



Where to Eat, Drink, and Party in Charleston, South Carolina

Get the lowdown on this Low Country boomtown.

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Imagine if New Orleans took a bath, drank less, and didn't try to kill you, and you've got Charleston, South Carolina. The food is superb, the weather is sultry, the women are beautiful, and the cocktails are strong. Over the past two years, new restaurants, bars, and hipster fixer-uppers have sprung up faster than you can say "local and sustainable." The house with kudzu growing out of the windows six months ago now has a Tesla in the driveway, and that gas station that closed in 1982 is suddenly the hottest eatery in town. Meanwhile, bewildered old men sit in lawn chairs on their driveways wondering what the hell happened. Know this: Charleston is divided in half by Calhoun Street—south of Calhoun are the city's swankiest neighborhoods, north of Calhoun are the coolest. Here's the lowdown on this Low Country boomtown:

South Of Calhoun

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Eat: [Minero](#) is the recent Mexican venture of Charleston's most renowned native chef, Sean Brock. The excellent shrimp and grits with chorizo and house-ground masa (pictured above) is a sublime twist on an obligatory local dish. Wash it down with a [Dragon Rojo](#)—a killer tequila-based cocktail made with fresh watermelon juice and Jamaica tea syrup. [167 Raw](#) is where Nantucket meets Low Country: five College Of Charleston buddies from Massachusetts and South Carolina opened it last year as a seafood market, and it's now the hottest raw bar in the city. Come early and expect a line. The lobster roll—featuring large chunks of fresh meat tossed with light aioli and chives on a lightly toasted bun—is definitely worth the wait.

Drink: [The Blind Tiger](#) is a Broad Street institution: lawyers lunch here by day, college kids rage here by night. Another nearby favorite with a minimum of pretense is [The Griffin](#), a raucous English pub where workers from the tourist flagship eateries on nearby East Bay Street go for after-shift boozing.

Do: [Old South Barber Spa](#) is a friendly spot for a hot towel shave and a shot of whiskey on a comfy leather couch while you wait. Once you're properly cropped, opt for an hour-long massage that will erase the pain of last night's overindulgences.

Stay: [The Vendue Inn](#) is modern, art-filled and newly renovated. The bustling rooftop bar boasts some of Charleston's best views. If you're down to splurge, [Zero George Street](#) is a stunning 16-room boutique hotel comprised of five historic antebellum houses. At night, enjoy a cocktail or three overlooking the private landscaped courtyard.

North Of Calhoun





Eat: Operating out of a former auto body shop, [Leon's Fine Poultry and Oysters](#) serves spicy fried chicken and oysters ranging from beautifully raw to divinely adulterated—char-grilled and smothered in melted butter and parmesan. After an epically satisfying lunch, don't forget to order a Bloody Mary, Pimm's Cup, or Red Snapper (that's a Bloody with gin) in a go-cup on your way out—they're all listed under "Day Drinking" on the menu.



[Artisan Meat Share](#) has been around for less than a year and it's already earned a reputation as the best place to buy quality meat. The take-home butcher cuts can be pricey, but you'll get a serious

the Italian with house-cured meats and Porchetta with pork cracklins are a must. *Butcher & Bee* is another meat-lover's paradise, courtesy of chef Chelsey Conrad's ever-changing sandwich menu. Standouts include the banh mi and an awesomely decadent double cheeseburger.



The perfectly prepared fried oyster slider on a homemade Hawaiian roll at *The Ordinary* (above) just might be the best single bite of food in Charleston. Housed in a former bank, *The Ordinary* is a beautiful, neo-classical temple of local seafood, including the fresh oysters and pick and peel shrimp seen here. The bar serves thirty different rums, and, much to its credit, not a single kind of vodka.



Do: Built in a former Studebaker dealership, *High Wire Distilling* crafts some of the finest local small-batch spirits, and you'll see their artfully-designed labels adorning the mirrored shelves of the city's most discerning cocktail bars. Their botanical Hat Trick gin, Sorghum Whiskey, and Four Grain bourbon are made in a hand-hammered copper still. They also host hourly tastings and tours.





Drink: [The Belmont](#) is arguably the greatest bar in all of Charleston, as evidenced by the loyal clientele of local bartenders who flock to this intimate oasis to partake in rare bottles and craft cocktails under a pounded tin ceiling. The classic black-and-white movies playing on mute against the back wall establishes an appropriately cinematic vibe. (And should the late night sweet-tooth cravings set in, the bartender will make you a Banana-Nutella Pop Tart.)

Do: Charlestonians are known for dressing well, and if you want to bite some of that Southern gentleman style, head to [Indigo and Cotton](#). This artfully-curated men's shop will help you nail the Low Country look something between lowbrow sailing and highbrow hunting that just works.



Uptown

Eat: [Edmund's Oast](#) is a festive beer geek pub with big tables, high ceilings and a loft-like feel. Hiding among their deep list of uncommon brews is the horrifyingly-named Peanut Butter and Jelly Beer, made with Concord grape juice and peanut butter powder, and it's actually pretty good. They also serve a heaping charcuterie tower on a tiered platter the size of a step ladder. For a divier feel, head to [Tattooed Moose](#), presided over by a taxidermied moose named Jack. Wash down the house specialty Duck Club sandwich (pictured below) with a local pint from [Coast Brewery](#).





Drink: According to its current owners, [Faculty Lounge](#) was once an after-school watering hole for teachers at a nearby high school. Now it's a speakeasy owned by a young couple who live around the corner. The bar has no website and does no p.r., and they sell...well, whatever they feel like, including Japanese potato chips and hot-plate ramen. Bottles on the back bar change regularly, "based on whatever my husband and I want to try," says co-owner Nayda Freire.

Off The Peninsula

See: The freaky-looking, 1,500-year-old [Angel Oak](#) tree on John's Island resembles something out of *Lord Of The Rings*. It's well worth the damage to your car's suspension to drive out on the dirt road and reckon with its twisted majesty.

Do: Ever wondered how tea is produced? Me neither, until I visited the [Charleston Tea Plantation](#). Watch the leaves cut, dried and roasted and drink free iced tea till your eyeballs float. For a satisfying beach day, head over the Ravenel Bridge to pristine Sullivan's Island. There's a very civilized main drag where you should eat at [The Obstinate Daughter](#). Indulge in small plates, quality cocktails, and windows open to ocean breezes. Relax, soak it all in, and order another drink. You deserve it.



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