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Great Summer Getaway: Greenville, SC....Really.

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Slideshow:

Great Summer Getaway

ATLANTA -- I'm from Atlanta, so I always encourage folks looking for a good summer getaway to try our local attractions first. Maybe it was all those years as a kid working at Six Flags and Stone Mountain, but those really are great weekend getaways.

However, if you just feel like you've got to get out of Metro Atlanta but still don't want to break the bank, I rediscovered a nearby gem I know you'll enjoy: Greenville, South Carolina. I know, I know. You're saying, "Greenville? Really?". But be prepared not only to be surprised but shocked at just how cool Downtown Greenville is. I worked in the Greenville area ten years ago and just went back for the first time. I was stunned. The transformation from a sleepy mill town to destination city is almost finished, and I couldn't believe the changes to the place.

Let's start with the Reedy River. The babbling creek snakes its way around and through downtown Greenville. Years ago, city leaders identified the area around the waterfalls as a perfect green space. It is. They've transformed the area, particularly the waterfalls, into this magnificent park complete with a jaw-dropping pedestrian suspension bridge perched above the falling water. My wife and I couldn't believe all the activities going on in there. Families were having picnics on well-manicured lawns. Couples strolled along dozens of paths. Kids were wading in an interactive fountain. The local Shakespeare company was performing "Richard III". An artists' market lined the stream. It was like a dream.

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Downtown Greenville itself is now home to great eateries, pubs, coffee houses and specialty shops. You can take the kids on a downtown scavenger hunt, looking for the tiny bronze mice secreted in different

places around Main Street. When we were there, we saw several families having a lot of fun searching for those little mice. And the city is not afraid to block off whole sections of Main Street for street musical festivals. There two different ones on the two days we were there.

Greenville didn't tear down many of its old brick mill buildings. It's "repurposed" them into offices, shops and lofts and they give the city a sense of history. When I lived there ten years ago, the west end area was a dilapidated area of vacant and forgotten store fronts and warehouses. Not anymore. An easy five minute walk from downtown and the Reedy River, the west end is now a vibrant area of more restaurants and shops all anchored by the city's beautiful new minor league baseball stadium.

But if symphonic music or plays are more your cup of tea, Greenville has a thriving arts community centered around the Peace Center which also is right next to the Reedy River.

If you feel you need to get out of town, Greenville is only two and half hours from Metro Atlanta (much less from the northeastern suburbs) and is a great place for an inexpensive weekend getaway, one you'll never forget.

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