

SOUTH CAROLINA

Visiting Greenville's a whole new ballgame

There's a lot going on in and around this revitalized small-town charmer.

BY RUSS HEAPS
Special to The Miami Herald

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Greenville is an eclectic mix of today and yesterday. Shoeless Joe Jackson called it home; portions of the George Clooney movie *Leatherheads* was filmed in and around downtown; and BMW builds crossovers and teaches performance driving just outside its city limits.

A cross between Mayberry and Coconut Grove, downtown Greenville bustles with foot traffic seven days a week. Joggers pad by diners seated at sidewalk tables outside downtown's numerous eateries and bars. Parents wrangle laughing children who are focused on finding the bronze mice hidden along Main Street. The air rings with the clanging bell of the free trolley picking up and disgorging passengers.

Main Street's small-town ambience is the result of an ongoing revitalization effort that began 25 years ago and transformed a stark, abandoned cityscape into the warm, inviting tree-lined boulevard it is today.

Located in what the locals refer to as the Upstate, Greenville is closer to Knoxville, Tenn., than it is to Charleston and the coast.

Roughly 70,000 people live within its limits and another 300,000 in its surrounding metro area. Its people are friendly and genuinely happy to have out-of-town visitors. They smile as you pass them on the sidewalk and will eagerly engage you in conversation if you have a question.

OUT AND ABOUT

Greenville would like us to think of it as an ideal weekend getaway.

Indeed, most visitors could easily fill two days with sight-seeing and activities without ever traveling more than a few blocks from one of the downtown hotels.

Those with wanderlust, however, can strike out in the morning to visit the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., Carowinds fun park (rides, shows, water park) in Charlotte, N.C. or Chateau Elan Winery in Braselton, Ga., and be back to savor the New South cuisine at Soby's on Main Street that evening.

But for those of us who are content with strolling tree-lined Main Street, browsing in the Mast General Store or one of the many other shops and boutiques, or taking in one of the museums at Heritage Green, driving isn't required to enjoy a Greenville week-



BART BOATWRIGHT

PARK LIFE: There's not a bad seat in the park at West End Field, above. Below, the Liberty Bridge spans Falls Park, where the Reedy River bisects Main Street.



GREENVILLE EVB

end. Leave the rental car parked and take a walk.

BUY ME SOME PEANUTS AND CRACKER JACK

I'm not a big fan of baseball, but fan or not, watching the minor league Greenville Drive at Fluor Field is an experience that is fun and entertaining beyond the game itself.

The Drive is affiliated with the Boston Red Sox, and the stadium is a mini replica of Fenway Park that is remarkably true to its namesake. Fluor Field, at Greenville's West End, opened in 2006 and was named Ballpark of the Year by Ballparks.com. With no seat more than 13 rows from the field, my Delray Beach friends and I were close to the action. The most

expensive general-admission seat in the house is \$8. The Drive's season is from mid-April to mid-September.

Before going into the ballpark we had sandwiches at the Liberty Tap Room next door. The cost of the entire evening including dinner before, tickets to the game and refreshments during the game totaled less than \$100 for the three of us.

ROLLIN' ON THE RIVER

Falls Park is located where the Reedy River bisects Main Street at Camperdown Way. Large expanses of grass are crisscrossed with "garden rooms" and nature trails from which the river is easily accessible. The park, as well as the 60-foot Reedy River Falls, is best viewed from the

355-foot Liberty Bridge, a concrete suspension bridge. The park, once the site of textile mills, today hosts theater festivals and bicycling events.

We followed one of the walking trails a mile or so to the most-visited family facility in the Upstate, the Greenville Zoo. Located in the city's Cleveland Park area, it is home to elephants, orangutans, giraffes, lions and all the other wild kingdom favorites.

I would never squander time on a weekend trip wandering around inside museums, but even picturesque Greenville experiences some rainy days, from which Greenville's museums offer refuge. Most are concentrated at Heritage Green, a two-block walk from Main Street.

Greenville County Museum of Art, Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery, Upcountry History Museum, and the new Imagine Nation Children's Museum are all adjacent to one another as well as to the Greenville County Public Library.

Near Fluor Field is the Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum and Baseball Library. A repository for memorabilia from Jackson's career and baseball in general, the building was Jackson's Greenville home. It is no coincidence that the museum's address, 356 Field St., reflects Joe's lifetime batting average — the third highest in baseball's history.

During the summer, the Reedy River Nighttime Concert Series brings a variety of concerts to the Peace Center Amphitheater on Wednesday nights. The performances are free.

April through September, Friday nights feature County

VISITING GREENVILLE

• **Getting there:** Allegiant Air (www.allegiantair.com) flies nonstop between Fort Lauderdale and Greenville, a two-hour trip, four days a week for as little as 29 (plus fees and taxes) each way. Otherwise, several airlines make the trip from Miami or Fort Lauderdale in about four hours with a change of planes; round-trip airfare starts around \$270. Or fly to Charlotte, N.C., a two-hour flight (starting at 167 from Fort Lauderdale, 247 from Miami) and drive 100 miles to Greenville.

• **Information:** Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau, 61 South Main St., 800-351-7180; www.greenvillecvb.com.

WHERE TO STAY

• **Hyatt Regency Greenville**, 220 N. Main St.; 864-235-1234; www.greenville.hyatt.com. This 328-room hotel is convenient to all downtown attractions and events. It is full service and its downtown-view rooms offer a spectacular look at the city. Rooms from \$129.

• **The Westin Poinsett Greenville**, 120 S. Main St.; 864-421-9700; www.starwoodhotels.com/westin. Built in 1925, this 200-room full-service hotel had a \$20 million restoration in 2000 and is Greenville's only AAA Four-Diamond hotel. Rooms from \$169.

• **Hampton Inn & Suites**, 171 RiverPlace; 864-271-8700; www.hamptoninnsuitesgreenville.com. Located on the banks of the Reedy River, it features 115 rooms and suites. Rooms from \$169, including breakfast.

• **Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites**, 407 N. Main St.; 864-678-8000; www.hiexpress.com/greenville dtwn. Offering 80 guestrooms and suites, it is within walking distance of the downtown core. Rooms from \$120, including buffet breakfast.

WHAT TO EAT

• **Soby's New South Cuisine**, 207 S. Main St.; 864-271-8431; www.sobys.com. Its name says it all. Entrees \$19-\$26.

• **Smoke on the Water**, 1 Augusta St.; 864-232-9091; www.saucytavern.com. Specializing in smoked meat dishes — prime rib, pulled pork and baby back ribs. Entrees \$16-\$25.

• **Peddler Steak House**, 2000 Poinsett Hwy.; 864-235-7192. Perfectly grilled aged beef and a salad bar to bring tears to your eyes — two good reasons to venture out of downtown. Entrees \$16-\$28.

• **Blue Ridge Brewing Company/Sky at Blue Ridge Brewing**, 217 North Main St.; 864-232-4677; www.blueridgebrewing.com. Good old American comfort food and small-batch beers. Entrees \$15-\$19.

WHAT TO DO

• **Falls Park on the Reedy**, South Main Street and Camperdown Way.

• **Greenville Zoo**, 150 Cleveland Park Dr.; 864-467-4300; www.greenvillezoo.com. Open year-round; \$6 adults, \$3 children 15 and younger, free 3 and under.

• **Greenville Drive Baseball**, 945 South Main St.; 864-240-4500; www.greenvilivedrive.com.

• **Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum**, 356 Field St.; 864-235-6280; www.shoelessjoejackson.org.

• **Heritage Green**, 450 College St.; www.heritagegreenc.com. The site of several museums.

• **Furman University**, 3300 Poinsett Hwy.; 864-294-2000; www.furman.edu.

• **Chimney Rock Park**, U.S. Highway 64/74-A; 828-625-9611; www.chimneyrockpark.com. Breathtaking views 60 miles north of downtown.

• **West End Historic District**, on Main Street between Camperdown Way and Markley Street, has a concentration of eclectic shops and eateries.

ANNUAL EVENTS

• **Freedom Weekend Aloft**, Heritage Park, Simpsonville; www.freedomweekend.org. May 22-25. One of the largest hot air balloon festivals in the Southeast.

• **Greater Greenville Scottish Games & Highland Festival**, Furman University; www.greenvillegames.org. June 5-6.

• **St. Francis Fall for Greenville — A Taste of Our Town**, downtown; www.mainstreetevents.com; Oct. 9-11. Street festival featuring local entertainment and food from local restaurants.

Bank Main Street Jazz. Main Street in front of the Hyatt Regency is closed to traffic, and the hotel's plaza hosts the best in jazz, blues and blues musical groups.