



On a Trip to South Carolina, Discover Some of the State's Unexpected Symbols

(June 11, 2019) – You can learn a lot about a state just by studying its symbols – the natural elements, foods, objects and traditions that the citizenry and their legislators deem important enough to officially acknowledge as being uniquely representative of the state's history and culture. South Carolina truly raises the bar when it comes to state symbols, offering all the expected things (bird, flower, tree) and a bevy of unexpected ones, too (a state dance, folk dance *and* waltz?). From boiled peanuts (state snack) and collard greens (state vegetable) to mules (state heritage work animal) and loggerhead turtles (state reptile), South Carolina is a place that likes to celebrate all that makes it special.

With a little research, it's entirely possible to plan a trip around some of South Carolina's quirkiest and most beloved symbols. We've laid some groundwork to get you started, telling you where to find some of the state's most interesting animals and foods, but for more information about everything you'll want to see, do and taste in South Carolina, check out www.discoversouthcarolina.com.

State Dog: Boykin Spaniel

This spaniel, described as a "little brown dog" that's full of energy and intelligence, dates to the early 1900s, when a friend gave L. Whitaker Boykin a stray dog he named Dumpy. The friend had realized that Dumpy loved hunting as much as Whit did, and the two were a perfect match. Dumpy was so small and spry that he could easily get into and out of boats without dumping his duck-hunting human pals into the water. Whit was so impressed with the agility and smarts of his new dog that he set about finding female pooches to breed him with. The resulting generations of pups, which are various shades of brown, are friendly and fun and have a reputation for being great companions ... whether or not they're asked to tromp through a swamp to fetch waterfowl. Boykin spaniels (yes, they're named for the human who figured out how awesome they are) are equally at home hunting or sitting on someone's lap. The City of Camden is particularly fond of the breed, and there's a full exhibit dedicated to Dumpy and all those like him at the [Camden Archives and Museum](#). Perhaps even more fun, [small bronze dog statues](#) have been installed around town; a guide that provides clues to the whereabouts of the 11 pooches is available at the museum.

State Heritage Horse: Marsh Tacky

It's a funny name ... and a fascinating horse. Marsh tackies have a 500-year history in South Carolina, and you can still see them today in a few spots around the state. This rare breed gained prestige during the American Revolution because the horses could easily navigate the colony's hot and dense swamps, allowing patriot Francis Marion (a.k.a. "The Swamp Fox") and his troops to elude the British cavalry. Marsh tackies are small – around 14 hands high and weighing 700 to 800 pounds – and they're known for being level-headed, sure-footed, easy to train and as tough as they come. So tough, in fact, that they defied extinction. Tackies were thought to have disappeared by the 1980s, but in 2005 experts searched for and confirmed through DNA testing that about 100 still existed. Since then, there's been a concerted effort to rebuild the population, which today hovers around 400. Those DNA tests also proved that the breed can be traced to Spanish war mounts from the 1500s. [Heritage Stables in the state's Pee Dee region](#) was founded in 2009 specifically to breed marsh tackies and educate visitors, and the remote island of [Daufuskie](#), where the first of the breed to be born there in 40 years arrived in November 2017, also welcomes visitors who are curious about marsh tackies.

State Marine Mammal: Bottlenose Dolphin

Part of the joy of a family vacation to the Myrtle Beach area is spotting a bottlenose dolphin – or a whole pod of them – playing in the ocean. The region offers 60 miles of Atlantic coastline along the towns of Little River, North Myrtle Beach, Myrtle Beach, Murrells Inlet and Georgetown. That equates to an incredible number of opportunities to see these aquatic creatures from a safe distance, from which humans get the thrill of a lifetime without disturbing the animals' natural tendencies. Several companies and outfitters offer [cruises and excursions](#) that give guests the rare opportunity to see dolphins in their natural environment and the added opportunity to learn more about the animals and gain a better understanding of how we can enjoy and appreciate them without becoming a threat to them. For more information about these eco-tours, visit Myrtle Beach's website, www.visitmyrtlebeach.com.

State Bird: Carolina Wren

South Carolinians love the happy chirping of *Thryothorus ludovicianus*, described by ornithologists as a "small but chunky" songbird that can be found up and down the East Coast. They're very much at home in urban areas, where they're likely to build a nest in a hanging plant and communicate with their peers with a loud call that sounds like "tea-kettle, tea-kettle, tea-kettle." No matter what the weather and regardless of the time of year, it's always possible for birdwatchers to spot Carolina wrens throughout the town of [Anderson](#). That's because artist Zan Wells crated a flock of bronze statues that appear up and down Main Street. Through a privately funded program aimed at highlighting public art and good works that benefit Anderson, there are now 24 statues that provide a "bird's eye" view of sites around downtown. Visitors can pick up a brochure called "A Little Birdie Told Me" and follow the wrens all over town.

State Game Bird: Wild Turkey

Where can you find the only museum in the world dedicated to the wild turkey? Right here in Edgefield, South Carolina, inside the national headquarters of the National Wild Turkey Federation. The 7,200-square-foot [Winchester Museum](#) tells the amazing comeback story of the wild turkey, which flourishes today thanks to the NWTF's efforts to restore, manage and hunt the population. In addition to the museum, which traces humans' relationship with wild turkeys from the earliest populations of South Carolina to modern times, the site also features the Palmetto Shooting Complex, which is a premier shooting destination in the Southeast. The facility houses two sporting clay courses, five trap and skeet fields, and even a 3-D archery range. All of this is just a short drive from downtown Edgefield, where turkey statues line the streets and the local moonshiner, [Carolina Moon Distillery](#), produces its signature "Old Tom Whiskey," which pays homage to the NWTF.

State Amphibian: Spotted Salamander

Thanks to a year-long campaign coordinated by a bunch of third graders at an elementary school in Spartanburg, the spotted salamander became an official symbol of South Carolina in 1999. Also known as a "mole salamander," this species lives in hollow, underground spaces in wet woodland areas and is therefore difficult for visitors to see firsthand. However, they can pay homage to the creature with a stop at the [Spotted Salamander Café and Catering](#) in the state capital of Columbia. Known for its robust menu of Southern favorites – from pulled brisket sandwiches to pimento cheese and fried chicken – the café is co-owned by one of the 2019 South Carolina Chef Ambassadors, Jessica Shillato. Those inspired to really get their salamander on can embark on Columbia's [Sally Salamander walking tour](#), a two-mile loop on which bronze spotted salamander statues and corresponding plaques help visitors stroll past significant "spots" throughout the city.

State Fish: Striped Bass

[Santee Cooper Country's](#) lake system is home to the now-famous "landlocked" striped bass. What's that, you ask? Way back in 1941, the Santee River and the Cooper River were closed off in order to back up free-flowing waters, and that's how the Santee Cooper lake system was formed. Striped bass need flowing water to successfully spawn, so they typically migrate up rivers from the coast to do what fish do ... and then get back to the saltwater for the rest of the year. But all those decades ago, the fish that made their way to the lake system got landlocked and then defied science by surviving and successfully adapting to a freshwater environment ...and being able to reproduce there. The fish population here is a unique phenomenon, and the bass have made South Carolina a leader in providing hatchlings to fisheries around the country. [Fishing guides](#) are happy to take visitors out on the rivers to see how many of those bass – and their finned friends – they can catch.

State Southern Picnic Cuisine: Barbecue

Yes, this is a state that takes its food seriously. In fact, South Carolina has so many culinary bragging rights that its legislators really dug in and came up with several food symbols. The state calls itself "The Birthplace of Barbecue," and it's said that the pulled pork here is the best you'll have. (Well, okay, that's said by the people of South Carolina. The people of North Carolina and Georgia may feel differently.) What South Carolinians will disagree about among themselves, however, is what sauce to use: mustard, vinegar and pepper, light tomato, or heavy tomato. There's no shortage

of barbecue joints throughout the state, but perhaps the best way to sample this classic is at an outdoor festival and barbecue competition. Two favorites include the South Carolina Barbecue Association Cookoff Competition, [“Smoke in the ‘Boro,”](#) held each March (March 20 and 21, 2020) in the town of Walterboro, and the [Festival of Discovery](#), a premier barbecue competition held on the tree-lined streets of Greenwood each July (this year’s dates are July 11-13). In both cases, the smell of BBQ lures visitors into the heart of town and encourages them to mingle with locals, swapping recipes and entering into heated discussions about which sauce reigns supreme.

State Fruit: Peach

Hey, speaking of state-to-state rivalries, let’s talk about peaches. Yes, Georgia, we’re calling you out. Georgians love to brag about their peaches ... but South Carolina grows WAY more of the stone fruit, and we’re positive ours taste better. But the best way to determine that we know what we’re talking about is with a taste test, and for that we suggest a visit to [McLeod Farms](#), a family operation that’s currently managed by its fourth generation. McLeod grows more than 20 varieties of peaches on its huge farm in McBee, which is in Chesterfield County. The family operates two roadside stands, one of which is open year-round, so passersby can stop in for everything from old-fashioned, slow-churned peach ice cream to peach preserves to peach salsa and even a surprising peach enchilada. The farm also hosts a peach festival each summer, but in our opinion every day a peach is ripe is a reason to have a party.

State Hospitality Beverage: Iced Tea

Not to be confused with the plain-old state beverage, milk, South Carolina’s “hospitality beverage” is what we offer a visitor when we just want to sit on a porch on a warm and breezy day and enjoy your company. Nothing beats a tall glass of iced tea ... with just the right amount of “sweet” to it, of course! The Town of Summerville, South Carolina, was the first place to grow tea in the United States; today the [Charleston Tea Plantation](#) on nearby Wadmalaw Island grows tea plants that are descended from Summerville’s original plants, and that’s pretty amazing. What’s even more amazing – as reported by Guinness World Records – is that South Carolina was also home to “Mason, the World’s Largest Sweet Tea.” Standing more than 15 feet tall and holding up to 2,524 gallons of sweet tea, this huge Mason jar in Summerville made history a few years ago, when 210 pounds of Charleston Tea Plantation tea and 1,700 pounds of Dixie Crystals sugar were mixed into the megaglass to the delight of townspeople and visitors alike. Today Mason stands empty but ready for selfies in its permanent position near Town Hall on Main Street, but there are plenty of places in Summerville and throughout the state to grab a regular-sized glass of tea and sit a spell.

MEDIA CONTACT

Mindy Bianca

mindy@mindybiancapr.com

919-200-6060

[Mindy Bianca Public Relations](#)