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March 02, 2016

Sean Brock's Guide To Charleston, South Carolina



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One of the most talked-about chefs from the South, Sean Brock knows Charleston. It's where he attended university and took his first chef job at the famous [Peninsula Grill](#). After working in Richmond and Nashville, he returned to South Carolina and got in touch with his roots. Literally: He began growing nearly extinct pre-Civil War crops, such as "Jimmy Red" corn and rice peas, at Wadmalaw Island, as well as farm-raising pigs himself. His restaurant Husk serves creative updates to Southern cooking ([76 Queen St.](#); [843-577-2500](#); [huskrestaurant.com](#)), and is a mainstay on best-of lists. Brock is also chef/partner at McCrady's ([2 Unity Alley](#); [843-577-0025](#); [mccradysrestaurant.com](#)), and tries his hand at Mexican cuisine with Minero ([153B East Bay St.](#); [843-789-2241](#); [minerorestaurant.com](#)). A serial James Beard Award finalist for "Outstanding Chef," Brock won the prize for "Best Chef Southeast" in 2010 and, more recently, his cookbook, *Heritage*, received the foundation's book award for "American Cooking" in 2015. Here,

he divulges his top picks for Charleston dining (from soul joints food to jacket-required restaurants), the best hotel in town, as well as the best scenic walks to take in order to work off all that Lowcountry decadence.

What neighborhood do you live in and how long have you lived there? I have lived west of the Ashley River for more than 13 years now. I love that area of town, and it's been great to watch it grow over the years. My favorite place to eat over there is the Glass Onion ([1219 Savannah Hwy.](#); [843-225-1717](#); [ilovetheglassonion.com](#)). I head straight for that restaurant when I come back from long trips. My Mom is crazy about that restaurant as well.

Where do you put up friends visiting town? I love sending people to Charleston Place ([205 Meeting St.](#); [843-722-4900](#); [belmond.com](#)). It's the kind of grand hotel that is often times associated with Charleston. The Charleston Grill is over the top delicious and has the most incredible host, Mickey Bakst ([224 King St.](#); [843-577-4522](#); [charlestongrill.com](#)). The location of this hotel allows you to walk to any of the great restaurants downtown. Plus my favorite restaurant, FIG ([232 Meeting St.](#); [843-805-5900](#); [eatatfig.com](#)), is right across the street!

Where is the best place to find your hometown's signature dish? I consider shrimp and grits to be the signature dish of Charleston. That can certainly be argued by many and is a great source of debate. If you have never had shrimp and grits and want to have experience it in its purest form, make a bee-line to Hominy Grill. That's my favorite. It's a classic version inspired by the great chef Bill Neal. ([207 Rutledge Ave.](#); [843-937-0930](#); [hominygrill.com](#))

What is your favorite restaurant to take visitors? Martha Lou's is my favorite place to take people as soon as they land. It sets the tone for the trip. The food there is the true definition of soul food.

Watching people eat that fried chicken and those lima beans for the first time is priceless. It's a type of cooking that we all strive for—a plate of food that feels like a great big hug. That's the best way to welcome people to Charleston. (1068 Morrison Dr.; 843-577-9583; marthalouskitchen.com)

Where can you find the best cocktails? Beer list? Wine list? I adore the cocktails at the Gin Joint (182 E. Bay St.; 843-577-6111; theginjoint.com). I seek out the best cocktails in every city I visit throughout the world, and the concoctions at the Gin Joint rival any place I've ever been. As far as beer goes, I am an enormous fan of Revelry (10 Conroy St.; 843-203-6194; revelrybrewingco.com). The thought, care, and passion that goes into that beer is completely insane, and you taste it with every drink. I have to be honest, the wine list that Cappie Peete oversees at McCrady's is my absolute favorite (2 Unity Alley; 843-577-0025; mccradysrestaurant.com). Every time I try a new wine from that list I can't stop thinking about it for days. There are lots of organic and biodynamic options, which is all I drink.



Where would you choose to splurge on a night out? Charleston is the perfect town for splurging – it's always been that kind of town. I would be hard pressed to pick a favorite because there are so many. If I were backed in the corner, I would have to choose Charleston Grill. I would devour all of the truffles, foie gras, and caviar they would feed me. The dining room and service there is what you think of when you have the desire to celebrate and wind down.

What is your go-to after-hours bar? I've been a patron of The Griffon pub since I was 21 years old. When I walk through those doors every single ounce of anxiety disappears. It's not easy to create or build a place like that. It just sort of has to happen. The Griffon is a bar that is most often filled with disgruntled line cooks and angry servers. But no one brings that into the Griffon—it's our sanctuary. It's where we go to shut our brains off and laugh about silly things before we wake up the next day and get back to reality. (18 Vendue Range; 843-723-1700; griffoncharleston.com)

What's the best way to spend a Saturday afternoon in town? I am in love with a restaurant called Nana's Seafood and Soul (176 Line St.; 843-937-0002). A cup of she-crab soup, some garlic shrimp and deviled crabs. It's the perfect Saturday afternoon meal. Then I like to wander around with my camera and shoot the amazing architecture of Charleston. The natural light and colorful streets make for some gorgeous photos.

Where do you go for the perfect cup of coffee? I love Black Tap for the perfect cup. I love how it's tucked away in a neighborhood that hasn't been taken over by restaurant and bars. The service is the friendliest and it's a very peaceful place to read *the New York Times* and prepare for the day. (70 Beaufain St.; 843-793-4402; blacktapcoffee.com)

What's your favorite view in town (that tourists might not know about)? If you want to see the untouched beauty of the lowcountry, just outside the peninsula, head to Wadmalaw Island. The hidden waterway and canopies of Live Oaks is breathtaking and the perfect place for a picnic lunch.





What's your favorite path or trail to follow on a walk? I love heading out to Sullivan's Island and taking a peaceful and quiet walk along the beach. It's just far enough out of the city to feel like you are on vacation.

What's your favorite shop or boutique? Every single time I walk by Shop Curiosity I stop and see if they are open. Courtney keeps weird hours at the store because she is constantly driving around picking. Every time I walk in there I'm like a kid in a candy store. I am obsessed with all those old service pieces from old hotels, etc. A lot of the plate ware and glasses at McCrady's bar come from there. My tool bain is filled with antique spoons from this amazing shop. (56 Queen St.; 843-647-7763; curiosityvintage.myshopify.com)

What's the ultimate souvenir from your town—something you can only get there? The best souvenir to bring back from Charleston is an antique rice spoon. The history behind rice in Charleston is long and complicated, but rice culture is the biggest inspiration for our cuisine. Something as simple as a spoon can carry a lot of different stories and lessons of a hard fought past.

What's the best-kept local secret? Well, if I were to tell you then it wouldn't be a secret anymore. So I'll tell you about my old secret place, now that more and more people have discovered it outside of the Charleston community. It's called Hannibal's Kitchen. It's right behind the old Johnson and Wales where I attended culinary school. It's the only soul food restaurant that has a bar and serves ice cold beer with its umami packed soul food. A dream come true for me. Two words, CRAB RICE. I used to sneak over there between classes and chug Budweiser and shove my face with that crab rice. It was one of my earliest tastes of true Gullah cooking. (16 Blake St.; 843-722-2256)

*In our **Hometown Guides** series, we're seeking the best restaurants, bars, vistas, and things to do in a given place from the people who know best—the artists, designers, chefs, and store-owners who live there. [See more Hometown Guides »](#)*

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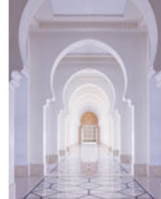
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