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The front porch of the Lowcountry

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The Front Porch of the Lowcountry

By Meredith K. Baer

IN THE LAST DECADES OF THE 1700s, LOWCOUNTRY PLANTERS BEGAN LOOKING FOR A LOCATION TO BUILD SUMMER HOMES IN ORDER TO ESCAPE THE HEAT OF THE COAST. THE SPOT THEY CHOSE, ORIGINALLY CALLED HICKORY VALLEY, EVENTUALLY BECAME KNOWN AS WALTERBORO, TAKING ITS NAME FROM TWO OF THE ORIGINAL SETTLERS—PAUL AND JACOB WALTERS. WALTERBORO WAS—AND STILL IS—A PLACE WHERE ROCKING CHAIRS AND PORCH SWINGS JOIN FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORS ON WARM EVENINGS.

Visitors today are reminded of the town's early days as a summer retreat—tree-lined streets where quaint homes with broad porches are surrounded by centuries-old azaleas and camellias, and beautiful churches that date to the 18th century. The early planters who summered here also built the town's first library in 1820. This and a number of other historically significant buildings still stand today, with some listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

While respecting its past, Walterboro also is a town firmly rooted in the present. Guests can wander streets filled with lively antique shops, or stop into one of its many restaurants. There's a farmers' market, history museums, modern shops and boutiques, and one of the finest folk art galleries in the South.

The South Carolina Artisans Center strives to preserve and perpetuate the state's folk art and highlight its rich cultural heritage. The gallery features traditional art-like basketry, ceramics, and woodworking as well as cutting-edge pieces in fiber, glass, jewelry, textiles, painting, photography, stained glass, sculpture and folk art. From less pricey creations to works valued at thousands of dollars, execution is consistently high and many pieces are of museum quality.

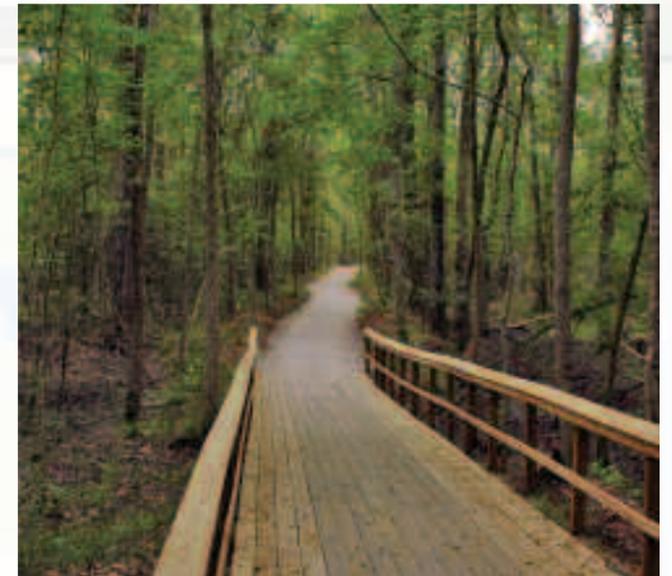
Treasure-hunters love scouring the village's dozen antique shops, finding everything from high-end antiques to fun vintage souvenirs. Visitors can also enjoy browsing the shelves at Downtown Books and Espresso or shopping the rustic Walterboro farmers' market for farm-fresh produce and delicious homemade food products.

History buffs are rewarded with a number of small, well-documented historic museums that record olden times in Walterboro. The Slave Relic Museum documents and celebrates the history and culture of Lowcountry African Americans with a collection that includes artifacts from the Underground Railroad and slave-made quilts, furniture and tools. Photographs and documents explore the African slave trade and stories of slaves in the antebellum South. The Colleton Museum, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is located inside a (c. 1855) jail. Here, exhibits explore the area's cultural and natural history from the age of the dinosaurs to present day.

Looking for a good place to dine? Walterboro has a number of novel restaurants offering a good range of food choices. On Washington Street, Chez Jean offers a menu of international cuisine. Or try the luck of the Irish at Blarney Stone, a pub where corned beef and cabbage are on a menu that also has shrimp and grits. For more traditional fare, have a delicious steak dinner around the corner at Blu Lagoon. At the end of the day, nothing beats an iced-cold drink like those found at Hiott's Drug Store, where an old-fashioned soda fountain harkens back to the days of our youth.

Nature lovers can take advantage of South Carolina's year-round balmy weather and enjoy the quiet solitude of the ACE Basin and the Great Swamp Sanctuary, which is accessible from downtown. From sunrise to sunset, a visit to the sanctuary promises a day full of hiking, canoeing and cycling through pristine Lowcountry swamps where flowers and Spanish moss drip from Cyprus trees.

Recreation enthusiasts enjoy hunting and fishing in the



Top: The Victorian Gothic St. Jude's Episcopal Church (c. 1852), is just one of the historic structures that stand in Walterboro. Above: Miles of trails and boardwalks give visitors to the Great Swamp Sanctuary a peek into the area's bustling ecosystem.

heavily wooded forests surrounding the town. And golfers will find a challenging nine holes to play at Dogwood Hills Country Club, a championship course designed by Donald Ross. Culture and art abound, with many programs held at The Colleton Center and the University of South Carolina Salkehatchie in Walterboro, and colorful festivals such as the annual Colleton County Rice Festival, a tribute to the town and county's rice planting heritage.

A new Welcome Center just off I-95 at exit 53 offers brochures and information on Walterboro and the Lowcountry. Known for Southern hospitality and historic homes, Walterboro is truly "The Front Porch of the Lowcountry."

Find out more in *Places...*

Turn to page 114 in the "green pages" for more on Walterboro.

