

## Columbia 5-day outdoor itinerary

If you think all the best recreational activities in South Carolina are in the Upstate or on the coast, think again. Smack dab in the middle of the state, a hundred miles from the ocean and the mountains, you'll find a remarkable array of outdoor venues where you can paddle, peddle and get as wet and wild as you want.

Columbia is more than just the state capital and home to the University of South Carolina. This dynamic city is a recreational Mecca for the outdoor enthusiast. Below are five different activities you can enjoy on your next visit to the Midlands.

### **Day 1: Mountain biking in Harbison State Forest**

Only nine miles from downtown Columbia is [Harbison State Forest](#), the largest urban green space in the Southeast. This 2,200-acre pine and hardwood forest features 20 miles of hiking and biking trails ranging from moderately easy to very difficult.

If you're new to mountain biking or are traveling with children, the Firebreak Trail is your best bet. It's a fairly easy four-mile loop that starts and ends in the parking area near the entrance to the park. Walking time is 2.5 hours.

For those of you looking to work up a sweat, try the moderately difficult Crooked Pine Trail. Starting at the Education Center, the 1.4-mile run crosses a stream via a boardwalk, meandering by a vernal pond before connecting to the Midlands Mountain Trail.

And then there's Spider Woman II — the Mount Everest of the Harbison Trail system. Serious cyclists looking for a grueling ride will enjoy this technical, single-track trail that follows Middle Creek to the Broad River and then loops back to the Midlands Mountain Trail. Expect steep slopes, abrupt dips, exposed boulders and difficult climbs.

A daily parking pass to Harbison State Forest is \$5. [Click here](#) for more information on the Forest facilities and trails.

### **Day 2: Sailing on Lake Murray**

After your mountain biking workout, relax and enjoy a sunset sail on [Lake Murray](#), the Midlands' favorite recreational destination for water sports. [Lanier Sailing Academy](#) offers a romantic two-hour cruise for two for \$120. Bigger groups can be accommodated at rates ranging from \$160 for three or four people to \$200 for up to six passengers. Half-day and full-day sails also are available.

You'll leave from [Southshore Marina](#) on U.S. 378 and head into one of the prettiest sections of the lake, passing [Dreher Island State Recreation Area](#). Be sure to look out for the eagles that are often seen soaring over the lake near their nest in the park.

At 41 miles long and 14 miles at its widest point, Lake Murray offers 78 square miles of open water to explore. Man the helm and set your course or just sit back and let the captain take you sailing on a dream.

Call (800) 684-9463 or [click here](#) to book your cruise.

### **Day 3: Canoeing the Congaree**

Lake Murray isn't the only water-themed attraction in the capital city. The Congaree River, which starts downtown at the confluence of the Saluda and Broad rivers, was designated a [National Recreation Trail](#) in 2008. This slow-moving urban waterway offers excellent paddling through historic areas dating back to prehistoric Native American times.

The highlight of the trail is the section along [Congaree National Park](#), a protected wilderness that boasts some of the tallest trees in the Eastern United States and the largest continuous tract of old growth bottomland hardwood forest in the country.

Free ranger-guided canoe tours through Cedar Creek, a Congaree tributary, are offered by the park service, but you'll need to make your reservations far in advance of your visit to Columbia. Reservations for the next available tours—scheduled weekends from July 1 through September 30—will be taken starting June 15. You can reserve up to two canoes with six seats per tour.

To book your boat, call the Harry Hampton Visitor Center at (803) 776-4396, ext. 0. You'll need to speak with a park ranger. Reservations cannot be made by leaving a voice message.

[Adventure Carolina](#) also offers three-mile guided canoe and kayak trips down the Congaree Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. Cost is \$30 a person. Call (803) 796-4505 or [click here](#) to book your reservation.

### **Day 4: Tubing the Saluda**

The Saluda River offers more fun on the water—but you're going to get wet on this one. For just \$15 a person, you can spend an afternoon drifting down two miles of this picturesque waterway in a rubber tube—and experience a little whitewater adventure too. The bigger rapids are upstream from the launch site near [Riverbanks Zoo](#), but you'll still get a taste of Class I and II rapids in the first 20 minutes of your float trip. We're talking mild ripples—nothing a small child couldn't handle.

Here's how it works: Leave your car at the lot near the West Columbia amphitheater just over the Gervais Street bridge. After signing in and paying the \$15 fee, [Palmetto Outdoors](#) will outfit you with a tube and life preserver and then take you by shuttle bus to the riverfront by the zoo. Take the short walk through the woods to the river's edge and off you go. The Saluda will take care of the rest.

A word of warning: the water will be nippy. It's released from the bottom of Lake Murray, after all. When you reach the Gervais Street Bridge, paddle your way over to the right side of the river to disembark at the amphitheater landing.

Call (803) 360-4697 or [click here](#) for more information.

### **Day 5: Rollerblading in Riverfront Park**

Columbia's Riverfront Park features a two-and-a-half mile trail sandwiched between the Broad River and the historic Columbia Canal. The wide asphalt path offers a smooth surface perfect for rollerblading--or walking, jogging, biking, skateboarding or strolling the dog.

Ample parking is available at the entrance to the park off Laurel Street near Huger Street. Take the path down to the old railway bridge over the canal—now a wooden pedestrian walkway—to get to the start of the trail. Benches and overlooks can be found at regular intervals throughout the linear park to rest and enjoy the scenery.

While you're happily rolling along, be on the lookout for some of the 300-plus birds who use the river for nesting and migrating. It's not unusual to spot red-tailed hawks, crested cormorants and bald eagles. And did I mention gators. You'll find them lurking in the canal.

The park also features picnic tables, an amphitheater with a large field and restrooms at the start and end of the trail.