

You're going *where?* Greenville, S.C.

Residents of this aging Southern mill town knew it still had life in it. It took decades of hard work, but today it surprises visitors with its low-key culture and high-wattage charm.

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GREENVILLE

I've never fallen in love with a place as quickly as I did with Greenville. This was a surprise, because I arrived in South Carolina with low expectations. In the late '80s and early '90s, I spent most childhood school vacations and several weeks each summer visiting grandparents who lived elsewhere in the Palmetto State. On many trips there, we would take time to explore a new area recommended to us by a local. Someone once recommended a frog jumping competition in Springfield, but no one ever recommended Greenville, in the Appalachian foothills about halfway between Atlanta and Charlotte.

But when I arrived last spring, the city of 70,000 had me at the first "Hey, y'all" I heard. (This happened before I had exited its airport.) In that greeting, and echoed in dozens of other interactions over the following days, were vibrancy and pride: The Greenvillians I met lived there because they loved the lifestyle the city gave them. While Greenville in the 1980s was not a best bet for family vacations, today it has a wide-ranging (and well-priced) food scene; quirky boutiques; outdoor cafes on bustling, tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly streets; art galleries; bike trails; ample urban green space; a public art collection with more than 70 sculptures; and the fastest-growing population of any city in the state. No wonder its branded social media hashtag is #yeahTHATGreenville.



Stay

Guidebook musts

The 115-room Hampton Inn & Suites Greenville Downtown RiverPlace is the rare chain hotel with a sense of place. Look out your window and you might see the Reedy River or the RiverPlace carillon, a tower of 25 bronze bells erected in honor of the local who spearheaded the development of this district. In the lobby, look for wooden beams reclaimed from area mills and repurposed as ceiling decor. At the hotel's river level is the interactive RiverPlace Fountain, which has 32 water jets that can pulsate in sync.

