



This Quiet South Carolina Town Is An Underrated Gem For 2026

With 2025 coming to a close, it is an exciting time to start looking towards the future. There are so many ways to make the coming year meaningful, and travel is one of the best ways to do so. And for those in or near [South Carolina](#), plenty of great travel options are ready to accompany you into the new year! Rather than revisiting the usual destinations, however, this article focuses on a spot that often goes unnoticed.

Meet Seneca, a town of roughly 9,000 residents in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Located near two massive lakes, this town awaits with plenty of outdoor recreation. Its downtown district is phenomenal for a town of its size as well, offering art galleries, theaters, history museums, and fine dining restaurants that will have you questioning where Seneca has been hiding all these years. So grab some comfy walking shoes, bring your appetite, and maybe even a canoe, and get ready to explore the streets and waters of Seneca, South Carolina.



Beautiful Lake Hartwell, South Carolina.

Lake Hartwell requires a slightly longer drive, but it is a fantastic destination for fishermen. This reservoir, covering 56,000 acres, has been recognized as one of the top fishing lakes in the United States, home to an abundance of largemouth and smallmouth bass, catfish, striped bass, walleye, and even occasionally trout.

Art Scene And Museums



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By Ally

Outdoor Recreation And Lakes



A kayaker on Lake Keowee at sunset.

Seneca sits near two beautiful lakes in the area, Lake Keowee and Lake Hartwell, making the town a wonderful destination for all kinds of water recreation. Lake Keowee is the nearest lake to town, spanning 18,500 acres and consisting of 300 miles of shoreline to explore. On a typical sunny day, you'll likely spot people out on the water, kayaking, canoeing, waterskiing, swimming, and fishing. There are also a couple of great spots to camp, such as South Cove County Park, which has 86 campsites near the lakeshore, 46 of which are directly on the lakefront.



Wall art in Seneca, South Carolina.

Many people come to Seneca for the water, but downtown has its own draw with an incredible mix of art centers and museums. The Blue Ridge Arts Center sits at the heart of the town's art scene, a centrally located gallery that is housed inside the town's oldest church structure. In addition to browsing the center's exhibits, visitors can check out its calendar, as it offers numerous art classes throughout the year! If you are in the mood to attend a live show, you can also check out the schedule at the Oconee Community Theater. Starting out as a school built in 1927, this local arts institution has since transformed into a creative performance hub, hosting drama, art, music, and dance events.

To see what life was like in Seneca in the early 20th century, travelers can plan a visit to the Lunney Museum, which is set in a bungalow-style home constructed in 1909. As you tour this home, you can learn about the Lunney family who once lived here as well as appreciate historic furnishings, original chandeliers, leaf pine woodwork, art glass windows, and more.

Dining And Shopping On Ram Cat Alley



Ram Cat Alley Historic District in Seneca, South Carolina. Image credit: Bill Fitzpatrick via Wikimedia Commons.

Every town has its Main Street, and in Seneca, you'll find a lot of the action on Ram Cat Alley. Here, you'll find an exciting concentration of restaurants and shops, making it easy to dedicate a few hours to exploration. If you are looking to start the day with your morning brew, swing by Brews on the Alley, a local coffee bar that has been serving the community for about a decade. Later in the day, it transforms into a craft beer joint! For dinner, consider making reservations at Vangelis's Bistro, an elegant restaurant that serves dishes like chicken roulade, gnocchi, and maple rum pork chop. You won't have a hard time finding a gift on this street, either. Green Springs sells a lovely assortment of pottery, soap, lamps, purses, and jewelry, while the Red Door sells unique home decor and toys for the kids.

Community Events And Festivals



Christmas decorations in Seneca, South Carolina.

Seneca knows how to keep things lively throughout the year with several signature events and festivals. One of the most famous is the annual Jazz on the Alley, a music festival that brings touring musicians to town every Thursday throughout the month of November. The FARM Center puts on the beloved SC Foothills Heritage Fair every September, featuring five days of events that celebrate the town's agricultural roots.



Christmas decorations in Seneca, South Carolina.

The same organization also hosts a weekly Foothills Heritage Farmers Market each Saturday morning, between May and October, giving you the chance to purchase some local produce, honey, meat, eggs, and more. If you visit town during the holidays, you can also attend one of its many activities during the Magic of Christmas celebration, such as a light show, a tree lighting ceremony, and a parade.

Extending Your Trip



Beautiful lakeside in Seneca, South Carolina.

Another perk of choosing Seneca for your getaway is how close it is to other scenic towns. Just a 15-minute drive northwest of town, you'll reach Walhalla, a renowned mountain town that offers convenient access to the Sumter National Forest and the National Wild and Scenic Chattooga River. Heading about 15 minutes east, meanwhile, you'll hit Clemson, a lively university town that sits along Lake Hartwell. It also offers some iconic attractions, like the South Carolina Botanical Garden and the Brooks Center for the Performing Arts! Truly, so much awaits in the northwestern region of South Carolina.

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With unspoiled wilderness, vibrant central business districts, and classic Southern hospitality, these South Carolina towns deserve a spot on your exploration checklist.