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Charleston's a colonial charmer

By Dana Schwartz

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Bearded coplay and good eats make Husk and its neighboring bar a hotspot.
Photo: The Neighborhood Dining Group

Charleston, SC, is one of the country's most charming — and well-mannered — cities (at least when Bravo cameras aren't following around its "Southern Charm" cast).

And with a booming dining scene, plus the draw of the artsy Spoleto Festival, there's never been a better time to head to the Lowcountry.

What to do



Art mania at the Spoleto Festival.
Photo: AP Photo/Druce Smith

Check out this year's Spoleto Festival, which runs through June 7 and is one of the country's biggest — and most anticipated — performing arts festivals, with 17 days of more than 150 opera, dance, theater, classical music and jazz showcases.

Indulge in some "Romeo and Juliet" (performed throughout the fest), NYC cabaret sensation Taylor Mac (June 3-6) and Bach's "St. Matthew Passion" (June 3).

Book a tasting (\$7) at the Charleston Distilling Co. Opened by former lawyer, Brent Stephens last July, the Upper King bastion of liquor is a boozier's delight.

Come for the information-packed tour, courtesy of head distiller Mattell Elliott this



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Come for the [magnificent peach wine](#) courtesy of [Horn Works](#) (which [Lambert](#) (the family's farm provides the grains) and a glimpse of the MoMA-worthy copper stills.

Just be sure to schedule the visit for after you've had a bite to eat — the signature King Charles vodka can be intense on an empty stomach.

Embark a day trip to [Middleton Place](#), one of Charleston's oldest and grandest plantations.

A 30-minute drive from town and set on the banks of the Ashley River, the 18th-century plantation is known for its 65 acres of breathtaking gardens.

Take advantage of the "Beyond the Fields" walking tour to explore the lives of the thousands of slaves once owned by the Middleton family (general admission, \$28).

Where to eat



A roast beef sammy at Butcher & Bee.

Photo: Lucy Guent

You can't leave Charleston without dining at two of the city's most acclaimed restaurants: [FIG](#), a 12-year Charleston mainstay, and [Husk](#), which opened in 2010 and has been a staple ever since.

At the latter, don't miss Chef Sean Brock's fire-roasted clams and chicken skins; stop in for a pre- or post-dinner drink (and some freshly shaved jamon) at its next-door watering hole, aptly named Husk Bar.

The bearded men might briefly transport you back to Williamsburg, but it's totally worth the mental detour.

Just steps from the Interstate overpass, in a previously dicey part of town, a splattering of deliciously hip restaurants are heralding a renaissance.

One of them, [Butcher & Bee](#), is the must-go-to lunch spot with a killer roast beef sandwich made with smoked onion jam (the famed banh mi) is only available on the late-night menu).

The BYOB cafe, which opened in 2011, also offers healthier small plates like its popular brussels sprout salad and a kale slaw, which you can find tech employees, local artists and students digging into at the communal picnic benches in the front parking lot.

Two blocks north is the year-old [Leon's Oyster Shop](#), set in a former auto body shop.

The laid-back New Orleans-meets-Charleston vibe lends itself to hours-long brunches. Don't miss the fried chicken, fried clam lettuce wraps and Siam salad made with Napa cabbage and peanuts.

Where to stay



The boutique Zero George hotel

Photo: Christopher Shane

While mainstays like [Belmond Charleston Place](#) (from \$339), a luxe five-star hotel located smack in the tourist hub, continue to lure well-heeled visitors, two-year-old [Zero George](#) (from \$299), situated in the Historic District, provides a more intimate and youthful alternative.

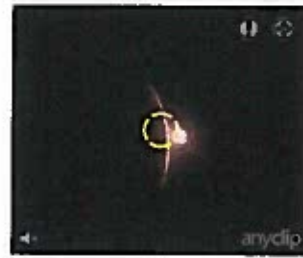
The 18-room boutique hotel is comprised of three 19th-century residences and two brick carriage houses, all sharing a center courtyard.

The rooms are a feminized version of the Restoration Hardwood aesthetic: comfortable, luxurious and peppered with accessories that ought to come with price tags.

Wake up for the complimentary breakfast with Charleston classics like treats from [Callie's Hot Little Biscuits](#).

At night, the hotel offers a gratis wine and cheese happy hour to guests, which can be

Piggy Patty



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Beach excursion



Sanctuary at Kiawah

Photo: Kiawah Island Golf Resort

Take a night or two and head out to Kiawah Island, a half-hour drive from Charleston but a world away thanks to its flat, wide beaches and plethora of golf courses.

Splurge on the **Sanctuary Hotel** (from \$500) and treat yourself to a steak dinner at the Ocean Room, complete with purple stools and, if you're nice (or bad, depending on whom you ask), shots of Underberg, a German digestif bitter, at the end.

Burn off some calories the next day with a bike ride (rentals at the Sanctuary Hotel cost \$18 for a full day) and zoom down the beach to the Ocean Course Golf Course — the newly announced site of the 2021 PGA Championship.

If you're not willing to shell out hundreds of dollars for a round, indulge in a burger, a laughably glutinous crab dip and a seaside view at the golf course's Ryder Cup Bar.

Head home street-side to ogle the multimillion dollar mansions...just beware the alligators!

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