

The irresistible
cheeseburger at Husk;
milliner Leigh Magar
and her hats (right).



The first Charleston renaissance blossomed between the world wars, turning the then-rundown Southern port town into an artists' enclave. Now another one is blooming. Part of this is historical: As the home of Fort Sumter, Charleston took center stage during the 150th anniversary of the Civil War this year. But mostly the city looks toward the future. In the last few years, its cosmopolitan restaurant and cultural scenes have flourished. "What Charleston has benefited from lately is a desire from people to find authentic America," says Angela Mack, executive director of the city's Gibbes Museum of Art. "There are millions of stories here, and they're what get you." That is, of course, if you know the right storytellers. Exploring Charleston is all about knowing where to go, who to see and what to ask for.

1

WALKING HISTORY

Guided tours through the historic district—with its steeped churches, moss-covered cemeteries and pastel clapboard houses—can be taken by foot, bus or horse and buggy. But none are as insightful as those given by **John Paul Huguley**, who founded the city's American College of the Building Arts 14 years ago to teach aspiring craftsmen the artisan trades. Huguley brings his deep knowledge to bear during the private three-hour tours through the historic center. With two weeks' notice, he can tailor each tour to specific interests, adding a meeting with the city historian, say, or cocktails in a restored home. *Tours start at \$150 per person; 843-670-5245.* **CONTINUED »**

DEPARTURES 10

Insider's Charleston

Don't let the Spanish moss and Southern drawl fool you. **ANDREW SESSA** visits this vibrant South Carolina city and reports on the red-hot restaurants, boutiques and historic sites.

2

SOUTHERN BELLES

Though the Spoleto Festival USA, an annual celebration of the performing arts (May 25–June 10, 2012; spoletousa.org), dominates the city's arts landscape, Charleston isn't a one-season cultural pony. Nearly 110 years old, the **Gibbes Museum of Art** also continues to push the city's scene forward. This fall, it celebrates the work of frequently unsung female artists with "Breaking Down Barriers," an exhibit featuring pieces by 31 women in the museum's permanent collection. Many of them worked in Charleston, including America's first professional female artist, the 18th-century pastel portrait artist Henrietta Johnson, as well as contemporary sweetgrass basket weaver Mary Jackson, who won a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" in 2008. At 35 Meeting St.; gibbesmuseum.org.

3

ROOMS TO BOOK

Just across the street from Charleston's historic market buildings, in a converted 1844 dry-goods storehouse, **Planters Inn** feels intimately connected to the past and the present. The 64-room hotel, with its cozy lobby, shaded courtyard and beloved restaurant,



Bow ties and stripes from Ben Silver, an institution for Southern gentlemen

The Peninsula Grill, has a homey, residential style and decor that evoke Charleston's colonial past without overdoing it. Request room 214, a grand king, all cool pastels, warm polished wood and soaring ceilings. Rooms start at \$300; 112 N. Market St.; 843-722-2345; plantersinn.com.

4

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

Past the big-brand names (Apple, Williams-Sonoma, Ann Taylor) of King Street, the city's major retail corridor, lies a trove of small, uniquely Charlestonian boutiques. This shopping itinerary, suggested by the ineffably stylish Mariana Hay and Rhett Outten, sisters and third-

generation owners of **Croghan's Jewel Box** (308 King St.; croghansjewelbox.com), reveals the gems.

Southern gentility, along with needle-point belts (\$165) and cummerbunds (\$245), can be found at the colorful, good old boy boutique **Grady Ervin** (313 King St.; gradyervin.com), while Repp bow ties (\$95) can be had at **Ben Silver** (149 King St.; bensilver.com), and most young gents get their first seersucker suit at **M. Dumas & Sons** (294 King St.; mdumasandsons.com).

Down the street at Croghan's, there's jewelry—new and estate, precious and semiprecious, some of it designed in-house—plus silver home accessories, including the sterling celebration cups (\$600) for which the store is also known.

Beyond these icons, Hay and Outten point to a few

newer King Street favorites. **Heirloom Book Co.** (123 King St.; heirloombookco.com) debuted in April and devotes itself exclusively to cooking tomes, both new and old. **Hampden Clothing** (314 King St.; hampdenclimbing.com), opened in 2007 by former Neiman Marcus buyer Stacy Smallwood, features rising designers like Alexander Wang and Derek Lam. Farther afield, on Cannon Street, is another Southern belle gone big city and returned. Leigh Magar studied at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology before coming back to her hometown in 1996 to open the millinery **Magar Hatworks** (57 Cannon St.; magarhatworks.com), whose fedoras and fascinators channel flapper-era glamour. **CONTINUED »**

5

SWINGING CHARLESTON

Q&A WITH JACK MCCRAY

The hometown of Porgy and Bess and the cradle of its namesake dance, Charleston's music scene is legendary. Author and jazz historian Jack McCray, who writes the "JazzBeat(s)" column for the local daily *Post and Courier* and penned the authoritative 2007 volume *Charleston Jazz*, gives us a primer.

Why does Charleston have such a strong jazz tradition? Because it had so many churches, the city became the home of Negro spirituals. These developed into a sort of proto-jazz in the early 20th century at a place called the Jenkins Orphanage, which taught music. It wasn't jazz per se, but the students began to improvise. Many of them went on to fill the swing-era big bands of Duke Ellington and Count Basie.

Does Charleston jazz have its own sound? Absolutely, just like Memphis and New Orleans do. It typically has a churchy, gospel feel with a pronounced backbeat. There's usually group improvisation, with all the players or singers doing their own thing at the same time, but all in sync.

Who are the artists to know about now, and where can we hear them? Percussionist Quentin Baxter is the musical director at Charleston Place Hotel's **Charleston Grill** (224 King St.; charlestongrill.com) and pretty much the town's face of jazz. Then there's Ann Caldwell, the city's most prominent jazz singer. She does standards, Tin Pan Alley stuff and a little blues. She performs at **Mercato** (102 N. Market St.; mercatocharleston.com), where they have live jazz nightly.



Drummer Quentin Baxter at the Charleston Grill, where he is also the musical director

6

GOLF COAST

The sprawling **Ocean Course at Kiawah Island Golf Resort**, an hour's drive from Charleston, hosts the PGA Championship this August. To prepare, golf course architect Pete Dye has refreshed his challenging par-72 links, which have more seaside holes than any other in North America. To best feel the nuance (and ocean breeze), schedule a private caddied playing lesson with Ronnie Miller, Kiawah's director of instruction, or lead teacher Abby Welch, one of *Golf Digest's* top 40 golf instructors under 40. *Greens fee starts at \$700 and includes a lesson plus caddie fees for a single player; kiawahresort.com.*

7

PLANTATION PUNCH

On a bespoke by-appointment **Ultimate Connoisseur Tour**, George McDaniel, executive director of Drayton Hall—the most noteworthy of Charleston's historical plantations—leads guests through the estate's unfurnished

hall (built in 1738), landscaped grounds and private offsite collections of furniture and decorative arts. Fully customizable, the itinerary can also feature a boat trip on the Ashley River, which the Drayton family used to take to the house, or a grand supper inspired by historical dishes from the Drayton diaries, which

feature old chestnuts like oyster patties and roasted veal. *Tours start at \$750 for a group of four; draytonhall.org.*

8

HAVE YOUR CAKE

Described by *The New York Times* as “a big white slice of

heaven,” the cream-filled coconut cake served at Planters Inn's Peninsula Grill has become a city icon. Executive chef Robert Carter based the recipe on his grandmother's, introducing it to the Grill in 1998.

With a few days' notice, those looking to get to know the cake intimately can arrange a kitchen tour with the hotel's managing director, Emmanuel Gardinier, to watch it being made. And with two weeks' notice, Gardinier can even arrange a hands-on cake-making lesson with pastry chef Claire Chapman. *Cakes start at \$100; cake-making lessons, at \$500; plantersinn.com.*



Drayton Hall, a preserved plantation

9

LOW COUNTRY GOES HAUTE

With the year-old restaurant **Husk** (76 Queen St.; 843-577-2500; huskrestaurant.com), Charleston has advanced its reputation as the engine behind the country's Southern cuisine craze. Its chef, 2010 James Beard Award-winner Sean Brock, uses hyperlocal ingredients—South Carolina beef, Capers Inlet clams—to showcase the exhilarating potential of New Southern cuisine. Diners can pair small plates both on and off his regular menu with bourbons from the extensive cellar. But his is not the only game in town. Mike Lata, who won a James Beard Award in 2009, puts a new focus on lesser-known Southern catches at **FIG** (232 Meeting St.; 843-805-5900; eatatfig.com). A four-course off-menu seafood tasting might include a creamy coddled Sea Island farm egg with stone crab. And at **Circa 1886** (149 Wentworth St.; 843-853-7828; circa1886.com), Marc Collins, cofounder of the Charleston Wine + Food Festival (March 1-4, 2012), creates a seasonal five-course Southern tasting menu with unexpected touches, like the antelope loin with blue corn grits.



Shrimp and grits with smoked sausage and crispy pig ears at Husk

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BY LAND OR BY SEA

Charleston is highly walkable, but the Southern heat can be brutal. For a respite, call the **Charleston Black Cab Company** (\$85 an hour; charlestonblackcabcompany.com), which has 24 five-passenger chauffeured London taxis. But visiting the city without a view from its harbor would be a sin. **Coastal Yacht Charters** (coastal-yacht-charters.com), launched in 2008, has a fleet of eight ships available for sunset, half- and full-day outings (from \$325 an hour)



A slice of the famous 11-layer coconut cake from Peninsula Grill

around the Charleston peninsula as well as fishing excursions (from \$400). If you're feeling lucky and adventurous, lunch can be catch-your-own: The water teems with redfish and grouper. If not, Charleston gourmet shop **Caviar & Bananas** (51 George St.; caviarandbananas.com) offers prepared dishes like barbecued pork and duck sliders. ■