23 reasons to see Santee.

Officially known as Santee Cooper Country, this region is filled with golf, history, charming towns and some incredible natural areas. Just a short drive from Charleston, this treasure is off the usual tourist path—and well worth the effort.

By Joquita Burka

1. Santee National Wildlife Refuge: 15,000 acres of undisturbed woods, pristine waters and natural habitat for everything from alligators to osprey.

2. Golf courses—21 to be exact—make this area a golfer’s dream.

3. Mepkin Abbey, a working monastery with public gardens.

4. Excellent bass, brim, crappie and catfish fishing in Lakes Moultrie and Marion.

5. Old Santee Canal Park includes trails, sweeping bluffs, Stony Landing Plantation and America’s first canal.

6. The unique blackwater Edisto River Canoe & Kayak Trail.

7. Outlet, mall, antique, art and boutique shopping.

8. I.P. Stanback Museum, at SC State University, for African and African-American art.

9. Santee State Park on Lake Marion with trails, cabins and camping.

10. Four passages of the Palmetto Trail—for a total of 85 miles of walking/biking.

11. Cypress Gardens, hiding place of the “Swamp Fox,” offers a reptile center, aquarium, butterfly house and boat tours.

12. Swan Lake Iris Gardens, home to amazing Japanese iris and each of the world’s species of swans.


14. Poinsett State Park offers cabins, equestrian camping, fishing and hiking.

15. Festivals—anything from the Governor’s Frog Jump Festival to the Boykin Christmas Parade & Road Kill BBQ is here.


17. Woods Bay State Natural Area, adjacent to the Pee Dee Country, is the site of a natural elliptical depression called a Carolina Bay.


19. Mill Creek Park is unique in offering equestrian facilities, stables and trails.

20. History: Claflin University, Eutaw Springs Battlefield, Alex Salley Archives Building, and much more.

21. Many fascinating sites along the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor.


23. Railroad Shrine and Museum in Branchville, the oldest railroad junction in the world.

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