People here enjoy just about every outdoor kind of fun short of mountain climbing. And you have to start with horses. For more than 100 years, Aiken has been the training ground for all the great equestrian sports. Steeplechasing and harness racing are also regular attractions here, as is high-goal polo, fox hunting, three-day eventing, dressage, show jumping, even barrel racing and cutting horses. The Willcox itself was voted Best Racehorse Name in honor of our favorite mascot, Willcox Inn, that shares the same name. The thoroughbred has won several stakes races including the Grade II American Derby in Chicago in record time. There are high hopes for horse, whose pedigree includes Triple Crown winners Secretariat and Affirmed plus the great horses Storm Cat, Mr. Prospector and Bold Ruler.

But if your sport doesn’t require a bucket of oats, the golf courses are world class. And for those who enjoy nature and walking, the area offers plenty of public parks, and tranquil gardens. For true outdoor junkies, hunting, fishing boating and water sports abound at nearby lakes and state parks, and numerous paths provide endless hours of hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Feel free to tour our downtown, too. It’s home to historic landmarks, mom-and-pop shops, a mix of restaurants, art galleries, museums, boutiques, specialty shops and antiques. If you’re interested in the performing arts, there’s a theatre in the heart of downtown. Complementing it is the local university’s Etherredge Center that attracts national-level entertainment to its proscenium theater and the Convocation Center, which hosts acts like Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus and the National Orchestra of Washington, D.C. And there's tons of activities to keep the kids occupied — inside an out. Believe us, bored isn't a word often used in Aiken's vocabulary.

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Hiking, Parks and Natural Features

Hitchcock Woods
The largest urban forest in the country, Hitchcock Woods has nearly 2,000 acres of natural beauty and quiet solitude. Points of interest include: Sand River, an unusual feature that has been the source of folklore and Indian legends; Cathedral Aisle, formerly a portion of the Hamburt to Charleston Railway; and Ridge Mile Track, built for training horses in the 1920s and '30s. There are also miles of marked trails for hiking and riding. www.hitchcockwoods.org

Silver Bluff Audubon Center and Sanctuary
Here you can canoe, bird watch, hike and kayak in 3,154 acres of pine forest, hardwood bottomlands, open fields, lakes and streams. More than 200 species of birds live here, from wood storks to redheaded woodpeckers and bald eagles. http://www.sc.audubon.org/Centers_SB.html

Aiken State Park
Set against the calm, winding South Edisto River, Aiken State Natural Area is a popular destination for the family or a budding naturalist. It offers canoeing in the river, peaceful picnicking, fishing in the river and the park's spring-fed lakes, campground and trailside camping and hiking trails.

http://www.southcarolinaparks.com/park-finder/state-park/1831.aspx

Boredom is not a word in Aiken's dictionary. In fact, with so much to do and see, there is simply no time to even look up the word. Outdoor activities abound year round in Aiken and surrounding towns. The area has an outstanding series of parks, hiking trails and nature features including:

Hopelands Gardens
Carolina Bay Nature Reserve

Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve
Aiken State Natural Area

Golf

Golf is not just a pastime in Aiken; it's part of the city's soul. The Masters Tournament is held just 30 minutes from The Willcox at the Augusta National in Georgia. And though the famous course, with its fabled fairways and gem-like greens is private, just being nearby imparts headiness for golfers and fans alike. There is an array of world-class courses down the road from Aiken, open to the public. Anyone who has swung a club in competition or just for pleasure's sake will feel the thrill of golf at its finest.

Local courses include:

Aiken Golf Club
The River Golf Club
Cedar Creek Golf Club
Midland Valley Golf Club
HoundsLake Country Club

Equestrian

High-stepping horses prance the old roads of Aiken, which are sometimes paved for cars but just as often left Carolina clay for tender treatment of hooves. Hitchcock Woods, with its soft tawny floor of pines needles is a step away from The Willcox. It is the largest urban forest in America, more sizeable than Central Park and wilder by far, with a blond river of sand curling through it. Park trails lead to hidden wildflower glens and riding rings. This is true horse country: polo, steeplechase, fox hunting and thoroughbred racing are enthusiastically enjoyed winter and spring, with the Triple Crown taking place here in March.

Polo

Polo season is September through November and March through June. Tournament games are played during the week and weekends. Club polo games are Sundays at 3 p.m. in downtown Aiken. For specific schedules, visit www.aikenpolo.net. Local polo clubs include:

Aiken Polo
302 Polo
New Bridge Polo
Langdon Road Polo

Fox Hunts

A traditional Winter Colony pastime, fox hunting and drag hunts take place in Hitchcock Woods. Area hunt clubs also sponsor the annual Blessing of the Hounds, a fall hunt meet, a hunter pace in Hitchcock Woods, and the spring horse show in Hitchcock Woods. Local fox hunting clubs include:

Aiken Hounds
Why Worry Hounds
Whiskey Road Foxhounds
Belle Meade Hounds

Horse Shows

Progressive Show Jumping: Through making safety a priority and awarding accomplishments, the shows give you and your horse the opportunity to gain the confidence to compete in this exhilarating sport.

Steeplechase

Aiken Steeplechase: Influential horseman including Thomas Hitchcock, Temple Gwathmey and Harry Worchester Smith founded the Aiken Steeplechase Association in Aiken in 1930. The first official race was run in Hitchcock Woods, and more than 1,000 people gathered to watch. Aiken has been home to many steeplechase greats and exceptional trainers. Whether it is fact or

fiction, the universal truth is that horses will always reign supreme in Aiken's history and in her future.

Eventing

Eventing: January, February and March are months in which Aiken becomes the center of eventing on the East Coast. Aiken's eventing snowbirds include some of the top names in the sport, including Phillip Dutton, Sally Cousins and Corinne Ashton.

Aiken Trials

Aiken Trials: Begun in 1942 as a way to give young horses in training the enlightening opportunity to experience every aspect of live racing, the Aiken Trials has become a time honored tradition as the first leg of Aiken's Triple Crown events, held annually for three consecutive Saturdays in March. The jockeys are local exercise riders who have an afternoon in the spotlight after paying their dues exercising horses each morning (in all weather) throughout the year.

Driving

The Aiken Driving Club: Founded in 1985 by the late Clifford S. Gerde, The Aiken Driving Club has grown from a handful of drivers to a membership of more than 200 individuals and families. Drives are in the Hitchcock Woods, Hopeland Farms, the Winter Colony District and other private facilities in Aiken and surrounding counties.

Riding Lessons

There’s no such thing as holding your horses in Aiken. There are steeplechases, fox hunts, polo matches and other competitive events. The streets downtown have names like Citation Drive, Ruffian Road and Saratoga Street, and the sidewalks feature a herd of life-size fiberglass horses. And it pays to learn how to ride. If you get the itch, one of the businesses below can help.

Fulmer International School of Equitation
Black Forest Equestrian Center
Jumping Branch Farm

Hunting

Hunting, particularly dove, quail, turkey and deer are a large part of Aiken's culture. Many Willcox guests enjoy excellent seasonal hunting in beautiful green fields and natural southern pine forests.

Carolina Star Gun and Hunt Club

Boating and Fishing

There are eight boat landings in Aiken County. Three are on the South Fork Edisto River. The Edisto is the largest free-flowing black water river in the United States. Three are also along the Savannah River, meandering all the way to the ocean at Savannah, Ga. The terrain varies from rapids to wide flowing areas, to narrow trails intertwined with cypress trees and offers an abundance of fishing holes. Fishing from the banks of Langley Pond is yet another way to pass the time.

Aiken County Tourism

Silver Bluff Audubon Center and Sanctuary
Here you can canoe, bird watch, hike and kayak in 3,154 acres of pine forest, hardwood bottomlands, open fields, lakes and streams. More than 200 species of birds live here, from wood storks to redheaded woodpeckers and bald eagles. http://www.sc.audubon.org/Centers_SB.html

Yoga, Pilates, Tai chi, Qigong and Chiogalates

If you've come to escape, we've got the solution to help tune out the the distractions. Ask The Willcox staff to arrange yoga, Pilates, Tai chi, Qigong and Chiogalates classes through Just Breathe Studio, the perfect place to relieve stress, decompress and drown out life's clutter.

Just Breathe Studio

Shopping

For those just discovering the heart of Aiken, it’s one of those special experiences Southerners call a “sercie,” a pleasant surprise that seems planned with them in mind. Such a remarkable collection of hip and trendy shops and eateries might be expected in large cities, but less likely in a quiet Southern town that invites strolling amid colorful flowers and towering trees. Yet here they are.

In Aiken, one-of-a-kind shops continue to open. Its complex demographics make it a desirable relocation destination in the Southeast, and by extension, a good place to do business.

Folly

Aiken Dry Goods

The Bone-i-fied Bakery

Birds & Butterflies of Aiken

The Curiosity Shop

Equine Divine

High Country Olive Oils

La Bonbonniere

Lionel Smith

Nandina

Pitter Patter

Plum Pudding

Kicks

Re-fresh

Return Engagement

Tea Garden Gifts

Three Monkeys

Vinya's

York Cottage Antiques

Museums

Aiken County Historical Museum
Located in a former winter colony mansion, this museum displays items and clothing that reflect

the county's history, as well as a nature room that exhibits flora, fauna, and geology of the area. The shell of a temporary observatory, built by German scientists for viewing the Transit of Venus in the late 1800s, is adjacent to the museum.

Aiken Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame
Commemorating locally trained horses that are national champions and have won fame on tracks and fields across the nation, this hall of fame is filled with a variety of horse racing memorabilia and awards.

Theatre and Concerts

The Aiken Convocation Center is home to The Pacers and venue for many of the Southeast's best concerts, shows and conferences.

Aiken Community Playhouse
The Playhouse began in 1952 with an investment of $64 and the desire to produce a play. Rehearsals were first held in the homes of members. Today, the Playhouse boasts an annual schedule of fantastic performances

Summer Concert Series at Hopelands Gardens
A picnic supper, a blanket, family and friends make for a perfect Monday evening May through August as local and regional artists perform at the Roland H. Windham Performing Arts Stage. Concerts begin at 7 and admission is free.

Antiques

Aiken becomes a regional fine art and antiques destination when the Aiken Center For the Arts hosts its annual Antique Show and Sale . This event brings antique hunters from all over the Southeast. Local dealers include:

York Cottage
Antiques and More
Aiken Antique Mall
Antique Emporium

Art Shows

Aiken Center for the Arts

Historic Tours

Enjoy a guided historic tour of Aiken sponsored by the Aiken Chamber of Commerce that can be customized to suit specific needs. Reservations are recommended. Tours are Saturdays at 10 a.m.

Activities for Kids

So you're thinking about bringing the entire family to Aiken, and you're trying to figure out how to please everyone, right? No problem. Even the kids will be entertained. Boredom is not a word in Aiken's dictionary. In fact, with so much to do and see, there is simply no time to even look up the word.

Aiken County Library
314 Chesterfield Street, Aiken, SC
Phone: (803) 642-2020
www.abbe-lib.org

EdVenture – Children's Museum
211 Gervais Street Columbia, SC
Phone: (803) 779-3100
www.edventure.org

EdVenture is appeals to families and children around the state as well as visitors to the Midlands. Permanent exhibits and programs, along with a vibrant schedule of changing exhibits, will entice return visitors and new arrivals. EdVenture is the largest children's museum in the Southeast. With award-winning exhibits and programming, there is something for every child to discover, experience and understand. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

Riverbank Zoo
500 Wildlife Parkway Columbia, SC
Phone: (803) 779-8717
www.riverbanks.org

From elephants and koalas to penguins and sharks, formal gardens to natural woodlands,

Riverbank Zoo and Gardens promises new discoveries around every corner.

Ruth Patrick Science Education Center

University of South Carolina Aiken
471 University Parkway, Aiken, SC
Phone: (803) 641-3313
rpsec.usca.edu

Science looms large at USC Aiken, and the centerpiece of the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center is the DuPont Planetarium. Housing four state-of-the-art telescopes, a graphics projector and an automated special-effects system, the planetarium offers programs for students of all ages and the community. Its hands-on approach to teaching is designed to help people experience the power of science and mathematics, as well as the interest and fun of discovery.