



Travel

MICRO GUIDE: CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Written by Cator Sparks – Posted on June 12, 2014

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Charleston is well known for its “moonlight and magnolias” past, but today the little town is jostling with bigger cities because of its’ young and vibrant scene. Take it from me, a part time resident, ditch all the guide books (and we aren’t even mentioning that Bravo reality show) and venture into the less touristy areas. Here you will find James Beard award winning food, nationally acclaimed art and classic fashion that are making this old town sizzle in a whole new way. Charleston may be swinging, but nobody rushes nothing down here so take a deep breath and grab a cocktail. As one of our favorite local artists Elizabeth O’Neill Verner once said, “What is the use of hurrying when one is where one wants to be?”

Where to Stay

There is a plethora of bed & breakfasts around town but they are a little too lacy and faux-finished for our tastes. Here are four spots we hang our hat.

Zero George Set on the corner of George and Calhoun Streets, this new boutique hotel is comprised of five historic homes that have been restored and feature the best modern amenities. Zero George is a really must visit, even if you can’t get a room. Come by for a drink, dinner or try their award winning cooking school in the cook house built in 1804.

The Vendue The Vendue has been a downtown staple for years, but just this month they reopened after a major renovation. Now the once stuffy Vendue is Charleston’s first hotel dedicated to the arts – complete with rotating installations curated by Robert Lange Studios. An artist in residence program is on the way too. The hotel is made up of five warehouses dating back to the 1780s and now boasts a Starbucks coffee shop (why they didn’t go local we can’t figure out) and a wonderful rooftop bar with breezy views of the city.

Wentworth Mansion If you want a truly grand ole Charleston experience, the Wentworth is the way to go. Last year, it was voted third best city hotel in the US by *Travel & Leisure*. That’s a big deal folks. But what’s a bigger deal is the size of this house. Built by a local cotton factor back in 1887 for his wife and 13 children, the manse still has original floors, molding, mantles and serious stained glass by Tiffany. If you are celebrating a big occasion, book the ballroom suite. Don’t forget to wind your way to the top of the roof for a spectacular view of the old city from the cupola.

Andell Inn If you are coming to the Charleston area and want to keep close to the beach, the Andell Inn is the newest place to book into. Located on swanky Kiawah Island, the Inn caters to the younger crowd and has a great little happy hour in the evenings and a relaxing pool scene. All rooms come with a kitchen, so perfect for traveling with family who want to lay low. Located in Freshfields Village, you will be about 45 minutes away from downtown. Bonus: Pets allowed.

Where to Eat

Yes, yes, we know you came to the South for grits, but there is a bounty of other exciting food adventures than the usual grease and meat fest. You have heard more than enough about Husk, Hominy Grill and Fig and while they are superb, these are the spots that the locals (and the global food community) are chatting about now. And we mean that, these four restaurants are all brand new to Chucktown.

Leon’s Located in a former paint and body shop, Leon’s raw bar and fried chicken joint is the hottest new spot on the peninsula. Opened in early June, it’s located away from the throngs of cruise ship tourists, and is a great spot to cab up to for lunch or dinner and feel like you are all up in the know.

Obstinate Daughter Located 20 minutes out of downtown on cozy Sullivan’s Island, this seafood spot is getting locals to actually drive somewhere (The Holy City is a big walking, biking town). The nautical interiors are refreshingly modern and the cuisine is too. We had Bloody Marys made with heirloom yellow tomatoes. Yes. We had two. Try their Lowcountry Shrimp roll and Lamb Scottaditto. Everything is good here though, so take your pick. Then head downstairs to **Beardcat Sweet Shop** for gelato and walk across to the beach for a sunset stroll.

Chez Nous Located in a 200 year old home, tucked away in a back alley, you will want to move into Chez Nous. Every day there is a new menu with only two starters, two entrees and two desserts. Don’t worry, all of it is so incredible you will think it was prepared by the Greek Goddess Demeter herself. There are no reservations and it gets very busy in the evening, so go for lunch when it is quiet and you really do feel like you are dining at home. (Closed Mondays)

Edmunds Oast Just a short car drive away from the center of things (and they have a parking lot, a treasure for this tiny town!), Edmunds opened in March and has been pumping out generous farm to table cuisine since. Most restaurants in Charleston shop local but this gem makes it a point to serve fresh out of the field and you can taste it. If you really want to taste the freshest flavors, order a vegetable plate. For an entree we keep going back to the Carolina Gold Rice Heritage Chicken Porridge. It’s warm, creamy, flavorful and pairs well with a nice cold house made brew. Oh, and on that note, they have about a dozen house brewed beers on tap at any moment. Boom. Curious about the name? Edmund Egan was an English-born brewer who came to Charleston in the 1760s and started producing beer soon after. He had great success and donated large amounts of money to the American Revolution, earning him the name “The Rebel Brewer”. Oast is an old European term for a kiln used in the drying of hops. Together the two make the name **What to do** Horse and carriages are bearable, but there is a bountiful amount of other ways to explore America’s prettiest city and it’s surrounding areas.

Sullivan’s Island beach walk Get up early, beat the heat and drive to Sullivan’s for a beach walk to the lighthouse and back. Pick up shells, see some dolphins and enjoy the way many locals start their day, with toes in the sand.

Middleton Place Tour There are a plethora of plantations near Charleston, but Middleton Place is the best in our opinion. They simply have it all: A grand house, America’s oldest landscaped gardens, heritage breed animals in the barn and stables full of horses ready to ride. The restaurant on the property is not your usual tourist trap and offers a huge wine list and great regional cuisine. On Wednesdays there are wine strolls on the property and if you really want to steep yourself in plantation life, the Middleton Place Inn is constantly rated one of the best Inns in the state.

Downtown Farmers Market We love to eat local, so check out the downtown farmers’ market open every Saturday from April through December. You can buy local produce from farmers as well as fresh flowers, hand crafted soaps, jewelry and local delicacies to take back home. There is also a food truck round up located here too so come hungry (and early) for a serious breakfast and shopping spree.

Paddle Board on Isle of Palms After all that amazing food and booze, you may want to get a bit of fitness in. There is no better way to work out in the lowcountry than on a paddle board in the Intracoastal waterway. Located 30 minutes away from downtown on the Isle of Palms, yoga and fitness guru (and one hot babe) Misty Lister will guide you out into the water where she will teach you the basics of paddle boarding and then teach a full body workout while anchored on your board in the middle of paradise.

Where to Shop

Please don’t enter The Market. Most items sold there are Made in China anyway. Support these great spots and come away with something worth talking about:

Indigo & Cotton This is the spot for the best menswear in town. Sorry, you won’t find seersucker at Indigo but you can find all of our favorite brands like Gitman Vintage, Saturdays NYC, Makr and Topo Designs.

Sugar Bake Shop Constantly rated one of the best bakeries in the South, come here for authentic Southern finds such as Lady Baltimore cupcakes, pralines and home made iced tea.

Preservation Society Gift Shop Charleston has the oldest Preservation Society in America and their shop is a great place to find amazing books on local history, architecture, food and gardens as well as Gullah life and African heritage.

Commons Tucked into a shady, vine filled alley, Commons specializes in American made goods for the home. Besides tableware, kitchenware, lighting and furniture, Commons has an incredible collection of old, rare cookbooks. Don’t come here in a hurry!

Feature image courtesy of [ExploreCharleston.com](#)

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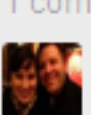
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

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