10 Best Brunches in Charleston

By Paul Donnell
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When a griddle calls in this town, you leave your diet at the door.

Lately, it feels like people have fallen out of love with brunch. It’s easy to get into a rut when places are hocking the same old eggs Benedict and watered-down mimosa, and the Worcestershire in the Bloody Marys starts to taste more like a challenge than a treat. But we’re in the South, home of fried chicken, grits, and biscuits, and there’s no reason why brunch shouldn’t survive and thrive here. Throw those attempts at a summer body to the wind, and make sure you double up on your Fresh Direct order of celery when you get home—we’re about to take you through our top picks for brunch in Charleston, a tasty, buttery, boozy (and, okay, occasionally healthy) bunch, where warmth, charm, and good company are as essential to the experience as a perennially filled glass.
RESTAURANT

The Macintosh

$6

Just how rich can brunch get? The gluttonous parade of midday meals at The Macintosh readily answers the question. Start things off with the spiced cheese curds or a heaping helping of poutine fries, then submit to the "Mac Attack," an artery-quaking plate of pork belly, bone marrow bread pudding, and poached egg, doused head-to-crust in Hollandaise Sauce. Hell, you only live once, right? Maybe you're sticking to a slightly leaner plan on your visit—and there are healthier dishes to be had—but when there's pickle-brined fried chicken and homemade chorizo to sample, why even consider them? Take a day off, and start anew tomorrow.

RESTAURANT

IKept

$5

The house restaurant for the Renaissance Hotel, there's a kind of high-end goth casual look to the place, with the black ceiling and black and silver furniture dominating the aesthetic. The menu is nominally a simple affair, with classics such as French Toast, Steak and Eggs, and breakfast sandwiches. The ingredients (locally sourced where possible) elevate the experience, though, with delicious brioche used for the sandwiches, house-made tomato jam, and duck fat corn bread. A clear favorite is the Hot Chicken and Waffle, which comes with some artisanal strawberry jam and is too alluring an indulgence not to order.
Cannon Green

Making a warehouse-looking space commodious enough to welcome in Sunday brunchers is no mean feat, but the green aspect is present beyond the signage, and the verdant furniture and smattering of plants makes for a calming, quasi-rustic spot. The mimosa game is strong here, deferring not just to the tyranny of orange, but offering grapefruit and peach options, too, a godsend for weary palates. The appetizers are the most curious part of the brunch menu, and a couple of items stand out as dishes you probably won’t see elsewhere. The Shrimp Escabeche is one of these, and the spice and citrus is sure to wake you up. The Pea Tendril is also worth a punt, and balances strawberries, asparagus, and pecorino while remaining wonderfully light. The bigger dishes are more mainstream, with irresistibly melty Croque Madame and the great addition of sun-dried tomatoes to their shrimp and grits.

Copenhagen by Foot

The Park Café

Everything from the façade to the plant-draped interiors hints at the healthiness and freshness of this café that sits just a short walk from Hampton Park. The sun-flecked white décor gives way to greenery sprouting from every corner, and it almost feels like a stylish conservatory, especially as you spy the natural chandelier that looks like it was constructed by birds trying for the most elegant nest imaginable. If you only try one thing on the menu, make it the Aebleskiver (you can just point at it if you don’t want a stall at the somewhat). It’s a sweet, moist-like thing that they roll in
'popover' and you're likely not able to find them anywhere between here and, well, Denmark.

The Junction Kitchen & Provisions

It's a short drive from the hub of downtown to up-and-coming Park Circle, but spots like this make it worthwhile. On a street with warehouses and old commercial lots that look unchanged since the 1960s, this café has that whole kitsch vintage thing going on, but presents in such an organic way that the word 'hipster' won't even cross your mind. Tales of their Bloody Mary variations will precede the visit, and they are not hyperbolic. The 'blonde' version uses yellow tomatoes and is as light as a day at the beach, while the half and half merges with a more traditional recipe for a perfect mix. The brunch menu is small but perfectly formed. The star of the show is the Mexican Hash, which presents cactus-braised pork doused in a house-made jalapeno honey hot sauce. A self-serve coffee station is a godsend for caffeine enthusiasts.

Daps Breakfast & Imbibe

Maybe it's the cushioned wooden benches, or the rustic wooden tabletops or the bijou cacti in miniature plant pots, but there's something immediately honey about Daps, an unassuming and welcoming spot in Westside. Daps serves breakfast all day every day, so it's an unsurprisingly casual crowd, the kind of people who want a breakfast burrito at 4 p.m. and aren't afraid to indulge that craving. Their folded egg sandwiches come in breakfast protein and chickpea varieties, though the Chorizo Gravy edition is really the stand-out in this arena. Hash also is a favorite, with The Special #1 a festival of veggies and The Big Meaty delivering on its name. As well as burgers and breakfast platters, the other menu section is cakes, with sweet delights, and a butternut squash variation that may prove too intriguing to ignore. And two words: breakfast wines.
For a true Southern brunch, make your way to High Cotton on bustling East Bay Street. The menu is available on both Saturdays and Sundays (a rarity in chilled-out Charleston) and comes with an assortment of signature items, like the Bellini Bar, flaky crab cake eggs Benedict, seafood crepes, or a crispy fried chicken sandwich. As a bonus, your brunch comes complete with the backdrop of a local bluegrass band.

The phrase "down-home" could have been invented for Hominy Grill, the least pretentious-looking restaurant in town—though the simple, white-walled dining room, with its ceiling fans and chalk-scrawled blackboards, belies a playful and well-curated brunch menu. It's one of the more extensive ones in town, too, with an impressive array of heart-stopping dishes like the Charleston Nasty Biscuit (a decadent mix of fried chicken, cheese, and gravy) and a silky She-crab Soup. The griddled banana bread and sesame-fried Catfish grit bowl are stalwarts, and although the waffle with hot chicken thighs and strawberry syrup doesn't like it'll work, it sure does.

From the impressive, imposing façade through to the dark woods and cushioned chairs of the main dining room, Hall’s has ‘classic old school steakhouse’ written all over it. High ceilings, oil paintings of dogs and the whiff of affluence cement its personality—it’s a grown-up, sophisticated joint and isn’t shy about letting you know it. As with the drinks, the restaurant ploughs a mainly traditional furrow, but the execution is on point. The crab cake eggs benedict is a triumph with its pepperjack grits and Creole Hollandaise, and the Southern Sweet Baked Potato Pancakes (served with bananas and candied pecans) prove too tempting for many diners to ignore. There are other sundry small twists that add an air of elegance, such as the lavender-scented brioche used on the French Toast.
RESTAURANT

The Getaway

This restaurant, that looks to blend the best of South American/Central American and Caribbean cuisine, presents visually just that, with more than a whiff of Old Havana in its rose-hued wooden walls and the dusky accent of its azure-blue floors. A good brunch menu should focus on a limited number of things and do them very well indeed, which is a strategy that The Getaway pursues and attains with some panache. The dishes are recognizably from the brunch universe, but have added exoticism, to whet the Soft Shell Crab Toast and the Getaway Benedict with braised artichokes. The orange and ginger flan with a spiced cream is a worthwhile option for dessert.