

What to Do In Charleston, South Carolina

[Charleston](#) is much more than an ordinary beach town. This cultural oasis possesses a rich coastal class and varies in landscape from its marshes on [Shem Creek](#) to the illustrious shores of Folly Beach. Travel inward towards King or George streets to find some of the best homemade cuisine the Southeastern [United States](#) have to offer. What's more is that Charleston is awash in antebellum antiquity and significant historical monuments.

When visiting the Charleston Historic District, you have to walk down East Bay Street and veer toward the waterfront for a look at that iconic [Pineapple Fountain](#) that adorns many visitors' Instagram feeds. Then there's Rainbow Row, those beautiful pastel houses that line East Bay Street right before the Battery. That's where you can walk around and look out toward [Fort Sumter](#). The historic site is located in Charleston Harbor and was opened as a tourist attraction in 1948. Famous for sustaining the first shots of the [war](#) (by cannon fire), the fortification is a must-see for visitors. A two-hour and 15-minute tour, complete with narrated boat rides and walking portions, is offered by this dual national and [state park](#). Tours to that [important point in American History](#) can be arranged from Liberty Square in Downtown Charleston and Mount Pleasant.

Waterfront Park

Stretching 12 acres alongside the Cooper River, [Waterfront Park](#) features a 1,250-foot pier that stretches out over [Charleston Harbor](#). You cannot afford to miss this picturesque attraction! Take a walk amid its dozens of pathways and witness the sights of nature – if you're lucky, you may spot a crane taking flight by the ocean's side. Its two large fountains are without a doubt the most iconic and decorative features of the park. Waterfront is also filled with spectacular views and a sea breeze that never fails to captivate its guests.

You may enjoy seeing some of Charleston's historic buildings like the [Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon](#), the churches that have stood tall for so long, and homes like the [Nathaniel Russell](#) or [Edmonston-Alston](#) houses.

King Street and Meeting Street are packed with enough shops and historic markers to fill any traveler's itinerary.

Charleston City Market

The [Charleston City Market](#) is located indoors, but don't let that fool you – the attraction has stall after stall, and it stretches for what would be nearly two blocks on the streets of the city. Its aggrandized selection is imposing. With local art, weaved baskets, antebellum apparel, candles, [jewelry](#), pottery, local artwork, and more, the market is alive with handicraft sales. This area is the perfect location to grab a souvenir and take in the cultural fibers of such a charming town. <https://www.thecharlestoncitymarket.com/>
Open Monday – Sunday, 9:30 am – 5:00 pm.

Night market hours: Open Thursday, Friday and Saturday 6:30 pm – 10:30 pm.

The Battery

This paved, public walk is covered with mainly antebellum homes and often steals the hearts of its visitors by way of charming pastel edifices and picket fences and gates. The scenic promenade features [Southern](#) mansions, old cannons, and archaic plaques denoting the historical significance of several different physical structures. Rich in history and fit with a spectacular view of Fort Sumter, the Battery is unquestionably one of downtown Charleston's most iconic settings.

South Carolina Aquarium

This spacious attraction is located on Charleston Harbor and serves as an ideal [family](#) attraction. Featuring hundreds of different sea animals – jellyfish, horseshoe crabs, loggerhead sea turtles, alligators, sharks – the versatile facility also houses birds and even snakes. The [aquarium](#) is never short of excitement, and its 'Touch Tank' allows patrons to stroke the spines of rays, crabs, and other marine animals. Its renowned salt marsh exhibit showcases stalwart features of the Charleston, [South Carolina](#) environment, giving guests an opportunity to appreciate the true sense of the city's natural surroundings.

Restaurant Recommendations

Halls Chophouse

Halls is a family owned upscale steakhouse located in the heart of Upper King Street. All the steaks come from Allen Brothers of Chicago which offers the highest quality grade of beef you can buy. The cuts of meat are aged in a climate controlled room with an ultra violet light. They are then rotated on a daily basis until the aging process is complete. This process creates a “bark” around the cut of meat that seals in the juices. The steaks are then cooked on a 1600 degree broiler, charring the meat and locking in the flavor. @ 434 King St

R Kitchen

R Kitchen is a unique restaurant where Ross Webb and his small team of assistant chefs whip up incredible meals. The atmosphere is very intimate, with guests seated around the kitchen, interacting with the chef while they are preparing the meal. The restaurant seats up to 16 guests in the kitchen or 20 on the covered patio, so you need to make reservations well in advance. The restaurant has two nightly seatings at 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm, offering a 5-course meal that emphasizes local, seasonal ingredients. @ 212 Rutledge Ave

167 Raw

167 Raw is part seafood market and part restaurant. They offer an assortment of fresh oysters, clams, fish and shrimp for purchase to go or you can stick around and try the legendary lobster roll or scallop Po Boy. The restaurant's chalkboard menu, which changes daily, lists the seafood specials and the daily selection of oysters and where they are from. Seating is limited, so arrive early or plan on waiting for a table. @ 289 East Bay St

Cru Cafe

Cru Cafe, located in a classic 18th century Charleston single-style home with a wraparound porch, offers traditional American comfort food. The seating arrangement is comfortable, and you can opt to sit indoors, on the patio, or on the terrace where you can enjoy the breeze. The restaurant has daily specials, a wine list tailored to the varied menu, and mouthwatering desserts. @ 18 Pinckney St

Lewis BBQ

John Lewis grew up in Texas and began learning how to prepare the perfect barbecue at age 18. He became a rising star, and his BBQ was voted the best in Austin by the local newspaper. Three years later he moved to Charleston to introduce the Holy City to Texas BBQ. Choose from cut-to-order brisket, house-made sausage, ribs, or super-moist turkey slices prepared in large custom-built smokers. @ 464 Nassau St

Trattoria Lucca

Trattoria Lucca, located on a quiet corner of downtown Charleston, serves up Italian cuisine inspired by the ancient Tuscan city of Lucca. The menu features Italian imported cheese and salami, handmade pasta, and the freshest seafood from the waters surrounding Charleston. The menu changes nightly depending on what local seafood and ingredients are available. @ 41 Bogard St

Stella's

Stella's specializes in Greek classic dishes like grilled halloumi, moussaka, keftedes, and much more. They also serve Sunday brunch and an extensive menu of shareable meze plates. Make sure to save room for house-made desserts, including baklava studded with chocolate, creamy rice pudding, and semolina custard wrapped in phyllo and anointed with cinnamon and lemon syrup. @ 114 St Philip St

Slightly North of Broad

Slightly North of Broad is an eclectic low country Bistro located in an 18th century warehouse. The chef utilizes ingredients from local farmers and fishermen to create irresistible Southern food. This highly awarded restaurant has an exposed kitchen and a casual atmosphere. The staff is expertly trained and the restaurant offers an extensive selection of wine. SNOB also offers a very inexpensive lunch menu. @ 192 E. Bay St

Magnolias

Magnolia's started a culinary renaissance when it opened in 1990 and remains a forerunner in upscale Southern cuisine. The Charleston restaurant, located at the site of the city's original Customs House (circa 1739), blends traditional ingredients and cooking techniques with modern flair and artful presentation. For a more wallet-friendly option, stop by for lunch when they offer plenty of Southern-styled soups, salads, and sandwiches. @185 E Bay St

Brown Dog Deli

Brown Dog Deli offers an assortment of deli sandwiches, wraps, salads, and burgers along with an entire menu of vegan and vegetarian options including a Black Bean Burger and a Portobello Philly. Some of the must-try items on the menu include the Reuben Dog, and the Duck Club made with apple-smoked duck breast. Dine inside this cozy hip deli or enjoy the relaxed outdoor seating area. @40 Broad St.

Eat Like a Local in Charleston *From Garden & Gun Magazine*

Burbage's Grocery

Open since 1946, this corner grocery is a long-time favorite of residents. Locals head here for a cold glass-bottle Coke and never leave without lunch (barbecue sandwich, anyone?). 157 Broad St.; 843-723-3231

Brown's Court Bakery

The classics—pillowy brioche, crusty baguettes, tangy sourdough boules—are well represented. But it's head baker David Schnell's creations such as Sriracha croissants, benne seed hamburger buns, and porter pretzel breads that you won't find at just any bakery. 199 St Philip St.; browns court.com

Chez Nous

With only five tables downstairs and nine up, Chez Nous builds on the success of co-owners Patrick and Fanny Panella's much-loved just-north-of-Broad wine bar, Bin 152, with adventurous French-focused fare. The menu changes daily, and, like the space, it's small: two appetizers, two entrées, and two desserts. 6 Payne Ct.; chez nouschs.com

Elliotborough Mini Bar

Though this out-of-the-way salon is too small for a full kitchen, locals know to stop by on Tuesday nights for the intimate weekly pop-up dinners, hosted by a rotating cast of in-town guest chefs. But near-nightly live music, a diverse wine list, and a cozy corner table are reasons enough to come any evening. 18 Percy St.; elliotboroughminibar.com

Gaulart & Maliclet

Both suits and slackers find a steady flow of French-pressed coffee and croissants at Gaulart & Maliclet, also called Fast & French. 98 Broad St.; fastandfrenchcharleston.com

Martha Lou's Kitchen

For more than twenty-five years, Martha Lou Gadsden has served lunch and dinner from this pink cinder-block hut by the railroad tracks. With eight dinner plates and twenty-six sides to choose from, there are plenty of tempting options, but the stewed cabbage with ham hock and red pepper makes you realize there's more to life than collards. 1068 Morrison Dr.; marthalouskitchen.com

Moe's Crosstown Tavern

Tucked away near Hampton Park, Moe's Crosstown is a beer and burger institution. A great spot for sports fans, including those who want to watch the game and those who want to hustle on the pool table in the back. 714 Rutledge Ave.; moescrosstowntavern.com

The Park Cafe

Good food made with fresh regional ingredients doesn't have to come with a fine-dining price tag. Let restaurateur Karalee Nielsen prove it to you at her full-service neighborhood café in Wagener Terrace. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the tucked-away eatery sits adjacent to Hampton Park. 730 Rutledge Ave.; theparkcafechs.com

Xiao Bao Biscuit

In the land of shrimp and grits, authentic Asian cuisine was pretty hard to come by until the husband-and-wife team Joshua Walker and Duolan Li began serving their down-home brand of pan-Asian comfort food. 224 Rutledge Ave.; xiaobaobiscuit.com

Neighborhoods to Know

South of Broad

This is the Charleston of postcards and guidebooks, the southern tip of the peninsula where stately historic homes with walled gardens line shady cobblestoned streets and church bells mark the hour. Residents refuel at [Burbage's Grocery](#) and [Gaulart & Maliclet](#), a tiny French bistro on Broad Street.

The French Quarter

Named for the French Huguenots who first settled here, this smaller neighborhood just north of Broad Street on the Cooper River side attracts art lovers with its plethora of galleries. When you've had your fill of paintings and photographs, grab a burger at chef Sean Brock's recently revamped flagship [McCrary's Tavern](#), followed by a local draft beer at the [Griffon](#) or a show at the [Dock Street Theatre](#), site of the first playhouse in the country.

Cannonborough/Elliottborough

Hemmed in on the south by Bee Street and on the north by Septima P. Clark Parkway (known to locals as the Crosstown), this emerging district includes an eclectic mix of restaurants (try [Xiao Bao Biscuit](#) and [Trattoria Lucca](#)), bars ([Elliottborough Mini Bar](#) and [Warehouse](#) are musts), and boutiques (such as [Mac & Murphy](#), a dreamy stationery shop).

MUST-DO

Seek Out Seafood

Surrounded by water on three sides, Charleston is flush with fresh seafood. Order stone crab by the claw at the [Wreck of the Richard & Charlene](#), tucked away on Shem Creek in Mount Pleasant; dig in to one of [Leon's](#) fried or grilled fish sandwiches; down a dozen local Caper's Blades oysters at [The Ordinary](#); head to [Bowens Island](#) for a plate of peel-and-eat shrimp; experience fried flounder done right at [Dave's Carry-Out](#). And what about those classic shrimp and grits? You can't do better than [Hominy Grill](#).

Walk. Walk. Walk.

Throw a pair of tennis shoes in your suitcase. The best way to see Charleston is on foot. Hike the [Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge](#) at sunset; get lost [South of Broad](#); stroll historic [Magnolia Cemetery](#) on the banks of the Cooper (tip: Go when the graveyard's abundant azaleas are in bloom); pack a picnic for an afternoon in the Olmsted brothers–designed [Hampton Park](#).

Island-Hop

There's a good chance that a trek to one of Charleston's barrier islands will be the highlight of your trip. Sink your teeth into a Poe's Tavern burger or brunch at the Obstinate Daughter before sunning on [Sullivan's Island](#); watch surfers at the Washout on [Folly Beach](#) (or book a lesson of your own), then relax with a beer at [Surf Bar](#); or, hop the Coastal Expeditions ferry to [Bulls Island](#) to see the Lowcountry in all its natural glory.