Southern Style: A Beginner's Charleston Guide

by Lynn yesterday - last edited yesterday

Situated in South Carolina's bucolic Lowcountry, the Charleston area is a veritable living museum, thanks to pretty, preserved antebellum public buildings, mansions and plantations, lamp-lit cobblestone streets, the restored Historic Charleston City Market, and renowned restaurants serving farm- and sea-to-table southern cuisine the way it was prepared in the Lowcountry centuries earlier.

Carriage tour through the charming residential streets of Charleston, South Carolina © ExploreCharleston.com

Originally settled by British colonists as "Charles Town" in the 1670s, the area that is now Charleston quickly grew into a busy seaport, with many wharves along East Bay Street – which is now lined with award-winning restaurants. Ships bearing deer skins, rice, indigo, and cotton sailed for England and they returned with European staples and luxury items to give the growing town a cosmopolitan air it still retains today. Many places of worship were also built, earning Charleston the nickname "The Holy City." Today, Charleston's rich 300-year history is still very much in evidence as one of America's most beautifully preserved architectural and historical treasures.
Museums, historic houses, plantations, and restaurants take centre stage in Charleston today. Depending on your interests, museum possibilities have to include: the Charleston Museum; the Gibbes Museum (specialising in southern art and the Charleston Renaissance period); historic Patriot's Point and the USS Yorktown (a decommissioned aircraft carrier that's now a floating museum with vintage aircraft lining the flight deck); the world-class South Carolina Aquarium right on the Cooper River; and the Civil War's Fort Sumter National Monument—reached by tour boat.

Though there are many possibilities open to the public, two of Charleston's best historic houses (Aiken Rhett and Nathaniel Russell houses) can be visited through the Historic Charleston Foundation. And don't miss the Foundation's two great shops at 108 Meeting Street and in the Historic Charleston City Market, which is also the place to buy famed sweetgrass baskets.
Finally, the many plantations surrounding Charleston are truly living museums and many locals will tell those new to Charleston that Middleton Place provides the perfect introduction to Lowcountry plantation life. This is thanks to working gardens, fields, and stately yards, the House Museum, a restaurant serving typical plantation fare (think she crab soup and shrimp and grits), and even modern accommodations at The Inn at Middleton Place for those who want to live like a plantation owner for the night.

Charleston has also made modern history by becoming one of America’s premier dining destinations. For chef-driven restaurants that feature the bounty of nearby farms and waters make sure to stop by: Slightly North of Broad (SNOB to locals); Charleston Grill; Peninsula Grill; McCrady’s; Husk; FIG (Food is Good); Circa 1886; The Macintosh; and Magnolias. Yep, Charleston first-timers should plan on staying several nights and making many lunch and dinner
reservations in advance!

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Have you visited charming Charleston? What did you make of its unique southern style? Share your experiences with us in the comments below.

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