Charleston Chew: Where to Eat and Drink in Charleston, South Carolina

By Shara MacNeill
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The dining scene in this southern charmer has reinvented itself with a slew of new options for cocktail hour and beyond. Here, 14 places to eat and drink in Charleston.

During my grandmother’s heyday, you wouldn’t wear jeans on King Street or dine out on weeknights. Charleston has since relaxed its starchy code of etiquette to the point where tattooed millennials in “Chuck Taylors” t-shirts skateboard through Marion Square. Thankfully, the upshot of this new informality is an inviting reinvention of Southern hospitality as it applies to the cocktail hour and beyond. Yes, you can still dress up for dinner at McCrady’s (2 Univ Alley; 843-577-0028, mccradysestaurant.com) or F.L.G. (322 Meeting St.; 843-806-6300, eastfig.com) but the latest wave of eateries and lounges inspire small plate snacking rather than a multicourse sit-down. And while I still feel slightly guilty dressing around the Holy City in vintage Alabama Chanin delen, no one harangues me anymore for being unladylike when ordering a Bush Hog (Avondale Plantation rum, lemon, Angostura bitters) and pickled shrimp at the Gin Joint (182 East Bay St.; 843-577-8111, thegijoint.com).

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Cocktail Hour

In a converted brick townhouse next to Sean Brock’s Husk (78 Queen St.; 843-577-2500, huskrestaurant.com) the Bar at Husk stocks an encyclopedic collection of small-batch bourbons. Try “Jaco’s Second Home” with Elijah Craig 12-year, Nonino Amaro, Cognac, agave, and pecan shell brandy. Mixologist Craig Nelsen presides at Proof (437 King St; 843-793-1422, charlestonproof.com).

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where he updates classic cocktails with spirits from local micro-distillers. (He makes the house ginger beer as well.) His "Koulebier" contains Old Grand-Dad 114, Mexican Coca-Cola reduction-orange bitters, and pickled boiled peanuts. Edmund's Oast (1081 Morrison Dr.; 843-727-1145, edmundsoast.com) is a brew pub with its own beers on tap but the cocktail list is wildly inventive. My favorite refreshers on a humid summer evening is "Jack & the Beanstalk" with gin, apricot, greshult, Amaro, and locally produced Jack Rudy tonic. Upstairs from the Macnikolos, The Cocktail Club (479 King St.; 843-724-0411, thecocktailclubcharleston.com) is a modern speakeasy that specializes in farm-to-shaker beverages. (The farmer's market is held in nearby Market Square on Saturdays.)

SUPPERTIME

While shrimp-and-grits is the default dish that appears in various guises on Lowcountry menus all over town, what I really crave are the fried oysters Rockefeller at Leon's Oyster Shop (608 King St.; 843-731-8550, Leonsoystershop.com) along with last watermelon pickle and hush puppies dunked in honey butter. If regional ACL Blades are in season, get a dozen raw with their mignonette at Brasserie Gigi (102 H. Market St.; 843-722-6393, brasseriegigi.com). Chef Sean Riffle's pan-seared Combahee soft-shell crab sandwich is worth the wait in line for a stool at 187 Raw (299 E. Bay St., 843-570-4907, 187raw.com). Stop in Artisan Meat Share (22 Spring St.; 843-614-7299, artisannmeetshare Charleston.com) to order Craig Diehl's house-made charcuterie and cured meats. Pair a plate of tallow, braunschweiger, and fennel salami with smoked bacon jam and pepper jelly. Two Boroughs Larader (106 Coming St.; 843-637-3722, twoboroughslarader.com) has regular Meat = Eat dinner popups with the Gin Joint, but I like to pop in this grocery store/restaurant for beef tarte with a wild onion panzanella and snap pea crudite. Xiao Bao Biscuit's (224 Rutledge Ave., xiaobao biscuit.com) Asian soul food is ideal for a crowd. The tataki-style whole pan-seared fish of the day, Taiwanese rou rou main noodles, and Sichuan mapo tofu are welcome additions to the neo-South pantry.

LATE NIGHT EATS

This isn't New Orleans. Charleston turns out the light early. Callie's Hot Little Biscuit (478 King St.; 843-737-6155, billieandcallie.com) is one my favorite last-call stops to counteract the effects of a cocktail-intense evening. In my new spot on upper King Street, too young coasts strolled with country ham or black pepper bacon until 2 A.M. on weekends. The Butcher & Bee (854 King St.; 843-819-0202, butcherbee.com) has a regular Friday late night taco menu. When it's on the chalkboard, don't miss the pork belly bao mi with miso mayonnaise. Mercy me.

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