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## Dynamite Downtown in Greenville, SC



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# PROFILE: GREENVILLE, SC

Townfolk here set the gold standard in revitalization. Once a nondescript textile village, Greenville has a charming, bustling downtown. Strolling across a bridge above a rocky waterfall is the culmination of an A-plus jaunt.

> BY LISA O'DONNELL



**“We walked along the waterfront and couldn’t believe how drop-dead gorgeous it was.”**

— Debbie Moyes

**D**EBBIE AND PETE MOYES LOVE GREENVILLE for reasons big and small — the Blue Ridge Mountain views, the thriving arts scene, the network of bicycle trails and ...

“Oh, the peaches,” marvels Debbie, a Chicago transplant. “Down here — wow! — you get peaches from mid-May through August.”

She and Pete, both 67, moved to the nearby community of Taylors on Lake Robinson, 15 miles north of Greenville, in 2013. They have delved into the many established and developing scenes in this city of 68,600 in the northwestern corner of South Carolina known as Upstate.

Debbie’s scene revolves around the Greenville Center for Creative Arts, home to an arts school and studios. The center helps put on a First Friday gallery hop that draws crowds each month. The sprawling arts center, housed in a former textile mill, opened in 2015 in the Village of West Greenville, a trendy area on the fringe of downtown with coffee shops, bakeries and farm-to-table restaurants.

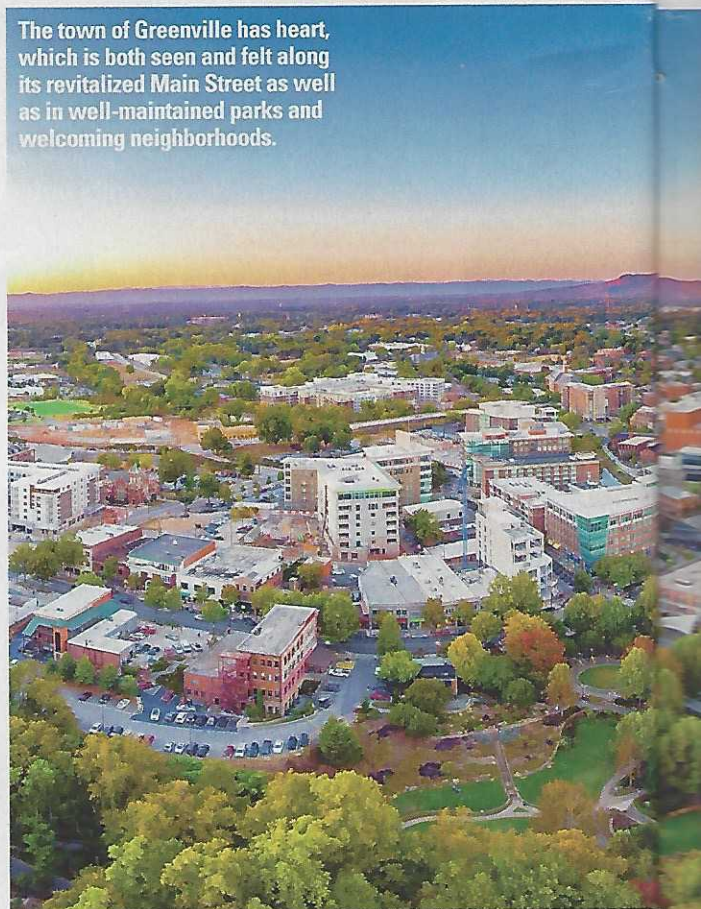
A fiber artist, Debbie volunteers and teaches quilting workshops at the center. “It’s become a huge part of my life,” she says. “I found my peeps here. We all love creating and appreciating art.”

Pete, who worked in learning and development for companies around the world, prefers Greenville’s bicycling scene, which features a bit of star power. George Hincapie, an elite cyclist who competed in several Tour de France races, lives in Greenville and actively promotes the sport.

“This area is prime cycling territory,” says Pete, a serious biker. “It has hills and beautiful views. I can do a 40-mile ride where I live and maybe three cars pass me.”

Casual cyclists love the 22-mile Swamp Rabbit Trail, a multiuse path on an old railroad bed. It meanders along the Reedy River, eases into downtown Greenville and skirts

The town of Greenville has heart, which is both seen and felt along its revitalized Main Street as well as in well-maintained parks and welcoming neighborhoods.





past Furman University.

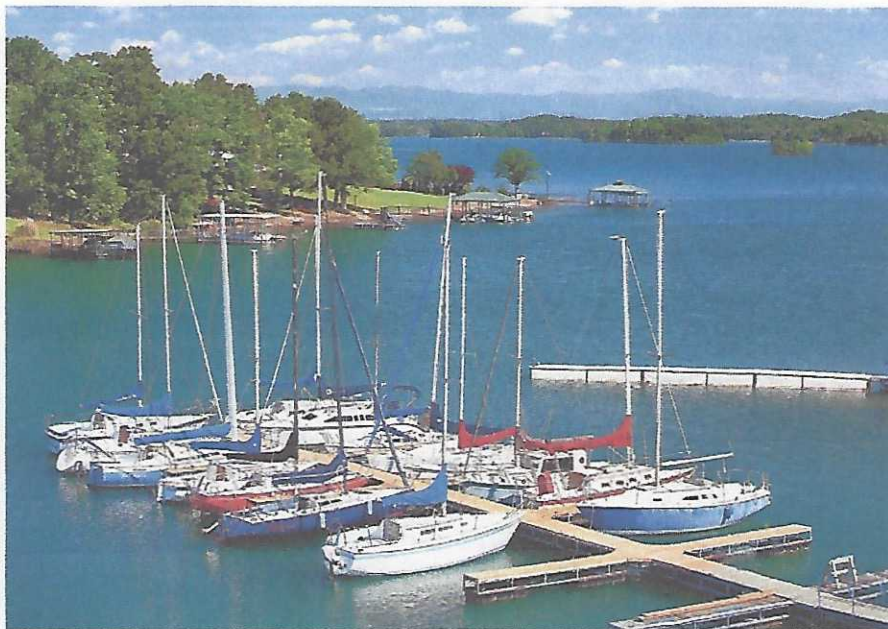
The Moyeses have lived around the world, including 10 years in Asia, for Pete's work. When they first visited Greenville, "we walked along the waterfront and couldn't believe how drop-dead gorgeous it was," Debbie says. "We've lived in the Northeast, in some old, old cities, so this is a younger city than I'm used to, but it's reinventing itself. There's always something going on."

Creating a diverse economy has softened the loss of thousands of textile jobs in the Greenville area. Tire giant Michelin North America Inc., moved its North American headquarters here in 1988, and soon was followed by German carmaker BMW, which operates its only assembly plant in the U.S. in Greer, 10 miles northeast. About 11,000 employees at that plant produce nearly 1,400 vehicles a day.

The presence of these global corporations gives Greenville an international flair that is unusual in small Southern cities. Furman University and Bob Jones University, both small liberal arts

schools, also provide stability — and lots of culture, to boot.

But the impact of these economic drivers was not always obvious downtown, which, by the 1970s, had many vacant stores and empty streets. Downtown's renaissance dates to the late

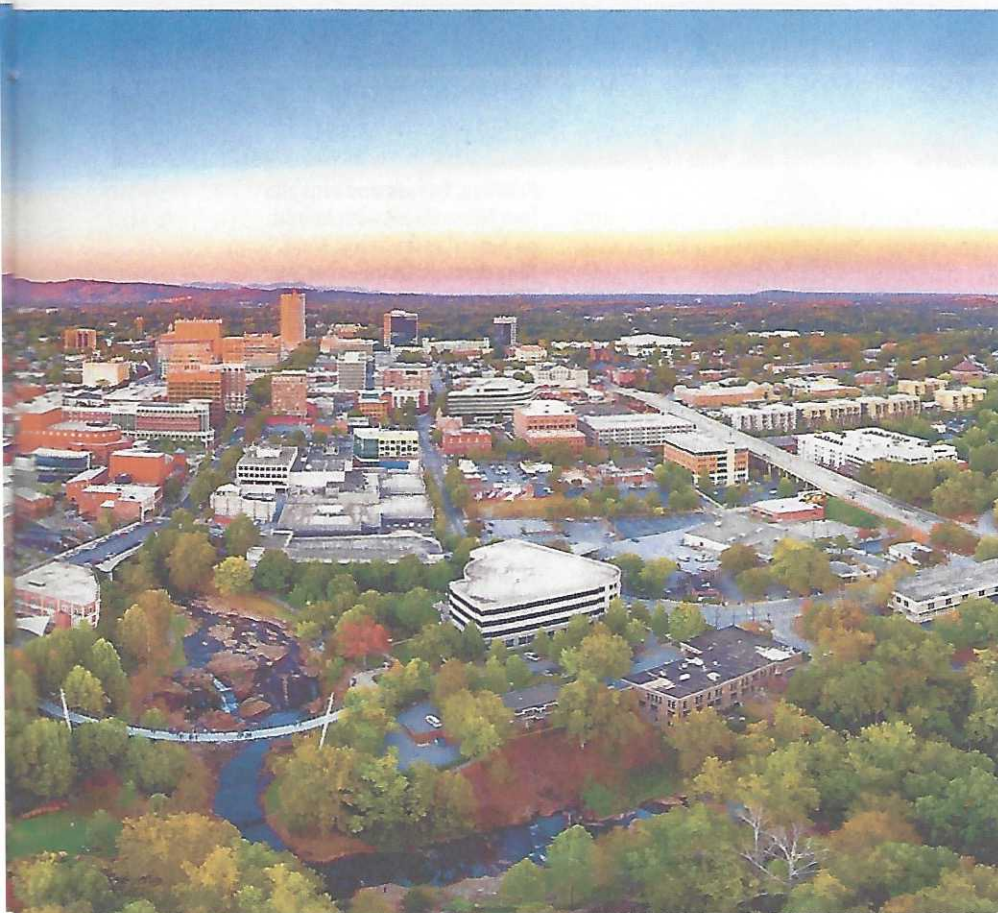


**Nearby Lake Hartwell State Park is a prime spot for boating and fishing on a 56,000-acre lake.**

1970s when a new streetscape plan was implemented on Main Street to make it more inviting to pedestrians. Trees were planted, decorative light fixtures were brought in and the number of lanes was reduced from four to two. Plus, the sidewalks were widened.

Greenville is a textbook example of superb urban revitalization in the postindustrial age. Those visionary political leaders, risk-taking private investors and residents willing to embrace change transformed this onetime Textile Capital of the World into a progressive, cosmopolitan city that has drawn comparisons to Portland, OR, and Burlington, VT. It landed a coveted spot on The New York Times list "52 Places to Go in 2017," alongside Cyprus, Botswana and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The Greenville write-up, headlined "The next Charleston?" says that the city "may be the next major food destination," mentioning Husk Restaurant, The Kitchen by Wolfgang Puck, Jianna, and Vault and Vator.

Perhaps the most ambitious project was set in motion in 2001 when the Greenville City Council, with help from the South Carolina Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway ▶







**Farmers, bakers and artisans line Main Street with booths on Saturday mornings from May through October for the TD Saturday Market.**

Administration, decided to uncover one of the city's most unique and beautiful features, the 28-foot Reedy River Falls, an iconic city landmark. In 1960, a four-lane bridge was built, obstructing the falls, making it not just hidden from view, but essentially inaccessible. In 2004, the bridge was replaced by another — this one a spectacular 345-foot-long pedestrian bridge that overlooks the falls. Liberty Bridge is the centerpiece of a 32-acre urban Falls Park on the Reedy that features gardens, amphitheaters, a multiuse trail and quiet spots that attract both tourists and locals.

The park is home to a number of Greenville events including the Upstate Shakespeare Festival, movie nights and concerts.

The downtown bustle extends beyond the park, spilling into surrounding streets lined with a mind-boggling array

of boutiques, galleries, taprooms and restaurants, including Soby's, famous for its shrimp and grits, spicy pimento cheese with pickled okra and white chocolate banana cream pie.

Sidewalks are lined with trees that provide a canopy from the heat and are dotted with sculptures, including a series of nine bronze mice.

Greenville has plenty of shopping choices, including sprawling retail developments with chain stores. Boutiques are scattered throughout, with many downtown. They include the Coleman Collection, a locally owned store with high-end women's clothing, and Rush Wilson, which has been outfitting men in stylish clothing here since 1959.

Another prominent downtown anchor and cultural hub is the Peace Center, with a 2,100-seat concert hall, amphitheater, lounge and 400-seat theater on 6 acres that

once was the site of a mayonnaise factory, among other businesses. Opened in 1990, the \$42 million Peace Center brings in internationally renowned musicians and touring Broadway shows, such as "Hamilton" and "Beautiful: The Carole King Musical."

The Bon Secours Wellness Arena is even bigger, seating nearly 16,000. Paul McCartney and Willie Nelson are among the musicians who recently played there. It also frequently hosts NCAA Tournament games.

Though temperatures spike to 90-plus degrees in the summer, Greenville's mild winters mean downtown



maintains its vibrancy year-round. That was something of a shocker for Scott and Gayle Butler, both 68. They visited Greenville a few years ago, three days after Christmas.

"It was a Thursday night in December. Who's going to be out on a weeknight after Christmas?" Scott recalls. "We pull up to Main Street. It's 10 o'clock at night. The trees were filled with lights and there were people up and down downtown. I turned to Gayle and said, 'I think I'm going to like it here.'"

Gayle, a former editor of *Better Homes and Gardens*, and Scott, who worked in employee benefits, moved from their longtime home in Des Moines, IA, to a downtown townhouse in 2015, after giving careful consideration to the Raleigh-Durham, NC, area; Richmond, VA; Charleston; and towns close to the Rocky Mountains.

The Butlers wanted to be near the mountains and ocean and in a pedestrian-friendly city with four-season weather. A colleague at *Better Homes and Gardens* suggested Gayle check out Greenville, which they were not familiar with, as is the case for most folks who aren't from the Southeast.

"We've never looked back on our decision to come here," says Gayle. "We had very definite ideas of what we wanted and it was a fit. I'm not sure there's another place that would fit so well."

As for their checklist, the Butlers can be in the North Carolina mountains in less than an hour, and can travel to their beach of choice, Pawleys Island, SC, in four hours.

Summers can be hot and sticky, but Scott, who grew up in northwestern Nebraska, made a vow that wherever he retired, he would not complain about hot weather.

Scott and Gayle take advantage of their downtown home base. Gayle is a regular at M. Judson Booksellers on Main Street. Since opening in 2015, the bookstore sponsors events such as quarterly Sunday Sit-Down Suppers that include four-course meals and discussions with visiting authors. The late Pat Conroy was among the first authors to visit.

Gayle also is active with a newcomers

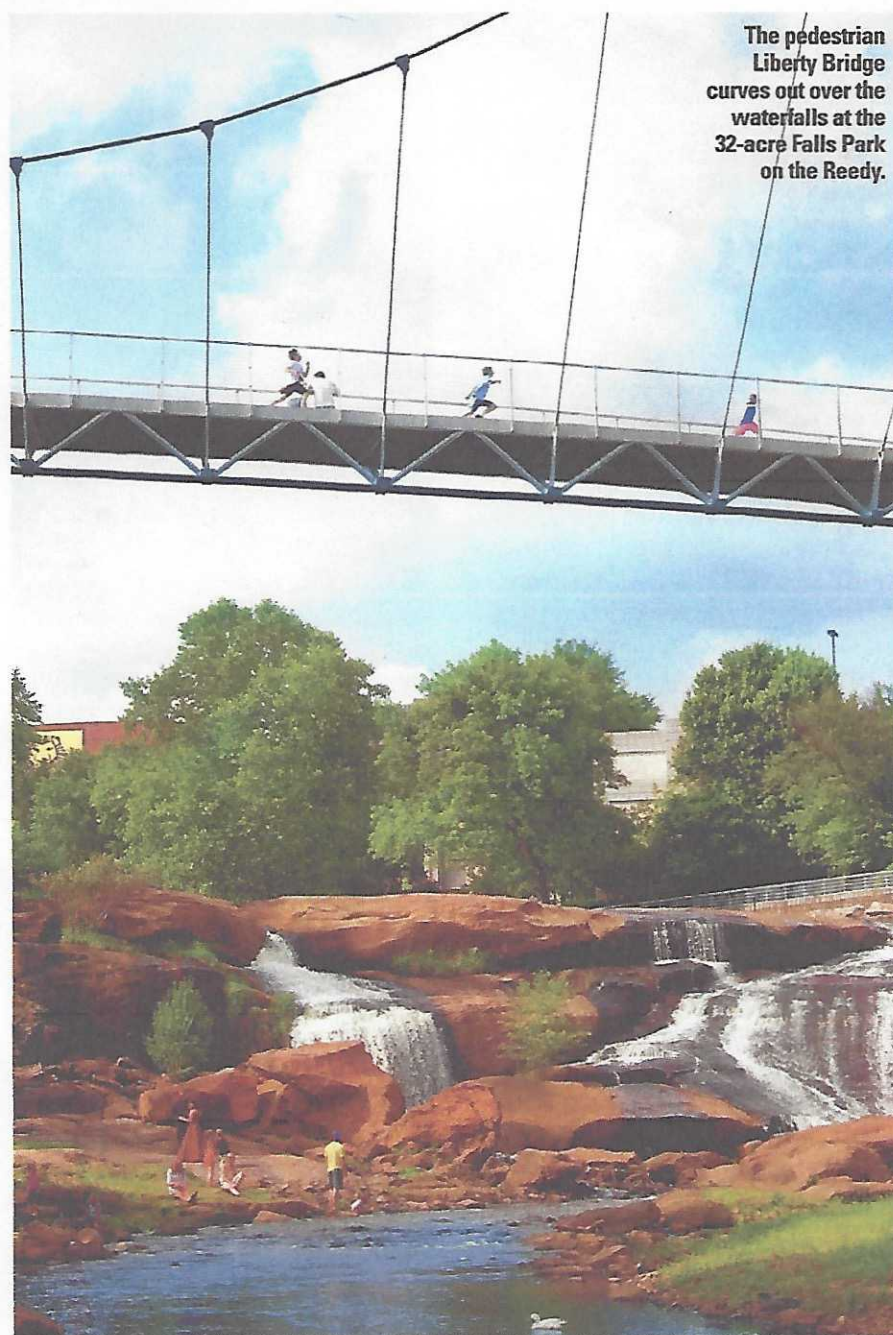
club and Greenville Women Giving, a philanthropic group.

Meanwhile, Scott serves on the board of the Friends of the Reedy River, a nonprofit devoted to preserving the river that has played a vital role in the city's history.

Though downtown has many restaurants, the Butlers occasionally venture away from Main Street to the up-and-coming Village of West Greenville, where they eat at The Anchorage and Golden Brown and Delicious, both of which use locally sourced ingredients.

Like the Village, the city's West End Historic District, between the Village and downtown, is undergoing a renaissance. It stole the hearts of Suzanne and Adrian Woolf, both 56, who had gone on numerous retirement relocation scouting trips from their home base in Boston before seeing Greenville. In 2015, they bought a Craftsman-style house in the West End and renovated it before moving in.

The weather, arts, golf and the city's laid-back lifestyle all appealed to the Woolfs, since they were eager for a break ▶



The pedestrian Liberty Bridge curves out over the waterfalls at the 32-acre Falls Park on the Reedy.



**Population:** 68,563 in Greenville and 514,213 in Greenville County

**Location:** Greenville is in the northwestern corner of South Carolina known as Upstate. It is 65 miles south of Asheville, NC; 100 miles southwest of Charlotte, NC; and 145 miles northeast of Atlanta. Interstate 85 runs through Greenville, linking Charlotte and Atlanta.

**Climate:**

January: High 50°/ Low 31°

July: High 89°/ Low 69°

**Average relative humidity:** 67%

**Rain:** 51 inches annually

**Snow:** 6 inches annually

**Cost of living:** Below average

**Housing cost:** The median sales price of homes in Greenville was \$242,000 in the first half of 2019, according to the Greater Greenville Association of Realtors.

**Sales tax:** 6%

**Sales tax exemptions:** Groceries and prescription drugs. Residents 85 and older pay 1% less sales tax.

**State income tax:** Rates are graduated in six tiers from 0% on taxable income up to \$3,030 to 7% on amounts more than \$15,160.

**Income tax exemptions:** Social Security benefits are exempt. There are exemptions in retirement income of up to \$3,000 for those younger than 65 and \$10,000 for those 65 and older. Those 65 and older get a deduction of \$15,000 against any South Carolina income, which is reduced by the amount of retirement exemption taken.

**Estate tax:** None

**Inheritance tax:** None

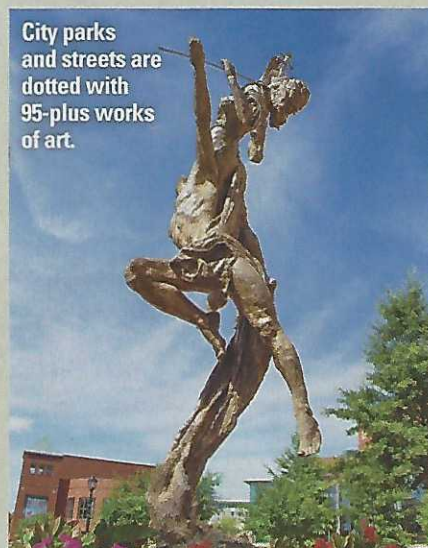
**Property tax:** The rate in Greenville is \$204.80 per \$1,000 of assessed value, with owner-occupied primary residences assessed at 4% of market value. This rate reflects an exemption from school operating costs for owner-occupied primary residences. Annual taxes on a \$242,000 home would be about \$1,982.

**Homestead exemption:** City and county tax credits may be available for owner-occupied primary residences. The first \$50,000 of fair market value of a home or mobile home owned and occupied by a state resident of at least one year who is 65 or older is exempt from municipal, county, school and special assessment property taxes.

**Personal property tax:** A personal property tax applies to motor vehicles, RVs and boats, which are assessed at 6% of their fair market value and taxed at the same rate as homes. The value

decreases yearly until the 15th year, when a minimum assessment of \$50 applies. A biennial vehicle registration fee also is charged.

**Education:** Greenville is home to two liberal arts colleges: Furman University, with 2,800 students, and Bob Jones University, a Christian school with about 3,000 students. Furman has an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute with a \$50 membership fee per academic year and courses starting at \$55. At Bob Jones, nondegree-seeking students can audit classes at no cost. Greenville Technical College offers a Plan 60 option, where those 60 and older who don't work full time can attend classes tuition-free if space allows. Some fees for materials may apply.



City parks and streets are dotted with 95-plus works of art.

**Transportation:** Serving Greenville and Spartanburg, GSP International Airport is home to six airlines, with flights to New York, Denver, Houston, Chicago and Washington, DC, among others. Amtrak has a station in Greenville, making it a stop on the Crescent line, which runs from New York to New Orleans. The Greenlink local bus service has a discounted fare of 75 cents for those 65 and older.

**Walk Score:** Greenville has an overall walkability rating of 41 out of 100, or "car dependent," according to WalkScore.com. Neighborhoods will vary.

**Health care:** Bon Secours Health System and Prisma Health are the two main providers. Bon Secours operates St. Francis Downtown, a 245-bed hospital and outpatient center. Prisma Health's main hub is Greenville Memorial Medical Campus, which has an 710-bed hospital, a cancer institute and a rehabilitation hospital. It is a teaching hospital affiliated with the

University of South Carolina School of Medicine. Locals often go to hospitals in Charlotte or Atlanta for specialized care.

**Housing/master-planned communities:**

- **Hartness**, an all-ages community, with a 180-acre nature preserve, sports courts and a Village Center. From \$369,000, HartnessLiving.com.
- **Verdae**, an all-ages community, with a 20-acre park, golf course and commercial district. From the mid-\$300,000s, Verdae.com.
- **Carilion**, an all-ages community, with a reflection pond, resort-style pool and multiple parks. From the \$240,000s, TRGCommunities.com/Carilion-1.
- **O'Neal Village**, an all-ages community in Greer, 10 miles northeast of Greenville, with a dog park, community garden and amphitheater. From the \$160,000s, ONealVillage.com.
- **Creekside Manor**, an all-ages community in Greer, with a pool and nearby restaurants and shops. From \$208,990, DanRyanBuilders.com.
- **Katherine's Garden**, an all-ages community in Greer, with a pool, cabana and community pavilion. From \$212,990, DanRyanBuilders.com.

**Housing/established neighborhoods:**

- **The West End Historic District**, with many fixer-uppers between downtown and the Village of West Greenville.
- **Village of West Greenville**, considered the SoHo of Greenville for its trendy restaurants, bars and artsy vibe.
- **Augusta Road**, one of Greenville's oldest neighborhoods, known for prime shopping.

**Housing/rentals:**

- **West Village Lofts Apartments**, rents from \$1,415 monthly, WestVillageLofts.com.
- **River's Edge Apartments**, rents from \$1,000, RiversEdgeDowntown.com.
- **The Greene**, rents from \$1,214, TheGreeneApts.com.

**Visitor lodging:**

- **Pettigru Place**, a bed-and-breakfast in a downtown historic district, from \$175, PettigruPlace.com.
- **The Westin Poinsett**, a 12-story hotel and city landmark on the National Register of Historic Places, from \$189, WestinPoinsettGreenville.com.
- **Hampton Inn and Suites Greenville Downtown-RiverPlace**, along the Reedy River downtown, from \$140, HamptonInnAndSuitesGreenville.com.

**Information:** Greenville Chamber, 24 Cleveland St., Greenville, SC 29601, GreenvilleChamber.org. VisitGreenvilleSC, 206 S. Main St., Greenville, SC 29601, VisitGreenvilleSC.com.





More than 60 miles of trails, the 420-foot Raven Cliff Falls and one incredible overlook await at Caesars Head State Park, 30 miles northwest.

from commuting. Suzanne, who worked in data governance for a Boston law firm, realized a dream of becoming a full-time artist. She exhibits and volunteers with the Greenville Center for Creative Arts, lauding the city's arts community as open to all artists, and not snobbish.

Adrian works in knowledge management from home and plays golf at least once a month. The area has some of the top golf courses in the state, with Golf Digest giving high marks to Greenville Country Club's Chanticleer course and The Cliffs Mountain Park in nearby Travelers Rest. The course at the Furman University Golf Club also is popular.

Greenville provides the walkability they craved. From the West End, they can stroll to the minor league ballpark, which is modeled after Fenway Park,

home of the Boston Red Sox.

A few times a week, they walk downtown, checking out galleries, eating at restaurants and keeping up with the latest shops, some of which offer the unexpected.

"We were at a beef jerky store and the owner also sells wine. So there's this small wine bar in the back," Suzanne says of Greenville Jerky and Vine. "It's just a quaint, quirky thing. Like, who knew? And those are the kind of things we like." **W**

*Lisa O'Donnell is a writer for the Winston-Salem (North Carolina) Journal.*

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