

DAILY NEWS

LIVING

A visit to Charleston and Columbia, S.C., turns up much more than just great barbecue

City Market and Drayton Hall are must-sees in Charleston, while the State House, The Oak Table and Riverbanks Zoo and Garden are Columbia highlights

BY [STAN SAGNER](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2014, 2:00 AM



CHARLESTON AREA CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Drayton Hall, a former plantation in Charleston, S.C., is the oldest surviving example of Georgian architecture in the country.

The first thing New Yorkers may notice when visiting South Carolina is "the nod." Coming from the Big Apple, where direct eye contact with a stranger can be a provocative act, you discover that, down there, it's just good manners. Wherever you go, you're greeted with a disarming nod and often a warm smile. It gives a good sense of what a trip to this Southern state has to offer.

My visit to the cities of Charleston and Columbia initially began as a search for "Yellow Gold," South Carolina's famous variety of mustard-laced BBQ, but I quickly discovered a whole lot more.



The courtyard of the Zero George Street Hotel in Charleston, S.C.

CHARLESTON



Fried Chicken Banh Mi sandwich, from Bulcher & Bee in Charleston, S.C.

Long regarded as one of the great, traditional food cities of the south, Charleston has gone into culinary overdrive lately. New, innovative restaurants are popping up all over, transforming the local dining scene into one of the most dynamic in the region.

About five minutes from downtown, chef Aaron Siegel marries sophisticated technique and multicultural influences with time-honored local flavors at **Home Team BBQ** (1205 Ashley River Road, hometeambbq.com) and the results are impressive. His brown sugar-dusted wings and gouda mac and cheese are absurdly addictive, but the silky, pork-infused collards are, as he points out, life-changing.



Home Team BBQ in Charleston, S.C., is known and loved for its brown sugar-dusted wings and pork-infused collards.

A few minutes away, check out the gleaming stainless steel stills at the **Striped Pig Distillery** (2225-A Old School Drive, stripedpigdistillery.com), Charleston's first of several. Founder Todd Weiss and partners are proudly crafting small batch rum, vodka and shockingly smooth 120 proof moonshine (corn whisky) from meticulously selected, locally grown grain and molasses. Tours and tastings are free and you'll likely get to meet the distillery's mascot, Stonewall Jackson, a 70-pound (and fast growing) pig who sits and plays dead on command. You may never look at bacon the same way again.

To get a full sense of Charleston's evolving food scene, treat yourself to a leisurely, calorie-packed walk up the Peninsula/Downtown area's Upper King St. where practically every other storefront is a recently opened food venue. Start at **Glazed** (481 King St., glazedgourmet.com), where Allison Smith knocks out a mouth-watering daily assortment of doughnuts in flavors from Maple Bacon to "Irish Car Bomb," which is filled with homemade Baileys and topped with a Guinness glaze. Get there early, as they often sell out well before closing.

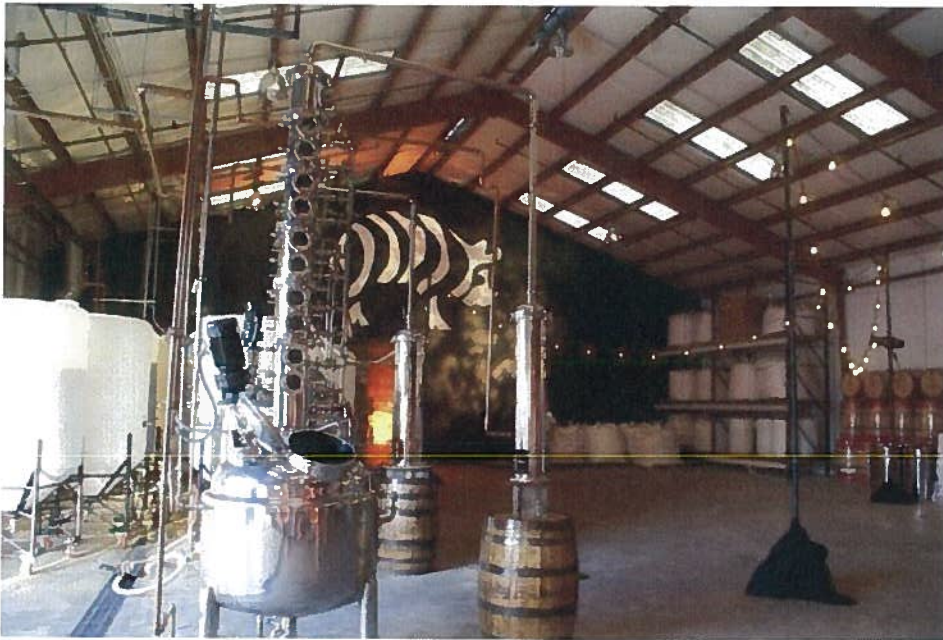


PERRY BAKER/SC PRT

The Charleston City Market is the place to find local crafts and good deals.

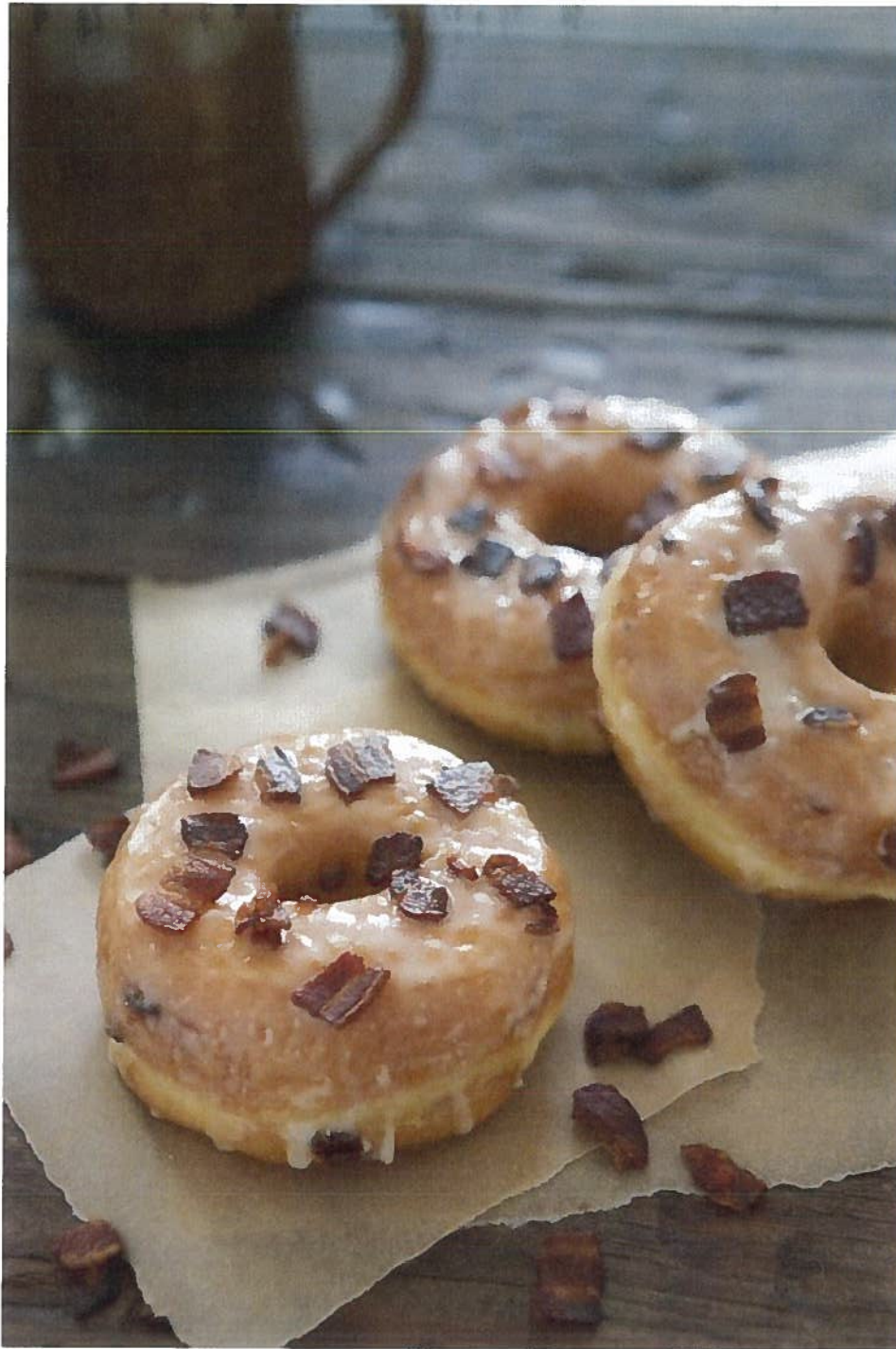
Next, snag a reservation at **Indaco** (526 King St., indacocharleston.com), Michael Perez's bustling modern Italian eatery featuring homemade pastas and inspired pizzas like "Brussels Sprouts with Fontina and Pink Lady Apple." Complete your journey by tucking into one of the spectacular sandwiches at **Butcher & Bee** (654 King St., butcherandbee.com), brainchild of Israeli transplant Michael Shemtov. The menu changes daily at this homey, local favorite, but with options like Fried Chicken Banh Mi and "Pulled" BBQ Squash with Smoky Slaw, you won't struggle to find something you like.

Charleston is, of course, more than an eating town. The best way to enjoy the city's charms is simply to wander its fabled cobblestone streets which are literally lined with history. The peninsula is scattered with too many historic homes and little museums to count. Be sure to stop by 200-year-old open-air **Charleston City Market** (188 Meeting St., thecharlestoncitymarket.com) for local handicrafts.



Check out the stills while at Striped Pig Distillery in Charleston, S.C.

In a region dotted with former grand plantations, **Drayton Hall** (3380 Ashley River Road, draytonhall.org) is a standout. Twenty minutes from downtown, this revolutionary era home is the oldest surviving example of Georgian architecture in the country and one of the few estates of its kind to survive the torches of the triumphant Union Army. Yankee soldiers were duped into staying away by flags flown by its owner suggesting the house was plagued with yellow fever. A visit to the property and its ancient, Spanish moss-draped oaks is a trip back in time. (Tickets: \$20 for adults; \$10, ages 12-18; \$6, kids 6-11.)



A maple bacon doughnut from Glazed in Charleston, S.C.

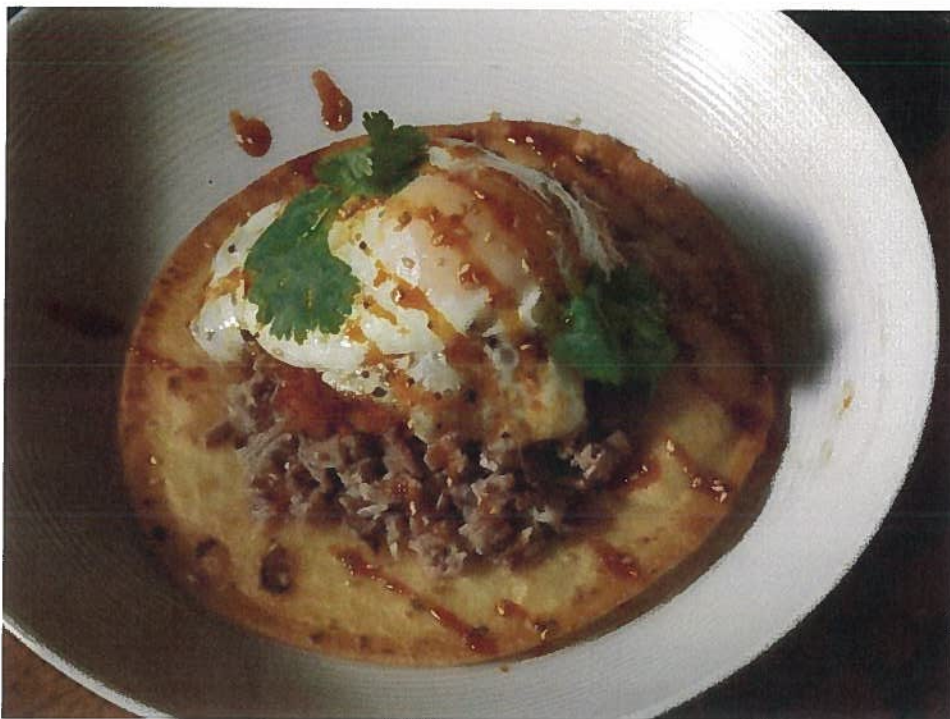


BRETT FLASHNICK

The Columbia Museum of Art has masterpieces ranging from Botticelli to Monet.

COLUMBIA

South Carolina's capital, Columbia, is an often overlooked, but not-to-be-missed part of any proper visit to the Palmetto State. The city, an easy two-hour drive north from Charleston, is full of year-round outdoor activities, and a proud showcase of some of the state's best culture and cuisine.



The fried egg-topped pulled pork and kimchee tostada from The Oak Table in Columbia, S.C.

The soaring, ornate **South Carolina State House** (1100 Gervais St., southcarolinaparks.com), which famously survived a sustained Union assault during the Civil War, remains one of the country's grandest. You can still see pockmarks (indicated with giant bronze stars) along the exterior facade from the Union Army's cannons. Free tours of the interior are offered throughout the year.

Across the street, offering stunning views of the capitol dome, is **The Oak Table** (1221 Main St., theoaktablesc.com), serving one of Columbia's most innovative menus. Howard Stephens' sleek contemporary American fusion restaurant effortlessly integrates diverse cultural riffs into familiar dishes. His fried egg-topped pulled pork and kimchee tostada may be the world's most perfect brunch dish.



Pink flamingos at Riverbanks Zoo and Botanical Garden in Columbia, S.C.

The deceptively rustic sounding **Motor Supply Company Bistro** (920 Gervais St., motorsupplycobistro.com) serves sophisticated locally sourced fare including a fantastic charcuterie selection. Chef Tim Peters' ethereal whipped lardo (an Italian cured meat) is alone worth the trip, but pair it with one of mad scientist Josh Streetman's inspired cocktails like The Polar Vortex, made with Reyka vodka, Dolin Luxardo Maraschino, and house curaçao. Plan ahead and join one of the chef's coveted DIY bacon workshops where you select from more than 40 ingredients to create your personal pork perfection.

For something less highbrow, but no less satisfying, head to **Palmetto Pig** (530 Devine St., palmettopig.com). Gene Antley's folksy buffet BBQ joint serves up spectacular fried chicken pulled pork and a killer, top-secret mustard sauce that a wily, loyal customer traded for a lifetime of free meals.



Visitors can tour the South Carolina State House, in Columbia, year round.

A good way to burn off some of those tempting treats is a visit to the popular nearby **Riverbanks Zoo and Garden** (500 Wildlife Parkway, riverbanks.org). The sprawling, family-friendly park has a huge assortment of thoughtfully informative animal exhibits as well as hands-on activities like a soaring (but safe) 1,000-foot zip line across the Saluda River, and a four-story "Sky-High Safari" ropes course. (General admission: \$11.75

adults; \$9.25 children 3-12.)

For those who prefer to stay on the ground, the **Columbia Museum of Art** (1515 Main St., columbiamuseum.org) is a small gem with a beautifully curated collection of masterpieces ranging from Botticelli to Monet. (Admission: \$12 adults, \$5 students.)



THOMAS HAMMOND

A platter of bacon at the Motor Supply Company Bistro in Columbia, S.C.

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IF YOU GO

Getting there: Several airlines, including Delta and JetBlue, offer daily nonstop flights from the New York area to Charleston for about \$200 round trip.

Getting around: If you plan to go beyond Charleston, you'll want to rent a car.

Stay:

Charleston: A few blocks from the Charleston Historic District, a cluster of restored, early 19th century homes have been reimagined into the city's newest boutique hotel, **Zero George Street**, named for its improbable-sounding address. Equipped with its own boutique cooking school, the hotel's enormous, luxuriously appointed rooms feel like you're staying at your very rich cousin's place rather than a hotel. Rates start at \$209, breakfast included. (0 George St., zerogeorge.com.)

Columbia: Centrally located and affordable, the **Hilton Columbia Center** is a short walk from the State House as well as many of the city's best bars and restaurants. Rates start at \$109. (924 Senate St., hiltoncolumbia.com.)