



PHOTO: GREENVILLE CVB/JEFF GANDY

Where: One thing that hasn't changed in this evolving city is its prime location. Greenville is nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, halfway between Atlanta and Charlotte, and less than an hour from the Blue Ridge Parkway. This small city with big-city amenities is attracting people from all across the country. They moved here to embrace business opportunities and the low cost of living — and enthusiastically share their new hometown with visitors.

Why: In a word: makeover. As we sat in the front window of **The Green Room** restaurant on **Main Street**, my husband, Chris, was in awe as we observed the constant crowds of people strolling along the busy sidewalks. He'd lived in Greenville in the early 1980s as a reporter for *The Greenville News*, housed in a building just a short distance from where we sat enjoying a delicious dinner. "Main Street was just a canyon of wig shops then. No one would be down here walking around in the evening," he said. We'd been told of Greenville's radical transformation and we were here to see it for ourselves. In decline like many small Southern towns, Greenville's makeover began in 1992, after a BMW plant built nearby spurred an investment of \$76 million into downtown. Nineteenth-century red brick buildings were renovated in order to house shops and restaurants, while newer glass and steel high rises filled the skyline. Another shocking change for Chris was the transformation of the grounds around the **Reedy River**, located at one end of Main Street. An old bridge with no view has been replaced by the



beautiful **Liberty Bridge**, a \$4.5 million curving pedestrian bridge that allows for a scenic view of the falls below.

Bikes and sights: Expertly outfitted with bikes, maps and information by Robyn Bylenga, owner of **Pedal Chic**, we set off on the **Swamp Rabbit Trail**. We rode this 17.5-mile trail along the Reedy River, with detours to tour **Cleveland Park** and the campus at **Furman University**. Back downtown, we parked our bikes next to a bench to explore the **Falls at Reedy River**. Next to seeing the renaissance of the once-seedy downtown area, the transformation of the falls was the most stunning. "We used to ride along a rickety old bridge to get to the other side of these falls, which were basically covered up," Chris said. Now as we looked around we saw the Liberty Bridge, where people strolled and stopped to take photos of the falls, and others carefully walked on the rocks or wandered along a flower-filled riverside path.

Above: Liberty Bridge and the Falls at Reedy River; Tacos at The Green Room.

PHOTO: COURTESY THE GREEN ROOM



Next stop, Main Street: After turning in our bikes, we strolled along Main Street, pausing at the **Dark Corner Distillery** to check out its selection of legal moonshine, and **Mast General Store**, a huge emporium in a 100-year-old building. We had

to pop into **Poppington's Popcorn** for a quick snack and were overwhelmed by the available array of flavors, such as lime cilantro, loaded baked potato and taffy apple.

Greenville's cultural side: The city's cultural explosion was another pleasant surprise. The **Peace Center** is the place to catch touring Broadway shows, and performances by the resident companies: **Carolina Ballet Theatre**, **Greenville Symphony**, **International Ballet and South Carolina Children's Theatre**. The schedule of the **BI-LO Center** is packed with the Greenville Road Warriors hockey matches, circus performances and rock concerts. The **Greenville County Museum of Art** includes works from every major artist in contemporary art, as well as examples of Southern art from colonial times to the present. The Museum is best known for its permanent exhibition *Andrew Wyeth: The Greenville Collection*, recently expanded to 35 paintings.



Greenville even has its own artists' colony, where 14 artists work in **Art Crossing at RiverPlace**. The city

PHOTOS THIS PAGE FROM TOP: JAN SCHRODER; GREENVILLE CVB; GREENVILLE COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART; WESTIN POINSETT; GREENVILLE CVB; FIREWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

partnered with the developer to attract more art space downtown by offering low rent to working artists. It's a plus for tourism, as visitors are welcome to come and see the artists at work. There are also plenty of smaller theaters and art galleries to explore. For arts events, look in local papers for the master arts calendar of the Metropolitan Arts Council (MAC).

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Where to sleep: For a real Greenville experience, book a room in the historic **Poinsett Hotel**. Built in 1925 and once lauded as one of the South's best hotels, it fell into disrepair in the 1970s. After stints as a residential hotel for senior citizens, sitting vacant for years and even being condemned at one point, the hotel reopened in 2000 and is now operated as a Westin. Greenville is also home to several top-rated bed and breakfasts.

Greenville eats: The dining scene in Greenville has boomed in recent years with many people crediting Carl Sobocinski, who had the foresight to open **Soby's on Main** 13 years ago when people avoided the downtown area. Soby's is still going strong, with the best brunch in town that includes a build-your-own Bloody Mary bar.

Sobocinski's Table 301 restaurant group has added **Soby's on the Side**, **Lazy Goat**, **Nose Dive** and **Devereaux's**, housed in a 100-year-old former cigar factory and one of the city's fine dining restaurants serving contemporary American cuisine. These join the close-to-100 other restaurants in the downtown area.

For creative cuisine, try **The Green Room**, where ahi tuna mini tacos and seared scallops are menu highlights. Greenville has its own outpost of that Charleston favorite, **High Cotton**. Housed in a large three-story building right along the riverfront, High Cotton serves seasonal dishes based on local ingredients. Chef Gary Mennie, who recently left Livingston restaurant in our hometown of Atlanta, runs the kitchen. Barbecue lovers will want to try **Smoke on the Water**, a step up in elegance from the usual barbecue joint. For a

taste of the South, try **Sassafras Southern Bistro**, located right off Main Street, or just visit the bar, a favorite with locals.

Romance factor: *Travel + Leisure* ranked Greenville's Main Street as one of "America's Greatest Main Streets" last year, and *Atlanta* magazine named it "Coolest Main Street in the South." Strolling leisurely down the street hand-in-hand, then across the beautiful Liberty Street Bridge was the most romantic part of our weekend getaway. Making our own new memories while Chris shared his from long ago made this weekend a special one for us.

Start here: www.greenvillecvb.com
—Jan Schroder

Top left: Rose Augustyn, co-owner of Poppington's Popcorn; The Greenville County Museum of Art; The historic Westin Poinsett; Greenville's vibrant Main Street.

