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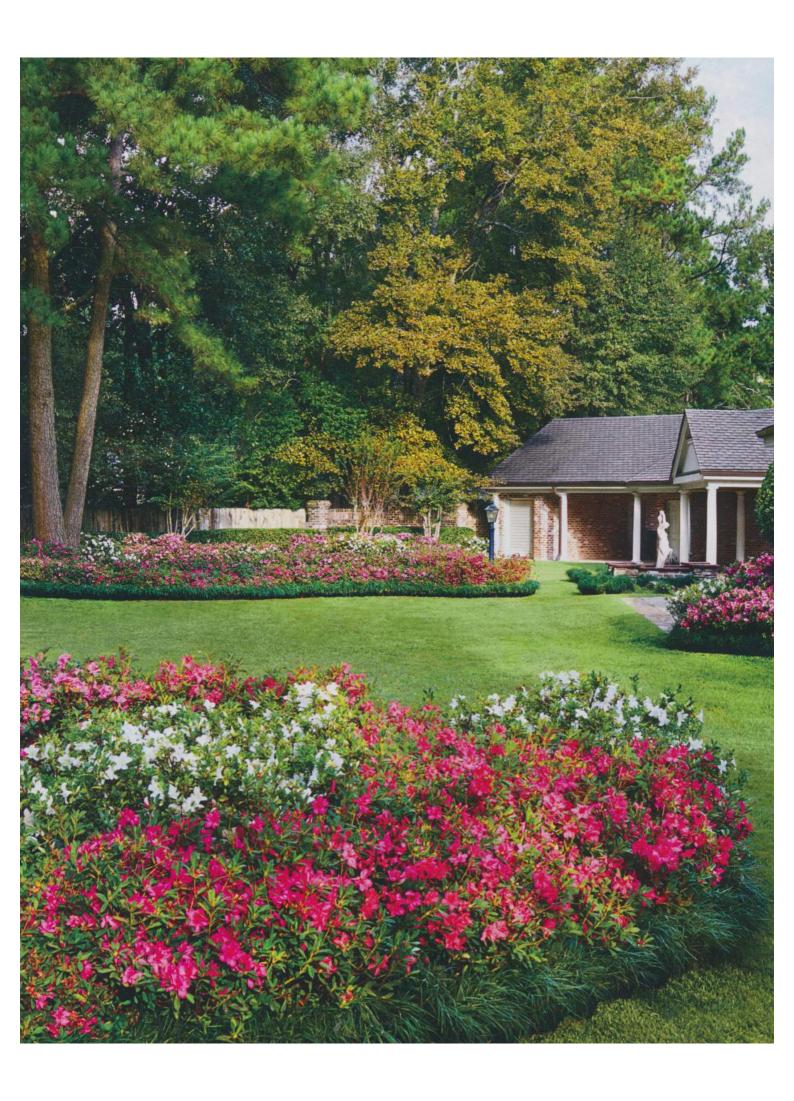
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RE-CREATING OUR FIRST COVER

Fifty years and several hurricanes later, Southern Living returns to Mobile, Alabama, with two truckloads of azaleas

BY STEVE BENDER

The first cover of *Southern Living* blazed with the blossoms of our region's favorite shrubs—azaleas. They weren't cold hardy up North, but down here they thrived like fruit flies on apples. A photograph taken in the heart of Mobile's famous Azalea Trail seemed the perfect way to introduce a new magazine that celebrated the best of the South. Neighborhood azalea trails from the East Coast to East Texas, like the one in Mobile, amazed onlookers. Famous gardens, such as Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia; Bellingrath Gardens and Home in Theodore,

Alabama; and Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, South Carolina, drew thousands of visitors to see waves of azaleas each spring. When color television began bringing us the Masters Tournament from Augusta National Golf Club in the 1960s, the clouds of azaleas blooming beneath the pines each April played second fiddle only to the champion.

But fashions wax and wane. And so it was with these old evergreen azaleas that first entered the South in the 1800s. Stunning as their flowers might be, they bloomed for only a week or two a year and then faded into green blobs. By the turn of the millennium, new hydrangeas and 'Knock Out' roses—shrubs that bloom much longer—had shoved azaleas aside.

Robert "Buddy" Lee had other ideas, though. An azalea breeder from Louisiana, he'd heard of a summer-blooming azalea from Taiwan called *Rhododendron oldhamii*. (All azaleas belong to the genus *Rhododendron*.) He crossed it with many other types to produce a revolutionary series of azaleas that bloom on both last year's growth (like most azaleas do) *and* new growth. He submitted his seedlings to the legendary Flowerwood Nursery in Mobile for evaluation. Rave reviews resulted in the creation of a company called Plant Development Services, Inc. (PDSI), to offer them to the public. The name of the plants is Encore azaleas.

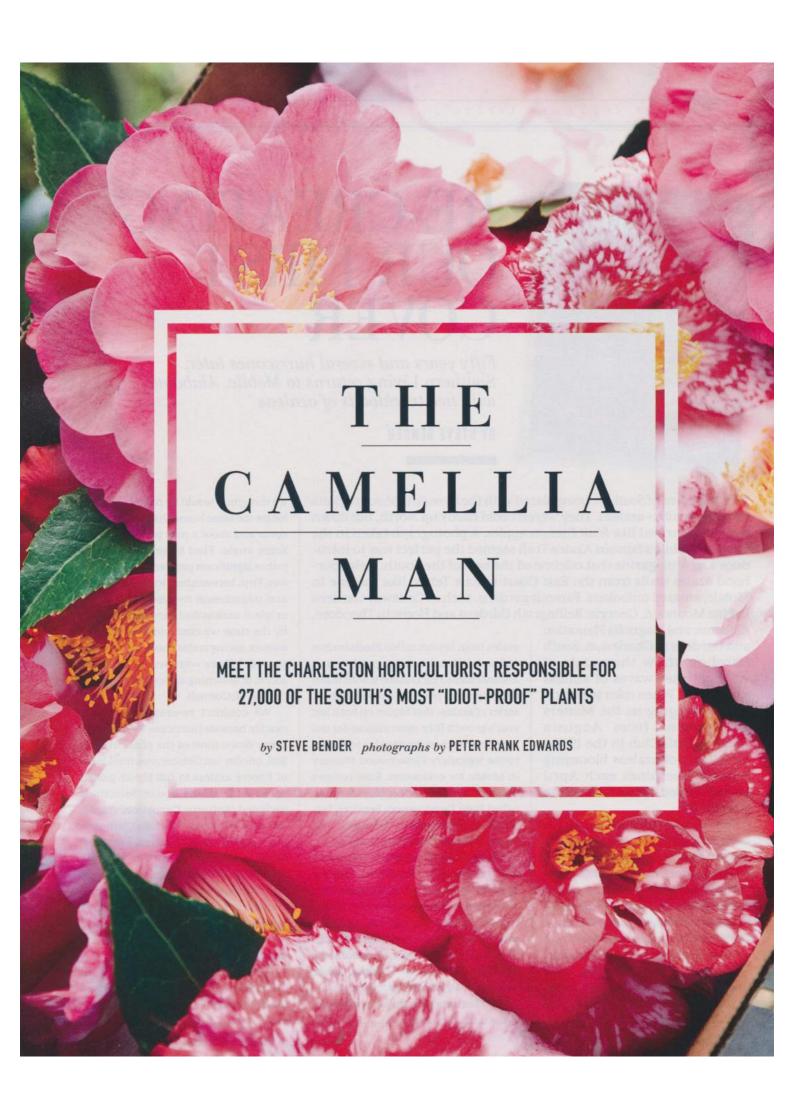
"Encores really changed the azalea market," says Kip McConnell, director of PDSI. "It used to be that azaleas were only a spring thing." But Encores bloom heavily in both spring and fall with intermittent flowers through the summer. About 30 different selections are available in a full range of colors. Unlike other azaleas, Encores like full sun.

In planning this anniversary issue,

we thought it would be neat if we could locate the same house that's on our 1966 cover and shoot a new photo from the same angle. Find it we did, but two rather significant problems stood in the way. First, between hurricanes, droughts, and uncommon freezes, none of the original azaleas had survived. Second, by the time we contacted the present owners, spring azalea season had already passed. Where were we going to get scores of blooming azaleas for the shot? I called McConnell.

We couldn't re-create the scene exactly, because Hurricane Frederic had taken down most of the pines in 1979. Still, one day last October, two truckloads of Encore azaleas in full bloom pulled up in front of the house. Selections included 'Autumn Carnation' (pink), 'Autumn Sundance' (fuchsia), 'Autumn Lily' (white), and 'Autumn Empress' (pink). A couple of local TV news crews showed up to record this historic event and film lots of sweaty guys hauling plants from place to place. The home's current owners, LeAnne and David Naman, seemed quite pleased. The plants are thriving.

So it seems that azaleas in the South are on the rebound. Don't be surprised to see them grace our cover again.









camellia is a man's plant," states Tom Johnson. "That is because it's pretty much idiot-proof, and men don't really like to be challenged." Though said

tongue in cheek, it partly explains how he finds himself today overseeing the country's largest camellia collection at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, South Carolina.

Established on the bank of the Ashley River by Thomas Drayton in 1676, Magnolia is still held by the original family. For many years, it thrived as a lucrative rice plantation, but in 1838 its ownership passed to Thomas' great-great-great-grandson, the Rev. John Grimké Drayton, who set out to create a series of romantic gardens to help his new Philadelphia bride feel at home in the Lowcountry.

At Drayton's hand was the perfect plant to do this—the common camellia (Camellia japonica). Native to China and Japan, it had been introduced to America through the port of Charleston by famed French botanist André Michaux years earlier. Ideally suited to the Lowcountry climate, camellias began flourishing in small gardens as well as on large estates.

Johnson grew up in Perry, Georgia, near the American Camellia Society's 9-acre Massee Lane Gardens, and often visited there with his father. Though he was impressed with the magnificent plants, the camellia bug didn't bite immediately—Johnson wanted to be a farmer. "But in the seventies, all the farmers were going broke," he recalls. "At the same time, the field of horticulture was opening up with new jobs, so I decided to be a horticulturist."

His timing was impeccable. Gov. Jimmy Carter had just added vocational study to the Governor's Honors Program, a summer program for gifted high school juniors and seniors. "I was the first vocational student nominated," Johnson says proudly. "I showed up with the top 200 students in the state. This boy behind

me looked at me and said, 'This program is going downhill fast. They're letting in farm boys now."

Johnson, however, excelled. He then led a group that won a national award from the Future Farmers of America for landscaping Perry's downtown area. "I flew to Kansas City, Kansas, to receive our award," he recalls. "They sat me at a table that had more silverware around a single plate than Mama had in her whole drawer back at home "

After he attended Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia, Johnson interviewed

with Alfred Simpson, owner of a large Atlanta landscaping firm. Simpson asked if he had any problem with working downtown. "I said, 'No, sir, I ain't never been downtown, so I'm sure it'll be okay.' Mr. Simpson leaned back, grinned, and said, 'Boy, we're gonna put you in charge of the whole damn downtown.' I was 24 years old

with a Gold MasterCard and \$1 million worth of accounts."

One account proved especially fruitful. "My second year there, I got put in charge of landscaping President Carter's Presidential Library," he recalls. "I would be out there clearing kudzu, and the President would visit with me." Before long, Johnson

became the library's chief horticulturist. "But after 15 years there, everything was done and my work was finished," he says. He knew it was time to move on.

The camellias he'd admired in his childhood called to him. He returned to his hometown of Perry to become the horticulturist for the American Camellia Society. When asked what drew him to camellias, he mentions that they're hard to kill. "If you planted a camellia, a rose, and an azalea in your yard and then moved away for years, when you came back, the only

thing left living would be that camellia." Camellias also bring historical gravitas to a garden. "I can walk out and look at a camellia's name, go to the International Camellia Register, and trace the lineage of that plant all the way back to when it was found in China. You can't do that with other plants," he notes. The third factor is

HOW TO GROW CAMFLLIAS

LIGHT: Filtered shade SOIL: Acid. well-drained WATER: Water new plants several times a week. Established plants more than 3 years old can usually get by on rainfall. FERTILIZE: Apply an acid-forming azalea/ camellia fertilizer (according to label directions) in spring, after the flowers drop. PRUNE: Immediately after plants bloom

"IF YOU PLANTED A CAMELLIA, A ROSE, AND AN AZALEA IN YOUR YARD AND THEN MOVED AWAY FOR YEARS, WHEN YOU CAME BACK, THE ONLY THING LEFT LIVING WOULD BE THAT CAMELLIA."

"CAMELLIAS DO WHAT THEY'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO.

THEY BLOOM IN THE DEAD OF WINTER."

their inspiring bloom. "Camellias do what they're not supposed to," he says. "They bloom in the dead of winter when there is nothing else to enjoy."

While he was managing the American Camellia Society's Massee Lane Gardens, Johnson became an advocate for what he calls romantic garden design. "A formal garden controls nature," he explains, "but a romantic garden cooperates with nature. It is an extravagant liar. It 'lies' you into forgetting about your life outside the garden." Instead of having balance, symmetry, clipped hedges, and paved walks, there are paths that ramble and edges that are blurred, and the plants grow as they like.

Johnson lectured frequently on this topic, and Drayton Hastie, Jr., who is on the board of Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, was listening. Hastie saw Johnson as the perfect person to restore the romantic look Magnolia once had

and recruited him unsuccessfully for three years. "But the last time, he was smart enough to give up on me and go to work on my wife, Mary Ann," Johnson recalls. "He put us up in a bed-andbreakfast down on the Battery for \$300 a night. Something like that is so wasted on a man! Then he bought me a bourbon and stuck me on

the other end of the table. 'The cabin we have for you at Magnolia is 10 feet from the Ashley River—you can sit in the hot tub,' he said to Mary Ann. Then he asked about our son, Logan, adding, 'How

would he like the job of training the miniature ponies?' On our way home, Mary Ann looked at me and said, 'Let me make this perfectly clear: We're going to Charleston.'"

That was in 2007. Hastie wanted to assemble the largest collection of ancient (existing prior to 1900) and historic (originating from 1900 to 1960) camellias in North America on Magnolia's 500 acres. Even with camellias in place since 1840, Johnson knew this would be no small task. "When you're in your fifties, you realize there's more behind you than ahead of you," he observes. "I knew that signing on to the restoration of the gardens here would consume the rest of my life."

His decision proved the right one. The number of visitors to Magnolia has quadrupled in the last five years. *Travel + Leisure* named it one of the 15 most beautiful gardens in America in 2014.

The International Camellia Society recognizes Magnolia as being one of only seven Gardens of Excellence in the U.S. And Magnolia's camellia collection of 27,000 plants represents 1,200 different selections.

Forgoing farming opened doors Johnson never could have expected. And he revels in his good fortune. "I get to take

America's oldest public garden into the future," he says. "Magnolia is a lady, and my job is to shine her shoes and dress her in robes for the thousands of suitors who come courting."

WHEN TO VISIT

Mid-January to mid-March is the time to see the most camellias in bloom at Magnolia. Find more information at magnolia plantation.com.





The Must-See Soul of the South.

With its renowned restaurant scene, exquisitely preserved architectural wonders, and soul-stirring coastal landscapes, it is no surprise that Charleston, South Carolina, is one of the most popular travel destinations in America.

Isn't it time you discovered for yourself what so many other travelers already love about Charleston?

Start planning your getaway at ExploreCharleston.com



Charleston SOUTH CAROLINA

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SOUTHERN

TRAVEL CULTURE

YOUR LOCAL'S GUIDE TO ALL POINTS SOUTH

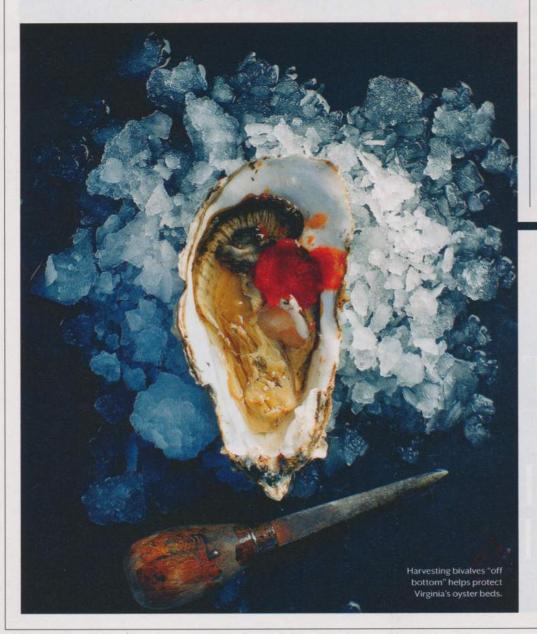
Southern Living

BEST PLACES IN THE

Our favorite new discoveries from Key Largo to Kentucky

here has never been a better time to live and play in the South, and these picks for new things to see and do represent just a few of the reasons why. Over the past several years, some of your favorite cities have added exciting attractions and revitalized downtown neighborhoods. Innovative chefs, restaurateurs, brewers, and distillers continue to make the Southern dining-and-bar scene more interesting every day. Even some of the region's natural wonders recently became easier to access and enjoy. Whether you're drawn to small towns or city lights, haute cuisine or haute cou-

ture, a jazz improv or a blues riff, your personal must-see list from the Atlantic to the Southwest just keeps getting bigger—and better.



ALABAMA

1 Our Theaters Have Never Sounded So Good

From the day it first opened in 1914. Birmingham's Lyric Theatre has been one of the hottest tickets in town. It closed in 1958 and fell into disrepair but is set to reopen this winter after a stunning \$11 million renovation. The theater was built for live performances without microphones, and with only 750 seats, it's an acoustic marvel. Executive director Brant Beene says, "You can snap your fingers on the stage and hear it up to the rafters." Look for a variety of shows, all of which will sound like they're happening in your living room. lightupthelyric.com

2-4 The South Is Your Oyster

Sustainable aquaculture has saved Virginia's oysters.

REAT NEWS for oyster fans: Now open are The Virginia Oyster Trail (virginia oystertrail.com); Rapp Session market and bar, next to Richmond's Rappahannock restaurant (rroysters.com); as well as Pleasure House Oysters' Chef's Table Tour, offered on the Lynnhaven River in Virginia Beach (pleasurehouseoysters.com).



and bike-friendly trail tying its popular downtown area to East Tupelo and the Elvis Presley Birthplace. The trail is set to open early this summer. tupelomainstreet.com

MISSOURI

23 St. Louis Is Singing the Blues

Robert Cray, Jack White, and Morgan Freeman are among those who are supporting the National Blues Museum, which is scheduled to open in April in St. Louis. Celebrating the impact of blues on American music, the cultural center will offer artifacts, interactive exhibits, and a performance hall. national bluesmuseum.org

NORTH CAROLINA

24 Wilson Has a Whirligig Park

Begun three years ago and set for 2017 completion, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park in Wilson will showcase and preserve the late artist's inventive works, which drew international attention. wilsonwhirligigpark.org

25 We're Bunking at Biltmore

Biltmore now offers two lodging options: posh and private at the Inn on Biltmore Estate or cottagey and casual at the new Village Hotel, which is just steps away from the Antler Hill Village and Biltmore Winery. Hotel guests also enjoy a free estate shuttle. biltmore.com/stay/hotel

26 Raleigh Tastes Better Than Ever

Raleigh recently welcomed chef Scott Crawford's new Standard Foods, a restaurant and grocery that celebrates both traditional farmers and artisanal producers with its farm-totable menu and an assortment of retail products. standard-foods.com

27 The Triangle Has a Beer Garden

What's the brew-haha?
The brand-new, 500-square-foot Raleigh Beer Garden has opened in the capital city with a whopping 366 options on tap, including 144 North Carolina brews.
The popular watering hole joins a thriving beer

Bake

scene that includes the 21-stop Raleigh Beer Trail; Beltline Brew Tours, three-to four-hour visits to several breweries in Raleigh and Durham; and even a pedal-powered Trolley Pub, which conducts lively sipping tours through Raleigh. theraleigh beergarden.com

SOUTH CAROLINA

28 Charleston Gaillard Center Gets a Standing O

The \$142 million renovation to Gaillard Municipal Auditorium is proof of Charleston's progressive thinking and its commitment to the arts. The contemporary auditorium, built in the late sixties, wasn't aging gracefully. But now the Gaillard is both visually and acoustically stunning and brings city offices and an 1,800-seat, world-class performance hall under one roof. gaillardcenter.com

ROBERT CRAY, JACK WHITE, AND MORGAN FREEMAN ARE AMONG THOSE SUPPORT-ING THE NATIONAL BLUES MUSEUM.



TENNESSEE

29 Chattanooga Is Creating a STIR

Part of the new Chattanooga Choo-Choo entertainment district, STIR restaurant and bar puts innovative spins on fresh, local ingredients. It elevates craft cocktails with 350 spirits and an ice chef. stirchattanooga.com

30-32 Our Blue Jeans Look Better

Southern designers are putting their own spins on everybody's favorite fashion staple.

OTHER-DAUGHTER DUO Kathy Moça and Emilie Whitaker, who launched curve-hugging Beija-Flor jeans in Greenville, South Carolina, have a new Nashville locale, and Bloomingdale's will begin carrying the jeans this spring (beijaflorjeans.com). Online purveyor Blue Delta Jeans has a flagship store in Oxford, Mississippi, where you can customize your jeans (blue deltajeans.com). And in Kansas City, Missouri, Matt and Emily Baldwin's Baldwin denim was featured in Vogue as a 2015 finalist for The Council of Fashion Designers of America's CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund endowment (baldwin.co).









CUISINE

It's no secret Charleston is home to a variety of culinary luminaries and boasts some of the best food in the country. The city's pulse has been connected to its kitchens since the late 1600s, when subsistence farming and fishing unknowingly gave birth to today's prized hyper-local Lowcountry cuisine.

SOUTHERN STAPLES

To taste authentic local flavors, look for dishes like shrimp and grits, she-crab soup, and fried chicken at places like Slightly North of Broad, Fleet Landing, Husk, 82 Queen, and Virginia's on King. Ovsters are revered with cult status at The Ordinary, Pearlz, and Hank's Seafood Restaurant. Meanwhile, intimate eateries like Artisan Meat Share, Butcher & Bee, and Cru Café give sandwiches a sophisticated Southern twistthink barbecued pulled squash

with crunchy cabbage slaw or smoked ham and pimiento cheese with roasted peanuts. For a total Southern immersion, check out the Sunday gospel brunch at Hall's Chophouse.

GOURMET GETAWAYS

What could be simpler than a one-stop epicurean adventure? Several of Charleston's renowned restaurants share an address with some of the city's top-notch hotels, offering memorable dining experience mere steps away from turndown service and crisp bed linens. Night after night, diners enjoy signature crab cakes served with jazz standards in the clubby atmosphere at Charleston Grill, housed inside the 435-room Belmond Charleston Place. Perhaps the most romantic place to dine is Peninsula Grill's candlelit garden, which is discreetly tucked inside the 64-room Planters Inn, the only Relais

& Châteaux establishment in South Carolina. Traditional with a modern twist describes both the cuisine and setting at Circa 1886, the carriage house-turned-restaurant located steps away from the 21-room Wentworth Mansion, a Gilded Age dwelling-turned-inn.

OUTDOORS

The area's coastal landscape is etched with beautiful barrier islands, pristine estuaries, and sprawling 17th-century plantations that fan out across the Lowcountry like the dazzling blue-green-gold plumage of a peacock—all waiting to be discovered.

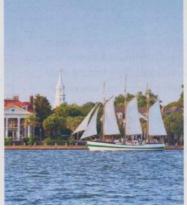
BOTANICAL WONDERLAND

Come spring, the delicate aromas of tea olive trees, Carolina Jessamine, and wisteria perfume the air, giving Charleston its "a city set in a garden" nickname. To experience it for yourself, make plans to visit during Historic Charleston Foundation's Festival of Houses and Gardens, March 16 – April 24, 2016.

FISH ON

Depending on the time of year, anglers can chase anything from sea bass and sheepshead inshore to grouper and tuna in the gulfstream. The labyrinth

he Schooner Pride



of waterways surrounding Charleston and its island communities is home to a booming redfish population, offering visiting fly-fishermen a year-round shot at epic on-the-water adventures.

SHOPPING

with a flourishing arts and fashion scene coupled with centuries of deep-seated tradition, the Charleston area possesses a style all its own.

TOP TASTEMAKERS

King Street's shopping options reign supreme thanks to a mix of longstanding family-owned boutiques, including Berlin's, Bob Ellis, Croghan's Jewel Box, and M. Dumas & Sons, alongside national brands. From an esteemed antiques quarter to a thriving contemporary design district, the extensive retail corridor offers something for everyone.

CERTIFIED LOCAL

At the Charleston City Market, one of the nation's oldest public markets, several hundred vendors sell items ranging from burlap sacks of Carolina Gold rice to silk scarves. Look for the "Certified Authentic: 100% Made in Charleston" green and white tile that's awarded to bonafide local products.

HISTORY

There's good reason Charleston has earned a national reputation for historic preservation—there's loads in the way of architecture, attractions, and traditions worth preserving.

A VERITABLE LIVING MUSEUM

Ornate plasterwork, period antiques, paneled ballrooms, and formal gardens illustrate





the grandeur of colonial wealth preserved at the Aiken-Rhett, Edmondston-Alston, Heyward-Washington, Joseph Manigault, Nathanial Russell, and Thomas Elfe open-to-the-public house museums.

SAIL BACK IN TIME

A bustling colonial seaport that was arguably America's most cosmopolitan antebellum city, Charleston has a rich maritime history that is revisited with daily tours to Fort Sumter and sunset cruises aboard the Schooner Pride.

CULTURE

For more than 300 years, Charleston's evocative beauty has inspired painters, poets, playwrights, and musicians. Stroll down the blue slate sidewalks and it's easy to see what inspired artist Alfred Hutty to write, "Come quickly, have found heaven."

SUMMERTIME

In 1934, George Gershwin whiled away the summer in a tiny cottage on Folly Beach. There, he transformed *Porgy*, the best-selling novel about Charleston's Catfish Row, into *Porgy and Bess*. The 40th

season of Charleston's Spoleto Festival USA (May 27 – June 12, 2016) will debut a new version of that landmark folk opera, featuring set and costume design by acclaimed Gullah artist Jonathan Green.

CURTAIN RISES

Bolstered by reinvigorated venues like the Dock Street Theatre and Memminger Auditorium, the forthcoming Gibbes Museum of Art, and the newly opened Gaillard
Performance Hall, Charleston
is experiencing a dynamic
resurgence of world-class
performance spaces worthy of
standing ovations.

FAMILY

hen it comes to making family-friendly memories, Charleston delivers with its expansive parks, tour options, and raw natural beauty.

SAND, SURF, AND FUN IN THE SUN

Charleston's five beautiful barrier islands and 90+ miles of pristine beaches can be full of surprises—like the sight of towering castles during the annual Piccolo Spoleto Sand Sculpting Competition. Pack a beach bag and hit the sands at Kiawah and Seabrook islands, Isle of Palms, and Folly Beach, or explore all types of sea life at the South Carolina Aquarium.

HARNESS SOME FUN

A one-hour carriage tour is the perfect vehicle for visitors of all ages to see the sights. Children are delighted by the clip-clop of the horse's trot while parents appreciate the entertaining stories and local lore shared by licensed guides.





