Chow Down in Charleston

With a slew of innovative chefs and stylish inns for both slepping and nosing, the graceful South Carolina city is a bona fide dining destination.

By Sarah Cosey
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Where to Stay

Luxuriously (and try your best at it) Lowcountry cooking at Zero George (from $292), a chic bistro-hotel boutique property, which opened in an enclave of beautifully refurbished 1804 buildings in 2013. The hotel is inside 60 acres with original design elements like plank floors and period millwork (but also slick marble baths); a sunny dining spot, Zero Café and Bar; and a carriage-house kitchen where small-group cooking classes are led every week (for both guests and the public) by noted local chef Randy Williams and Vierra Pelleto ($125 per person).

Appetites for a better French Quarter rendezvous, now filled with local art, at the Vendue.
(From Calendar of the Vendue)

Where to Eat:

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EXPLORE
Those who can't join reservations at Rocks—or just want to try a fresh take on Maine seafood—should stop by Joan Brock's new spot, 34 Were Ave.  
(Photo: Charles Jinkins)

Try the latest venture from hometown Maine hero Joan Brock (of the James Beard Award-winning Fish & Ships, and America's Best) at 34 Were Ave., which takes the chef's famed Lowcountry cooking even further south—to Maine. At this cozy emerging Pinot-centric space in the East Bay neighborhood, diners come to sample the pinot noir tasting menu (for $95) or to enjoy the 7-course prix fixe menu ($120).

Cocky up with a date at Charlestown's, which quickly became known as the most romantic restaurant in town when it opened last June. Occupying a narrow, unfolds-back-to-back two-story home on a residential downtown block, the cozy eatery is a lab of love for chef Jull Blanchard and Joan Casavant, who serve a daily changing menu of fresh fish and seafood, as well as some of the best meat and seafood they can find. Their catering menu is a must-see.

Satisfy your cravings for fresh fish with a visit to Charlestown's' Hipster fish, cheese and wine bar in a former Upper King building. The Fish & Wine bar is a hit with locals and visitors alike. The menu features fresh seafood, meat, and vegetarian options, all prepared with a focus on local and sustainable ingredients. The wine list is extensive, offering a wide range of options to complement the food. The atmosphere is relaxed and welcoming, making it the perfect spot for a casual meal or a laid-back evening.

What to Do

Venture into the waterway town of Charleston with Carter Island Eco Tours.  
(Photograph: Courtesy of Carter Island Eco Tours)

Explore some of the most scenic areas of downtown Charleston, including the historic Battery, Fort Sumter, and the Battery Park. You'll also have the opportunity to enjoy a scenic boat ride on the Ashley River, passing by historic sites such as the Dock Street Theatre and the College of Charleston. This tour is a great way to see the best of Charleston from the water.

Join the food-loving herd at the Charleston Farmers Market, which takes over Market Square downtown every Saturday. More than 80 local growers and producers sell products like sweet corn, peaches, and berries; organic varieties grown by local farmers; and heritage breeds raised and raised with care. If you're not visiting and don't have a kitchen, you can still stock up on products like smoked olive oil, jam, and peanut butter from Charleston Spice Co. Local honey and locally harvested rice are from the same sources. You're also more than a dozen food carts—serving everything from tacos to donuts to fresh vegetable tacos and even sushi. Stop by the Carter Island Eco Tours, a waterfront culinary tour that offers a unique and delicious experience. Enjoy the best of Charleston's food scene while taking in the beautiful surroundings of the Ashley River.

Go on a guided tour of the coastal route featured in the book Charleston Culinary Tours, which is offered every weekend and is a great way to taste the best of Charleston's food scene. This tour takes you to some of the city's most well-known establishments, and you'll get to sample some of their signature dishes. The tour is led by a local guide who is knowledgeable about the city's culinary scene and can offer insider tips and recommendations. The tour includes a visit to several restaurants, a history lesson about the city's food culture, and a chance to try some of the city's signature dishes. This tour is a must for anyone interested in food culture and history in Charleston.

Expert Picks

Chef Andy Henderson, whose brunch menu at Edmund's Oast was nominated for a 2019 James Beard Award, shares his favorite local haunts:

I really like to eat at... (provider name) in West Ashley. It's a great place to get lost in thumbing through old menus and read (the restaurant's) menu history. It's also a great place for the locals.
My favorite and break is off just Avenue to the Isle of Palms, just outside the city. The area can get crowded when the waves are good, but it's definitely one of a locals' go-to breaks. It also has really convenient parking.

There's a pier in the neighboring town of Mount Pleasant near Sullivan's Island called the Mt. Street Pier. It's great for fishing, with panoramic views of both downtown and the ocean. It's also the ultimate spot for watching the fireworks on July 4.

Resources

For news about the newest local art exhibits, concerts, and events, check out the digital edition of Charleston City Paper. Print copies of the weekly can also be found at many coffee shops and King Street shops downtown.

Charleston Eats makes the city's favorite restaurants of the moment; it also runs interviews with top local chefs and in-depth dining reviews.

Shopabucks. has great info about local boutiques and properties through Charleston Shop Crawl, a blog run by a former NYC fashion stylist.

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