

South Carolina: Steeped in Living History

After you've explored
Charleston, don't stop there

By Rob & Wendy Lindsay

High Battery Seawall,
Charleston.



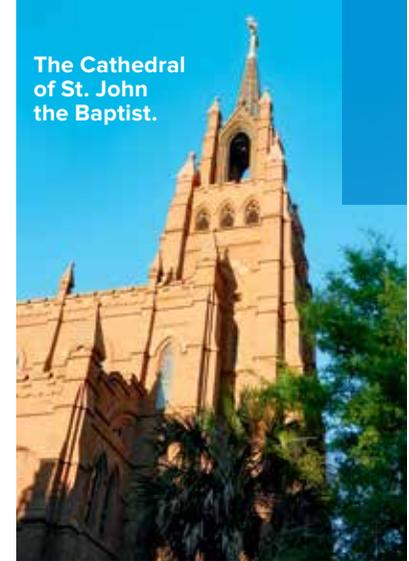
Saint Michael's Episcopal Church.



The William Roper House.



The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.



Charleston is often called South Carolina's most beautiful and historic treasure. The state's oldest city, this southern star has enjoyed the spotlight for more than 300 years.

The English founded Charles Towne—named for Charles II—on the Ashley River in 1670. A decade later, the settlement was moved to its present location, where the Ashley and Cooper rivers meet. During the plantation era, Charleston's sheltered bay, fed by two navigable rivers, made it one of the most important ports on the Eastern Seaboard, exporting cotton, rice, and indigo—and importing more slaves than any other North American port. Fort Sumter, guarding Charleston Harbor, was where the first shots of the Civil War were fired.

Wars, fires, earthquakes, and hurricanes have tried to wipe Charleston off the map, but the city—South Carolina's largest—resolutely remains. Today, in spite of it all, Charleston's historic district has 73 pre-Revolution buildings, 136 late-18th-century structures, and more than 600 edifices built in the 1840s. This is a southern city with grit and determination, as well as a reputation for genteel southern charm.



Mount Pleasant Memorial Waterfront Monument.

Waterfront Park.



Piazas and Haint Blue

A good place to begin exploring is the French Quarter, also known as the original town or the old downtown, originally a walled town on the waterfront area, though nothing of the walls remains.

Wander down the cobblestoned Chalmers Street and you'll come upon the Pink House, one of the oldest surviving structures in Charleston. Built in the early 18th century as a tavern, the Pink House is today an art gallery in one of the most historic locations in the United States. Nearby is another popular photo spot—the lovely Pineapple Fountain in Waterfront Park, a symbol of the city's hospitality.

Nowhere in the area is busier than the Charleston City Market on Market



Gullah woman weaving sweetgrass baskets at the City Market.



Chalmers Street.

Street. There's been a market on this spot since 1807. Once it was where locals bought fish, vegetables, and meat, but today it's a magnet for tourists, with more than 100 local artists and artisans selling their wares.

Among the usual array of crafts are some uniquely Charleston items. We found one artisan selling old local roof slates emblazoned with the images of historic buildings. Another artist had turned bricks obtained from the repair of historic buildings into works of art painted with vibrant local scenes. Meanwhile, working quietly away in a corner and at another spot outside, two Gullah women (descendants of enslaved Africans) were deftly weaving the traditional sweetgrass baskets for which the market is famous. One told us that her ancestors had brought these basket-making skills from West Africa and that they are part of her culture.



A Charleston Single House.

Near the market entrance, a young fellow was weaving "palm roses" from strips of palm fronds. According to his sign, these roses were given to a loved one going off to fight in the Civil War. A sign by the exit encouraged shoppers to return for the Night Markets on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, when live music adds to the fun all summer.

A great way to tour the old city



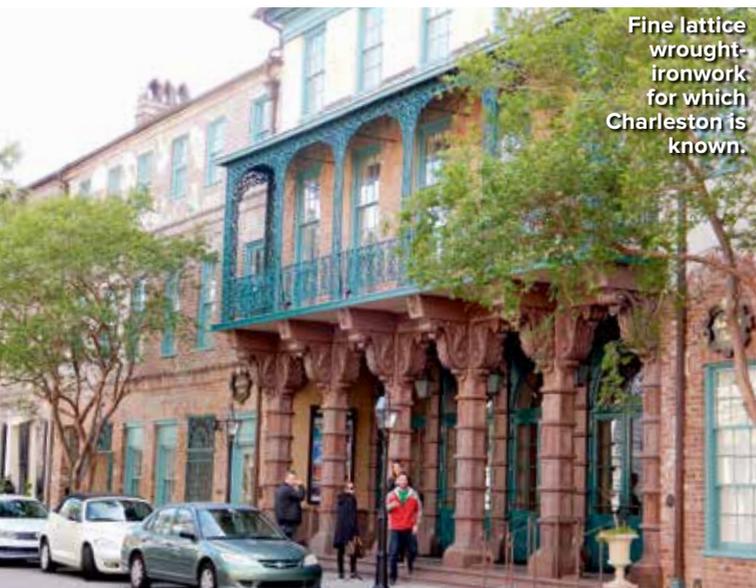
Rainbow Row.



Edmondston-Alston House, the Middleton family's "city house."



John Rutledge House Inn.



Fine lattice wrought-ironwork for which Charleston is known.



Pineapple, a symbol of hospitality.

As a pair of mules pulled our 16-person carriage, we learned about the distinctive Charleston Single House. Early Charleston was laid out in long, narrow lots, and houses were built perpendicular to the street, with the narrow side—only a window or two per storey—facing the street and the front of the house, with its long porch—known locally as a piazza—facing a side yard or garden. The piazza is often screened-in, and residents can sit out in relative privacy overlooking

their garden. Tradition has it that if the street-level piazza door is left open, visitors are welcome. These highly desirable historic homes today sell for millions. Another distinctive Charleston look comes from the magnificent decorative wrought iron gates and fences, their lacy black designs contrasting with the light-coloured buildings. Master blacksmith Philip Simmons turned wrought iron into an art form, and his custom-designed

is by carriage. There are many carriage companies to choose from, most departing from the area just a few steps from the market. We chose Palmetto Tours, the oldest carriage company in the city.

fences and especially gates were prized.

Rainbow Row, a cluster of 18 pastel-coloured row houses on East Bay Street, may well be the most photographed area of Charleston. Over time, what had been a region for merchant stores along the wharf had become a run-down area. In the 1920s, people began restoring the buildings, painting each in a different pastel colour. Rainbow Row is now the most popular image emblazoned on Charleston souvenirs. Some claim it is the longest cluster of Georgian row houses in the United States.

Another popular photo spot is Cabbage Row, a three-storey Revolutionary War-era tenement that was once home to as many as 10 African-American families. It was the inspiration for local author

Photo: Explore Charleston/Brennan Wesley.

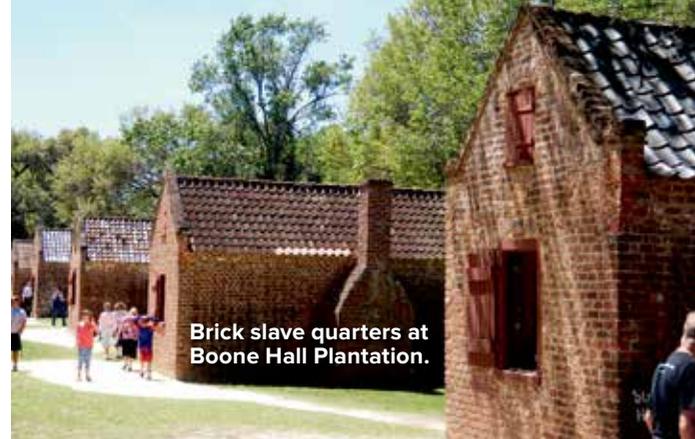
Photos: Lindsey Editorial.



Magnolia Plantation.



Drayton Hall.



Brick slave quarters at Boone Hall Plantation.



Great Hall, Boone Hall Plantation. Below right: Gullah storyteller, Boone Hall.



DuBose Heyward, who changed the name to Catfish Row in his novel *Porgy*, from which he and George Gershwin crafted the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

The carriage tour over, we continued exploring the city on foot. The Old Slave Mart Museum is a reminder of the shameful history of the slave trade. Display cases of manacles, whips, and leg irons vividly convey the horror.

At different stations, the push of a button activates the actual voices of former slaves recounting their lives.

Museum staff explained to us the term “Gullah,” which we’d heard often. African slaves in the Lowcountry (low-lying coastal South Carolina and Georgia) created a language and culture they called “Gullah” (the word is perhaps related to “Angola”) so they could communicate with one another, since they came from a variety of different African tribes and regions.

In addition to the handwoven Gullah sweetgrass baskets found in the market and upscale souvenir shops, the Gullah influence is evident everywhere you see “haint blue,” a soft shade of blue-green paint often found on the ceilings of piazzas around town. The colour was believed to repel evil spirits, or “haints”; it’s also supposed to keep wasps and spiders away. You can also taste Gullah culture—in the flavourful and often spicy Lowcountry cuisine for which Charleston is known.

You can learn more Gullah history on special Gullah walking tours in town.

Palatial Homes and Plantations

You often hear the phrase “South of Broad” in Charleston—the reference is to both a physical location and, more informally, the upscale part of town. You can glimpse the wealth of the former plantation era in the numerous mansions and grand houses scattered between Broad Street and the harbour.

The grande dame of the city’s great homes is the Victorian Calhoun Mansion, the largest private residence in all of Charleston, with 30 main rooms. A stunning example of Gilded Age decor, the building was clearly built to impress, with a soaring grand entry hall and a ballroom with a 45-foot ceiling. At one time a hotel, the mansion is now open for tours, with the previous owners’ amazing collection of priceless antiques and collectibles on display in the public rooms. You can tour the gardens for free, but it would be a shame to miss the house tour.

Some of the most palatial and historic homes in all of the southern United States lie along The Battery and East Bay Street. Two large white houses at the corner of East Bay and Atlantic may even remind you of the White House in Washington, D.C.. Many of these mansions were built as “city homes” by wealthy Charleston families who also owned plantations.

A short distance outside Charleston

are three plantations open to the public: Middleton Place, Magnolia Plantation, and Drayton Hall, all along Ashley River Road.

Established in the 1730s, the plantation at Middleton Place at one time grew rice, indigo, and cotton—with the help of a large slave workforce. The building that stands today is only one wing of the palatial great house that was burned to the ground during the Civil War.

A National Historic Landmark, the site is home to the oldest landscaped gardens in the United States. Work on the 65-acre (26.3-hectare) gardens began in 1741. The magnificent rolling terraces, garden rooms, and reflecting pools are popular sites for local weddings and photos. The vast sculpted grounds reminded us of country estates we had toured in England and France.

The stable-yard complex is like a fascinating craft-village, with artisans demonstrating old skills such as candle-making, spinning, weaving, blacksmithing, and tanning. In the nearby restaurant, don’t miss the excellent Lowcountry fare on a menu created by celebrated chef Edna Lewis.

Down the road is Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, founded in 1676, the ancestral home of the Drayton family. Historians consider the original plantation house and its original gardens to be the oldest in the Carolina colony, and both are on the National Register of Historic Places. Descendants of the Drayton family still reside on the renovated property and have maintained

the vast informal English garden famous for its azaleas and camellias. They also turned the former rice fields into a bird sanctuary that has attracted birders over the years, including John James Audubon.

Next door is Drayton Hall, which dates from 1738 and is the only original plantation house on the Ashley River to survive the Civil War intact—thanks to small-pox flags that scared away federal soldiers. Historians list it as the oldest unrestored plantation house in America still open to the public. The house is an example of Georgian Palladian architecture and has never had plumbing, water, electricity, or gas. The site’s African-American cemetery, dating from 1790, is among the oldest African-American cemeteries in the United States still in use. An extensive visitor’s centre is under construction and will add considerably to the experience in the years to come.

Northeast of Charleston, off the Cooper River in Mount Pleasant, is the most visited plantation of all. You may have seen Boone Hall Plantation without knowing it. In the opening scene of the 1985 TV miniseries *North and South*, a dashing young Patrick Swayze gallops up a long avenue of arching oaks; the scene was filmed at Boone Hall Plantation, where you can easily spend a whole day exploring. The Avenue of Oaks, originally planted in 1743, is the most photographed sight on the grounds and a lovely shady spot on a hot day.

Guided tours of the Great House relate the history of past owners. Most interesting to us was a Canadian couple, Thomas and Alexandra Stone, who bought the plantation in 1935. They demolished the modest original two-storey house and replaced it with the white-columned Colonial Revival mansion that stands today.

One of the oldest working plantations in the United States, Boone has been producing crops for more than

320 years. A narrated tractor-pulled-wagon tour takes visitors out through the fields to see the pecan groves, peach orchards, and “U-pick” crops that are very popular with local families.

As you drive down the Avenue of Oaks, you see a row of small brick buildings to one side. These were some of the plantation’s original slave quarters, built there both to display the plantation’s wealth (slave quarters usually being less substantial) and to advertise Boone bricks to visitors. It was common on plantations for slaves to work in the cotton fields in summer and make bricks in winter. Boone Hall helped shape the appearance of Charleston, for the dark-reddish-brown handmade bricks the site’s slave workers turned out were used in many of the city’s houses and public buildings

Photos: Lindsey Editorial.

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Formal Dining hall (circa 1840s) in Bratton family homestead.



Bratton family homestead (circa 1823).



Glencairn Garden, Rock Hill.



during the mid-1800s. Records show that in 1850, 85 slaves produced four million bricks.

Battle and Barbecue

A 25-minute drive from Boone Hall, on a point of land guarding the entrance to Charleston's natural harbour, is Fort Moultrie.

In June 1776, during the Revolutionary War, the fort, called Fort Sullivan and under the command of Colonel William Moultrie, was still under construction when nine British warships attacked. The temporary barricades of palmetto logs and sand simply absorbed the impact of the ships' fire, and some cannonballs even bounced off. The British left, defeated. It is in honour of this victory that South Carolina is known as The Palmetto State and its flag bears a palmetto tree.

But the British returned four years later and laid siege to Charleston. The rebels felt defeated and most of the uprisings scattered around the country were quickly put down—until Brattonsville, which is where we headed next.

The site of a battle that changed the course of American history, Brattonsville is located on the outskirts of Rock Hill, close to the state's northern border. Charleston is about 60 miles (100 kilometres) off Interstate 95—it's a destination, not an overnight stop on a Canadian snowbird's north-south route; we spent three days in the area

and still only skimmed the surface. Rock Hill, on the other hand, is right on Interstate 77, a major north-south route. You can stay overnight, have a good meal, and take time for a walk in a garden or a visit to a historic site and still have time to make your next stop.

In July 1780, a British force of roughly 130 cavalry led by Captain Christian Huck, a German-born Philadelphia Loyalist, arrived in the area. Huck had lost property to the rebels and been forced out of Pennsylvania, and he was bitter. He had orders to "push the rebels as far as you deem convenient," and he did so, bullying cruelly. On July 11, Huck and his men reached the home of Colonel William Bratton. Though her life was threatened, Bratton's wife refused to divulge his location. While Huck's cavalry camped overnight, a slave named Watt was sent to find Bratton, who returned with three militia regiments and surrounded the cavalry camp as dawn was breaking. The British were defeated in short order and Huck was shot and killed as he tried to ride away from the battle. The Battle of Huck's Defeat and subsequent victories in the area gave the Patriots a boost in morale and confidence that helped lead to the victory in Yorktown, Virginia, that ended the Revolutionary War.

Historic Brattonsville is today a 775-acre (314-hectare) living museum preserving the legacy of the Scots-Irish and African-Americans in the area.

You can tour 30 colonial structures, often manned by costumed interpreters, and see the buildings where the Mel Gibson movie *The Patriot* was filmed.

From there, we drove to Rock Hill—for barbecue. South Carolina is among those places (Virginia, Texas, Kansas City...) that claim to be the birthplace of barbecue, and among the state's many spots to get great barbecue, The Dixie Pig in Rock Hill is a standout that has been busy since opening in 2015. It's not much to look at from the outside, but the food is exceptional.

Co-owner Curtis Hines wanted us to have a taste of just about everything on his menu—chicken, ribs, four homemade sauces, baked beans with pulled pork, mac and cheese, black-eyed peas with collards, and much more. The kitchen team's hours of smoking, basting, and slow-roasting have resulted in the best pork ribs we have ever tasted. The experience was completed with classic blues music playing in the background. When we finally backed away, stuffed, our primary thought was, How soon can we return?

We discovered a few more special spots in Rock Hill. Legal Remedy Brewing appeals to the younger crowd with food and an extensive menu of craft beers boasting names like All Rise Session Pale Ale and Pro Bono Stout. By contrast, The Pump House offers a genteel setting overlooking the river, with fine dining. Our overnight



Curtis Hines, co-owner of The Dixie Pig.

If You Go:

Charleston is filled with tourists during the city's two high seasons: from March to June (blossom time) and from September to November. At those times, accommodations in the historic part of town are both hard to find and extremely expensive. We suggest booking well ahead or searching for a place on the outskirts of the city.

Delicious fried green tomatoes, Pump House Restaurant, Rock Hill.

stay at East Main Guest House B & B was a refreshing change from hotels and the breakfast was delicious.

The next morning, we toured beautiful Glencairn Garden. Set in a valley with a stream running through it, the 12-acre (5-hectare) garden was a sea of colour with dogwoods, wisteria, a few camellias and drifts of pink and white azaleas (there are more than 3,500 azalea bushes). The flower beds and shrubs have been artfully designed to display a different palette each season. Paved walking trails allow all ages to enjoy the peaceful setting in the heart of the city. Glencairn Garden is now permanently on our list as a place to stop and stretch our legs on the long drive home from Florida each spring. ■

Photos: Lindsey Editorial.

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