

Ringin', Hot Springs in the ON THE New Year

GO NO. 12

Tradition and Fun meet at the Arlington

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Oaklawn preps for new season

Christmas light displays

FROM THE EDITOR:

Can you believe 2014 is almost here? 2013 was a year of firsts for me. I celebrated my first wedding anniversary, bought my first house, and will spend my first Christmas away from home. This year I will make the trek to my in-laws' house in North Carolina, as I think last year's freak Christmas snowstorm scared them from ever coming back to Arkansas for the holidays.

While I love my husband's family dearly, I will miss my friends and family in the Natural State. Before I make my way east, I intend to soak up Christmas in Arkansas as much as I can. There's something magical about seeing downtown Hot Springs trimmed in garlands and bows and Garvan Woodland Gardens illuminated with millions — yes, millions — of lights. In this issue, we've rounded up some of the best Christmas displays in central Arkansas, many of which you can view from the comfort of your (hopefully) heated car, perhaps with



some hot cocoa or cider in hand. It's also time to start thinking about plans for Dec. 31. For those who prefer to ring in the New Year in style, rather than watching the ball drop from the couch in their pajamas, the Arlington is offering not one, but two parties to toast the new year.

If you're one of those who is more excited for the racing season than the upcoming holidays, Oaklawn's opening day will be here before you know it. Oaklawn has some fun new things in store for racing enthusiasts in 2014, including a craft beer garden and new infield activities.

It's going to be a good year, readers. Happy holidays from us to you.

Eliza Gaines

Executive editor

Hot Springs
ON THE

GO

DECEMBER 2013/JANUARY 2014 VOL. 07 NO. 12

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Hot Springs on the go!

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Hot Springs, AR 71901

Hot Springs on the go! is published monthly by The Sentinel-Record Inc., 300 Spring St., Hot Springs, AR 71901. Ph 501-623-7711

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Cover photography by Mara Kuhn

EN ROUTE

Culture

Magnolia Plantation and Gardens is the oldest public tourist site in the Lowcountry as well as the oldest public gardens in America, having opened its doors to visitors in 1870.

Charleston, SOUTH CAROLINA

History, heritage and holidays

Story and Photos by REBECCA MCCORMICK

What SEC football is to Southern sports, Charleston is to Southern travel. For the third consecutive year, Charleston has been voted the No. 1 city in the United States in Conde Nast's Readers' Choice Awards. From plantation estates and historic houses to cannons and coastal forts, the city has a colorful history rich as its food. Perhaps most importantly, the locals are some of the nicest people on the planet. (At Wentworth Mansion, for instance, when a guest is ill, the staff sign a get-well card and send it with a plush robe to their suite.) In 2012, 4.8 million people visited Charleston, where the population is barely 125,000.

Background: Situated midway on South Carolina's Atlantic coast, Charleston has survived everything from Civil War to Hurricane Hugo in 1989, devastating fires and earthquakes to financial upheaval caused by the closing of their naval base in 1996. Through it all, Charlestonians have retained their identity and now pride themselves on living history. Social graces like calling cards and handwritten thank-you notes are more common than social media. And courtesy is still the currency of choice.

Why go now: Charleston's Civil War Sesquicentennial (www.sccivilwar.org) continues through 2015. Celebrations include concerts, conferences, exhibits, films, living history programs, reenactments, tours and workshops.

Besides that, it's the holidays, and Charleston is wrapped in twinkle lights thick as diamonds at Tiffany's. Children of all ages will enjoy seeing the ginormous model train framed by two spiral staircases in the lobby of Charleston Place Hotel. Since 1999, the Nappi family of Greenville, S.C., has been setting up the snowy European landscape with a fully operational miniature ski lift and 300 feet of model track. Each year, they add a new feature.

Spend your day: A one-hour carriage tour through Charleston's cobblestone streets will give you a good overview of the city's

historical landmarks and neighborhoods. Plan to shop. Seriously. Not shopping while you're in Charleston is like going to the Masters and not buying something in the pro shop. Start out on King and Market streets, where you'll find hundreds of boutiques, antique stores, big brand shops and local crafts. Later in the day, pop into art galleries, museums and restaurants along your stroll down to Battery Park. Or squeeze in an antebellum historic house tour at the Nathaniel Russell, Aiken-Rhett or Edmondston-Alston homes. **Must do:** Schedule a Gullah tour with Alphonso Brown, owner and operator of Gullah Tours (www.gullah tours.com), who points out the wonders of Charleston that were "built, designed or created by blacks, but for whom credit was never given." The Gullah dialect is an English-based Creole language with a strong African influence, incomprehensible to most Americans.

Don't bother: Looking for Mardi Gras in Charleston, despite the fact the city has a French Quarter with a slew of French-named streets. "We were founded by French Huguenots, not French Catholics," a sweet local informed me. "You'll have to go to Savannah for Mardi Gras, honey."

Where to eat: Butcher & Bee (www.butcherandbee.com; \$\$) Order your handcrafted sandwiches from communal tables in an industrial setting for lunch, late-night fare or an occasional pop-up dinner cooked by visiting chefs. Vegans



Located on St. John's Island, the Angel Oak tree is estimated to be in excess of 1,600 years old.

and vegetarians are well-served here.

Glass Onion (www.ilovetheglassonion.com; \$\$) Mosey outside of downtown for comfort food that draws heavily from the South, New Orleans and the Lowcountry. My hubby's favorites: fried chicken and gumbo. My favorites: grilled pimento cheese and turnip greens.

Slightly North of Broad (S.N.O.B.) (www.mavendksouthernkitchens.com/slightlynorthofbroad; \$\$\$) You'll need a reservation to squeeze in among the locals who support this popular contender for the top spot in Charleston's highly competitive culinary who's who. Main courses, available in medium and large sizes, take a polite nod to Southern and Lowcountry traditions, but take their curtain calls from upscale farm-to-fork trends.

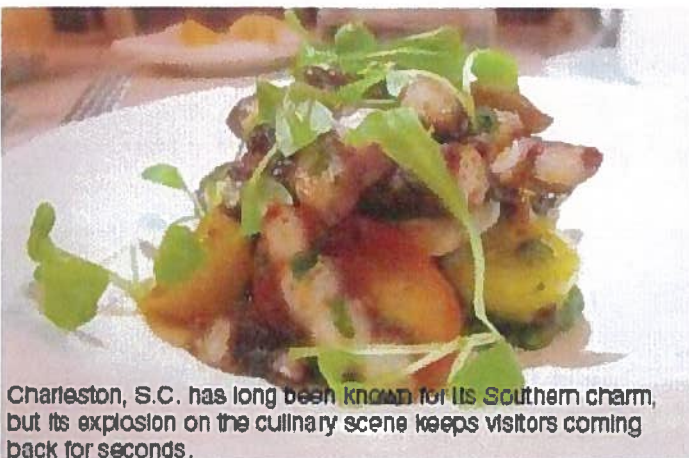
Where to stay: Charleston Place Hotel by Orient Express (www.charlestonplace.com; \$\$\$) Add your name to the list of celebrities who have stayed at this elegant antebellum-style hotel — the only one in the Carolinas to boast three AAA Four Diamond ratings: one for the hotel, one for the Charleston Grill (Please tell general manager Mickey Bakst hello!) and one for the Palmetto Café. Walk to Charleston Place boutiques and City Market, then return to the hotel for afternoon tea or a spa treatment.

Rutledge Avenue Inn (www.homeaway.com/vacation-rental/p433353vb; \$\$) Located in the heart of Charleston's newly designed bed and breakfast corridor, this renovated luxury flat — complete with marble tile bath, gourmet chef's kitchen, washer and dryer — will make you feel like a local. Owned by Charleston native Matt Eldridge, four renovated circa 1910 bungalow flats also includes off-street parking only a few blocks from the upper King Street Design District.

Getting around: Charleston International Airport (CHS) is little more than 10 minutes from historic downtown. Rental cars, taxis (about \$25) and shuttles (about \$14 a person) are available at the airport. If you drive into downtown, though, your first priority will be to find a parking place. Start at the Visitors Center, where parking rates run a dollar an hour, although most coupons are not accepted.

So you know: Driving around historic downtown is impossible. Wear comfortable walking shoes and plan to explore on foot, by horse-drawn carriage or in the comfort of a Greyhound mini-bus.

More information: Charleston Convention and Visitors Bureau; 375 Meeting St, Charleston, SC; 800-774-0006; www.charlestoncvb.com.



Charleston, S.C. has long been known for its Southern charm, but its explosion on the culinary scene keeps visitors coming back for seconds.

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