JEWEL OF THE SOUTH
Charleston's charms are legion, and what better time to visit (or revisit) than in the spring, when the city's famed gardens are at their showiest?

BY ALISON GWINN

Like a sweet Southern belle whose appeal only seems to get more potent as the years go by, South Carolina's oldest and largest city offers beautiful architecture, a vibrant food scene, history that dates back to the 17th century and extreme walkability. We're as smitten as Charleston's fictional native son Rhett Butler once was with another famous belle.

Where to sleep
Perfectly located in the city's historic district, and within easy walking distance to great shopping, The Grand Bohemian (grandbohemian charleston.com), a 50-room luxury boutique hotel with beautiful decor, gracious hospitality and its own art gallery, offers multiple Southern culinary options, including a rooftop restaurant with views of the city and harbor, a wine-blending and tasting room and a specialty coffee shop. The Grand Bohemian, part of the Kesner Collection, is a sister property to Beaver Creek Lodge.

What to do
Visit Rainbow Row, walk along the historic waterfront and gaze out at Fort Sumter with Charleston Strolls (charlestonstrolls.com). If you just want to take a walk on your own, head for Waterfront Park, which has beautiful views over the Cooper River. Walking not your thing? Take a one-hour tour with Palmetto Carriage Works (palmettocarriage.com). See a show at Dock Street Theatre, the nation's oldest theater (charleston stage.com). Or go fishing off Folly Pier, the second-largest pier on the East Coast.

Go back in time
The Boone Hall Plantation (boonehall plantation.com), touted as "the South's most-photographed plantation," has a spectacular, 17th-century approach, a gorgeous mansion and slave/sharercoon cabins that offer many historic insights. Speaking of history, if you are a military buff, visit the Patriots Point Naval &
going places
ready, set, jet!

drinks are more your thing, take a tasting tour of Charleston Distilling Company (charleston-distilling.com), which specializes in small-batch craft spirits, or enjoy a fascinating (and raucous) Wine Blending Class at the Grand Bohemian. Another option: Take a stroll through history and learn about low-country cuisine on a Charleston Food Tour (charlestonfoodtours.com).

Where to shop
The Grand Bohemian is only a few blocks from famed King Street. The city’s second-oldest street has been named one of the country’s 10 best shopping streets, and is filled with chic boutiques (we like Hampden, House of Sage, Julep, the Frickly Filly and MÖSJA), national brands (Macarwell, Vineyard Vines, Loft), home furnishing stores and lovely antique shops, which include pieces from numerous periods, sourced from all over the world. For local goods, from food to crafts, stop by the historic Charleston City Market, or the Charleston Farmer’s Market. Visit galleries, starting with the hotel’s own main-floor Grand Bohemian Gallery, the exclusive purveyor of works by French painter Jean Claude Rod and make your way to Robert Lange Studios, the Corrigan Gallery and the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art on the College of Charleston campus.

Maritime Museum
(patriotspoint.org), home of the USS Yorktown, or take a boat out to Fort Sumter (fortsumtertours.com) for a tour of the pivotal Civil War site led by National Park Service rangers.

Where to eat and drink
The truth is, it’s possible to never leave the Grand Bohemian and still dine like a king: Elevate, the hotel’s rooftop space, is a perfect spot for brunch, dinner or drinks. Venturing outside the hotel? For fun, locally sourced, made-from-scratch sandwiches, healthy plates and cold-pressed juices, try Butcher & Bee (butcherandbee.com). Stop at Brown’s Court Bakery (brownscourt.com) for a variety of wonderful pastries.

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