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Greenville: Talk About a Classic City

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A mingling of New South and Old South will greet visitors when the world's most-prestigious bass fishing tournament comes to Greenville, S.C., this month.

Sure, you'll be heading out to Lake Hartwell to watch the spectacle that is the [Bassmaster Classic](#). Fifty competitors will vie Feb. 22-24 for the event's \$500,000 first-place prize.

But what will you do when you're not attending weigh-ins at [Bi-Lo Center](#)?

There's always the [Bassmaster Classic Outdoors Expo](#) taking place a short shuttle ride away at the [Carolina First Center](#). With 315,000 square feet of exhibit space and a recent \$22 million facelift, it's one of the nation's largest convention facilities. The latest fishing products will be on display with exhibitors offering contests, interactive displays and appearances by bass pros.



The Classic may be the draw for sports tourists, but the scenery around Greenville is just as epic.

But Greenville, home to 60,000 residents and once known as the world's textile capital, begs to be explored.

Throughout the Upcountry, as the northern corner of South Carolina is known, there are more than 500 historic sites set against the backdrop of Blue Ridge Mountains and their pristine lakes and forested trails. The performing arts are represented by a slate of plays and concerts, while museums and parks can help occupy any spare time.

The city itself, which traces its origins to the Revolutionary War period, recently experienced a downtown revitalization.

"It has that downtown metropolis feel, but also has that Southern hospitality," said Lauren Posta, spokeswoman for the Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"We will have AmbASSadors roaming the streets – volunteers from different organizations walking around with maps and schedule cards, suggesting things to people, giving directions."

Posta invites all to drop by the visitor center on Main Street near City Hall.

Indeed, Main Street is the main place to be, with the focal point being **Falls Park on the Reedy**. There the Liberty Bridge – a 355-foot, curved pedestrian walkway – overlooks a waterfall and garden.

"Obviously, I was shocked that the Reedy River runs right through downtown," said Posta, a California transplant here two years now. "And the Liberty Bridge is like nothing you've ever seen. It lights up at

night, so it's cool to see any time of day."

Shops and restaurants line Main Street, where early arrivers might be able to beat the \$5 parking garage fee at the Bi-Lo Center. If you do park there, a short jaunt west will take you to a trolley that runs down Main Street past many points of interest.

"My favorite thing to do is really spend some time downtown," Posta said when asked where she'd take her parents. "The entire West End – Main Street, all the way up to Bi-Lo center, it's all within walking distance of downtown."

Near Falls Park are the **Shoppes at West End**, with all kinds of boutique stores and a couple of ice-cream stores.

For dining, Posta recommends **Soby's New South Cuisine** in downtown, **High Cotton** on the higher end, **Rick Erwin's** for fine dining and Larkin's on the River. She advises to save **Mary's**, which is close to the Liberty Bridge, for Sunday brunch.

On Main Street, Bassmaster Classic fans might appreciate the old-time **Mast General Store**, loaded with all kinds of outdoors equipment, apparel and camping gear.

"In the very back of it, for the children, is a huge area that has walls of candy," Posta said. "Maybe 20 bins of different types of candy. It's kind of like an old-fashioned general store."

Close by is the [Heritage Green](#), an arts, learning and entertainment center. The [Greenville County Museum of Art](#) houses works of Andrew Wyeth, Jasper Johns and a collection of American art with a Southern flavor. (Admission is free.)

Heritage Green also is home of the **Greenville County Library**, **Greenville Little Theatre**, which offers "To Kill a Mockingbird" during the Classic, and [Upcountry History Museum](#).

The **Peace Center for the Performing Arts**, with four venues, also downtown, holds regular performances of the Greenville Symphony, Carolina Ballet Theatre, South Carolina Children's Theatre and International Ballet. The Moiseyev Dance Company performs Feb. 22 at 8 p.m.

Into Baroque art? The **Museum and Gallery at Bob Jones University** includes works by Rubens, Tintoretto and van Dyck.

Another point of interest is one of the last private homes designed and built by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was created in the early 1950s for two county librarians. Inquiries can be made with the Chamber of Commerce regarding tours.

If you're more interested in history, the [American Legion War Museum](#) on Main Street includes displays of former Army and Air Force bases in Greenville County, in addition to artifacts from the Revolutionary War, Civil War, Spanish-American War, World War I, WWII and the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Persian Gulf and Iraq.

For history buffs another cool place, according to Posta, is [Cowpen's National Battlefield](#) in Chesnee, S.C.

In Greenville's Pettigru Historic District is the **16th S.C. Volunteers Museum of Confederate History**,

which holds a collection of Confederate relics and artifacts, both military and personal, as well as a research library.

The kids certainly will dig the [Greenville Zoo](#). Another animal-based outing for the family is [Hollywild Wildlife Park](#), which features safari rides and nearly 500 animals roaming inside large natural enclosures across 80 acres.

Though not yet up from Spring Training, the [Greenville Drive](#), the Boston Red Sox Class A team, plays at [West End Field](#), a replica of Boston's Fenway Park complete with Green Monster and Pesky's Pole.

Baseballparks.com named West End Field its "Ballpark of the Year" for the 2006 season.

Nearby is [Shoeless Joe Jackson Memorial Park](#), featuring a statue of the Greenville native who worked in a textile mill in nearby Brandon Mill. Jackson, who has the third-highest career batting average and had his swing emulated by none other than Babe Ruth, remains ineligible for the Baseball Hall of Fame because of his involvement in the "Black Sox" scandal of 1919.

Other notable folks from Greenville include the Celtics' Kevin Garnett, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Charles H. Townes (inventor of the laser), civil-rights activist Jesse Jackson and Academy Award-winning actress Joanne Woodward, wife of Paul Newman.

With its tax incentives and low cost of living, Greenville has garnered international investors. The North American headquarters of Michelin and the U.S. manufacturing arm of BMW are here. BMW Zentrum has a state-of-the-art visitors center highlighting the company's commitment to engineering.

In the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the outdoors sites are numerous.

"What is unique is the proximity of downtown to the mountains," Posta said. "It's a unique environment to be downtown and enjoy the metropolitan aspect, and then a half-hour drive to be in the mountains, hiking."

Posta points to state parks at [Paris Mountain](#), [Ceasars Head](#) and [Table Rock](#).

Yet, one of the most interesting lies 60 miles north of Greenville, at [Chimney Rock Park](#) in North Carolina. It offers 75-mile views overlooking Lake Lure and Hickory Nut Gorge, where the 404-foot falls were showcased in the 1992 movie "The Last of the Mohicans." Numerous trails can be enjoyed, and there's also a 26-story shaft blasted out of the mountain for an elevator.

But get back to the Bi-Lo in time for the Bassmaster Classic weigh-in. The state-of-the-art arena has played host to Janet Jackson, the Eagles and Eric Clapton, in addition to NBA and NCAA basketball and other sporting events.

Anderson, S.C., near the Lake Hartwell launch site, also has Classic fever. A public arts project has 40 bass – all 6 feet long – painted by sponsors about town, and about 30 smaller versions hanging on the wall of the **Anderson Arts Center**. Two of the large painted fish can be found at the launch site, said Breann Lollis of the Arts Center.

"The downtown area is really cool. We've been going through a huge revitalization project," said Lollis, who invites visitors to view the historic buildings. "And they'll be able to see the fish."

Yes, you'll be able to see plenty of fish – painted ones and more lively varieties.

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