

The Best of the Carolinas & Georgia

From steep, sloping mountain forests to lush farmlands that evoke the English countryside, the Carolinas and Georgia offer a landscape as diverse and colorful as the personable demeanor of the region's residents.

The tri-state area has aged gracefully with time, leaving in place an amiable drawl and such culinary traditions as hot buttered grits and fresh boiled peanuts, yet it has also managed to rival its Northern competitors in technology and style. Long burdened with a "Scarlett" reputation cluttered with pickup trucks and good ol' boys, these Southern states now boast bright, neon-lighted cities complete with cutting-edge architecture, high-tech industry, exhilarating sports events, and intricately designed highways—not to mention big-city gridlock.

Still, the Old South lives on, at least in pockets, and some achingly pastoral countrysides seem to be torn from the pages of such Deep South authors as Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty, and William Faulkner. But it is in the bosom of the tri-state area, in a setting of old-style graciousness, that the muscular, gleaming New South engine of commerce, industry, and innovation powers on.

Clichés die hard, though, and Hollywood has been reluctant to let go of its love affair with the colorful Old South. Best-selling novels and Academy Award-winning screenplays continue to mine the mystique of a South clad in its own troublesome history. The region has become a big attraction for writers and movie producers lured by superb natural settings, historic ambience, and (in the case of the producers) beneficent right-to-work laws. So many movies have been made in and around Wilmington, North Carolina, that it has been dubbed "Hollywood East."

The South of yore may live on in Hollywood, but the talk today is of the New South, a land characterized less by drawls and "y'alls" and more by a bright, intelligent group of people bringing culture and business to an area that once slept quietly by the cotton gin. These new sons and daughters of the South might invite "y'all to come back now" for a second visit, but they'll suggest that you bring along a checkbook to buy their products (such as a set of high-end furniture manufactured in Lenoir) or that you invest in one of the mega-pharmaceutical research labs that have set up shop in the Research Triangle of North Carolina.

The Carolinas and Georgia are no longer whistling "Dixie," but standing up and making their voices heard in the world marketplace. The voices reflect the diversity of a population that not so long ago faced considerable challenges regarding racial inequality, challenges that Georgia native son Martin Luther King, Jr., so eloquently called upon the nation to meet. One happy result of the efforts to surmount those challenges in recent years has been the reverse migration of many African Americans from the North home to the South.

The New South has other voices, including those of politicians clamoring to fill the shoes and Senate seat of the seemingly immortal but at-long-last-expired Strom Thurmond. And of course, there's the dignified, soft-spoken peanut farmer from Plains who became president of the United States and is now an agent of world peace.

The Carolinas and Georgia are major destinations for travelers. Charleston and Savannah rank among the top 10 cities in the country in *Condé Nast Traveler's* Readers' Choice Awards year after year. From the Smoky Mountains to the sun-kissed Atlantic coastline, from the windswept dunes of Kitty Hawk all the way to Georgia's Suwannee River country and Okefenokee Swamp, the tri-state area is attracting visitors by the millions.

Taken as a whole, the North Carolina/South Carolina/Georgia tri-state area is like a country unto itself. It's wildly diverse and packed with places to see and things to do. We've traveled the back roads of the Carolinas and Georgia since we were kids, exploring the Old South and the New South. That's why we feel qualified to bring you our suggestions of the best, with the understanding, of course, that there's always plenty of room for disagreement. Here are our picks for the cream of the crop.

1 The Best Scenic Drives

- **The Outer Banks** (North Carolina): If you can get past the overly crowded highways in summer and strip-mall development, prepare yourself for one of the strangest and most beautiful natural geographical areas in North America. To explore this thin slip of land, drive N.C. 12, beginning at Corolla in the north and ending at the Ocracoke lighthouse in the south. Along the way, you'll pass the shifting shoals of Oregon Inlet, Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, and pristine stretches of beach along Cape Hatteras National Seashore. See chapter 4.
- **The Blue Ridge Parkway** (North Carolina): This is the single most dramatic drive in the tri-state area and one of the grandest drives in the

world. Beginning in Virginia, the parkway winds and twists along mountain crests for some 470 miles. It passes through most of western North Carolina before halting at Great Smoky Mountains National Park near the Tennessee border. See chapter 8.

- **Chattahoochee National Forest** (Georgia): U.S. Route 76 from Ellijay and past Blairsville to Clayton is one of the most scenic routes in Georgia, dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, when the federal government purchased much of the land here. That act alone helped preserve the fading culture of the southern Appalachians, which you can see today as you slowly make your way through this national forest. See chapter 19.

2 The Best Family Vacations

- **Great Smoky Mountains National Park** (North Carolina): Sixteen peaks of the southern Appalachians soar skyward to approximately 6,000 feet. We're attracted not just by the mountains, but also by the surrounding theme parks and activities, ranging

from water parks to valley railroads and offering countless opportunities for fun. See chapter 9.

- **Charleston** (South Carolina): If the tri-state area has a town that's designed for families, it's Charleston. The city has been called an 18th-century

etching come to life. You can take boat rides to Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began; explore Magnolia Plantation, with its petting zoo and gardens; and visit several family-oriented nature parks, including one at Palmetto Islands. See chapter 11.

- **Hilton Head** (South Carolina): Much more upscale than Myrtle Beach, Hilton Head is filled with broad beaches. You can enjoy myriad activities, such as biking on the beaches, taking a dolphin-watching cruise, and exploring the 605-acre Sea Pines Forest Preserve, a public

wilderness tract with walking trails. All major hotels offer summer activity centers for kids. See chapter 12.

- **The Golden Isles** (Georgia): This string of lush, subtropical barrier islands, located south of Savannah near the Florida border, is designed for family fun and adventure. Summer Waves, a 118-acre water park on Jekyll Island, is just one of the many attractions designed with children in mind. Nature still thrives in this setting, including Cumberland Island National Seashore, a 16×3-mile wildlife sanctuary. See chapter 22.

3 The Best Places to Rediscover the Old South

- **Beaufort** (North Carolina): Not to be confused with the town of the same name in South Carolina (see below), Beaufort is North Carolina's third-oldest settlement, dating from 1713. Its 200-year-old houses and narrow streets reflect the old way of life. The town is rich in Carolina tradition that predates the Civil War. See chapter 5.
- **Beaufort** (South Carolina): Straight from the screen in *The Big Chill* and *The Prince of Tides*, Beaufort is like a sleepy dream of long ago. Established in 1710, it grew fat from Sea Island cotton. Wealthy owners built lavish antebellum houses that still stand today, luring visitors with their faded charm. See chapter 12.
- **Georgetown** (South Carolina): A town with surprisingly well-preserved pre-Revolutionary War houses and churches, Georgetown invites you to enter a time capsule. In this small enclave of some 11,000 people, more

than 50 historic homes still stand, dating back as far as 1737. See chapter 13.

- **Madison** (Georgia): Only an hour's drive east of Atlanta stands today's version of what antebellum travelers called "the wealthiest and most aristocratic village between Charleston and New Orleans." General Sherman was an acquaintance of a local U.S. senator from here and, for old times' sake, agreed not to burn down the town. Its oak-lined streets and historic homes still stand. See chapter 18.
- **Savannah** (Georgia): Because General Sherman was talked out of burning it, he gave the city to President Lincoln as a Christmas present instead. No city in all the South has Savannah's peculiar charm. Its very name suggests Spanish moss, hoop skirts, mint juleps on the veranda, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, and lovely antebellum architecture. See chapter 21.

4 The Best Small Towns

- **Edenton** (North Carolina): Edenton is the quintessential small port town along the Outer Banks. If Colonial-

style clapboard is your thing, this is the place to see it. You can wander past well-tended gardens on streets

shaded by magnolia and pecan trees. Edenton has been here since 1722, and the National Register of Historic Places long ago gave the town its blessing. See chapter 4.

- **Asheville** (North Carolina): The city might object to such a classification, but it's the "small town" of cities. One of the most desirable places to live in America, Asheville has attracted everybody from the Vanderbilts to the tragic feuding couple F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. With its well-tended blocks and broad, tidy streets, it's the most stylish town of its size in the tri-state area, and locals are determined to keep it that way. See chapter 8.
- **Thomasville** (Georgia): The plantation era never died here, and life still moves at a leisurely pace along

Thomasville's shady, tree-lined streets. Over the years, the town's aristocratic elegance has attracted the wintering wealthy, including the Rockefellers and Goodriches. Jacqueline Kennedy fled here to recover from the assassination of her husband. See chapter 20.

- **Macon** (Georgia): In the heart of the state, this sleepy town has a historic core of approximately 50 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Nearly 600 other structures here have been cited for their architectural significance. Macon long ago decided to let Atlanta race hysterically toward the millennium; it prefers to wander slowly along, content in its appealing charm, although its cherry-tree-lined downtown is undergoing revitalization. See chapter 20.

5 The Best Golf Courses

- **The Pinehurst Resort Golf Courses** (1 Carolina Vista, Pinehurst, North Carolina): This is the only resort in the South that has eight signature courses. The original architect was the now-legendary Donald Ross. All the great names in golf—including Nelson, Jones, and Hogan—have played these courses. In all, there are 126 holes of golf, with modern holes designed by Tom Fazio and Rees Jones. See p. 145.
- **Pine Needles Lodge** (Southern Pines, North Carolina): This 1927 Donald Ross masterpiece is a challenging par-71 course, attracting golfers of various skills. The course plays to 6,708 yards from the championship tees and has been immaculately restored to its original splendor. See p. 151.
- **Palmetto Dunes Resort** (Hilton Head, South Carolina): This course,

designed by George Fazio, is an 18-hole, 6,534-yard, par-70 course named by *Golf Digest* as one of the "75 Best American Resort Courses." It has been cited for its combined "length and keen accuracy." See p. 262.

- **Old South Golf Links** (Bluffton, South Carolina): This 18-hole, 6,772-yard, par-72 course has been recognized as one of the "Top 10 Public Courses" by *Golf Digest*. It has panoramic views and a natural setting that ranges from an oak forest to tidal salt marshes. See p. 262.
- **Sea Island Golf Club** (St. Simons Island, Georgia): Owned by The Cloister, the most exclusive resort in the South, this widely acclaimed golf course lies at the end of the Avenue of Oaks, the site of a former plantation. Opened in 1927, the club consists of several courses, such as the 18-hole Ocean Forest (7,011 yd., par 72). It

has been compared favorably to such golfing meccas as St. Andrews in

Scotland and Pebble Beach in California. See p. 483.

6 The Best Beaches

- **Cape Hatteras National Seashore** (North Carolina): Some 70 miles of relatively unspoiled beaches begin at Whalebone Junction in South Nags Head and stretch down through Hatteras and Ocracoke islands in the south; in fact, Ocracoke's beaches consistently show up on top-10 lists of the nation's finest. Ferocious tides, strong currents, and fickle winds constantly alter the most dramatic beaches along the Eastern Seaboard. See chapter 4.
- **Hilton Head** (South Carolina): *Travel & Leisure* has hailed these beaches as being among the most beautiful in the world, and we concur. The resort-studded island offers 12 miles of white-sand beaches; still others front the Calobogue and Port Royal sounds. The sand is extremely firm, providing a good surface for biking and many beach games. It's

also ideal for walking and jogging—against a backdrop of natural dunes, live oaks, palmettos, and tall Carolina pines. See chapter 12.

- **Myrtle Beach & the Grand Strand** (South Carolina): This is the most popular sand strip along the Eastern Seaboard, attracting 12 million visitors a year—more than the state of Hawaii. Sure, it's overdeveloped and crowded in the summer, but what draws visitors to Myrtle Beach is 10 miles of sand, mostly hard-packed and the color of brown sugar. See chapter 13.
- **Wrightsville Beach** (6 miles east of Wilmington, North Carolina): It's the widest beach on the Cape Fear coast: Wrightsville's beige sands stretch for a mile along the ocean-front, set against a backdrop of thick vegetation. It gets very crowded in summer, however. See chapter 5.

7 The Best Luxury Hotels & Resorts

- **Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa** (Asheville, North Carolina; ☎ 800/438-5800 or 828/252-2711; www.grovetparkinn.com): The premier resort of the state has sheltered everybody from Thomas Edison to F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the big names still check in. The hotel is continually upgraded, and it is said to be just as grand as it was on the day it opened in 1913; it even boasts a \$14-million full-service spa. See p. 162.
- **The Sea Pines Resort** (Hilton Head, South Carolina; ☎ 888/807-6873 or 843/785-3333; www.seapines.com): This is the oldest and most famous of the island's resort developments. Set on 4,500 thickly wooded acres, with

a total of three golf courses, Sea Pines competes for the summer beach traffic as few resorts in the Caribbean ever could. Its focal point is Harbour Town, which is built around one of the most charming marinas in the Carolinas. Luxurious homes and villas open onto the ocean or golf courses. See p. 270.

- **Ritz-Carlton Buckhead** (Atlanta, Georgia; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 404/237-2700; www.ritzcarlton.com): Often a discreet rendezvous for visiting celebrities, this hotel is the epitome of plushness and luxury. General Sherman wouldn't have burned it; he would have checked in and called for room service. European style and flair

set the grace notes, evoked by Regency and Georgian antiques, white marble floors, and French-crystal chandeliers. Exquisitely decorated bedrooms and one of Atlanta's premier deluxe restaurants add much allure. See p. 357.

- **The Mansion on Forsyth Park** (Savannah, Georgia; ☎ 888/711-5114 or 912/238-5158; www.mansiononforythpark.com): Almost from its first day, it has been hailed as the most opulent and spectacular boutique hotel in Savannah, a restored redbrick mansion dating

from 1888. In addition to all the creature comforts, it is a showcase of art, home to some 400 paintings. See p. 450.

- **The Cloister** (Sea Island, Georgia; ☎ 800/732-4752 or 912/638-3611; www.cloister.com): This hotel has been called the grande dame of all Southern resorts. A clubby place, The Cloister means formal dinners by night and outdoor activities by day that range from the best tennis in Georgia to riding, fishing, and swimming (at the beach or in two inviting pools). It's a class act. See p. 489.

8 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Cedar Crest Inn** (Asheville, North Carolina; ☎ 800/252-0310 or 828/252-1389; www.cedarcrestvictorianinn.com): The city is famed for its B&Bs—the finest in North Carolina—and this one rates at the top. A Queen Anne–style mansion built in 1894, Cedar Crest Inn is rich in Victorian trappings, including a captain's walk, projecting turrets, and various architectural follies. See p. 161.
- **Anchorage Inn** (Charleston, South Carolina; ☎ 800/421-2952 or 843/723-8300; www.anchoragencharleston.com): Converted from an antebellum cotton warehouse, this inn, with its mock-Tudor facade, is a bastion of charm and grace, with canopied beds and individually decorated bedrooms. See p. 226.
- **Ansley Inn** (Atlanta, Georgia; ☎ 800/446-5416 or 404/872-9000; www.ansleyinn.com): A stately yellow-brick Tudor mansion in the prestigious neighborhood of Ansley Park has been reincarnated as a small-scale European inn. From its English Chippendale furnishings to its Venetian chandeliers, it offers first-rate accommodations at affordable prices. See p. 356.
- **17 Hundred 90** (Savannah, Georgia; ☎ 877/468-1200 or 912/238-1200; www.17hundred90.com): Like a house in 18th-century New England, this is the oldest inn in Savannah. It's even said to be haunted. The Colonial trappings of this place have won many a devotee, some of whom wouldn't stay anywhere else when they visit Savannah. See p. 454.

9 The Best Budget Hotels

- **Old Reynolds Mansion** (Asheville, North Carolina; ☎ 800/709-0496 or 828/254-0496; www.oldreynoldsmansion.com): This antebellum brick house, one of the few left in Asheville, was rescued from the bulldozer and is

now a three-story inn. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the B&B offers the most inviting budget-priced rooms in the city. See p. 164.

- **The Greenleaf Inn at Camden** (Camden, South Carolina; ☎ 800/437-5874 or 803/425-1806; www.greenleafinnofcamden.com): Situated in the heart of historic Camden, The Greenleaf is the coziest and most comfortable choice in town. A part of the inn dates from 1805, and it's filled with Victorian furnishings. It's also one of the finest dining choices in Camden, even if you're not a guest. See p. 314.
- **Sugar Magnolia** (Atlanta, Georgia; ☎ 404/222-0226; www.sugarmagnoliabb.com): Situated in a historic district, this 1892 Victorian house of considerable charm rents individually styled and commodious guest rooms with Southern style and flair, each unit suitable to house a colonel in the Confederate army. The staircase alone is worthy of an entrance by Miss Scarlett. See p. 360.
- **Plains Bed and Breakfast Inn** (Plains, Georgia; ☎ 229/824-7252; <http://plainsbandb.com>): In Jimmy Carter's hometown, this is a stylish B&B built by a Baptist preacher in 1910. It's just two doors away from a service station where the former president's brother, Billy, often held press conferences. Miss Lillian and her husband were said to have "conceived" the future president in one of the tasteful and comfortably furnished upstairs bedrooms. See p. 437.
- **Bed & Breakfast Inn** (Savannah, Georgia; ☎ 888/238-0518; www.savannahbnb.com): This little charmer is adjacent to the landmark Chatham Square in the oldest section of the historic district. Built in 1853, just years before the Civil War, it has been restored with sensitivity and filled with antiques or reproductions. See p. 454.

10 The Best Restaurants

- **Horizons Restaurant** (in the Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa, Asheville, North Carolina; ☎ 800/438-5800): This is the most formal restaurant in western North Carolina, as befits its location in the city's grandest resort. Horizons is consistently rated among the top restaurants in the nation. Patrons are served an excellent array of Continental dishes—including brook trout, bouillabaisse, and medallions of venison—prepared from the freshest ingredients on the market. See p. 166.
- **Anson** (Charleston, South Carolina; ☎ 843/577-0551; www.ansonrestaurant.com): Hip, stylish, and upscale, this is a favorite dining room of discriminating Charlestonians, who flock here for Low Country dishes with an original, modern twist. Anson compares with top-notch restaurants in New York and San Francisco, and offers the best service in the city. Try the fried cornmeal oysters with potato cakes or the cashew-crusted grouper with champagne sauce. See p. 232.
- **Charlie's L'Etoile Verte** (Hilton Head, South Carolina; ☎ 843/785-9277): Like a whimsical Parisian bistro, this elegant yet unpretentious establishment packs them in every night in an area that has more restaurants than customers. The reason is the food. The cuisine borrows freely from almost everywhere. See p. 271.
- **Seeger's** (Atlanta, Georgia; ☎ 404/846-9779; www.seegers.com): The best Continental cuisine in Georgia's capital is showcased at this hip dining place operated by Guenter Seeger, who made his fame in Atlanta at the

swanky Ritz-Carlton hotel in Buckhead. Before hitting Atlanta, he won fame in Europe at his Michelin-starred restaurant in Germany's Black Forest. Here, in a 19th-century house, the presentation is done with European tradition and flair, but the food is market-fresh and beautifully concocted with top-rate ingredients. See p. 367.

- **The Lady & Sons** (Savannah, Georgia; ☎ 912/233-2600; www.ladyandsons.com): Launched with \$200 in 1989, this restaurant has become one of the finest in eastern Georgia, turning out a Southern cuisine of taste and refinement. The buffets are reason enough to visit. And wait until you try Food Network star Paula Deen's chicken potpie. See p. 456.