

A photograph of a rustic wooden fence made of weathered logs and branches, situated in a grassy field. In the background, there is a large, dark evergreen tree on the left and a small, dark wooden house partially visible behind it. The sky is overcast and grey.

Upcountry

New way to think about a
South Carolina vacation

Vistas throughout Historic Brattonsville
can trigger reflections of the people
once living here.

story and photography by **Christine Tibbetts**

South Carolina low country places you know. Charleston. Beaufort. Canopy roads and rice plantations. Historic sites. Shrimp, potatoes, corn, sausage and seasonings you serve to a crowd loving Low Country Boil.

So you know the low country, but switch gears and consider Upcountry in the state just above the Georgia border. This region nestles the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, so drive upstate.

That means lots of natural wonders like waterfalls, hiking trails, and delightful cities.

I liked my discoveries checking out what local folks called the Upcountry.

Think six counties (but do travelers remember county names?) and lots of towns.

The Upcountry visitor guide groups attractions and lodging, festivals and restaurants, arts and entertainment by counties so here they are to help your planning:

- **Anderson**
- **Cherokee**
- **Greenville**
- **Oconee**
- **Pickens**
- **Spartanburg**

Greenville's the big city and it's dynamic with a familiar buzz. Spartanburg surprised me, probably because I knew little beforehand.

Orient with places you might have known: Gaffney near the far eastern corner and Clemson heading to the western edge of the region; Easley and Anderson prominent too.

My explorations went through York County too, including the town of Rock Hill and Historic Brattonsville. They're a bit east of Spartanburg, hugging the border with North Carolina, 10 minutes south of Charlotte. Olde English District is their moniker.



The brand new Springhill Suites in Greenville offers sleek modern looks, walking access to downtown and swinging seats in the lobby.

Upcountry Spartanburg

Go to Spartanburg for lunch and dinner at the very least. I can vouch for three fine chefs with restaurants named The Kennedy, Cribbs Kitchen and FR8yard.

South Carolina names chef ambassadors each year for their culinary skills and engaging personalities, and one of them is here.

Chef William Cribb sources foods both fresh and local, plus colorful and delicious at the FR-8yard. He's the state's 2017 chef ambassador.

All three of these restaurants plan menus carefully with an eye to in-season ingredients, and to presentations that are art.

Braised pork shanks tender to the tiniest touch stand tall and proud with cashew gremolata on top. Potato salads are warm and purple. Collards are grilled with pickled shallots. Key lime, rosemary and thyme grace the stuffed and grilled snapper.

You'll simply have to experience the sweet potato gelato and chess pie to understand their delightfulness.

Marriott is interested, too, and opened their first-for-South Carolina AC branded hotel in

Spartanburg. Find city views from the 10th story restaurant, and collections of artwork associated with Black Mountain College — paintings, textiles, works on paper and sculpture.

Why AC? That's hotelier Antonio Catalan with properties in Spain and Italy. America's first AC opened in New Orleans in 2014.

Bicycles roll here in abundance. Spartanburg keeps adding trails and lanes because they're proud to be the first bike-sharing community in the south-east. That was 2012. Today, a 32-mile trail network is in the works.

Greenville – Believe in Rejuvenation

The people who live in Greenville like to live there. Choose to. Invite others.

Visitors like me feel that vibe. Seems sincere.

The back story about Greenville makes local happiness ring even truer. Like many towns, traditional industries changed or went away. Some places chose tourism as a new business. And then invented their product.

The people of Greenville chose each other. Their story is about figuring out what the folks al-



Cuisine is colorful and delicious in Spartanburg Upcountry restaurants where one of the chefs was named the South Carolina Chef Ambassador in 2017.



ready there wanted or would like to do. They also considered what might attract new workers.

Seems to be the reason this city is fun. Walk-about downtown offers simple and spontaneous fun or big opportunities. Signature events every season. Bookstores with bakeries. Public art, big and small.

For example, I stayed in the very new Springhill Suites in downtown. Glad that brand just opened in Tifton, too. Exceptional cuisine at the lobby bar, swinging chairs that invite musing.

And walkable to restaurants, museums, art along the sidewalks. Better than that—new buildings are required to include art. Greenville says art’s an integral part of life.

I strolled from the hotel to the Smithsonian-affiliated Children’s Museum of the Upstate, and the Greenville County Museum of Art.

Interesting, diverse collections, exhibitions, interactive pleasures, plus accommodating docents and staff.

Jasper Johns and Andrew Wyeth stand out in the permanent collection.

“Things the mind already knew” is an intriguing framework for a Johns exhibit, with commonplace objects his subjects.

Wyeth was primarily a realist painter. The Wyeth Gallery is a calming space so intend to linger.

(Learn-a-little-more tip: Free docent lectures in the galleries open all kinds of insight to the art and artists, historic settings too. I got lucky arriving 10 minutes before one, without knowing. Check the schedule when you go. Not open Monday or Tuesday.)

Energy and enthusiasm for discovery dominate the Children’s Museum of the Upstate in Greenville. My fun would have tripled if I’d had kids with me.

“Spark your imagination” is a specific section, but really defines all three floors. Do you love this declaration, posted for all to ponder?:

“Children should invent. Invention allows children to see what they are capable of – and boosts their self-esteem and feelings of success.”

Downtown Waterfall

Do not skip the downtown waterfall. This is an unlikely urban experience – long, lovely bridge through the treetops, rushing water, swinging benches, walking trails. This experience is charming in the night lights too.

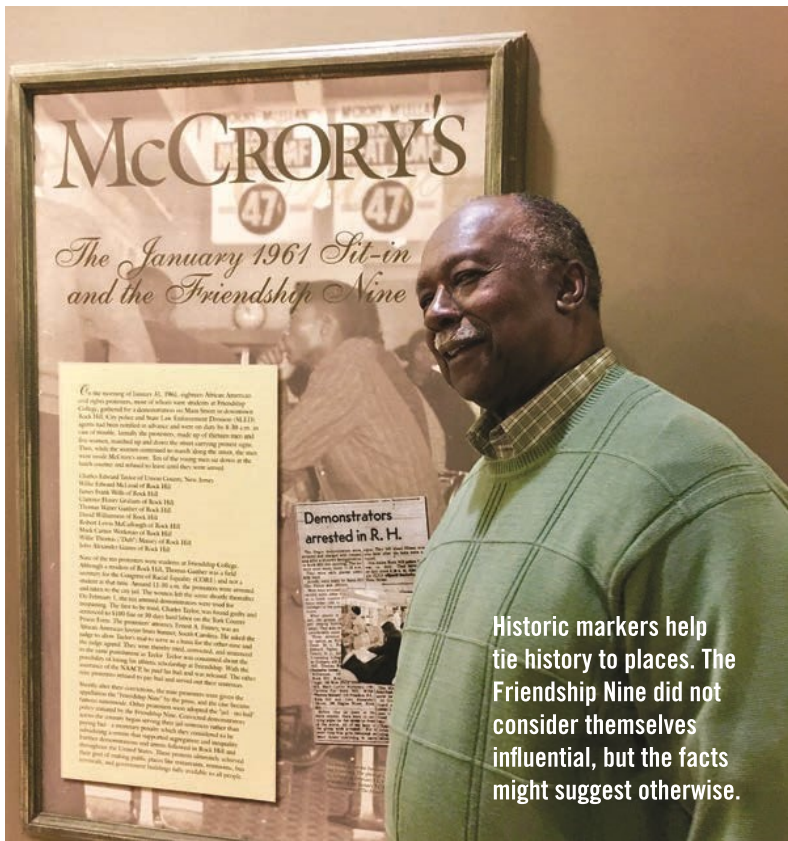
Falls Park on the Reedy (River) is the name if you notice signs. Follow them.

Experience A Lot with a Guide

Stay a week in Greenville and discover ever so much. My visit was shorter so I stretched my options with a Greenville History Tour and relied on historian John Nolan to guide me to an abundance of fine experiences.

I chose his culinary tour but could have opted for a historic driving or walking tour.

History while walking also filled my tasting tour, with Nolan sharing interesting tidbits as we strolled from eatery to eatery.



Historic markers help tie history to places. The Friendship Nine did not consider themselves influential, but the facts might suggest otherwise.

Perhaps it was because my docent was superb, but the stories told at Historic Brattonsville in the town of McConnells are eerily pertinent today.

Historic site interpreters referred to being enslaved as a condition, that being a slave is not who one is.

On a much lighter note, while touring homes, they often suggested, “Privacy then was a state of mind.”

If you watched the Mel Gibson movie, “The Patriot,” then expect a déjà vu feeling because parts were filmed at Brattonsville.

Rock Hill Honors the Friendship Nine

Public art has long distinguished Rock Hill. Personal history does too.

This is an important point on the multi-state Civil Rights Trail.

The stark feel of nine empty chairs at the lunch counter, each with a name tag, in the former McCrory’s launches the story of Jan. 31, 1961.

Meet one of the nine students who sat there and were arrested, and wrap history in this man’s personal humility.

“I never talked to my family about it,” says David Williamson, Jr. “Years later, my daughter learned I was involved and called me to ask.

“I am more interested in teaching young people that love works, not hate.”

Thirty days in jail, cold bologna sandwiches to eat and eventual dropping of the charges are part of the history of the Freedom Nine in Rock Hill.

“The arc of justice came around, just as Dr. King said,” Williamson mused when I learned from him as he sat at the lunch counter. **TS**

BMW Driving Experience

Greer is the location but think of the BMW Performance Center as belonging to Greenville and Spartanburg for your wanderings.

“The golden age of horsepower” framed my thinking and I don’t like to drive. Anybody who is happy behind the wheel will love the multitude of experiences here.

Instructors exude passion for the cars and their capabilities, but the range of opportunities deserve a story all their own.

Historic Brattonsville in the Upcountry

Four generations of Brattons lived on this land that’s now an expansive living history experience. Not often do I get to peek into personal lives from 1780 to 1860.

Renovation of a large brick building to address Reconstruction era issues is underway.

FOR MORE:

www.VisitSpartanburg.com

www.VisitGreenvilleSC.com

www.VisitYorkCounty.com