay

Guidebook musts

The 115-room **Hampton Inn & Suites Greenville Downtown RiverPlace** is the rare chain hotel with a sense of place. Look out your window and you might see the Reedy River or the RiverPlace carillon, a tower of 25 bronze bells erected in honor of the local who spearheaded the development of this district. In the lobby, look for wooden beams reclaimed from area mills and repurposed as ceiling decor. At the hotel's river level is the interactive RiverPlace Fountain, which has 32 water jets that can pulsate in sync.

Local faves

Consider yourself warned — Wendy Lyman, the owner and manager of the six-room **Swamp Rabbit Inn**, is also a licensed real estate agent. It's not that she'll put the hard sell on you if you stay at her Ikea-furnished inn, with a front porch full of rocking chairs, two blocks from the Swamp Rabbit Trail. Instead, she'll ply you with Kringle, a Danish pastry that she has delivered from a bakery in Racine, Wis., then allow you free rein in the inn's stocked communal kitchen, advise you on the best bike ride for the day or tell you about local hiking. And you won't want to leave.

Explore

Guidebook musts

"You start with artists, and it transforms an area," Lyman says. One of the earliest elements in the RiverPlace district was **Art Crossing**, where Reedy riverfront parking spaces would instead be developed as galleries and studios (but rented for parking space rates). Artists — local painters, sculptors and photographers — lucky enough to get into Art Crossing open their workshops and studios to guests between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Other days and times, you'll have to settle for the several pieces of public art in the area, including John Acorn's "Ten Artispheres," a contemporary sculpture commemorating the 10th anniversary of Greenville's largest annual arts festival (held every May), and a sculpture of Charles Townes, a local who won a Nobel Prize in 1964 for developing the laser. While Art Crossing itself is limited to the stretch of galleries and workshops on the south side of the river, it's worth it to cross the pedestrian bridge to the Peace Center Amphitheater, which often hosts free concerts and performances.

Local faves

A century ago, Greenville's **West End Historic District** was a bustling commercial and residential area. Furman University was there, as were the Greenville and Columbia Railroad depot, warehouses full of cotton and fertilizer, and homes for working-class families. "Ten years ago, parts of the West End could be a little scary," Lyman says. "Houses were vacant and buildings falling down." Last year, the Topside Pool Club, Greenville's first, opened on the rooftop of a new West End building. Falls Park is in West End, as is Fluor Field. Three hotels are slated to be built here in the next two years; a Homewood Suites by Hilton will open later this year. Wander the residential streets off Pendleton and August streets and see private homes being remodeled and refurbished. "Collaboration is what I think makes this city special," Lyman says, "and everyone is collaborating about what to do with this area. It's got so much."

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