Charleston's history is central to its experience, and the city's Preservation Society, along with several other organizations, maintain several historic homes and properties that will give you a deep dive into the area's background. Here, our list of some of the most informative, professional, and enriching ones to check out.
ACTIVITY

Joseph Manigault House →

Located on a busy intersection a stone's throw from the Visitor's Center in downtown Charleston, the Joseph Manigault house is an oasis of calm. Tours leave on the half-hour, and if you arrive early, you can wait under a lovely portico. The house itself is grand from the outside—in a certain way a little forbidding, but there is no mistaking that this is an exceptional survivor of Charleston's early nineteenth-century suburban building campaign.

ACTIVITY

Magnolia Plantation & Gardens →

With its roots dating back to the 1680's, Magnolia Plantation was one of the first ancestral homes of the Draytons, a prominent Lowcountry plantation family, and is still owned and operated by Drayton family descendants. The property is now best known for its elaborate gardens, first developed in the 1830s by Revered John Grimke Drayton.
Heyward-Washington House

Tucked away in perhaps the loveliest block of Church Street in the South of Broad neighborhood, Heyward-Washington House is a treasure box of history and decorative arts. Built in 1772, this Georgian-style double house provides a glimpse into the paradoxical nature of Charleston society during the Revolutionary and Antebellum periods.

WATCH THIS

The Most Under-Appreciated Spot in the Atlantic
**Activity**

**Nathaniel Russell House**

Approaching the Nathaniel Russell House from the street, your first impression is just what Nathaniel intended: your eye is drawn immediately to his initials wrought in iron over the front door. This overt display meant the same thing in 1808 (when the house was constructed) as it means at a certain New York City tower today: new money run amok.

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**Activity**

**McLeod Plantation Historic Site**

If you're interested in the history of Charleston, which is as much the history of slavery, segregation, and tense race relations as it is about pretty window boxes and grand houses, a tour of McLeod Plantation is a must on your itinerary. The house itself is show-stopping, with its grand oak allée and gleaming white columns. Purchase tickets in the new visitor center, and stop to read the interpretive signage, for which the McLeod curatorial team was honored with an award from the American Association of Museums.
ACTIVITY

Aiken-Rhett House

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The faded grandeur of this grand house time-washed in vibrant yellow ochre feels like a trip through a time capsule. Much of the original wallpaper, curtain hardware, and paint remains untouched from the 19th-century. Windows and doors are flung open to sea breezes, adding an air of authenticity to the proceedings—though quite hot on a summer’s day. If you see one house in Charleston it should be this one.

ACTIVITY

Philip Simmons Foundation

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This is certainly an unusual house museum in Charleston, but it is one absolutely worth visiting. Not only does it provide a pleasing contrast to the grand residences South of Broad, it also tells the story of those whose skills and determination formed the backbone of Charleston’s built environment.
Edmondston-Alston House

Charleston may have a wide range of house museums to choose from, but only one—
the Edmondston-Alston House—commands sweeping views of Charleston harbor.
The house was constructed in 1825 and is one of the first houses constructed along
High Battery. As the epicenter of Charleston’s 18th- and 19th-century wealth, the
harbor is also where the Civil War began. In 1861, the family stood on these same
piazzas watching the bombardment of Fort Sumter.

Drayton Hall

When John Drayton began construction in 1739 of his grand country house, little did
he know that nearly 300 years later, it would survive intact and be touted as one of the
finest examples of Georgian Palladian architecture in America. Visitors drive along a
sandy road, past massive live oak trees as old as the house itself. On approach, it is
easy to feel overwhelmed by the home’s sheer scale and presence.
There are gardens, and then there are gardens. Middleton Place is definitely the latter, with 65 acres of meticulous formal gardens unfolding along the banks of the Ashley River. Designed in a more formal Baroque style, the gardens seek to control nature and impose order rather than embrace the chaos of a verdant America. If you're a fan of the grand formal gardens of European palaces such as Versailles, Middleton is a must-see, its terraced landscape one of the finest historic prospects in Charleston.