

NOTHING COULD BE FINER

As one of the USA's most historic cities, Charleston has been attracting visitors for centuries and, with British Airways' new direct flight linking the South Carolina city directly with London (and Europe), the trend looks set to continue. ROSS CLARKE gets a taste of its famous Southern hospitality



“Charleston is one of the best built, handsomest, and most agreeable cities that I have ever seen.” So aristocrat, military officer and Hamilton contemporary Marquis de Lafayette said 242 years ago. Skip forward two centuries and the city is still being lauded for its friendliness and charm – it’s been voted America’s ‘Most Friendly City’ by *Travel+Leisure* and *Condé Nast Traveler* on multiple occasions. Whether it’s your first visit to the city or you’re returning for the umpteenth time, you can’t help but be beguiled by its openness, warmth and culture.

THE BIRTH OF CHARLES TOWN

Take a stroll down any Charleston street, visit any major landmark, and you’ll find a reference to or remnants of the British – after all, the city was named after King Charles II of Great Britain and Ireland back in the late 1600s. But, like all great port towns – and due to its trading routes with Europe, the West Indies, and Africa – the city developed its own unique culture from those (both free and enslaved people)

Photographs: Doug Hickok; Cheryl Zibisky; Andrew Cebulka; Jason Varney



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT The Battery wall and promenade; Dock Street Theatre; Belmond Charleston Place; take a dip at Belmond Charleston Place; oysters – a Charleston delicacy

who arrived and settled here, as much as the battles that were won and lost.

This is a city that was besieged by the pirate ‘Blackbeard’, the site of the first battle of the American Civil War (take a tour of Fort Sumter National Monument for more on this), the location of the Siege of Charleston during the American War of Independence (stop by the Old Exchange & Provost Dungeon for a humorous history lesson from an appropriately costumed guide), and the site of battles against the elements – the 1886 earthquake that damaged more than 2,000 of the city’s buildings, and the hurricane of 1989 that brought the sea crashing over The Battery wall and into many historic homes.

In spite of this at times problematic heritage, Charleston has built on each of its losses and triumphs to create a vibrant city. The intriguing influences of its past have been used to construct a blend of the old world and new, seamlessly preserved, and ever present today in its architecture, food and even language.

WALK OF NATIONS

Type Charleston into Instagram and more than likely you’ll see images upon hashtagged images of the pastel-hued houses of Rainbow Row. It’s not without reason; no trip to Charleston is complete without a wander through the French Quarter and The Battery with their historic, brightly painted buildings and hotchpotch architectural styles. On the same street you’ll find a clapboard townhouse across the street from a grand Palladian-style civic building.

For something more definitively ‘Charleston’, take a tour of the single houses with the Preservation Society of Charleston. Distinct to the city, these houses are long and narrow, with porches and small gardens to the side separating each house. Many have been lovingly restored thanks to the work of the Society and local enthusiasts.

FOOD FOR THE SOUL

With a swathe of new openings showcasing the best in Mediterranean,

French, and Southern cuisine, all with an emphasis on farm-to-fork – something any Charlestonian will tell you they’ve been doing for the last three centuries, long before it became a trend – and creativity, Charleston is a food-lover’s delight.

For innovative Italian, enjoy whipped ricotta, honey, black pepper, and extra-virgin olive oil, and a glass of Sangiovese, at Le Farfalle. If American dining is more your palate, head to the recently opened Tradd’s for classic dishes with a modern twist – such as fava-bean toast, and pan-seared Pacific halibut with sweet-pea purée. For a taste of the local catch, slide into one of the sage green banquettes at The Darling Oyster Bar and order a plate of the crispy oysters or lobster rolls. But, if you’d rather stick to the traditional and indulge in authentic Southern delights, nowhere does it better than Jestine’s. Enjoy bountiful plates of meatloaf, collard greens, crispy fried chicken and fried green tomatoes as sizable as the welcome is warm. ☺

HIGH LIFE PROMOTION



LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE Boone Hall Plantation & Gardens

OUTDOOR LIVING

Charleston's coastal location makes it prime for adventurers, whether boating and fishing, playing 18 at the Kiawah Island Golf Resort – home to the 1991 Ryder Cup and the 2021 PGA Championship – or luxuriating in nearby Myrtle Beach, with its old-fashioned beachfront arcades, boardwalk and beach. With its subtropical climate, it would be remiss not to experience some of the majestic gardens in the area, such as those at Middleton Place, home to the oldest landscaped gardens in the USA.

CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

Each year during late spring, the city plays host to a 17-day artistic spectacular in the form of the Spoleto Festival USA, where Charleston's historic and contemporary venues – including Dock Street Theatre,

the New World's first theatre – offer visitors the best in opera, drama, dance, and music from both renowned and emerging talents.

If the warmth and welcome of Charleston encourages you to take a small part of it with you when you leave, pick up a souvenir created by a local artist, or head to Charleston City Market for sweetgrass baskets woven in the Gullah tradition.

REASONS TO STAY

While the city embraces you with a small-town magnetism, there are a wealth of options to lay your head at, from the boutique French Quarter Inn, to the luxury grandeur of Belmond Charleston Place. As the artist Alfred Hutty is said to have telegraphed to his wife about Charleston in 1920, "Come quickly, have found heaven." ■
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**BA launches flights to
Charleston from London
Heathrow, from
4 April 2019**