

Turnkey Vacation

Charleston

Charleston National

CHARLESTON IS HOT—and I'm not referring to the climate.

In each of the last three years, the readers of *Conde Nast Traveler* have voted Charleston, South Carolina, the Best City in the United States. It's an award based on six criteria—ambiance, culture, friendliness, lodging, restaurants, and shopping.

But not golf—and that's the best news of all. Why? Because the truth is, Charleston's golf is very good indeed. I'm not referring now to the justly famed playgrounds on the islands of Kiawah, Seabrook, and Isle of Palms. No, I'm talking about a handful of closer-to-town courses that have managed to remain under the radar and therefore have two things in common: They're uncrowded and they're reasonably priced. Most important, all are within 20–25 minutes of the city, leaving plenty of time to enjoy Charleston's winning charm. There are several hotels in the heart of the city, but no finer base than the Francis Marion, rising 12 stories above the historic district (and one of the few tall buildings in town). When it opened 90 years ago, it was the most magnificent hotel in the Carolinas and today it retains its elegance, thanks to a \$12 million renovation financed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Ask for a room on one of the higher floors, as the views of the city and harbor are stunning.

—George Peper

DAY 1 Morning: Charleston National—An authentic lowcountry experience, this Rees Jones course wends scenically through marshlands and lagoons beside the Intracoastal Waterway. The finishing stretch is nerve-wracking, particularly when the wind is up. Bring either your straight game or lots of balls.

Afternoon: Patriots Point Links—The closest to town of all the courses (just five minutes away), it sits on a peninsula beside Charleston Harbor with arresting views of Fort Sumter and the neighboring islands. Water comes into play on over half the holes, most memorably the 17th, an island par three perennially rated

the best in the lowcountry.

Off-Course Option: Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum—Just beside the

course is an impressive display centered around the USS *Yorktown* aircraft carrier along with a Medal of Honor Museum and a replica of a Vietnam naval base camp.

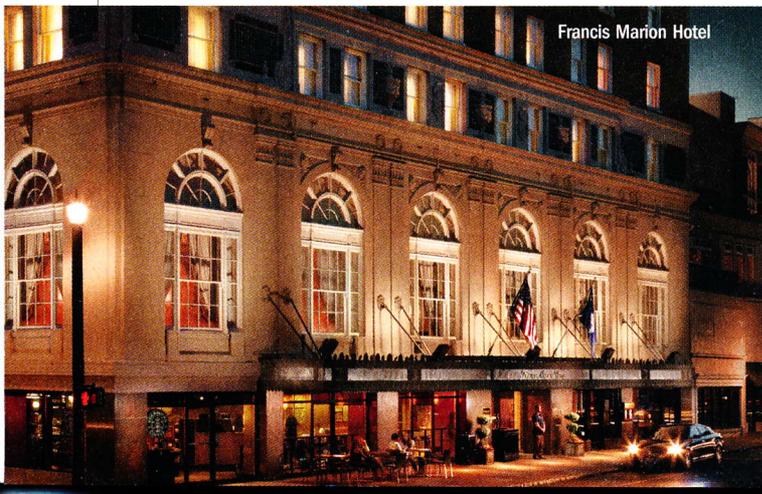
Evening: Stay with the day's nautical theme and book an outdoor table at the city's most popular waterside restaurant, **Fleet Landing**, housed in a 1940s-era retired naval building. There's no better place to try Charleston's signature dish, shrimp and grits.

DAY 2 Morning: Grab a Starbucks on the hotel's ground floor, then walk up King Street a couple of blocks to **Glazed**, a bakery that

opens at 7:00 a.m. and closes at 3:00 p.m. or when they run out of donuts, whichever comes first. Among their inspired creations: the Irish Car Bomb, filled with Baileys and topped with a Guinness glaze. Then waddle to the tee at **The Golf Club at Wescott Plantation**, where 27 holes from Mike Hurdzan await. In contrast to the previous day's courses, these three inland nines are lined with mature pines, oaks, and dogwoods but the fairways are generous, the bunkering is minimal, and the expansive TifEagle greens are smooth and fast. Play the Burn Kill and Black Robin nines if you can.

Afternoon: Skip lunch. Instead, book yourself a **Charleston Culinary Tour** and discover why this is one of the best food towns in the world. You'll make stops at several restaurants, each of which will serve up its specialties.

Evening: Start things off with a drink at **Wet Willie's**, where if your golf has been letting you down you can get an Attitude Improvement (think a mai tai on steroids). Then head next door and dine to the sounds of a jazz trio at **High Cotton**, where chef Joe Palma, who honed his skills at New York's famed Le Bernardin, brings his magic to a lowcountry menu.





DAY 3 Morning: Gird yourself for a full test at **RiverTowne Country Club**, a course linked with two of the game's biggest names—Arnold Palmer, who designed it, and Annika Sorenstam, who hosted an LPGA event here in 2007–08. Thirteen holes are lined by water, and the multi-tiered greens will test your putting. The home stretch, from the 12th onward, is a gauntlet.

Afternoon: If Arnie beat you up, you should get some revenge a few minutes down the road at **Dunes West**, an Arthur Hills design, this one carved from a former plantation. Ponds and tidal marshlands abut several fairways but there's only one forced carry. The most intriguing hole is left for last, a 456-yard par four with two alternative greens on either side of a marsh. After 36 holes, enjoy a soothing beverage of choice in the gracious plantation-style clubhouse set amidst ancient moss-draped live oaks.

Off-Course Option: Even if you're not the shopping type, you'll enjoy the people watching on **King Street**, where the 10-block array includes both big-name designer boutiques and one-of-a-kind shops, antique stores, and galleries. Want an authentic King Street souvenir? Buy yourself a preppy bow tie at **Ben Silver**.

Evening: There aren't too many restaurants that still do a tableside Caesar salad, but one of them is **Cypress** and it is superb. This is also the place to order a big juicy rib eye or chateaubriand. The Cypress vibe—open kitchen, a deft blend of traditional and contemporary—is today's Charleston at its best.

DAY 4 Morning: The first evidence of golf in America dates to Charleston, back in 1739, and history is also a part of **The Links at Stono Ferry**, site of a Revolutionary War battle that claimed nearly 300 lives. If you're feeling in need of a tune-up, this is the place as the head teaching professional is David Kite, affable son and spitting image of Hall of Famer Tom. Then go enjoy the Ron Garl course, especially the inward nine with a string of holes beside the Intracoastal Waterway and an island green at the 18th.

Afternoon: Make your second course a delicious one at **HöM** (pronounced "home"), a "burger boutique and ping pong lounge." Highly recommended: the Pittsburger, washed down with a Dark & Stormy (rum and ginger beer), which they price at "\$6.5/\$5 if it's raining." Then, since this is the Deep South after all, take a tour of **Boone Hall**, a 300-year-old, still-working plantation. The spectacular approach, through two long rows of centuries-old oaks, puts even Augusta's Magnolia Lane to shame.

Evening: Ask Charlestonians to name the most revered restaurant in town and many of them will say **Husk**, tucked in a porch-fronted white townhouse on a quiet side street where James Beard Award-winning chef Sean Brock has a

Essential Charleston

ACCOMMODATIONS

A Francis Marion Hotel 387 King Street
\$179 and up; francismarioncharleston.com

GOLF COURSES

A Charleston National 1360 National Drive, Mt. Pleasant
\$75; charlestonnationalgolf.com

B Dunes West 3535 Wando Plantation Way, Mt. Pleasant
\$75; duneswestgolfclub.com

C Golf Club at Wescott Plantation 5000 Wescott Club Drive, Summerville; \$80; wescottgolf.com

D Links at Stono Ferry 4812 Stono Links Drive, Hollywood
\$80; stonoferrygolf.com

E Patriots Point Links 1 Patriots Point Road, Mt. Pleasant
\$70; patriotspointlinks.com

F RiverTowne 1700 RiverTowne Country Club Drive, Mt. Pleasant; \$70; rivertownecountryclub.com

RESTAURANTS

Cypress 67 East Bay Street; cypresscharleston.com

Fleet Landing 186 Concord Street; fleetlanding.net

Glazed 481 King Street; glazedgourmet.com

High Cotton 199 East Bay Street; highcottoncharleston.com

HöM 563 King Street; homcharleston.com

Husk 76 Queen Street; huskrestaurant.com

Pavilion Bar 22 East Bay Street; marketpavilion.com

Wet Willie's 209 East Bay Street; wetwillies.com

DIVERSIONS

Patriots Point Naval & Maritime Museum
40 Patriots Point Road, Mt. Pleasant; patriotspoint.org

Charleston Culinary Tours
charlestonculinarytours.com

Boone Hall Plantation & Gardens
1235 Long Point Road, Mt. Pleasant; boonehallplantation.com



rule: "If it doesn't come from the South, it's not coming through the door." Whether your taste is oysters and foie gras or cornbread and greasy beans, this is a place to savor. Just be sure to book well in advance. After dinner, stop at the Market Pavilion Hotel and head up to the rooftop **Pavilion Bar** for a nightcap and a lingering last look at a city that has it all.