

SOUTH CAROLINA

Think of the Palmetto State as a lavish quilt of culture. Its rich history, world-class arts festival and towns like Myrtle Beach, hard-wired for family fun, make South Carolina a top destination. **By H.M. Cauley**, for the AJC

1. Gullah culture

Nestled in the marshy lowlands between the heart of Beaufort and the Atlantic beaches is **St. Helena Island**, the site of the historic 50-acre **Penn School**. The national landmark is a reminder of the rich heritage of black slaves who toiled in the area and who, after the Civil War, farmed, fished and formed a community centered around their west African roots.

The culture of the Gullah people who live there today is marked by their distinctive creole language as well as their handiwork – hand-woven baskets and crafts – and their rice-based recipes.

The Penn School was one of the first in the country to educate freed slaves and now is the focal point for an annual early November celebration of Gullah crafts, culture and cuisine. From September through May, a weekly **Community Sing** that celebrates traditional African song is held on the grounds. Visitors are invited to explore the church, school building and cemetery.

Penn Center, 16 Penn Center Circle West, St. Helena Island, 1-843-838-2432, www.penncenter.com

2. Charles Towne Landing

English settlers in the Carolina territory made their home at Charles Towne Landing as early as 1670. Today, it is a state historic site and a living history center where visi-

tors can interact with costumed guides to learn about life in the Colonial period.

A visitors center is stocked with artifacts and examples of how the settlers went about daily life. Explore the 17th-century cargo ship *Adventure*, anchored at the town's dock. Meander by foot or bring your bikes to ride through the salt marshes or the 80 acres of English gardens, shaded by enormous magnolia and oak trees believed to be hundreds of years old.

Archaeological sites, cemeteries and the historic Legare-Waring plantation house are other attractions. There's also a natural habitat zoo populated by local species. Guided tours, re-enactments and cannon firings take place throughout the year. There is no place to stay or eat at the Landing, but picnic areas and grills are available.

1500 Old Towne Road, Charleston, 1-843-852-4200, southcarolinaparks.com/ctl

3. Spoleto Festival USA

Since its inauguration in 1977, this annual festival of music and the arts has gained a worldwide reputation. It attracts performers from around the globe for almost three weeks, beginning on Memorial Day weekend each year.

Visitors are invited to enjoy more than 700 events, including operas, visual arts exhibits, dramatic and dance performances and music ranging from classical and symphonic to jazz, choral and chamber.

Along with the chance to see famous as well as up-and-coming artists, arts lovers get to experience their preferred genre in a variety of settings, including historic churches and theaters as well as outdoor venues.

The main festival corresponds to Piccolo Spoleto, which showcases music, dance and art talents from around the Southeast in a broad range of events, including poetry readings, children's activities, crafts and films.

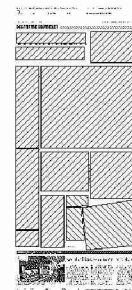
The 2014 Spoleto Festival runs from May 23 to June 8. Tickets go on sale later this year.

14 George St., Charleston, 1-843-579-3100, www.spoletousa.org

4. Upstate Heritage Quilt Trail

The Amish are known for the colorful hex signs on their barns. The quilters of South Carolina's upstate area have put their own spin on the idea by mounting intricately-painted quilt squares on out-buildings.

The idea took off after the first square was brushed onto the side of the Oconee Heritage Center in Walhalla. Since then, about 100 squares in classic patterns that incorporate wedding rings, baskets, stars, flowers and more have appeared – and not just on barns or public buildings. Private homes, historic structures, businesses and stores across Anderson, Oconee and Pickens counties now sport the pan-



els that have long been part of a local craft tradition.

The Upstate Trail is one of five in the state that follow what has become a national tradition. The trail's website provides a printable PDF map, as well as brief explanations of designs and, in some cases, GPS coordinates.

P.O. Box 333, Walhalla, S.C., 29691, 1-864-723-6603, www.upstateheritagequilttrail.org

5. Greenville
The city's travel slogan, "Yeah, that Greenville," is a reminder that this often-overlooked destination, just two and a half hours from Atlanta, has a lot to offer.

Take a carriage ride or stroll along **Main Street**, the city's restaurant and shopping heart, where free weekly concerts are offered March through September. Nearby is the local performing arts center, a zoo, and museums dedicated to history, heritage, science, children's activities and art.

Rent a bike and pedal along the **Swamp Rabbit Trail**, a 14-mile path along the Reedy River. Meander through **Falls Park**, where the suspension cable Liberty Bridge offers stunning vistas of the city, the park, the river and a cascading waterfall.

Greenville is also home to the Boston Red Sox Class A team the Drive, which plays in **Fluor Field**, a scaled-down version of the major league club's Fenway Park, complete with a hand-operated scoreboard. Baseball fans also will want to vis-

it the **Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum**, dedicated to the legendary player who lived in Greenville.

Visit Greenville, 148 River St., Greenville, 1-800-351-7180, www.visitgreenvillesc.com

6. Charleston dining
The Low Country along the Carolina coast has given its name to a cuisine famous for she-crab soup, seafood boils and shrimp and grits. The state's oldest city has long had a reputation as a Low Country food Mecca, but contemporary chefs aren't just resting on the locally harvested clams. Many have taken the basics and added their own Southern flair.

At longtime favorite **High Cotton** (199 East Bay St. 1-843-724-3815), chef Joe Palma has given the traditional ingredients a twist, serving up buttermilk fried oysters, pork chops with spoonbread and potlikker jus, and a traditional boil with mussels, clams and shrimp.

At **Circa 1886** (149 Wentworth St., 1-843-853-7828), local favorites Carolina bass, locally raised grass-fed beef and Low Country-grown rice are elegantly served in a historic carriage house.

Elegance is also the hallmark of the **Peninsula Grill's** courtyard and dining room seating (112 N. Market St., 1-843-723-0700), where Low Country oyster stew is paired with wild mushroom grits.

Chefs at **Husk** (76 Queen St., 1-843-577-2500) pepper the menu with local creamery butter, honey and seafood specialties, while the

cooks at **Amen Street Fish and Raw Bar** (205 East Bay St., 1-843-853-8600) specialize in classic she-crab soup, hush puppies and shrimp dishes.

And no visitor should skip a trip to **Carolina's** (10 Exchange St., 1-843-724-3800), where the seafood stew is a hearty blend of clams, mussels, shrimp, scallops, squid, potatoes and peppers in a creamy garlic broth.

www.charlestondining.com

7. Beaufort
This historic city on a sparkling intracoastal waterway reflects the influences of the English and Spanish settlers who once lived there.

But the history is more recent at the **1790 Cuthbert House Bed and Breakfast**, the mansion where Gen. William T. Sherman and his entourage stayed during the March to the Sea (a photograph in the foyer depicts the general on the front steps). The luxurious inn, furnished with antiques but updated with spa bathrooms, is ideal for a romantic retreat or a weekend getaway.

The Cuthbert House is just one of several historic inns from which you can explore the city's waterfront park, markets, restaurants and historic sites. The flat lowlands are ideal for biking and walking, but horse-drawn carriage rides offer another way to tour the environs. A short drive from the heart of downtown takes visitors to the Atlantic beaches or to **Parris Island**, the Marine base where a free

museum traces the story of the corps as well as the history of the region.

Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce Tourism Division & Visitor Center, 713 Craven St., Beaufort, 1-800-638-3525, www.discoversouthcarolina.com

Cuthbert House Inn, 1203 Bay St., Beaufort, 1-800-327-9275, www.cuthberthouseinn.com

8. Hunting Island State Park

Once a hunting preserve for the local elite, this barrier island is now a historic site and national park with five miles of beaches. It has two notable features: a 130-foot lighthouse that is the only one in the state open to the public; and a summer population of loggerhead turtles that come to the island to nest.

No matter what time of year, the island is teeming with wildlife, including deer, alligators, snakes and raccoons. Visitors can learn more about the wild inhabitants at the nature center. Park rangers also give guided nature walks through the salt marshes, woods and beaches.

Facilities include a fishing pier (rods and reels are available), hiking and biking trails, a playground, showers, bathrooms and 200 campsites that require a two-night minimum stay. There is only one cabin, big enough to sleep six, so advance reservations are a must.

Admission to the park is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children ages 6 to 15. Lighthouse admission is \$2 per person.

2555 Sea Island Park-

way, Hunting Island, www.huntingisland.com

9. Aiken equestrian country

A short drive along I-20 east of Augusta, the town of Aiken anchors the state's horse country. The bucolic countryside is dotted with horse farms and polo fields, as well as historic plantation homes and lavish gardens.

Among the many equestrian-related attractions is the **Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum**, a free showcase of the trophies, ribbons and accomplishments of the 39 champions from the flat and steeplechase racing world that called Aiken home.

Horse-lovers can see the animals in action at the **Aiken Polo Club**, one of the country's oldest, where matches and tournaments have been held since the late 1880s. During the spring and fall, Sunday matches are open to the public for \$5.

The local fox and hounds club roams the fields during the winter months. Area horse farms also offer a variety of clinics and lessons for all levels of riders. Visitors can get a feel for the city with a two-hour trolley ride that stops at Aiken's historic sites, including Civil War battlefields, plantation homes and gardens.

Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum, 135 Dupree Place, Aiken, 1-803-642-7631, www.aikenracinghalloffame.com

10. Disney's Hilton Head Island Resort

There's no Cinderel-

la Castle or death-defying roller coaster, but this Disney-owned resort on Hilton Head is just as kid- and family-friendly as its bigger relatives.

The main attraction here is old-fashioned fun: fishing, swimming, biking, board games, bingo, campfires, nature hikes, ghost stories, treasure hunts on the beach and more. Excursions are offered for kayaking, dolphin swims and golf lessons (for those 13 and older). Along with swimming pools close to the hotel, the resort boasts its own beach house about a mile away on a 12-mile stretch of white sand.

Accommodations range from studio rooms to villas big enough to sleep 12. No need to change out of a bathing suit for dinner; dining here is quick and casual. Grills throughout the property let families fire up their own favorites. During the spring and fall, there's a weekly low-country shrimp boil. Summer months feature a weekly poolside barbecue night with games and music.

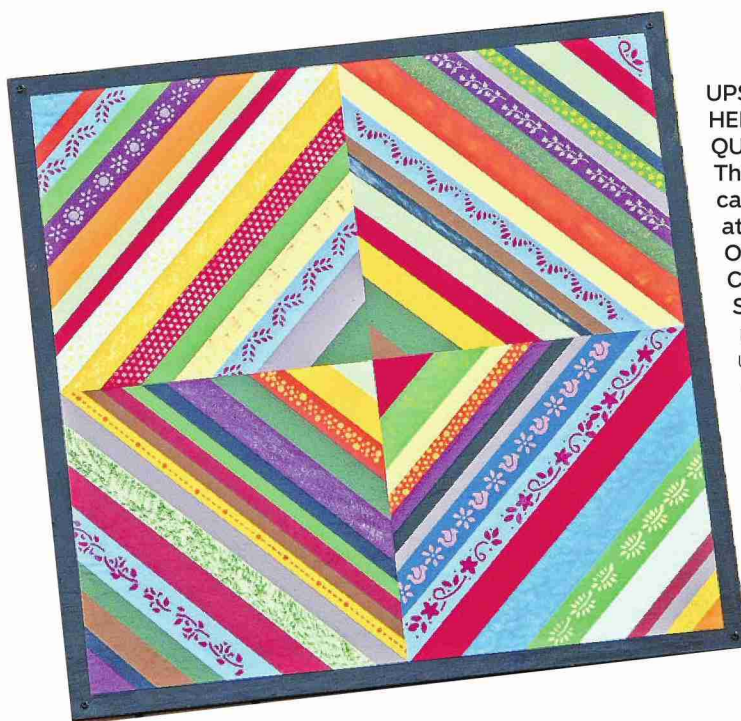
22 Harbourside Lane, Hilton Head Island, 1-843-341-4100, www.disneybeachresorts.com

MYRTLE BEACH

More than 15 million people visit Myrtle Beach each year, making it one of the most popular beaches in the U.S. Besides the amusement parks, golf courses, theaters and shopping districts, the beach also hosts the longest wooden pier on the East Coast, as well as a boardwalk that opened in 2010 and quickly established itself as one of the nations' best.



CONTRIBUTED



**UPSTATE
HERITAGE
QUILT TRAIL**
This square
can be found
at the Greater
Oconee
Chamber in
Seneca.

DISCOVER
UPCOUNTRY
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ASSOCIATION



GULLAH CULTURE

Vera Manigault, of Mt. Pleasant, makes colorful sweetgrass baskets. The Penn Center in St. Helena Island is the focal point of an annual celebration of Gullah crafts and cuisine each November. CONTRIBUTED BY TAKAAKI IWABU / THE STATE



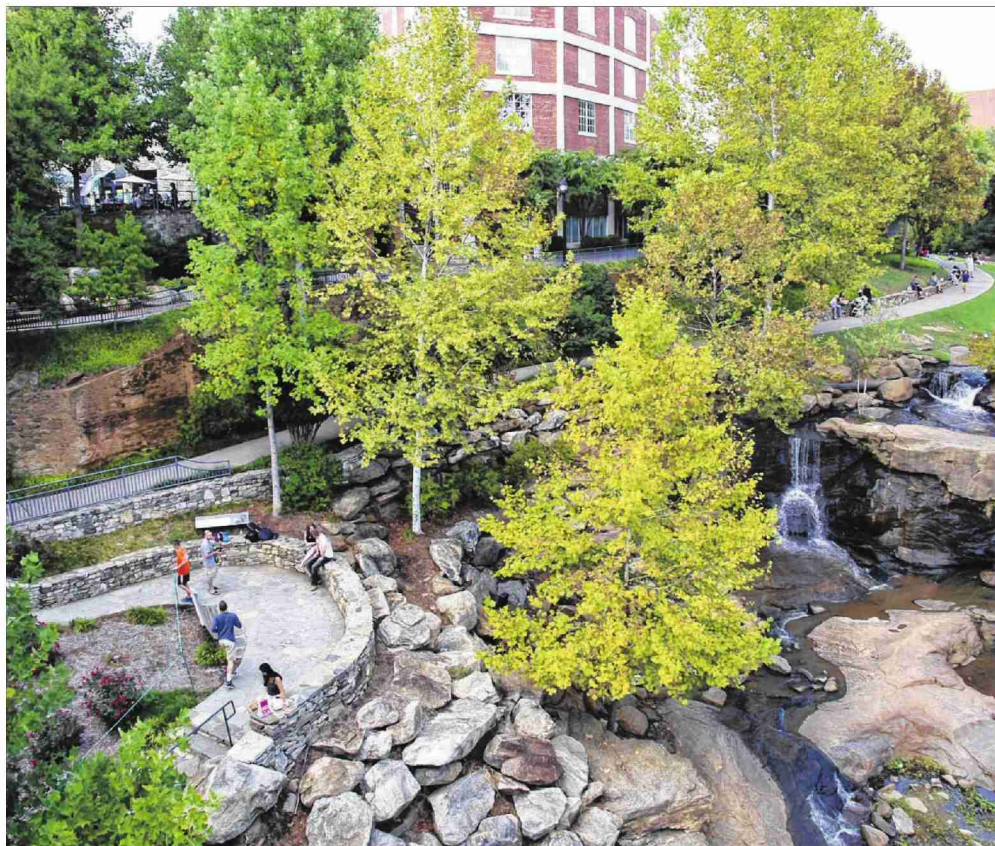
CHARLES TOWNE LANDING

Costumed re-enactors fire a cannon, giving visitors a glimpse of life in Colonial times. SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION & TOURISM



SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

The internationally known arts festival was founded in 1977 and is home to a variety of performances, like this year's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." BRUCE SMITH / ASSOCIATED PRESS



HUNTINGTON ISLAND STATE PARK
 Climb to the top of the lighthouse for spectacular views of the beaches and marshes where loggerhead turtles come to nest.

GREENVILLE
 Falls Park features a walking path that winds along the Reedy River. PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, RECREATION & TOURISM



CHARLESTON DINING

Circa 1886 offers a seasonal menu that can include Trio of Berry Sorbets, a creation by Pastry Chef Scott Lovorn. CONTRIBUTED BY CIRCA 1886