



Clara Bosonetto

Western South Carolina

The four counties of Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg and Barnwell make up the 2,462 square miles of thoroughbred country in western South Carolina. The area is situated along I-20 between Atlanta and Columbia, S.C., and just east of Augusta. Leave the interstate behind to explore charming small towns and their galleries, antique shops,

roadside produce stands, festivals, plantation homes and historical sites from Colonial and Civil War times. The drive from greater Atlanta to Aiken is under three hours. Drive time from Aiken to Barnwell or Blackville is about 40 minutes. Download a helpful trip planner: www.tbredcountry.org.

Budget



Blackville, located along the SC Heritage Corridor, is home to a small Mennonite community. One of its families runs Miller's Bread Basket, a popular restaurant on Main Street. CONTRIBUTED BY SOUTH CAROLINA NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Stay

Find serenity at Wisteria Cottage, a remote 25-acre farm with a restored two-bedroom cottage (sleeps four with one queen and one double bed) from the 1940s. Slow down on the front porch, stroll the flower and herb garden, walk in the woods, or soak in a claw foot tub. One night rates are \$60; \$50 per night for two or more nights. A typical Mennonite breakfast served in the cottage kitchen or on the deck is \$30 additional for two. 2136 Jones Bridge Road, Blackville, 803-671-5638, blackvillwisteriacottage.com.

Eat

Travelers come from miles away to Miller's Bread Basket, where Amish-Mennonite cooking with a Southern influence is served cafeteria-style with homemade casseroles, breads and seasonal vegetables (\$7-\$10). Save room for a slice of shoofly pie. 483 Main St., Blackville, 803-284-3117.

Experience

Visit the Healing Springs Country Store for deli sandwiches, hot dogs, hoop cheese, baked goods, ice cream, and Pennsylvania Birch Beer (carbonated soft drink) and local souse (pickled head cheese). The store sells sterilized gallon jugs for less than \$2 to take to the artisan wells of Healing Springs around the corner. 2563 Healing Springs Road, Blackville, 803-284-3377. Indians believed the mineral spring water had healing powers. Revolutionary War soldiers were brought here to drink. Gallons of water (free) pour continually from underground pipes. Springs are located behind the Healing Springs Baptist Church at 17 Springs Court.

Moderate



"Face jug" is a term coined by art historians to refer to an African American pottery piece created in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the midst of slavery, in the Edgefield District of South Carolina. CONTRIBUTED BY SOUTH CAROLINA NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Stay

Reserve a Barnwell State Park cabin or campsite and get savings on up to four park activities. Two-bedroom cabin rates average \$66 per night. The 307-acre park is known for its fishing (on a 16-acre or an 8-acre lake) and nature trails. 223 State Park Road, Blackville, 803-284-2212, www.southcarolinaparks.com/barnwell.

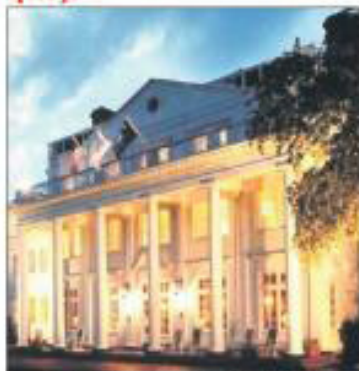
Eat

Partake in a Southern buffet of fried chicken, rice, gravy, mac and cheese, tomato pie and cornbread and desserts of blackberry cobbler and pineapple upside down cake at Lakeside Grille (\$8). Selections vary; served 11 a.m.-2 p.m. 188 Gilmore St., Barnwell, 803-543-0700.

Experience

"Stay & Play Deals" activities at Barnwell State Park include a tour of a beautiful plantation home at Rodcliffe Plantation State Historic Site (\$4) or take a free guided tour of the Battle of Rivers Bridge, where Gen. William T. Sherman fought on his march to Columbia (treasures at this historic site are original, preserved and over 140 years old). Rent a canoe (\$5) and paddle a portion of the South Edisto River, the longest free-flowing blackwater river in North America. Or rent a fishing motorboat (\$85) at Lake Warren State Park. Step into the downtown Barnwell historic general store to buy locally made souvenirs such as the traditional Carolina face jugs. 12080 U.S. 278, 803-543-7900, www.pawpintpottery.biz.

Splurge



Famous guests of The Wilcox included Winston Churchill, Harold Vanderbilt, Elizabeth Arden and Count Bemadotte of Sweden. This grand hotel is also said to be a popular place for ghostly experiences. CONTRIBUTED BY [WWW.WILCOXHOTEL.COM](http://www.wilcoxhotel.com)

Stay

Guest rooms and suites at the Wilcox are elegantly appointed with period antiques, plush beds and deep soaking tubs. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the grand Southern Inn features a restaurant, landscaped pool and a small spa. Rates from \$189-\$423 include full Southern buffet breakfast, 100 Colleton Ave. S.W., Aiken, 877-648-2200, www.thewilcox.com.

Eat

Visit Malla for a fine dining experience. Entrees, \$16-\$35. 120 Laurens St. S.W., Aiken, 803-643-3086, www.mallarestaurant.com.

Experience

Since 1977, thoroughbred racing trophies, racing silks and photography have been on display at the Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame and Museum (donations accepted). 135 Dupree Place, Aiken, 803-642-7631, www.aikenracinghalloffame.com. Catch a match at the Aiken Polo Club, one of the oldest and most historic polo clubs in the states (first game held in 1882). The season runs from April to June and from September to mid-November on Sundays; \$5 general admission; \$20 social pavilion; \$25 for parking on the field (bring your own picnic). 420 Mead Ave., Aiken, 803-643-3611, www.aikenpoloclub.org.

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By Clara Bosonetto - For the AJC

Weekend in Thoroughbred Country, S.C., one of three ways: on a budget, spending a bit more, or when the getaway calls for a splurge.

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