A living time capsule? Yes. But this thriving Southern port is much more.

By Diane Daniel
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT
CHARLESTON — A visit to the Holy City, so named for its historic houses of worship, pulls you back in time. Horse-drawn carriages transport tourists along cobblestone streets flanked by centuries-old, beautifully preserved, and impeccably manicured gardens and homes, many open to the public. From land, you can gaze across the harbor to Fort Sumter, where Union soldiers suffered the first hit in the Civil War. But Charleston comes with a fast-forward button, too. Lowcountry cuisine keeps raising the bar, and an ever wave of boutiques and bars buoy several neighborhoods. Mix it all together for heavenly results.

DAY ONE
1:30 p.m. Meet Martha: Before you hit the highfalutin eateries, start simply and soulfully at Martha Lou’s Kitchen (1068 Morrison Drive, 843-577-9583), operating since 1983. Inside the pink Lincoln Plaza building, Martha headed up the kitchen. In the theater of that dining room, diners will see Martha Lou’s signature she-crab soup, also on her menu since 1983. Martha’s “cold” seafood chowder is popular too. Martha Lou’s is only 30 minutes from historic Charleston, with easy access on the freeway.

Two blocks from your hotel, head to the Charleston Tea Plantation (http://www.charleston-tea.com), one of the last tea plantations in the United States. Martha Lou’s uses tea leaves from here in her soups and chowders.

2:30 p.m. Explore the historic district: Now back out on the streets—on foot, in carriage, or by trolley. The two-hour Charleston Carriage Company trolley tour (www.charleston-trolley.com) starts and ends at the Marion Square Visitor Center (1 King St.) and includes the historic district and the city’s waterfront. The Saturday Market (www.charlestonmarkeplace.com) is the city’s place for locally grown and artisanal items. Don’t shop on a Saturday. Check out the 18th-century home of rice planter and plantation owner Daniel Drayton at Drayton Hall (www.draytonhall.com; 843-577-3505). It’s open every day and offers guided tours of the house.

SOUTH CAROLINA

OUT OF AFRICA

This evocative 1985 award-winning film, shot on location near the Ngong Hills outside Nairobi, presented Kenyans such beautiful, lush detail that even today travelers seek to revisit its most memorable moments. The grandeur of the landscape, the graciousness and beauty of the people (descendants of the Kikuyu tribe), the magnificence and power of the herds of wildlife crossing the savannah, are lovingly revealed by cinematographer David Watkin’s stunning, slow-moving photography. The scenery is so vivid and compelling that Africa itself becomes a character. Adapted from Karen Blixen’s classic book, the romantic drama told the story of Blixen’s life in colonial Kenya. Meryl Streep played the leading role, and Robert Redford played Denys Finch-Hatton, her lover. It is a story not only of Blixen’s love for the fiercely-independent Finch-Hatton but also of her love for Africa. The box office hit won seven Academy Awards and lured travelers worldwide to the land that Blixen loved.

By DIANE BARK AND PAMELA WRIGHT

ASSASSINATION TANGO

Despite a frame that begins and ends the movie on Coney Island in Brooklyn, N.Y., this 2002 bilingual romantic drama is not only of Blixen’s love for the fiercely-independent Finch-Hatton but also of her love for Africa. The box office hit won seven Academy Awards and lured travelers worldwide to the land that Blixen loved.

MOVIES, Page M4
In Charleston, S.C., past is always present.