

Illuminated Liberty Bridge in downtown Greenville
Photograph by Kevin Ruck



GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA: THE SECRET'S OUT

This blossoming Southern city is popping up on travel bucket lists everywhere

BY RACHEL MARSH

In the middle of a plaza on a downtown strip in Greenville, South Carolina, sits a life-size bronze boar fountain. *Il Porcellino*, a replica of a sculpture in Florence, Italy, is rumored to bring good luck to anyone who places a coin in its mouth, if the coin falls into the grate below.

This auspicious boar is situated unassumingly on the sidewalk, and if you're not careful, it would be easy to walk by and miss his blessings of good fortune.

But that's the paragon of Greenville. Though growing quickly, this humble Southern city is still packed with hidden gems: distinctive experiences and discoveries politely nestled in their own patch of city that can too easily slip off of any unsuspecting traveler's radar.

EXPLORE YOUR SURROUNDINGS

Tote along your wallet as you wander. Greenville is prime real estate for avid shoppers, with local boutiques and markets such as Southern Fried Cotton, Wish Boutique and Mast General Store.

As you stroll through the streets, keep your eyes peeled for the unassuming-yet-obligatory gem that is Poppington's Gourmet Popcorn (yes, gourmet popcorn). This popcorn shop is to microwave popcorn what craft beer is to Bud Light: Poppington's boasts dozens of unique flavors (cheeseburger, birthday cake, lemon chiffon and maple caramel bacon cheddar, anyone?), turning popcorn from a mindless movie theater snack to a decadent (and rather addictive) treat.

But hey, why buy souvenirs when you can make them? Follow your nose to Magnolia Scents by Design: disguised as a mere soy candle store, this shop provides guests the opportunity to slip on a



Il Porcellino
Photograph by
Rachel Marsh

chandler cap and make their own products. Pick your own scent (I went with roasted bean) and color (I went with beige), stir up the soy wax, then sit back and let science work its magic. You even get to name it ("soy latte," thank you very much).

Any cat lovers (or even cat likers) in the house? Carve out time in your schedule for Organic Cat Café, a café-slash-kitty-lounge with dozens of felines vying for your love and affection. Guests get an hour and a half of playtime and fur cuddles, plus a café beverage.



LOOSEN YOUR BELT

Like any good South Carolinian, Greenville wants to make sure all of its guests are constantly well-fed – and the vast repertoire of dining options makes that easy.

When prompted, an informed local will quickly (yet so politely) point you in the direction of Soby’s. A staple in the city’s culinary scene, Soby’s provides the finest Southern comfort stereotypes, including fried green tomatoes, shrimp ‘n’ grits, pimiento cheese and seafood, all with a smile and a side of “bless your heart.”

And no true Southern town is complete without at least one acclaimed barbecue joint. That’s where Bacon Bros. Public House comes in, with made-from-scratch foods, locally sourced provisions and vegetarian-converting slow-cooked meats.

Then for some of the best dessert that may ever grace your palate, take a detour to Stella’s Brasserie. Decadent pastries, cakes, crème brûlées and puddings are often homemade and can entice and impress even the most harbored sweet tooth.

RAISE YOUR SPIRITS

To really get to know the town – or, its finest watering holes, anyway – let someone else show you around. The Brewery Experience Tour, a localized beer-centric tour bus, provides a shuttle to three carefully selected breweries that represent Greenville’s brew scene.

Taste samples and meet brewers at each destination for a personalized and well-rounded experience. And don’t worry – snacks are also included to ensure that a good time is matched with ... good responsibility.

If wine is more your vice of choice (or, hey, even if it’s not), slip into Foxcroft Wine Co. Doubling as a wine shop and upscale restaurant, this spot has hundreds of well-chosen bottles lining its shelves. Grab one to enjoy in-house, or sip on one of the many wines on tap. They’ve crafted the menu for cuisine that pairs well with wine (although what doesn’t?), with foodie-friendly fare such as flatbreads, charcuterie, cheese and seafood.

EXPAND YOUR LUNGS

While this town is full of covert discoveries, vibrant outdoor space is, fortunately, not hard to come by.

Falls Park, for instance, in the heart of Greenville, offers pedestrians a leisurely detour and respite from a lively city. The park’s many facets make it easy to get lost in nature, with a picturesque waterfall, a bridge that seems to defy gravity and various pieces of art that’ve managed to sneak their way in.

The rest of the city accommodates foot traffic as well, making it easy to get your 10,000 steps in along copious sidewalks and flat topography. Just be on the lookout for those iconic yet sneaky Greenville treasures, like the nine bronze mice hiding between buildings on Main Street or the 27 inspirational quotes chiseled into the sidewalk that many pedestrians unwittingly amble right over.

BUT BEFORE YOU BID ADIEU ...

Like its counterpart in Florence, the legend of the boar statue claims a guaranteed return to the city to anyone who rubs its snout. So, before your departure from Greenville, swing by *Il Porcellino* one last time to wish him farewell.

His worn-down nose, a sign of many hopeful returns, may come as no surprise. **B**

