Destination: Charleston

Yes, the region’s unofficial trademark dish, shrimp and grits, is gluten-free. But it’s the natural Lowcountry beauty, distinctive architecture, and burgeoning (and GF-friendly) dining scene that make South Carolina’s historic city one of our favorite places for a hearty helping of Southern hospitality.

BY M. LINDA LEE / PHOTOGRAPHY CHRISTOPHER SHANE
DO THIS

Farmers Market
Stalls overflowing with artisanal foods, crafts, and the bounty of the area’s fields, farms, and waters make for lively Saturday mornings (April through November) at the historic district’s central Marion Square. charlestonfarmersmarket.com

The Battery
A leisurely stroll along the Cooper River’s oleander-lined promenade to ogle Charleston’s “single houses” (characterized by false entrances facing the street) gets anyone into the relaxed Southern groove.

King Street
National brands and indie boutiques line the blocks of King Street between Market and Calhoun Streets. Head south of Market, to the less-touristy stretch heading to The Battery (above), for high-end European and Southern antiques.

Festival of Houses & Gardens
Access to the choicest private homes and gardens in nearly a dozen historic neighborhoods makes it worth planning a trip around this annual six-week spring festival. The packed calendar of events includes individually priced lectures, food tastings, and guided walks. historiccharleston.org

Gibbes Museum of Art
Better than ever after a $13.4 million facelift, the Gibbes showcases a stellar collection of American art—much of it with a Southern perspective—from the 18th century to the present. Check out the newly reimagined sculpture garden, too. gibbesmuseum.org

The Charleston Gaillard Center
The new neoclassical home to the Charleston Symphony Orchestra also hosts speakers and other music and dance performances year-round. gaillardcenter.com
Clockwise, from top left: The Battery; an ornate gate; a Charleston home; Waterfront Park; King Street shopping.
EAT HERE

While none of the following 100% gluten-free, these Charleston restaurants are well-versed in catering to GF and other special diets.

Cannon Green
The Cannonborough-Elliottborough neighborhood courtyard seating flanked by the picturesque façade of a circa 1840 Charleston "single house" provides a posh platform for Mediterranean-accented dishes by chef Amalia Scatena. Must tries: house-made pickles, baby beet salad, cioppino (minus the crouton). cannongreencharleston.com

Edmund's Oast
While they don't offer GF beer, this upscale brewpub outside the historic district does score points for extremely tasty bar food, creative cocktails, and a boisterous vibe. Its moniker honors English-born "Rebel Brewer" Edmund Egan and the European term for a kiln used to dry hops (oast). Must tries: chicken and Carolina Gold rice porridge, charred okra. edmundsoast.com

Charleston Grill
Floor-to-ceiling wood paneling, neutral tones, soft jazz, and chef Michelle Weaver's decadent cuisine set a special-occasion scene. The mix-and-match menu allows freedom to design your own meal from four menu categories: "Pure" ingredient-focused dishes, "Lush" French classics, "Cosmopolitan" globally inspired fare, and "Southern" fresh takes on regional standards. Must tries: branzino, "21" Club steak tartare (request GF), Catfish Country Captain Stew (request GF). charlestongrill.com

167 Raw
There's always a line to get in this tiny twenty-seat raw bar on a quieter section of East Bay Street—a testimony to owner Jesse Sandele's experience with fresh fish (his father ran a seafood market, which Jesse now owns, on Nantucket Island). Must tries: oysters from the raw bar, lobster roll (the GF version uses a corn tortilla or piles the fillings atop fresh greens). 167raw.com

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Mediterranean-inspired small plates and pastas encourage sharing at chef Nate Whiting's sexy spot on upper King Street. Grab a seat at the communal table or at the bar overlooking the open kitchen, and be sure to order a cocktail from the ever-changing list of cleverly named house libations. Must tries: sous-vide butter-poached halibut (aka barreelfish), Canadian duck three ways. 492king.com

The Grocery
The modern country-grocery dining environs, complete with shelves lined with jars of pickles and preserves from their in-house canning program, testify to chef Kevin Johnson's affinity for farm-fresh cuisine. Must tries: wood-roasted whole fish, fried oysters with deviled-egg sauce (request GF). thegrocerycharleston.com
Husk
Within this 1893 house on the historic district’s Queen Street, chef Sean Brock champions Southern ingredients and heritage, likely in the form of Broadbent’s country ham, Gechee Boy Mill grits, and produce from his organic garden. Bonus: almost everything on the menu can be made GF.
Must tries: shrimp and grits, American Spot heritage pork with Carolina Gold red rice. huskrestaurant.com

The Macintosh
Booming acoustics and a packed dining room and bar ensure the atmosphere is as festive as chef Jeremiah Bacon’s seasonally inspired contemporary American menu, which showcases his winning way with fresh fish. Must tries: Seared grouper with broccoli and sunchokes, 7-ounce Certified Angus Beef deckle steak. themacintoshcharleston.com

Minero
At this Sean Brock outpost (also Husk, above), tortillas made from heirloom corn (ground in-house) are the foundation for casual yet memorable artisanal Mexican fare. Gluten-free considerations include a separate menu and extra care in the kitchen to avoid cross-contamination. Must tries: queso fundido, tacos al pastor, red posole with Anson Mills hominy. minerorestaurant.com

The Ordinary
Within a gorgeously restored 1927 bank building on upper King Street, James Beard Award–winner Mike Lata offers up his take on an upscale oyster bar, complete with delicious small plates that beg to be shared. Must tries: Nantucket Bay scallop aguachile, pickled white shrimp, squid a la plancha. eattheordinary.com

Clockwise from top: Minero’s taco al pastor; The Macintosh’s seared grouper with broccoli and sunchokes; Minero’s interior. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The Ordinary’s scallop aguachile; Edmond’s Oast; Cannon Green.
DRINK IT IN

The Bar at Husk
Century-old exposed brick, dark wood paneling, expertly crafted cocktails, and a connoisseur's bourbon list make Husk's neighboring sister property a destination in its own right. huskrestaurant.com

Bin 152
A quiet, low-lit oasis steps away from King Street's bustle, this wine bar beckons with antiques and more than thirty wines by the glass—paired, if desired, with cheese and charcuterie. bin152.com

Black Tap Coffee
Coffee is king at this sunny Harleston Village shop where the owners globally source beans, roast them on nearby James Island, and turn them into hot and cold specialties. blacktapcoffee.com

The Cocktail Club
Though it's right upstairs, it's not its proximity to The MacIntosh restaurant (page 91) that makes this laid-back lounge a destination. It's the 1881 warehouse's way-cool exposed beams, brick walls, leather club chairs, craft cocktails, rare liquors, and live music. thecocktailclubcharleston.com

The Gin Joint
A prime decompression chamber for Charleston's celebrated chefs, this little bar knows how to mix a drink—as evidenced by their Bittermilk line of crafted cocktail mixers. theginjoint.com
SLEEP HERE

Belmond Charleston Place
Smack in the middle of the historic district, this luxurious inn is the grand dame of the city’s lodgings, offering every Southern comfort imaginable, including eats from the Charleston Grill (page 30), a Euro-style spa, and chic lobby-level shops.
belmond.com/charlestonplace

Grand Bohemian Hotel Charleston
This new boutique hotel brings contemporary style and art-filled public spaces to Charleston’s historic district. Sign up to blend your own wine next to the lobby wine bar, or sip craft cocktails on the rooftop.
grandbohemiancharleston.com

HarbourView Inn
At this inn overlooking the Charleston Harbor, you can’t get any closer to the waterfront without getting wet. Family-friendly perks include free continental breakfast and evening cookies and milk.
harbourviewcharleston.com

Indigo Inn
Its name hints at the fact that this small, renovated 1850 warehouse a few blocks from the historic district’s Old City Market used to store indigo. Rates include breakfast. indigoinn.com

Planters Inn
Well-located on the corner of Market and Meeting Streets, this quintessential Charleston address offers elegantly appointed rooms in an original 1844 building and newer piazza rooms overlooking the romantic palm-studded courtyard. The on-site Peninsula Grill is equally posh.
plantersinn.com

Clockwise from top: Cafe at the Grand Bohemian Hotel Charleston; Planters Inn room; Planters Inn exterior; HarbourView Inn. Opposite page, from top left: Cocktail Club interior; Cocktail Club’s Antique Modern cocktail; Bir 152 exterior; slow drip at Black Tap Coffee.