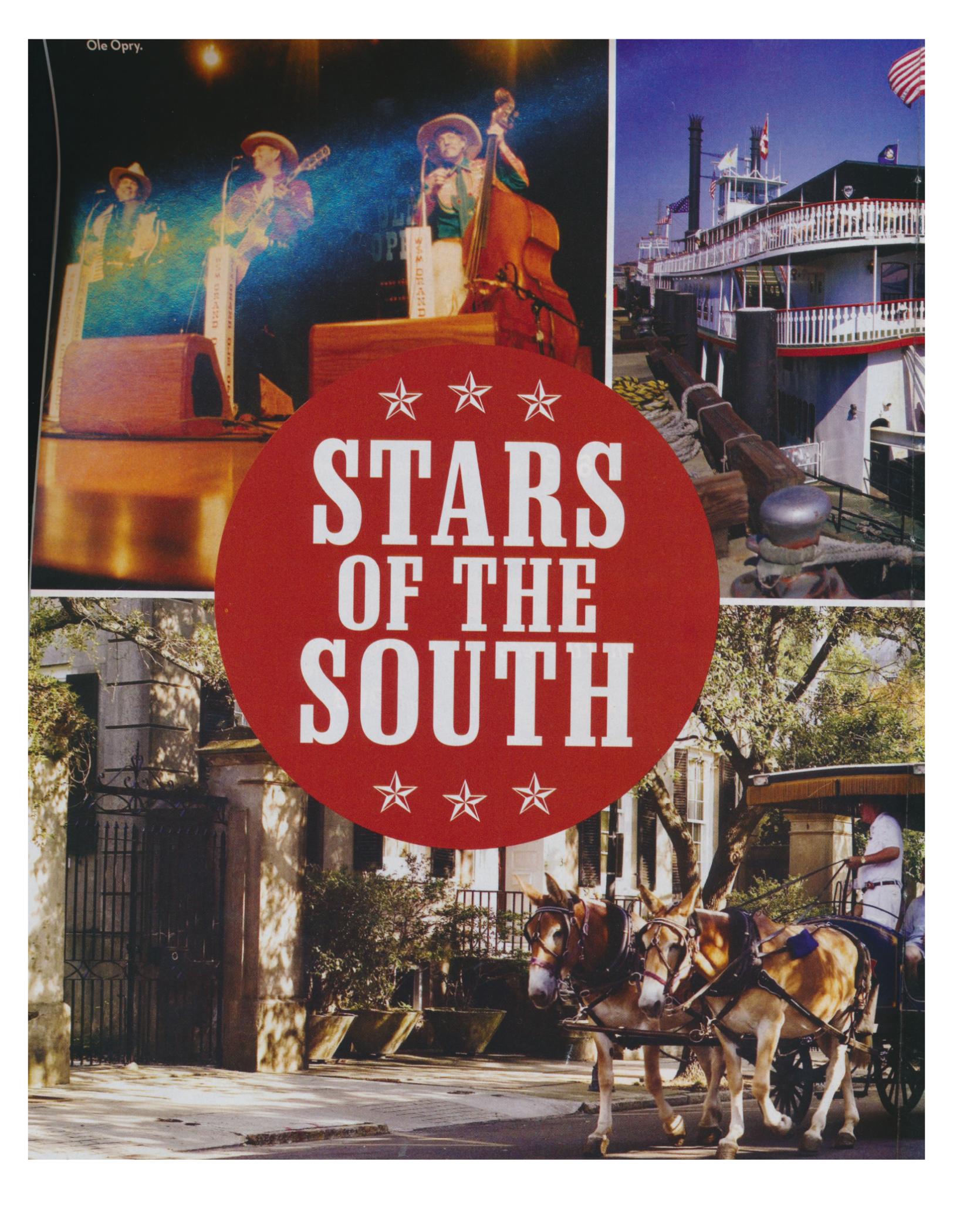


Ole Opry.



STARS  
OF THE  
SOUTH



**Charleston, Nashville and New Orleans** blaze brightly in the South. Each serves up big-city culture—distinctive architecture, mouthwatering cuisine, soulful sounds and more—with a friendly, small-town feel, the kind that makes you drop your shoulders and take it slow. So sit back and enjoy a stroll through these three Southern charmers—each easy to enjoy, and oh-so-hard to forget.

## ★ NEW ORLEANS ★

Like a pot of simmering gumbo, New Orleans is a delicious medley of up-tempo music, dazzling architecture and rich culinary influences. The city also is known for its legendary, larger-than-life celebrations—from festive Mardi Gras parties to high-spirited, second line parades. Add in an impressive list of museums (more than 45, including The National WWII Museum) and a renowned culinary scene, and there's little doubt this Louisiana hot spot has more mojo than ever.

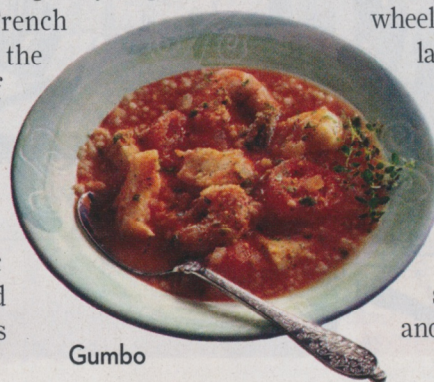
Head uptown to stroll venerable St. Charles Avenue, past the grand antebellum mansions in the oak tree-lined Garden District. For another side of the Big Easy, hop a streetcar to the French Quarter to peek in the lush courtyards of the brick townhouses. Here, New Orleans jazz flows from street corners and music venues. Performed day and night, this

toe-tapping combo of lively pianos and brassy horns is as easy to find as a string of Mardi Gras beads (especially during New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, April 24 to May 3, 2015).

When it's time to dine, few cities in the world can rival the sheer concentration of top-notch restaurants in New Orleans, many influenced by the city's French, African and Spanish heritage.

**Culture Classic:** In the 19th century, the Mississippi River bustled with paddle-wheel steamboats carrying passengers and cargo to and from faraway cities. Experience that colorful era with a cruise on a restored paddle-

wheel riverboat, featuring lacquered cypress bars and the deep reds and greens popular in the 1800s. The top deck is ideal for enjoying views of the Big Easy while sipping a beverage and listening to live jazz.



Gumbo

# ★ CHARLESTON ★

Nestled on a peninsula in South Carolina's Lowcountry, Charleston is a coastal gem. From the gently swaying marsh grass along its tidal rivers to the antebellum architecture, Charleston's confluence of natural beauty and historical clout make for a truly singular city.

In the compact downtown, an idle stroll often can lead to lamp-lit residential districts replete with grand homes, canopied by majestic oaks dripping with gauzy Spanish moss. Many of these homes date to the 18th century, and some are open to the public—offering peeks into the lives of some of Charleston's great families.

History enthusiasts will relish Fort Sumter National Monument, where the Civil War's first shot was fired, as well as Museum Mile—a one-mile section of Meeting Street packed with key historical sites.

While owing much to its past, Charleston also sports a plethora of modern culture, from contemporary art galleries to the performing arts. The latter is showcased during the internationally acclaimed Spoleto Festival USA. More recently, Charleston has staked its claim as the epicenter of Southern cuisine: Its robust collection of restaurants draws heavily on local tidewaters for an abundant supply of shrimp, crabs, oysters and rice, the region's staple grain.

**Don't Miss:** Compact Charleston lends itself to exploration on foot. The many guided walking tours on offer are a terrific way to see highlights like the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist and "Rainbow Row," while getting a local expert's insights. Many tours are themed—architecture, history, ghost lore—so you can pick your pleasure. ■

## Southern Suggestions

Enjoy life in Dixie like a local with these favorites.

	Charleston	Nashville	New Orleans
<b>Signature Bite</b>	<b>SHRIMP &amp; GRITS</b> Sauteed shrimp atop creamy stone-ground grits ... ah, classic comfort food, found at down-home diners and the chicest eateries. 	<b>HOT CHICKEN</b> Fiery breading delivers the heat; dill pickles and sliced white bread help temper the burn. 	<b>BEIGNETS</b> Cloud-like puffs of fried dough—dusted in powdered sugar and perfect with a cup of chicory coffee. 
<b>Scenic Stroll</b>	<b>THE BATTERY</b> This historic waterfront promenade is graced with antebellum homes, a garden park and views of Fort Sumter. 	<b>SHELBY STREET PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE</b> Lovely over-the-river views of the skyline peak at sunset—or at night, when everything is illuminated. 	<b>ROYAL STREET</b> All the beauty and charm of the French Quarter—and car-free from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. most afternoons. 
<b>Budget</b>	<b>DINE</b> Many fine restaurants offer a reduced-price menu at lunch, so have your special meal midday. 	<b>DANCE</b> Grab your boots for line dancing at the Wildhorse Saloon, where you can take free lessons in between band performances. 	<b>LISTEN</b> Locals seek out jazz along Frenchmen Street, where many of the venues are cover charge-free. 
<b>Top Shopping Street</b>	<b>UPPER KING STREET</b> It's dubbed SoHo of the South for its mix of eclectic boutiques and restaurants. 	<b>12th AVENUE SOUTH</b> It's "12South" if you're a local; go for designer cowboy boots and country music A-listers sightings. 	<b>MAGAZINE STREET</b> Lower Magazine is home to antiques shops, trendy boutiques and relaxing cafes. 

HOT CHICKEN: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION/ALAMY; BEIGNETS: MILTON PHOTOGRAPHY/ISTOCK PHOTO; THE BATTERY: JIAN DAGNALL/ALAMY; SHELBY STREET BRIDGE: SEAN PAVONE/ALAMY; SAX: LUCAS GRANDADAM/GETTY IMAGES; KING STREET: PETER FRANK EDWARDS/REDUX/BOOTS; LUCCHESI



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