

# Georgetown



## South Carolina's Picture-Perfect Town

By Katie McElveen

Its shady sidewalks pass under centuries-old live oak trees. At sunset, when the marsh grass glows like gold against the blue sky, the view from the riverbank is mesmerizing. Dominated by a clock tower that was built in 1842 to guide merchants and shoppers to the open-air market, the downtown is lined with buildings that once housed rice and indigo, but are now filled with bustling shops and restaurants.

You might not have heard of Georgetown, SC, but chances are you've seen it. That's because in late 2006, the city was chosen as Picturetown USA by the Nikon® camera company. To promote the company's D40 camera, a group of Georgetown residents—non-photographers—were given cameras and told to shoot as many pictures of their families, their friends and the landscape as they chose. Dozens of the surprisingly stunning images were featured in a series of advertisements that ran in nationally distributed magazines and newspapers, in movie theaters and on television stations throughout the country, with hundreds more on display on the Nikon Picturetown website at [stunningnikon.com/picturetown](http://stunningnikon.com/picturetown).

While the photographs highlighted the beauty of this coastal town, they weren't able to convey the region's unique history as one of the wealthiest rice-growing areas in the country, nor its casual, laid-back attitude that welcomes visitors with a smile.

Rice is a picky plant, requiring a flat area that can be repeatedly flooded and drained to thrive. Located on a floodplain where five tidal rivers empty into a protected bay just a few miles from the Atlantic Ocean, Georgetown was perfectly positioned to not only grow rice but to ship it as well. The first plantations, which grew both rice and indigo, were established right around the turn of the 17th century. By the mid-1800s, some 91 plantations around Georgetown grew almost half the rice produced in the country, and the city's port shipped more rice than any other in the world.

Although the marshes have reclaimed the rice paddies, vestiges of Georgetown's rice culture remain and are waiting to be explored.

Nell Cribb, who has been conducting walking tours of the city's historic district for more than 20 years, suggests starting your visit to Georgetown with a stroll through the historic district or along Harborwalk, the city's restored waterfront. "Take it leisurely," she notes. "The houses are original, not replicas, and people are still living in them. Georgetown is the real thing, like Coca-Cola®!" And don't be surprised if locals nod "hello" as you walk by, or stop for a quick chat. "Even visitors feel like they're a part of it here," says Cribb.

Suzanne Hargrove, who came to Georgetown as part of the Nikon crew, couldn't agree more. "I fell in love with the people," she says. "They were all so incredibly friendly!"

There are a number of ways to learn about Georgetown's rice culture. One is to visit the Rice Museum, housed in the clock tower, where artifacts and tools tell the story of how the tiny white grain brought great wealth to the entire region. Another is to drive south on Highway 17 to the circa 1740 Hopsewee Plantation or head out Highway 701 to Mansfield Plantation, a bed and breakfast that sits on 1,000 acres filled with rice mill ruins, a preserved slave village and an antique-filled main house.

But it's the network of tidal creeks that push into the marshes and allowed rice to be cultivated in the first place that offer the most unique perspective. On a kayak tour with Black River Outdoor Center, you'll glide past the ruins of former plantation houses and along the dikes and trunk gates that were used to control the flow of water into the rice paddies. Along the way, you'll learn how the labor required to dig the complex system of canals by hand through the alligator-infested waters rivaled that used to build the pyramids in Egypt.

After a day exploring, soak up the cool breezes at one of the riverfront restaurants along Front Street, or stroll across the street to the Rice Paddy restaurant, where you can feast on grilled local tuna in a restored 19th-century brick building.

It's the perfect way to end a day in Picturetown USA.

Find out more in *Places...*

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