



## Greenville, SC Offers Appealing Contracts

By Russ Heaps



A city of dichotomies, Greenville, SC is quaint and vibrant, traditional and modern, and humble and proud. Its downtown reflects a 25-year ongoing revitalization that transformed a bleak, uninviting, abandoned cityscape into a warm, friendly, tree-lined commercial neighborhood. Think Mayberry meets Tribeca.

Main Street teems with foot traffic seven days a week. Free curbside parking and an abundance of parking structures – some of which are free at night and on the weekends – attract suburbanites from the outlying neighborhoods to the city core. Crowded with tables of diners outside of downtown’s numerous restaurants and bars, the sidewalks are shared with joggers, locals walking their dogs and parents wrangling giggling young children intent on locating each and every one of the bronze mice hidden along Main Street.

Even at Main Street’s busiest, you won’t hear a blaring car horn. Some stop-and-go is the price you pay for cruising on this shaded boulevard and everyone accepts it. What you might hear is the clanging bell of the free trolley as it makes its way from the Greenville Drive stadium; the music wafting up from a free concert at the Peace Center Amphitheater; or Hamlet’s soliloquy delivered by a local actor on the stage of The Carolina First Amphitheater.

Greenville is full of surprises. Shoeless Joe Jackson called it home; portions of the George Clooney movie *Leatherheads* was filmed in and around downtown; and BMW assembles crossovers and teaches performance driving just outside its city limits.

Roughly 70,000 people live within Greenville’s limits and another 300,000 or so in its surrounding area. These are friendly people who will exchange hellos with strangers they pass on the street and happily pause to answer visitors’ questions. “Southern hospitality” is an overworked expression, but the locals in Greenville not only practice it, they polish it up and give it new meaning.

Closer to Knoxville, Tenn. than it is to Charleston and the coast, Greenville is located in what the locals refer to as the Upstate. In terms of tourism, Greenville thinks of itself as a weekend getaway. And, indeed most visitors could occupy two days seeing the sights and enjoying a variety of activities without traveling more than a few blocks from one of the downtown hotels. But because of its proximity to a number of cities and attractions, Greenville also serves well as an anchor for extended vacations.

Visitors itching to spread their wings a little can strike out in the morning to tour Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC, Carowinds theme park in Charlotte, NC, Chimney Rock Park, NC, or Chateau Elan Winery in Braselton, GA and still be back in Greenville that evening to relish the New South cuisine at Soby's on Main Street. All that is required is a sense of adventure and a 90-minute drive to enjoy a remarkable wealth of sights and activities.



But for those satisfied to relax by strolling tree-lined Main Street, ducking into some of its many shops and boutiques to do a little browsing, skipping a stone across the Reedy River, or soaking up a little culture at one of the museums at Heritage Green, driving isn't required. Leave the car parked, take a walk, and enjoy.

Almost a destination in itself, the Mast General Store on Main Street is popular with locals and visitors alike. Just as the name implies, it offers an eclectic mix of upscale merchandise that includes clothing, shoes, housewares, gifts, toys, and candy. Serious shoppers can easily lose themselves for an hour or two.

Even if you're not a big fan of baseball, watching the Boston Red Sox-affiliated Greenville Drive baseball team at Fluor Field in the historic West End is an experience that's fun and entertaining beyond the game itself. A scaled-down replica of Boston's Fenway Park that is remarkably accurate to its namesake, it was named Ballpark of the Year in 2006 by Ballparks.com. Extending from mid April to mid September, the Drive's season is packed with home games. There isn't a bad seat in the house and the most expensive general-admission seat is only \$8. It's no more expensive than taking the family to the local cineplex for a movie. You won't sit more than 13 rows from the field; so no matter where you sit, you are close to the action. Before the game, grab a sandwich at the Liberty Tap Room that is adjacent to the ballpark. A varied menu and more than 30 beers on tap are the draw.

Falls Park is Greenville's second largest park and is located where the Reedy River bisects Main Street at Camperdown Way. Large expanses of grass and well-tended gardens are criss-crossed with nature trails all with river access. The park, as well as the 60-foot Reedy River Falls, is best viewed from the 355-foot Liberty Bridge. A concrete suspension bridge, it provides an amazing vantage point of the river, park and downtown's skyline.

Following one of the nature trails for a mile or so brings you to the most-visited family attraction in the Upstate, the Greenville Zoo. It is situated in the Cleveland Park area and is home to elephants, orangutans, giraffes, lions and many other wild kingdom favorites. Open year-round, the entry fees are \$6 for adults and \$3 for children 15 years old or younger – 3 years old and under are admitted free.



If only spending two or three days in Greenville, investing some of those precious hours wandering around museums may not seem like the best use of your time; however, all the green in Greenville is the result of some rain. On those rainy days a variety of museums offer refuge from the weather. Most of them are concentrated at Heritage Green – a two-block walk from Main Street. Greenville County Museum of Art, Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery, Upcountry History Museum, and the new Imagine Nation Children's Museum are all in close proximity to one another and the Greenville Public

Library.

Near Fluor Field is the Shoeless Joe Jackson Museum and Baseball Library. A repository for memorabilia from Jackson's colorful career and baseball in general, the house-turned-museum was Jackson's Greenville home. Its 356 Field Street address, by no coincidence, is an homage to his 356 lifetime batting average – the third-highest in baseball history.

During the summer the Reedy River Nighttime Concert Series brings a variety of concerts to the Peace Center Amphitheater on Wednesday nights. The performances are free. The Peace Center is host to a mix of performing arts throughout the year that includes concerts, plays and comedians. Beginning in early April and continuing until the end of September is County Bank Main Street Jazz. Every Friday night, weather permitting, the block of Main Street in front of the Hyatt Regency is closed to all but foot traffic. The hotel's plaza deck is transformed into a bandstand where the best in local jazz, beach and blues musical groups perform. Vendors hawk soft drinks, food and beer from booths lining the street and those with a mind to, dance to the beat.

Also on the edge of downtown, the Bi-Lo Center hosts sell-out crowds for performers such as Kenny Chesney and Toby Keith.

Several downtown hotels provide overnight accommodations with basic room prices running from \$120 to \$169. At opposite ends of Main Street, the Hyatt Regency and the Westin Poinsett (AAA-rated Four Diamond) are convenient to all of downtown's attractions. Farther north on Main Street is the Holiday Inn Express & Suites. Situated on the southern bank of the Reedy River, the Hampton Inn & Suites is also centrally located.

Main Street's restaurants bustle with diners, particularly on the weekends. The menus run the gamut from gourmet cuisine to comfort food. Popular choices are Soby's New South Cuisine on South Main St., Smoke on the Water at the intersection of Augusta St. and South Main St., and the Blue Ridge Brewing Company/Sky at Blue Ridge Brewing on North Main St. Tempting you to venture out of downtown, Peddler Steak House on Poinsett Highway offers perfectly grilled aged beef and dinners that include a salad bar brimming with all the fixin's.

In anticipation of a Greenville getaway, checking with the Greenville Convention and Visitors Bureau ([www.greenvillecvb.com](http://www.greenvillecvb.com)) is always a good idea. It can provide the schedule of annual events so that you might coordinate your trip with one of particular interest. Such events include the St. Francis Fall for Greenville – A Taste of Our Town. Providing an opportunity to sample the offerings of many of Greenville's eateries, it is held on Main Street during October. Another annual happening is the Greater Greenville Scottish Games and Highland Festival at Furman University in June.

**Here's the Value:**

Members save 10% off regular rates at the Westin Poinsett.

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