

Experience romantic South Carolina

Katie McElveen, special for USA TODAY 5:56 p.m. EDT June 6, 2014



(Photo: Getty Images)

No matter where you go in South Carolina, it's hard to miss — or resist — the gentle tug of the state's romantic side.

Start in the mountainous Upstate region, where more than 25 waterfalls — many visible from the road — encourage meandering. Tucked into the foothills, the city of Greenville, with a waterfall of its own, has a charming downtown lined with boutiques, outdoor cafes, parks and galleries. During the summer, couples flock to Main Street to listen to free concerts before strolling to dinner at restaurants like Passerelle Bistro, which overlooks the Reedy River.

But it's South Carolina's nearly 200 miles of coastline, anchored by regal and charismatic Charleston, that steals the most hearts. From the historic mansion-lined Battery to refined Broad Street, the bustling corner of Meeting and Market Streets and Upper King Street's hip eateries and speakeasies, Charleston is both warm and welcoming. Stroll the cobbled streets or take in the steeped skyline and views of the Atlantic from rooftop verandahs at both the Vendue Inn and Market Pavilion Hotel. Just outside downtown, roadways shaded by centuries-old live oak trees lead past elegant plantation houses, tidal creeks and seafood shacks on the way to a shoreline dappled with barrier islands.

Kiawah Island's gracious Sanctuary Resort was built to replicate a historic beachside manse, albeit one that offers couples massages and rooms with balconies overlooking the ocean. Further afield, traditionalists love lively Myrtle Beach, where arcades and beach bars line an old-school boardwalk crowned with a giant Ferris wheel. Serenity-seekers can have the beach to themselves on long stretches of Pawleys Island, then cross the

causeway to local restaurants like Bistro 217 and Frank's Outback where elegant lowcountry fare is served in garden rooms lighted by candles.

For water with no waves, book a riverfront cottage at the Inn at Palmetto Bluff, where oversized screened porches, a palm-shaded pool and firepits-for-two encourage canoeing.