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# 10 reasons to visit Charleston

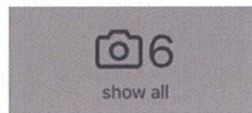
Charleston's Southern Charm is irresistible, says Amira Hashish, as she uncovers the best the city has to offer...

AMIRA HASHISH | 4 hours ago 0 comments



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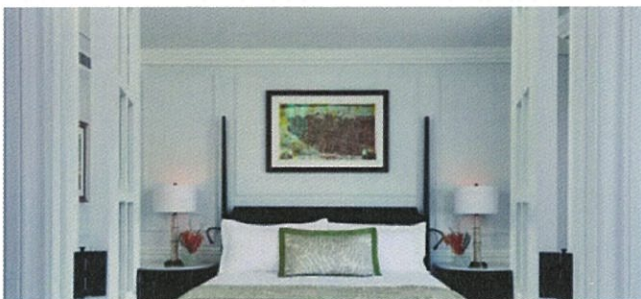


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From fabulous food to historical homes and cute independent shops, Charleston is one of America's small city gems...

## The splendour of the Belmond

This grand property, in the heart of the downtown district, oozes old-world charm. The five star experience begins the moment you stroll the past the picturesque fountain and into the vast lobby area. The ground level even houses a shopping centre, filled with boutiques including **Louis Vuitton** and Anne Fontaine. The Thoroughbred Club lobby bar is a gathering point for locals and guests, with a nightly piano player. Then there's the Charleston Grill for jazz and fine dining or The Palmetto Cafe for an al fresco ambience.



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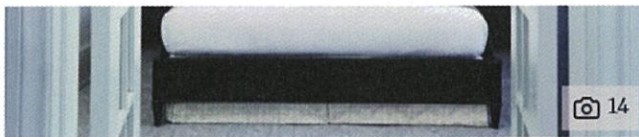


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Upgrade to Club Level for access to a VIP lounge which offers complimentary food and drink at various sittings throughout the day (king club room from around \$870 per night). For those that fancy a break from a busy day of sightseeing, the on site spa and indoor heated pool provide the perfect dose of escapism.



Five star in every sense, [charlestonplace.com](http://charlestonplace.com).

### Top chefs

FIG (aka Food is Good) is one to book way in advance as tables fill up weeks ahead. The laid-back restaurant takes its Lowcountry food very seriously. Seasonal ingredients and local, sustainable products are prepared by James Beard Foundation award-winning Chef Mike Lata. Try the spaghetti and clams or ricotta gnocchi to start. Then move onto the the baked snowy grouper with spring shallot, asparagus, vin blanc and champagne sabayon. Be sure to leave space for the butterscotch pot de creme. This restaurant more than lives up to its name. This food is good...so good, [eatatfig.com](http://eatatfig.com).



Another local hero is Sean Brock, whose Husk restaurants are making waves across various states. His newest restaurant, McCrady's Tavern, combines modern cooking with the spirit of the Gilded Age to create unique dishes such as Broiled Flounder Vin Black and a NY Strip Steak served with blue cheese and watercress. It is a lively haunt with a statement bar for pre or post dinner cocktail, [mccradysrestaurant.com](http://mccradysrestaurant.com).

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### Plantation tours

A trip to Charleston would not be complete without a visit to a plantation. Boone Hall has been growing crops in its grounds for more than three centuries. You may recognise this sprawling estate from movies including *The Notebook*, starring a young Ryan Gosling. However, it is the history that really resonates. There is a poignant Black History in America exhibition in the cabins where the slaves lived. Learn about Gullah culture and take a tour around the fields where cotton plants once flourished and tomatoes and strawberries now thrive, [boonehallplantation.com](http://boonehallplantation.com).



Alternatively, there is Middleton Place. This National Historic Landmark is home to America's oldest landscaped gardens and a lively stableyard that has free-grazing sheep, cashmere goats, Belgian draft horses, guinea hogs, peacocks and water buffalo. You can trace the humble rice seed's journey from subsistence crop to sterling commodity that made Charleston the wealthiest colonial city during the eighteenth century, [middletonplace.org](http://middletonplace.org).

### Laid-back lunches

Butcher and Bee is a buzzy eatery a little walk away from the downtown area but boy it's worth it. The farm-to-table concept incorporates a rotating menu of inventive cuisine with local produce, such as kale slaw, spicy carrots and whipped feta. Israeli born owner Michael Shemtov puts his twist on Southern classics and the result is super satisfying. Dip the house made pitta in the hummus, indulge in the crispy stuffed olives and nibble on the falafel. As an entree, the veggie burger is excellent. The *pièces de résistance* is the ice-cream drumstick. That's waffle ice-cream covered in caramelised white chocolate and waffle bits. Yes, it's as delectable as it sounds. [butcherandbee.com](http://butcherandbee.com)



Make a beeline for the buzzing Leon's Oyster Shop for a delectable selection of deep fried food. Housed in a refurbished garage, this is a cool place to hangout. As well as the bright, rustic interiors there is plenty of outside space for sunny days. The fried oysters rockefeller with spinach and herbs or the fried oyster sandwich with avocado both came highly recommended and did not disappoint. Leave room for the soft serve with sprinkles too, [leonsoystershop.com](http://leonsoystershop.com).



For Sunday Brunch, it's High Cotton. Munch your way through indulgent local favourites as jazz music tinkers away in the background. From buttermilk fried oysters to Carolina shrimp and grits or fried chicken biscuit, the classics reign here. Jen's Pastries, made on site everyday, are also a must, [highcottoncharleston.com](http://highcottoncharleston.com).

## Historical houses

Magnificent homes are a staple on Rainbow Row. The stuff of Instagram dreams, this series of pastel-coloured properties is a selfie hotspot. Take time to stop and admire the architectural details before exploring the streets behind.

Then head inside a couple of landmarks. **Heyward-House** was built in 1772 for Thomas Heyward Jr., a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and was opened to the public in 1930 as Charleston's first historic house museum. It is still popular on the tourist trail. Used as a private hotel for President George Washington during his week-long visit in 1791, this home showcases an array of colonial era, Charleston-made furniture. The Holmes Bookcase is considered to be one of the finest examples of American-made furniture whilst the formal garden features typical plants from late 18th century gardens.





**Edmondston-Alston** House was built in 1825 and enhanced in 1838. This stunning mansion sits on High Battery and offers a sweeping view of Charleston's historic harbour. It was from the piazza that General P. T. Beauregard watched the bombardment of Fort Sumter, which signalled the start of the Civil War. One of the home's more notable antiquities is an original print of the Ordinance of Secession.

For a journey back in time discover downtown Charleston with the Old South Carriage Company. Pass by the antebellum mansions, historic landmarks and beautiful parks at the leisurely pace of a horse drawn carriage, [oldsouthcarriage.com](http://oldsouthcarriage.com).



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## Fun fine dining

Zero Restaurant + Bar is an intimate space with a wonderful tasting menu and friendly, knowledgeable service. In the ultra chic George Hotel, it is the epitome of elegance.

Chef Vinson Petrillo creates sumptuous dishes with European twists. The scallop tartare is a real highlight. Our lovely waitress was hesitant about serving Brits the Beef Wellington but we can confirm that it more than lives up to expectations.



The desert is also a divine mix of mousse, meringue and ice cream. For a special experience, the menu can be paired with boutique wines, many of which have quirky backstories.

There is plenty of personality here so if you are seeking fine dining

There is plenty of personality here so if you are seeking fine dining in a relaxed and romantic atmosphere, this is the place, [zerorestaurantcharleston.com](http://zerorestaurantcharleston.com).



### Rooftop views

The downtown skyline has hardly any tall buildings due to the city's height restriction ordinance. So hotel rooftops are popular places to hang out admire the church steeples and Arthur Ravenel cable-stay bridge over the Cooper River. Head to The Restoration Hotel for one of the best 360° views in Charleston.



The handcrafted cocktails, craft beers, and local wines are served with a smile, [therestorationhotel.com](http://therestorationhotel.com).

### Cool cocktails

A stroll along Upper King Street after dinner will unravel so many great cocktail options. Be sure to pop into 492. It's a lively spot in a completely renovated building that was abandoned following Hurricane Hugo, the category five storm that devastated parts of Charleston in 1989. The owners breathed new life into the space. On Thursday nights there is live music in the atmospheric courtyard. Signature drinks include the Disco Sour (watch as the ice turns purple), Oaxacan On Sunshine and Summer Breeze, [492king.com](http://492king.com).







For a cosy vibe it's Little Jack's Tavern. Co-owners Tim Mink and Brooks Reitz (the guys behind Leon's) have transformed a former Saint Alban into a well-designed tavern with cocktails. Packed with horse racing trinkets and boxing memorabilia it is reminiscent of an old-school American sports bar. There is fabulous service to boot. Order a Manhattan or Martini and listen out for the expertly curated soundtrack.



This place is also about the atmosphere. In fact, there is even an expert on site who is the master of lighting and sound. Pitch a seat at the bar as the night draws in, [littlejackstavern.com](http://littlejackstavern.com).

### A sunset sail

The best way to soak up the Holy City skyline is from the water. Do it in style by embarking on a harbour cruise aboard the 84-foot, three mast wooden Schooner Pride. Sail past Civil War landmarks, barrier islands and the longest cable-stay bridge in North America and watch the sun go down as you head towards the picturesque harbour.



Two hours of tranquillity, [schoonerpride.com](http://schoonerpride.com).

### Independent shops

King Street is full of colourful boutiques, oozing Southern charm. Dedicate a couple of hours to browsing the many independently owned shops.

owned shops.

We loved Lily, where shopkeeper Kevin is as delightful as his trinkets. He personally selects every piece in his impeccably designed store and will tell you the story behind each choice, [lilycharleston.com](http://lilycharleston.com).

For jewellery head to Croghan's Jewel Box, a local gem which has been open for more than 100 years. The youngest generation of the family business are also making waves. Mariana Hay's Goldbug collection is beautiful, [croghansjewelbox.com](http://croghansjewelbox.com).

For more information visit [explorecharleston.com](http://explorecharleston.com) and [visittheusa.co.uk](http://visittheusa.co.uk). ■

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