



Charleston after dark

When the sun goes down, the party begins

Charleston, South Carolina, can be downright steamy this time of the year, but things really heat up when the sun goes down. After a long day of roaming the cobblestone streets of this charming waterfront city with its majestic antebellum mansions and iconic fountains, you may be tempted to turn in early, but resist the urge. You don't want to miss out on the vibrant nightlife.

Here are a few hot spots that are worth missing your beauty sleep.

Bourbon N' Bubbles

Kick off the evening with an aperitif at Bourbon n' Bubbles, the swanky new bar that opened on King Street last December. Like Charleston itself, it's gracious and refined, but still a heck of a good time.

<https://www.ajc.com/travel/charleston-after-dark/P1Q1LxyVC5J6BxVUUEh9KK/>

A semi-circular bar is a hub for the glitzy crowd — the place to see and be seen. Those who prefer a quiet drink out of the spotlight can imbibe at the low-key bar in an adjoining room. Plush velvet banquettes, antique mirrors and whimsical light fixtures that, with a little imagination, look like oversized Champagne bubbles, comprise a seductive, slightly retro mise en scene that entices guests to linger.

What makes the place special is the offering of select spirits not easy to come by elsewhere in Charleston. For instance, true bourbon connoisseurs can get a pour of the elusive 23-year-old Pappy Van Winkle, one of the rarest bourbons in the world for a price tag to match. The cost is \$100 per ounce.

If you're bonkers for bubbly, order the Around the World Sparkling Flight that includes a trio of effervescent delights: Stellina di Notte prosecco, Schramsberg Mirabelle rosé and Taittinger champagne.

To pop the cork on a special occasion, there's an impressive selection of rare and high-end champagnes, especially for partiers with a sky-is-the-limit budget. A cool \$1,400 will get you a bottle of Salon Blanc de Blancs 2007 Le Mesnil, the legendary champagne produced only in exceptional years.

But you don't need deep pockets to enjoy a drink here. There are plenty of moderately priced beverages on the menu.

Whatever you're drinking, accompany it with a small plate of duck confit spring rolls or a tuna poke tostada.

570 King St., Charleston, South Carolina. 854-429-1011, www.bourbonnbubbles.com

Prohibition

There are so many "secret" speakeasies around the country, the concept has somewhat lost its mystery, but Prohibition is no ordinary 1920s-style establishment. How many F. Scott and Zelda wannabes can say they've danced the Charleston in Charleston, the city where the scandalous 1920s dance craze was born? If you don't know the moves, channel the devil-may-care zeitgeist of the Jazz Age and pop in for a Sunday night lesson.

You'll learn other dances, too. A regular crowd of local swing dancers takes to the floor weekly to show off their fancy footwork, but newbies are always welcome.

If you arrive without a partner, you'll likely find one in this age-diverse crowd.

“You can have a 22-year-old dancing next to a 70-year-old couple,” General Manager Zach Siders said. “The cool thing is, the dance floor is not that big, so they get to know each other and become friends.”

Most of the dancing takes place on weekends, but there’s live music every night.

When it’s time for a break, order a Warthog, a gin-based cocktail garnished with a torched rosemary sprig that emits a woodsy aroma as the finishing touch.

Prohibition is also a full-service, farm-to-table restaurant, so come hungry. The grass-fed, beef tartare is a customer favorite, not only because of the perfect blend of toothsome, savory flavors, but the spectacular presentation. The French classic is served on a plate topped with a glass, cedar wood smoke-filled cloche. When removed, the smoke disperses in a fragrant cloud.

547 King St., Charleston, South Carolina. 843-793-2964, www.prohibitioncharleston.com

Victor Social Club

“Don’t bother with churches, government buildings or city squares. If you want to know a culture, spend a night at its bars.”

Ernest Hemingway said that, and if the Nobel Prize-winning writer were alive today, he may be surprised that he has a role in Charleston’s drinking culture.

Victor Social Club, housed in a historic building in Hudson Alley, is an Ernest Hemingway-themed bar plastered with art that pays homage to the author’s many big-game fishing adventures. A painting of his beloved fishing boat, Pilar, has pride of place above the bar.

Unlike Hemingway, the lounge doesn’t ooze hyper-masculinity but rather a cool, mature elegance reminiscent of the Hotel Saratoga in Havana, Cuba, the city the novelist called home for two decades. Granted, the tufted, nail head-edged sofas do look as though they would fit in at an old-school gentlemen’s club, which Victor’s was back in the day, but seated on them are imbibers of both sexes, enjoying cocktails with names like Islands in the Stream and Midnight in Paris.

To spice up the night, try the Hemingway Heat, a palate-zinging drink made with piquant tequila and garnished with a jalapeño pepper slice.

39-F John St., Charleston, South Carolina. 843-203-3001, www.holycityhospitality.com/victor-social-club

Vendue Rooftop Bar

Catch a radiant sunset at The Rooftop, the laid-back bar atop The Vendue, touted as Charleston's art hotel. As the sun slides below the steeple-punctured skyline that gives Charleston the moniker "The Holy City," tourists and locals alike snap Instagrammable shots of the glowing orange and pink horizon.

Beer lovers appreciate the selection of local brews, some with whimsical names like Holy City Pluff Mud Porter, a summer favorite. "Pluff mud" refers to the malodorous mud indigenous to Lowcountry marshes, but the nose on this medium-bodied brew is mild and malty. Those with daring palates go for the Westbrook White Thai. Inspired by the flavors of Southeast Asia, this beer is infused with the bold tang of lemongrass and ginger.

For some, nothing is more refreshing on a sultry summer evening than a cocktail. Servers hustle to keep up with demand for strawberry basil lemonade made with Cathead honeysuckle vodka.

19 Vendue Range, Charleston, South Carolina. 843-577-7970, www.thevendue.com

IF YOU GO

Where to Stay

Hotel Bella Grace. A new centrally located boutique hotel. Rooms \$211-\$469. 117 Calhoun St., Charleston, South Carolina. 843-990-7500, www.hotelbellagrace.com

HarbourView Inn. A waterfront hotel in the heart of historic Charleston. Rooms \$219-\$234. 2 Vendue Range, Charleston, South Carolina. 843-853-8439, www.harbourviewcharleston.com

Where to Eat

Fig. An upscale bistro that offers elevated takes on Southern classics. Entrees \$29-\$46. 232 Meeting St., Charleston, South Carolina. 843-805-5900, www.eatatfig.com