Weekend Getaway Idea: Charleston, South Carolina

Written By Stephanie Spear | May 14, 2024

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It seems like everyone is visiting Charleston, South Carolina these days. For a bachelorette party, a babymoon, or even a quick weekend getaway, this charming city has a lot for visitors. *The Hoboken Girl* recently went to Charleston to see what the hype was all about. The fuss is well-deserved, as there is something for every type of visitor to this hip, modern spot with historical roots. While Charleston is one of the oldest cities in the United States, its history coexists with great restaurants, fun shopping, thought-provoking museums, and more. Oh, and it's stunningly beautiful, with cobblestone streets, grand architecture, and incredible gardens. **Read on for a list of things to do in Charleston, South Carolina.**

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About Charleston

Charleston, South Carolina is known as the Holy City for the literally hundreds of churches whose spires make up this town's skyline. But to call it the Eternal City would not be far off, either, because like Rome, Charleston has seen its fair share of war and history. Like Rome, it's a beautiful city with grand architecture and cobblestone streets, situated on a river. Charleston was founded in 1670 and is the oldest city in South Carolina.

^ *The College of Charleston*

In its early days, Charleston's role as a port city made it a nexus for trading, making South Carolina one of the wealthiest of the original 13 colonies. It also made Charleston a central location for the slave trade: over 40% of all slaves passed through the city. Racial tensions have been a perpetual undercurrent in the community, and many will recall the 2015 massacre at Mother Emmanuel Church, where a white man shot and killed nine parishioners of the black church. In 2018, the Charleston City Council passed a resolution formally apologizing for the city's role in the slave trade.

Charleston has played a long role in America's military history. It was a valuable location during the Civil War, and several of the original battlements are visible and visit-able, including Fort Sumter. One of the first submarines, the H.L. Hunley, was used in the Civil War and it can be seen at its resting place in North Charleston. The Citadel is a public military academy founded in 1842 that has been at various times a fort, an arsenal, and a garrison for federal troops. Now, it is a college and graduate school. Joint Base Charleston was founded in 2010 after merging Charleston Air Force Base and Naval Weapon Station Charleston. There is also a Coast Guard base in Charleston.

Charleston's location in the Lowcountry means it is a popular destination for lovers of flora and fauna. The marshland ecosystem attracts birds and other wildlife unique to the region. Modern Lowcountry explorers can go fishing, take a boat tour, or take a guided kayak or paddleboard tour of the marshlands to spy on different kinds of critters, including dolphins. Many gardens in the region attract visitors from around the world. The Garden Club of Charleston's annual Home and Garden Tour always sells out.

Read More*: *A Weekend Getaway Guide to Hudson, NY

The Lowcountry is also the home of the Gullah Geechee people, whose cultural influence on the region can't be underestimated. The Gullah Geechee are the descendants of enslaved people in the Carolinas. Many foods that we consider to be Southern classics are actually from the Gullah: peanut soup, fried okra, and benne seed wafers, for example. The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor was established in 2006, and this four-state region features dozens of sites featuring Gullah heritage, with several located in and around Charleston.

The Lowcountry has inspired artists of all media for decades. There are dozens of books and movies set in and around Charleston. The blue, green, and brown tones of the marshland inspire painters and potters whose works are available to view or purchase throughout galleries in Charleston. Even in its early days, Charleston was an art hot spot because of the wealthy residents. One of the most famous paintings of George Washington is located in Charleston, as it was commissioned by the city as a gift for the visiting General. The city's notable architecture and preserved historic homes are a tribute to the town's emphasis on decorative arts: the early wealth of the community meant that Charleston residents were often on the cutting edge of trends.

Charleston's rich and varied past and present means that there's an itinerary for any kind of visitor: the history buff, the shopaholic, the art connoisseur, the film snob, the bookworm, and the outdoorsy will all find plenty to do. Perhaps the best part, in addition to the variety of attractions, is how easy it is to access each one. Downtown Charleston is a compact area, completely walkable, and one can go from spot to spot in just a few minutes. Dozens of walking tours organized by theme are available, including ghost tours. The further afield attractions, such as plantations, gardens, or some museums, are less than an hour from the downtown area.

The city plays host to festivals regularly, from jazz music to sculpture to Lowcountry cuisine. And the cuisine, for many, is worth a visit on its own. Charleston has been recognized as a leading food city, and the abundant choices for 'where should we eat?' make it clear that it's for good reason.

Charleston is served by Charleston International Airport (CHS) which has many flights daily to and from Newark airport. The non-stop flight is about two hours. There is an Amtrak station in Charleston, which is about a 13-hour journey from Newark Penn Station.

Where to Stay

The Jasmine House | 64 Hasell Street

This B&B is a beautiful, history-filled Greek Revival mansion that boasts large, clean rooms with beautiful decor. The inn is full of character, and the location is perfect for a quick weekend getaway — everything is within walking distance. A basic continental breakfast is included with your stay.

John Rutledge House Inn | 116 Broad Street

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Charleston, South Carolina

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This noteworthy Charleston B&B, named after one of the 55 signers of the U.S. Constitution, John Rutledge, is more than your average bed and brekky. It's actually Rutledge's home, constructed in 1763 — and remodeled and repurposed as an inn in 1989. If the walls inside could talk, they'd tell you that President George Washington sipped tea here, President Taft hung out here, and the first-ever batch of She-Crab Soup was made at this Broad Street address. But besides all that, it's a homey, clean environment within walking distance from everything (not to mention totally Insta-worthy with a tiled sidewalk out front).

The Restoration Hotel | 75 Wentworth Street

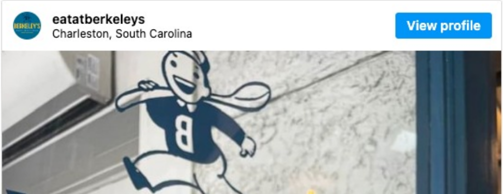
A personal favorite (but definitely more of a splurge), this five-building mini-hotel features modernized-yet-historical rooms. The vibe: a stunningly luxurious spot to retreat to while being able to step outside for shopping and hanging in the Southern city. Besides the combo of "Old World" Southern charm mixed with new, luxe ambiance (think rooms with stainless steel appliances and leather headboards with exposed brick and private terraces), the hotel has partnered with Martone to create a bike-share program for all the guests. So, it's an eco-friendly yet quaint way to get around town.

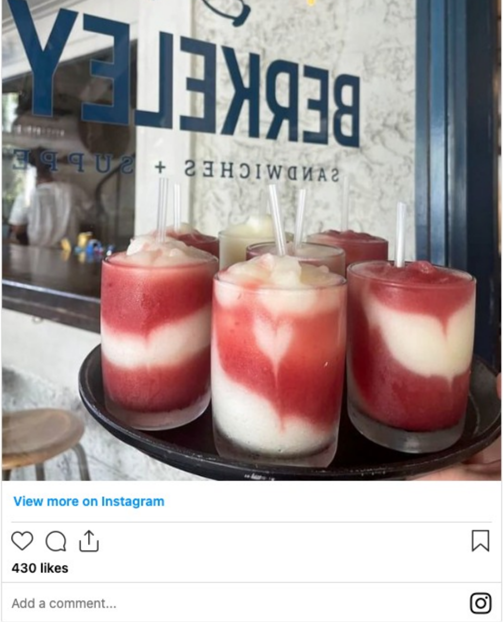
The Charleston Place | 205 Meeting Street

If you're an avid traveler, then you know that any Belmond Hotel is top-tier. In Charleston, you can expect a luxury spa-meets-hotel in the heart of downtown — right near all of the action. It's pretty snazzy, but totally worth it if you're into a splurge for your weekend away.

Where to Eat

Berkeley's | 624 1/2 Rutledge Avenue





The premise of Berkeley’s is simple: keep it simple, and do it well. The menu has ‘sandwiches and suppers, wine and beer, friendly faces,’ and all of those are available in spade. The big patio and frose machines (Pinot Freezio is one of the options) behind the bar add a laid-back element to this quietly elegant spot. Don’t be deceived by its simplicity, though, the sandwiches and suppers available are truly remarkable.

Imagine the best possible version of your favorite comfort meal like a hanger steak or a French Dip sandwich, and then order it at Berkeley's. ***HG* pro tip:** leave some room for homemade ice cream for dessert.

Bubbie's Cookies + Treats | 370 King Street, Charleston + 405 West Coleman Boulevard, Mount Pleasant

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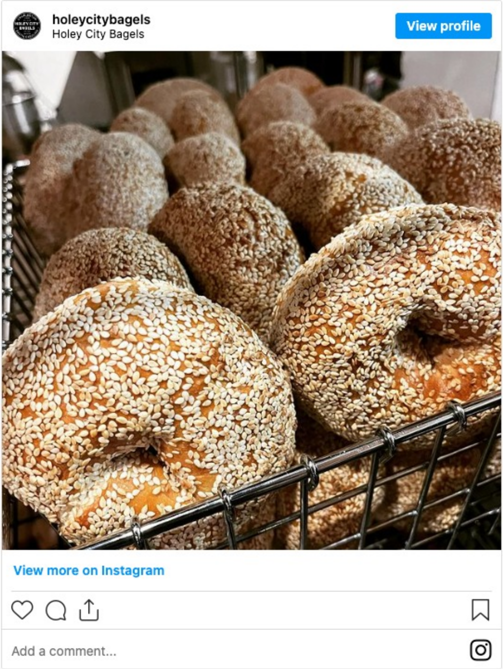
Anyone who's had a Bubbie or been near one knows that like their hugs, their treats are unmissable. Bubbie is a Yiddish word for grandmother, and everyone who visits this treat shop can experience that kind of love. The Bubbie's team makes over 80 flavors of cookies baked daily, and they're all kosher. Gluten-free and vegan options are included. But the sweetness doesn't stop there, as Bubbie's also has over a dozen flavors of ice cream rotating throughout the season. If that wasn't decadent enough, patrons can order custom-made ice cream sandwiches, opening up a seemingly endless combination of sweetness.

Dap's Breakfast + Imbibe | 280 Ashley Avenue

ONE WAY
DO NOT ENTER
280A
BREAKFAST
IMBIBE COFFEE PARTY
BREAKFAST
IMBIBE COFFEE PARTY

Weird name, great food, and awesome vibes. This neighborhood spot with a huge, shaded patio takes the luncheonette concept and turns it up a notch, with classic dishes and modern takes on its brunch-all-day menu. Think: pancakes made with Fruity Pebbles cereal-infused batter; a ham and cheese sandwich made with brie; and a breakfast banh mi. Seasonal flavors rotate through the coffee and cocktail menus, like pineapple mimosas or house-made orange chai syrup.

Holey City Bagels | 43 Cannon Street



It takes chutzpah to include a bagel spot in an article intended for New Jersey audiences, and *The Hoboken Girl* will head off reader skepticism here. Holey City Bagels was founded by a New Jersey ex-pat who couldn't find a decent bagel in Charleston, so he made his own. It's the classic tale of a homesick Northerner experimenting in his kitchen, then branching out to a stand at the farmers market, upgrading to an Airstream trailer, and finally opening a cafe. In addition to the incredible variety of bagels and spreads, sandwich options abound, including the one breakfast sandwich to rule them all: Taylor Ham, egg, and cheese on a bagel. ***HG* pro tip:** order online in advance to skip the line.

Magnolias | 185 East Bay Street

185
Magnolias
Uptown
Down South
LUNCH & DINNER

Over time, some restaurants become so synonymous with the cuisine served that it's almost a shorthand. Starbucks for coffee, Five Guys for a burger, and here in Charleston, Magnolias has become shorthand for classic yet elevated Southern cuisine. The restaurant is located in an old rowhome on East Bay Street, where large windows overlooking the street let in natural light over the dark wooden bar. Magnolias opened in 1990 and was something of a pioneer of the times, serving Southern classic dishes in an upscale environment. Could a humble dish like fried chicken with mashed potatoes and creamed corn make sense in a fine dining setting? The restaurant's longevity and full reservation books have proved the point.

Miller's All Day | 120 King Street

PRESCRIPTIONS

This charming, retro-styled spot has taken brunch to the next level. Miller's delectable menu is at the core of its offerings, and the coffee bar, bakery, and stocked bar, all featuring seasonal specials, make this a next-level experience. Classic dishes like waffles and corned beef hash are served alongside items like deviled crab fritters. The bar is where the team's creativity really shines, with clever concoctions like the Chai Greyhound (Cannon chai vodka, grapefruit, ginger, + cinnamon) and the Mad Aviation (gin, creme de violet, orgeat, luxardo, + lemon). With gluten-free options available and frose on tap daily, it's hard to peel yourself away from Miller's to keep exploring the rest of Charleston.

Places to Go Out/Have Cocktails

Market Pavillion Rooftop Bar | 225 East Bay Street

A night in Charleston — given its foodie scene — will definitely include great drinks, but if it's views you're looking for, look no further than the Market Pavillion Rooftop. Complete with signature cocktails, spectacular city views, and a cascading pool, this nightlife hotspot is located at the corner of East Bay and South Market — aka it's the perfect spot to start of your night pre- or post-dinner.

Prohibition | 547 King Street

Your dinner at Prohibition will most likely be serenaded by some live jazz, and when it comes to the ambiance — it's ideal for a cozy date or a group of friends. Executive Chef Greg Garrison really outdid himself with this one, and the food is some of the best in Charleston, hands down. The drinks are just as good as the food, with everything from margaritas to negronis.

There are tons more restaurants and bars — but with these in mind, we'll leave you to explore and wander on your own! And for a full list of fun bars, click here.

Where to Shop

Candlefish | 270 King Street

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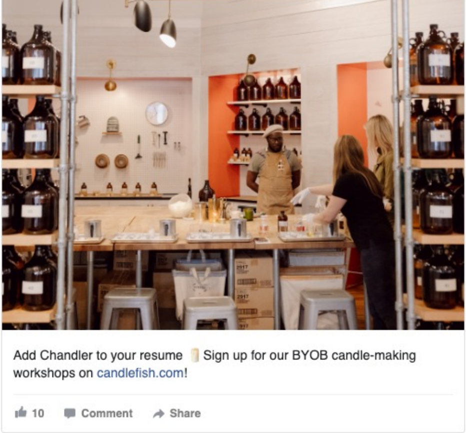

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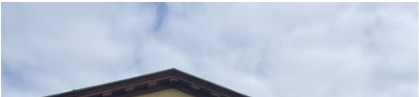
This chic shop calls itself a Library because of how its selection of scents is organized. At Candlefish, in addition to the dozens of scents available ranging from clean to smoky, sweet to savory, guests can make custom scents exactly to their preference. The bright and airy shop is welcoming and a serene rest stop from busy King Street.

Charleston City Market | 188 Meeting Street



This four-block-long market is as much a part of Charleston's history as any of the grand buildings and stately homes in town. It's been in operation since its founding in 1807, and is a must-see for any visitor. The current, brick-walled structure was built in 2011, a far cry from the original wooden sheds that vendors rented by the week. While the outward appearance of the market has changed many times, the focus on local vendors is the same. Here visitors can find handmade art, jewelry, ceramics, and more. One of the most iconic items available at the market are the beautiful hand-made sweetgrass baskets, which are a relic of the Gullah Geechee culture. The 'basket ladies' are often working on projects while at the booths, and it's incredible to see these artisans at work.

HART | 650 King Street

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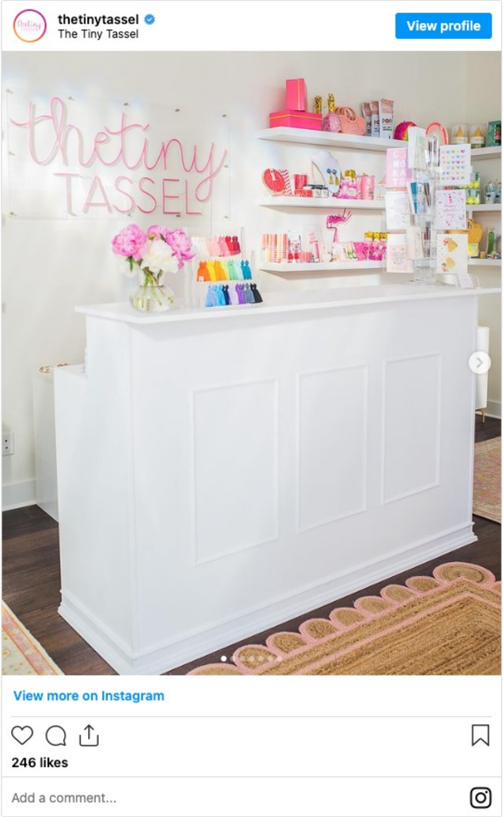
This woman-owned jewelry brand was founded by Charleston native Hart Hagerty in 2016. HART's offerings are fun, eclectic, and elegant. From customized charm bracelets and necklaces to Mama and Me sets, the possibilities are endless. Shoppers can browse in-store or make an appointment for a more personalized experience. The store also hosts private events.

The Tiny Tassel | 46 Spring Street Unit B



This charming shop is the brainchild of founder Mimi Striplin, who founded the brand with an online shop in 2015 and moved into the brick-and-mortar space in 2021. The Tiny Tassel specializes in all things color — headbands, scarves, and earrings, among other things. The handmade items are meant to evoke joy for the wearer. Mimi works with other local makers so there's always something new featured in-store.

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What to Do