

Beach Bound? Lots to See in South Carolina Along the Way

COLUMBIA, S.C. – Millions of travelers drive across South Carolina each year en route to the beach, and for those willing to wait just a minute, there's a lot for them to see and do just off the interstate on their way to Hilton Head, Charleston and Myrtle Beach.

History, theme parks, zoos and family friendly farms loaded with produce and fun are just some of the attractions.

For instance, for families coming into South Carolina on Interstate 77, the attractions start right at the North Carolina-South Carolina border, where Carowinds straddles the state line. Easily spotted from the freeway with its roller coaster and other tall rides serving as a counterpoint to the Charlotte skyline, the 112-acre theme park is the largest of its kind in the Carolinas (www.carowinds.com).

Just south of there, in rural York County, is Historic Brattonsville. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Historic Brattonsville has flourished to become one of the largest restoration and living history sites in the Southeast. The 775-acre Revolutionary War battlefield site features 29 historic structures and programs chronicling Carolina Piedmont development from the 1750s through the 1840s (www.chmuseums.org).

Natural history, meanwhile, unfolds for those who take a quick trip off Interstate 95 near Florence and check out Woods Bay State Natural Area. The park preserves one of the largest remaining pristine Carolina bays, elliptical depressions of mysterious origin scattered along the Atlantic coastal plain. Carnivorous plants, alligators, plentiful songbirds and cypress-tupelo swamp make it a nature lover's delight. (www.SouthCarolinaParks.com).

Also not to be missed is the Darlington Raceway Stock Car Museum at the "track too tough to tame." Cars on display range from the 1950 Plymouth that won the first Mountain Dew Southern 500 to Darrell Waltrip's spectacularly smashed-up 1991 Chevy Lumina, a testament to stock car safety. (www.darlingtonraceway.com)

Small towns and cities with plenty of culture, boutique and arts shopping and dining options are poised at each of the other freeway entries into the Palmetto State. For instance, Bluffton with its Spanish-moss draped art studios amidst old home and chic shops, is just outside Hilton Head at the southern end of I-95 near the Georgia line.

And then there's equestrian-oriented Aiken just off I-20 near Augusta, the charming small towns of Pendleton and Anderson just off I-85 coming in from Georgia, Landrum and Chesnee with their arts shops and boutiques off I-26 and I-85 coming in from North Carolina, and of course, bustling Greenville, now a dynamic city with an international flair.

A good place to start the exploration there is at Heritage Green, a campus of museums and theaters (www.heritagegreencsc.com) near downtown Greenville and its

picturesque River Falls Park. Nearby are a string of state parks along the Blue Ridge, offering stunning vistas and deep, cool woods (www.SouthCarolinaParks.com)

South Carolina, meanwhile, is a heavily agricultural state. Visitors can keep their eyes open for produce stands through the busy traveling months as soon as they exit the freeways and find themselves on nearly any major country road. Pick-your-own and working farms open to visitors also abound. Check out the Farms link at www.sc-heritagecorridor.org to get that journey going.

In the center of it all, of course, is Columbia, the state capital at the intersection of interstates 77, 20 and 26. Attractions there include world-class Riverbanks Zoo & Garden (www.riverbanks.org), the South Carolina State Museum (www.scmuseum.org), the robust Columbia Museum of Art (www.columbiamuseum.org), the largest children's museum in the South (www.EdVenture.org), along with the University of South Carolina and Fort Jackson, one of the nation's largest basic training posts.

More information on destinations in South Carolina is at www.SCNextDoor.com. Another good place to start the journey is with the South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions at www.scatr.com.

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