28 Best Restaurants in Charleston

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Whether it's seafood, barbecue, fine dining, or something else you crave— we've got it covered.

Technically, Charleston is classified as a small city—but it's a mighty force on the nation's food scene. For years now it's known for its dynamic mix of offerings—classic Southern food, like Lowcountry cuisine and barbecue done at peak levels, alongside fresh Eastern seafood, and innovative kitchens with creative chefs who redefine what we think of as farm-to-table cooking. Sean Brock's vision for the new South at Husk Charleston makes stellar use of the region's ingredients, while at Fig, those seasonal ingredients and Southern classics are served in an upscale bistro setting. Don't worry—the city's top places for a burger, oysters, dessert, and fried chicken, too, are on our list. We've looked at all categories, neighborhoods (like the ever-popular downtown Charleston restaurants), as well as a mix of the old and the new, to create our list of the city's best places to eat. If we have one piece of advice, it's to come hungry.
RESTAURANT

Husk $$

Husk breathes life into a two-story late 19th century home with Queen Anne-style facade. This is the restaurant that kicked off the Sean Brock empire, the first place to go to experience his "new South" vision for the region's cuisine. Only Brock and his acclaimed executive chef Travis Grimes can take a pig's ear and transform it into an epiphany, reduced to shatteringly crunchy strips and nestled in a straight-from-the-garden lettuce wrap along with paper thin strips of sweet and mildly tangy cucumbers and red onions, all dappled with creamy, smoky tobiko sauce (a firm nod to Brock's international travels and inspiration). The menu changes regularly, but the dinner rolls are a constant, sprinkled with black sesame seeds and bourbon-barrel-smoked salt, served in a locally crafted sweetgrass basket with pork-infused butter for dredging. The bar is technically a separate, adjacent building, and a destination in its own right. Whatever your preference, be sure to genuflect at the altar of canned and pickled vegetables upstairs in backlit mason jars.

RESTAURANT

Fig $$

Old enough to be considered an institution, but still creative enough to wow the locals who have favored it for years. Fig is one of Charleston's biggest success stories. Owned by Mike Lata, the kitchen is run by James Beard winner Jason Stanhope, who brings his South American background and French technique to Southern cuisine, creating dishes like fish stew provençal, made with locally caught white shrimp, squid, mussels, and Carolina gold rice.

RESTAURANT

Rodney Scott's BBQ 🍖
Chances are, the smell of smoking pork hits you before you get to the restaurant’s front door, which faces King Street with a row of full-length windows framed in blue. Blue and red are the main accents here, an industrial and clean design so patrons remember it’s all about the food—served in classic red baskets lined by paper that soaks up the vinegar-based barbecue sauce as it dribbles from an overflowing pulled pork sandwich. Beyond the pork, there is a killer mac and cheese, some smoked chicken, and some BBQ ribs you might have to fight someone for. It’s counter-service, so make sure you’ve got your order planned down before it’s your turn—no one wants to be the cause for a back-up here.

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RESTAURANT

Xiao Bao Biscuit →

For a taste of something outside of fried green tomatoes and sweet tea, head to Xiao Bao Biscuit on the corner of Rutledge Ave and Spring Street. Here you'll find a beautiful marriage of Asian and Chinese soul food, with spicy dishes like Thai yellow curry with mung bean cakes, Japanese cabbage pancakes with pork "candy," or local snapper prepared with Chinese spices and seasoned greens. Inside a converted gas station, it's popular for business and casual meals among the creative class.
RESTAURANT
Le Farfalla

What is so beautiful about this restaurant is that it is Italian and Charleston at the same time, a bit like a rambling Italian seaside restaurant tucked just a block off King Street. There is a charming courtyard perfect for brunch in dappled sunlight, a formal dining room with high-backed wooden booths, but for most people (just like the kitchen at a good house party), the bar is the heart of the restaurant. Although firmly in the "tourist district," it is still firmly a neighborhood spot. You can pop in for a happy hour bite of fried mozzarella sticks (so retro), enjoy a plate of rigatoni verde and a glass of wine at the bar, or go all out with courses and spend the evening there. Standards include the Fideo with toasted angel hair pasta and local shrimp, a filling Warm Rosemary Focaccia served with whipped ricotta, anything from the excellent vegetable selections, and Octopus Carpaccio, a fan favorite.

RESTAURANT
The Ordinary

Housed in a 1920s bank building, the high ceilings and expansive room—designed with clean white tile and black wood accents—is elegant in a simple, Parisian cafe sort of way. The website says "fancy seafood," and this is the place for it in the city. Don't miss: oysters on the half shell, crudo, the lobster roll, or the crispy oyster slider, since it's something that most people who frequent get every time, no matter the choices for the rest of the meal. This bar has an impressive collection of rums, so the cocktail list is divided into "With Rum" and "Without Rum" categories, with 12 in the former.

RESTAURANT
McCready's Tavern

Photo by Andrew Cebulka
The cobblestone alley entrances, the brick arches, the dark woods and the creaky wooden floors all suggest colonial Charleston, and they're right on point, since this place originally opened as McCrady's Tavern in 1773. It's been a lot of things in between, including a Sean Brock fine-dining meca, until he reimagined it once again as a tavern with food that recalls the Gilded Age—their current iteration. Creative, adventurous, calling-to-the-classics, with executions that range from high-low (caviar and tater tots, and a bernaise-burning burger) to mainly high (escargot-stuffed marrow bone and local clams stuffed with deviled crab).

RESTAURANT

Millers All Day

If Pinterest or Instagram influencers had a dream diner, Millers All Day might be it. It's breakfast all day (or at least until 7 p.m.), but it isn't boring or typical, especially since the chefs use heirloom grains and local ingredients as a jumping-off point for creativity. On the sweet side of things, the waffles are a riff on banana Paster, with edges that stay deliciously crispy up against the sorghum syrup and the meringue topper. Despite the internet phenomenon that are the unicorn (pink) grizz, the star of the menu is fast becoming the Hoppin' Johnn, a Sea Island Red Pea Lowcountry classic that is popular on many Lowcountry menus. They've got every type of coffee you could want, but great beer and bubbly, too.

RESTAURANT

Zero Restaurant + Bar

A molecular gastronomy experience that draws seasoned diners as well as a pre-theater crowd (the Galliard is down the street). There are three separate tasting menus: one for omnivores, one for herbivores, and an abbreviated menu for those going to the theater, with beverage pairings included for the first two. Let go of the reins and allow Chef Visson Petrillo to direct the experience: this is the kind of place that leaves you intellectually satisfied, as well as sated.
RESTAURANT

The Grocery

Locals and rafters who dig locally sourced ingredients come for this fresh take on Lowcountry cuisine. Chef Kevin Johnson was a vegetarian for a decade, so he approaches vegetables with the respect they deserve, not as an afterthought to protein. All the ingredients are as local as possible, but the flavors primarily come from the Mediterranean rim. Expect harissa spiced carrots, triggerfish garnished with marcona almond, and lamb loin with farro tabouli—and don’t skip the house dirty martini, made with pickled tomato juice.

RESTAURANT

167 Raw

The line in front of 167 Raw, a tiny but mighty fresh seafood haunt, forms at 10:30 a.m., a half hour before it opens—and it’s like this all day. Queue up—the maître d’ will pour drinks while you wait—and when you finally nab your coveted seat, settle in for as much fresh seafood as you can handle. Think raw bar items, crudos, tacos, po’ boys, and “favorites,” like the market-priced lobster roll. This is a kitchen that has fun with whatever fresh seafood rolls through the door, so there’s always something new to try: Arctic char dumplings, shrimp boullion balls, uni toast, golden tile agnacchi. And despite the line outside, you won’t be rushed by the staff.
Hominy Grill

If the bowl of grits above the restaurant name on the front door wasn’t enough, the headboard walls, tin ceilings, wood floors, and wooden chairs all are clues you’ve walked into a classic eatery that serves comfort food. Before there was a big brunch scene in Charleston, there was Robert Stehling and his Charleston Nasty biscuit, and that, along with his shrimp and grits, perfectly fried okra, collards, and fried catfish, is as on point as ever. Saving room for dessert is difficult, but if it can be done, the chocolate pudding has a strong, local cult following. Cocktails, brunch-style cocktails to be exact, are the best move here, including a classic Bloody Mary and a Mexican Coffee with Don Pedro brandy and Kahlua. Additionally, a few draft beers are available, and there’s a small but mighty wine list with some lovely and affordable Europeans whites with good acidity to cut through all that gravy.

Lewis Barbecue

A little off the beaten path of the downtown corridor, Lewis Barbecue, one of the city’s newer joints, is worth the added travel time. Renowned Austin pit master John Lewis steers the food program, and the menu is simple, but abundant—large slabs of slow-smoked, melt-in-your-mouth brisket, smoked sausages, and an array of sides, like fluffy cornbread and tangy coleslaw. Here, it’s all about the tray, and once you go through the line, chances are you will have one stacked with hedonistic glory. One of the best parts of the experience are the staff, who slice and portion your meats on the plate. They’re quick to offer a sample, suggestion, or by “just one more slice” on your tray before you leave their station. It feels fun, like a friendly picnic for a meat-loving club.

Minero

Sean Brock’s Mexican-meets-Charleston casual restaurant pleases all palates with a love for tacos and an aversion for long waits. The cocktail game is strong here, and if
you are a tequila or a mezcal fan, prepare to spend some time with the list, which is
extensive and includes headers such as "Single Village" and "Extra Añejo." Food-wise,
it's imaginative, whimsical, but with a perfect pitch for ingredient pairings in the
space between. A local ingredient such as bunee seed is filtered through a Mexican
corn and comes out as a sauce reminiscent of tahini, while Southern farm-raised catfish
shows up on tacos, and all platters come with a side of Lowcountry hoppin' john.

PHOTO BY ROBERT DONNAN

RESTAURANT

The Glass Onion

If you've found a spot in the parking lot, consider yourself lucky—but it's not some
 buzzy new bistro. Walk in, and this simple place sits comfortably in the tradition of
 Southern diners, where meat-and-three, counter service, and simple wooden tables
carry way more weight than a well-prepared drink. Stand and peruse the huge
chalkboard menu and—we know, there are so many choices—try to come to a decision
before you reach the counter. You've probably heard about the shrimp po'boy, the
catfish, the grits, and the lemon meringue pie so high you could use it as a pillow, but
that's really just the beginning. Things on the menu seem simple, like shrimp and
grits and bread pudding—but behind that simplicity is high-level execution from a
chef who honed his skills in fine dining. Breaded seafood is light and crispy; grits
preparation is perfection; and pickles are put up yearly by the kitchen staff, made
from local stuff.

PHOTO BY ANDREW CEBULIA

RESTAURANT

The Macintosh

The Macintosh was one of the first places to anchor the now crowded Upper King
restaurant district, and it wowed with its dark detailing, exposed beams, and historic
brick lovingly preserved from a bygone Charleston era. But it's always been about the
food here—protein-centric and often rich—and inviting people to join you in enjoying
it. This is a meeting place, both at the bar and the table, and it feels bustling because it
usually is. Although things like the burger, lamb rack, or deckle might woo you upon
first menu perusal, don't skip over the seafood, such as soft-shell crab in season or
flounder with horseradish.
Leon's Oyster Shop

Leon's Oyster Shop has been drawing in hungry Charlestonians since it opened its doors in 2014. Though its scruffy, whitewashed façade is often overlooked by tourists, Leon's is known the South over for its fried chicken sandwich, which has the power to send a vegetarian tumbling off the wagon. The breading uses seafood seasoning and the tender filet is topped with Duke's mayo and Asian slaw tossed with fish sauce. Fins, the brioche buns are baked daily and grilled just enough to get that perfect crispy exterior and soft, pillowy interior.

Stella's

An unabashed love letter to owner Steven Niketas' Greek heritage and to founding chef Stella Dikas. This is an embracing, communal spot. These are all classic Greek dishes, and lots of them. Start with meze to share, some mild and meaty (koftekes, kretopita), others salty and bold, like "marinara," battered and fried smelt with a traditionally acharreisve garlic skordalia sauce. Pastas can turn exotic, with...
unusual notes of clove and nutmeg. Save room for a dessert of loukoumades: little honey-rich pastry puffs traditionally awarded to Olympic winners in ancient Greece.

RESTAURANT

Chez Nous

Each day, Chef Jill Mathias writes out the menu by hand: two appetizers, two entrees, and two desserts. The menu is the same at lunch as it is at dinner, and what ensues is a daily dinner party of sorts. It’s seasonal, elevated, European comfort food. There are fresh asparagus spears still crunchy under beautiful white, firm-fleshed fish, veal stew with mushrooms, bitter greens salads, crusty bread, and vanilla custard or millefeuille for dessert. Unless you follow the restaurant on social media, you never know what the meal is going to be until you’re seated. Everything is simple here, including the beverage list, dominated by wines from Southern France, Northern Italy, and Northern Spain.
Tu is the newest venture brought to us by the folks who knocked our socks off at Xiao Bao Biscuit. The menu divides into three sections: the first devoted to exotic and cool starters, the second more savory and vegetable-centric, the third spotlighting a few proteins. You'll want to order a jumble of dishes and share, though all are worth hogging. Aqua Chile surprised with tender strips of beef cured in seaweed and suspended beneath a thin layer of lime and chili oil, topped with two raw sardines and little kisses of balsamic and “dynamite sauce” drizzled in a creamy, horseradish and wasabi, doused with fresh trout roe and encircled with whimsical shrimp hushpuppies. It’s rare that a Charleston restaurant leaves you feeling that you’ve connected new synapses in your brain.

Edmund’s Oast, located on Morrison Drive, has been a favorite mingling spot for locals since its opening. Don’t expect greasy, typical pub fare. Edmund’s takes their food just as seriously as their beer, with a highly rated charcuterie program (nearly everything cured and made in house). As for the beer, the styles are a mix of American and English ones: the Tweed Jacket English Brown Ale is a crowd favorite (and with that moniker, who wouldn’t love it?).

Henrietta’s branches off the main lobby of The Dewberry, so technically it is a “hotel restaurant,” but don’t let that deter you. For breakfast, brunch, lunch, or dinner, this is a clean and minimalist take on a classic Parisian brasserie, but think of it as a refined French bistro with an incredible brunch and lunch menu. The small plates are perfectly executed, and the cocktails are top-notch. The vibe is cozy and welcoming, making it a perfect spot for a casual meal or a bit of people-watching.
service. Given the city’s French Huguenot-rich early beginnings, that’s not such a stretch. You’ll see familiar bistro items on the menu, like escargot, charcuterie, French onion soup, and steak frites, with Southern thrown into the mix: oysters, deviled eggs, boudin bites, and shrimp & grits.

RESTAURANT

Bar Normandy

For a restaurant that consistently serves up some of this city’s best food, Bar Normandy is atypical in every way. When you walk into the modest space right off Broad Street, for late afternoon oysters and drinks or for dinner, it feels like a hastily cobbled together pop-up venue. The chef (either Alex Lira or Philip Lawrence, they alternate) works behind a small counter where he preps, plates, and cooks with little more than two induction burners and a panini press. The sole server in the room will seat you as soon as he or she can, the day’s cryptic menu is listed on a letter-board.

Come hungry: This is a restaurant that really just wants to cook great food in a relaxed atmosphere and not overcharge its customers.

RESTAURANT

Peninsula Grill

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The Peninsula Grill has been a fine dining institution in the city for 21 years, and it recently had a bit of a chef shuffle, but is slowly adding new dishes (for instance, a crudo with caviar and peas) while remaining respectful to the restaurant’s tradition. Beef, and steak specifically, is the main attraction, with varying cuts, add-ons including foie gras and lobster tail, and eight sauces to accompany it. For dessert, it’s all about the famous coconut cake.

RESTAURANT

Bertha’s Kitchen

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This place is soul food and Lowcountry cooking royalty: a counter-service icon you don’t want to miss. Owned and operated by the daughters of founder Albertha Grant, those cooking your food are the ones working the line and the register. It’s $8 for a meat and two sides, so consider taking the leap and going for two entrees. There’s too much to love for one styrofoam container: fried chicken, crisp and hot; fried pork chops that are tender and well-seasoned; red rice, white rice, mac and cheese; okra stew that’s probably been made the same way since their grandmothers were making it; oysters falling off the bone if they have it; fried fish if they have it; any dessert they suggest, and sweet potatoes. Sweet tea and lemonade to drink.
The Darling Oyster Bar

The Darling Oyster Bar, one of King Street's favorite seafood bars, turns heads thanks to its airy and elegant open design, complete with a station where you can sit and watch local shuckers prepare thousands of East Coast oysters every day. Start with a big platter of Carolina oysters, then dive deep into creamy shrimp and grits, which come a little spicier than other places in town. The star of the menu, though, is the monster Bloody Mary—it's topped with a hush puppy, lobster tail, king crab leg, Old Bay spiced shrimp, and a pickle.

Charleston Grill

This is a place to celebrate. Chef Michelle Weaver proves that fine dining can be fun. Her menu is divided by "Shared," "Roots & Steams," "Waves & Marsh," and "Field & Pasture," eschewing the idea that courses have to be formal. Sommelier Rick Rubel's list is expansive at 39 pages, and he's usually in the house to provide spot-on recommendations based on meal, palate, and price point. And he's trained the staff to do the same.

The Obstinate Daughter
without any hint of maritime kitsch. Blended wood and pale blue seating are a calm backdrop for a bustling operation: the kitchen keeps the servers pivoting, bringing out trays from the raw bar, pizza from the wood-fired oven, and pasta and seafood dishes, too. This is the sister restaurant to Wild Olive on Johns Island, so it makes sense that it has an Italian influence, though interpreted through a coastal lens. There’s so much on the menu worth trying, so consider sharing plates instead of hogging your own, and then set about convincing the group to go for any homemade pasta (but especially the seasonal Pappardelle), plus a pizza, and the Mepkin Abbey Mushrooms. The latter, a kale, mushroom, and egg plate, is one of the most popular dishes on the menu.