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ting for my Uber car to arrive, I was musing about the graciousness and elegance of
Charleston, South Carolina arguably among the top tourist destinations in the States.
This appealing municipality of some 150,000 residents has garnered countless accolades,
attesting to its amiable, cordial, and history-filled profile from local and national publications.

Of course, if the tributes are not enough to convince you to hop on a plane to
savor some Southern hospitality yourself, perhaps my Uber driver's co-pilot
would assuredly seal the deal: Up pulls my sedan, and who is riding shotgun?
Gunner, a Chattahoochee gun dog! Imagine that happening in Gotham.

WHAT TO SEE & DO
Aside from canine friendliness, there is much to admire in this city. History is
at every turn: Take a stroll down Meeting Street past the lovely South Carolina
Historical Society (and its charming gift shop) and the verdant Washington
Square Park to Broad Street. Here are the Four Corners of Law: the Lord's Law
is St. Michael's Church, the US Post Office is the federal law, City Hall represents
civil law, and the courthouse, state law.

Dotting the city's historic district and beyond are countless remarkable and
celebrated homes. (Tip: Buy the Charleston Heritage Foundation's Heritage
Passport, available in a few configurations, which affords entrée into most of
the renowned sites, including two nearby plantations.) Don't miss The Heyward
Washington House, once home to both George Washington and to a signer of
the Declaration of Independence; the Joseph Manigault House, one of the most
distinguished dwellings in the city, and a paragon of Federal architecture; the
Aiken-Rhett House, unaltered since 1858, illustrative of antebellum architecture;
the Nathaniel Russell House, arguably the nation's most important neoclassical
dwelling; and the Edmonston-Alston House, where General Beauregard once
surveyed the bombardment of Fort Sumter. At the newly renovated Gibbes
Museum of Art, the oldest museum building in the South, a stellar collection
that spans four centuries is a must-see. I toured the entire museum and regretted
I did not have more time to appreciate its impressive exhibits.
I ventured out of town to Middleton Place (a former plantation, with a National Historic Landmark designation), making a brief stop en route at the stunning Magnolia Plantation. It was a gorgeous day, and Middleton’s herd of sheep were grazing, lolling and contentedly among the tourists. It is the former home to Henry Middleton, a President of the First Continental Congress and his son, Arthur, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The flora—America’s first formal gardens—are magnificent, now over 270 years old. After taking in the family’s living quarters, venture to Eliza’s House, a slave cabin. Pick up a copy of Slavery at Middleton Place, a very well researched volume that carefully recounts life on the other side of the divide. Hardly a footnote, do not overlook the Old Slave Mart Museum, in the heart of town and right near the Market, a vast open-air series of sheds with all manner of foods, souvenirs, and trinkets. Nearby, on King Street, the Preservation Society of Charleston has a wonderful gift shop, featuring local artisans’ wares.

BEST STAY

In the pursuit of “work,” I have called the five-star the Wentworth Mansion home (at least for three nights). It is clear that owners Linn Lesesne and Richard Widman (along with their caring staff) do all they can to make your stay simply seamless. These very cordial proprietors offer a tray of elegant crystal carafes of port and brandy all day long in a snug, vest-pocket anteroom, and lemonade and iced tea in the Great Room. Every day at 5 PM, wine and hors d’oeuvres are offered in the Main Salon and wraparound porch.

A member of Small Luxury Hotels, the Wentworth is a gracious 21-room hotel, once the 1886 Gilded Age family home to Francis Silas Rogers, a wealthy merchant, and father of 13! The stately manse passed into the hands of two organizations before Widman purchased it in 1997 and pumped some seven million dollars into restoring its heirloom grandeur, highlighting imperial architectural details, including Tiffany glass, and adding modern, marble baths and 21st-century necessities. Widman even installed a widow’s walk on the roof, providing a panorama of the city. In a separate edifice, across the charming gardens, is the Circa 1886 restaurant, serving the most succulent and creative fare—no surprise, since Charleston is a foodie’s paradise. Another cozy building houses the sybaritic spa. Info: wentworthmansion.com.

ENTICING EATERIES

Charleston is a food lover’s mecca where one can sample all the enticing eateries and experience the cuisine from so many gifted chefs. Lunch at 82 Queen Street was a toothsome treat, under the whisk of Chef Steve Stone, it is one of the city’s oldest restaurants and not to be missed. Try 492, a convivial watering hole and dining destination, under the direction of Chef Josh Keeler, whose award-winning cuisine will please every palate. Reservations are not easy to come by at Husk, which has four locations in the South. Here, James Beard Award-winning Chef Sean Brock transforms the essence of Southern food. I celebrated my birthday at the Charleston Grill at the Belmond Charleston Place Hotel; upon hearing it was my special day, the manager arranged for a Champagne tasting with a flight of fine, seductive wines. Dinner was mouth-watering, worthy of the Four Diamond Award the restaurant earned from AAA.

For more information on Charleston, South Carolina, visit charlestoncvb.com.

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