

# CHARLESTON, SC

## HIGHLIGHTS, HISTORY & HERITAGE

BY RUTH J. KATZ

**W**aiting 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.

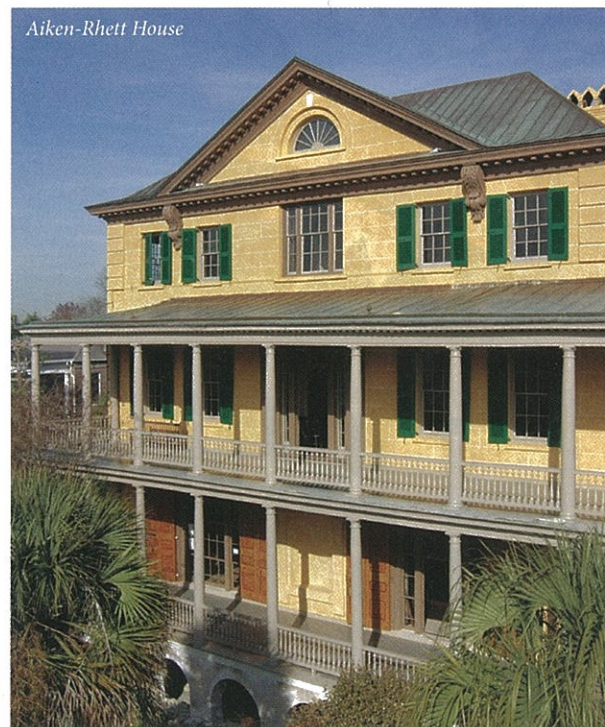
Of course, if the tributes are not enough to convince you to hop on a plane to savor some Southern hospitality yourself, perhaps my Uber driver's co-pilot would assuredly seal the deal: Up pulls my sedan, and who is riding shotgun? Gunner, a Chattahoochee gun dog! Imagine that happening in Gotham.

### 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.

*Aiken-Rhett House*





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, lollygagging 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.



Middleton Place House

## 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 proffer 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](http://wentworthmansion.com).



Wentworth Mansion

## 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](http://charlestoncvb.com).

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