

36 Hours in Charleston, S.C.

Christian L. Wright, The New York Times | January 12, 2017

1. Hit the Ground Strolling, 4 P.M.

Walking in Charleston is one of life's great pleasures, like an oyster roast or England in bloom. [The Preservation Society of Charleston's](#) annual fall Tour of Homes and the [Historic Charleston Foundation's](#) spring Festival of Houses and Gardens grant entree to private drawing rooms and pruned azalea bushes. But you can just wander around the southern tip of the peninsula on your own to see the densely packed, incredibly well-preserved showcase of American history and architecture: Federal, Greek Revival, rowhouses, 18th-century wrought-iron boot scrapers on the sidewalk and second-story porches (piazzas, in common parlance) on many a wooden "single house." Some street names, such as Longitude Lane, Savage Street and South Battery, read like Gothic poetry, while others will teach the local tongue. Legare Street is pronounced "La Gree," Hasell is "Hazel." Get a map and get lost on purpose.

2. Sunset and Steeple, 6 P.M.

In a city hugged by rivers, there are surprisingly few places to raise a glass by the water. Order an Aperol spritzer at the Rooftop bar at [the Vendue](#) hotel: \$9, views of the harbor and the church spires that pock the skyline included. A mix of newlyweds, girlfriends in colorful blouses and office mates out for after-work stress relievers crowds the open-air space to drink in the unobstructed sky and its riot of color as the sun goes down.

3. Nantucket on the Cooper, 8 P.M.

The restaurant explosion in Charleston has repurposed defunct buildings, revived ill-used corners and seduced a number of entrepreneurs "from off." Across the street from the Harris Teeter supermarket on East Bay, for instance, Jesse Sandole — whose family opened the Nantucket fish market in 1978 — has made a success with the whitewashed brick [167 Raw](#). Specials are scrawled on a mirror backed by glossy white tile, otherwise decorated with framed field guides to fish. Young friends gather on high bar stools to share tart ceviche with warm tortilla chips (\$14) or have a bountiful lobster roll (about \$27) all to themselves.



The interior of the Editor, a new boutique on King Street. Credit Hunter McRae for The New York Times
Saturday

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On an ungentrified corner up by Hampton Park and the Citadel, the [Park Cafe](#) has become a local favorite — see the young mother dining with her infant at an outdoor table and the flannel-clad fellow with a man bun and MacBook at the tiny bar by the takeout counter — on the strength of its breezy white interior, seasonally inspired menu and modest prices. Breakfast for two might include oyster mushroom toast with chervil and a “veggie mess” of scrambled eggs, tomato, white Cheddar and avocado, about \$24.

5. Plantation Life, 11 A.M.

About 11 miles west of the peninsula, the Ashley River Road (a.k.a. Highway 61) becomes a narrow passage lined by oak, hickory and palmetto trees, designated a National Scenic Byway and once a boulevard of plantations. Stop at [Drayton Hall](#). At the center of this 18th-century plantation sits a remarkable Georgian-Palladian house, preserved in a state of grand dilapidation. When the seventh generation of the Drayton family gave the house to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1974, it was with the promise of not changing anything. Like the 19th-century [Aiken-Rhett House](#) museum downtown, Drayton Hall has been maintained — with its worn paint and faded friezes — rather than restored. An hour’s guided tour is like time traveling into the bittersweet, sometimes ugly history of the Lowcountry and its people, both free and enslaved. Admission \$22.

6. Adventures in Shopping, 2 P.M.

Gucci, Lacoste, Anthropologie and Apple have all moved in downtown, but the independent shops — like [Croghan’s Jewel Box](#), known for its sterling silver, and [Billy Reid](#), haberdasher to the movers and shakers — give a better impression of Southern style and sensibility. Start on the rapidly changing Upper King Street, where you can steel yourself first with charcuterie and a glass of wine at the cozy wooden bar of [Artisan Meat Share](#), born of the Community Supported Agriculture program started by the chef Craig Deihl when his cured meats at Cypress got foodies licking their chops. About two blocks south at 509 King Street is [the Editor](#), a new boutique fashioned like a stylish woman’s apartment. [Ro Sham Beaux](#), at 493 King, sells coastal-chic home décor and paintings by Lowcountry artists. The tiny storefront of [Blue Bicycle Books](#) hides its rabbit warren of rooms arranged by subject (like military history), shelves of new and used hardcovers and stacks of titles dedicated to the Holy City (Charleston’s nickname). A good end to an afternoon’s shopping is just past the wrought-iron gates of Washington Park, on Broad Street. Alongside [Ann Long Fine Art](#), a gallery opened in 1997 and specializing in classical realist work by contemporary artists, there’s [the Commons](#), a matchbox nestled into a sultry little alley, that sells American-made housewares like hand-blown glassware and ceramics in unique shapes and sizes.



The shellfish platter at the Ordinary, a seafood-focused restaurant. Credit Hunter McRae for The New York Times

7. Dinner at Home, 7:30 P.M.

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Lots of James Beard Award nominations have made restaurant reservations hard to come by. Book a month ahead for [FIG](#), the sophisticated yet casual dining room that set a culinary benchmark long ago, or just walk in at [Leon's Oyster Shop](#) for fried chicken and a pitcher of beer. For an approximation of dinner at the home of a local friend, try [Chez Nous](#). In an off-the-beaten-path residential neighborhood, the tiny restaurant takes up two floors of a classic single house, renovated to feel as if it's in the South of France. The menu changes daily — two appetizers, two entrees and two desserts — and is posted on Instagram. You might start with a delicate endive and walnut salad before the hearty pork shank with onion, carrots and a potato purée arrives, and finish with a slice of gâteau Basque. Dinner for two, about \$95, not including drinks.

8. Nightcap, 10 P.M.

If you strike out with the bouncer at the retro cocktail bar [the Belmont](#) — or are put off by young lovelies behaving badly — nip into the bar at Mike Lata's colossal restaurant in a former bank, [the Ordinary](#), for a martini and a couple of East Coast oysters, or beat a retreat to the Thoroughbred Club, the dark, wood-paneled bar at the [Belmond Charleston Place](#) hotel, and settle in for a single malt with a backdrop of live jazz.



A view of Sullivan's Island. Credit Hunter McRae for The New York Times Sunday

9. Beach Time, 8:30 A.M.

Swing by [the Daily](#) (opened in the industrial complex left behind by its parent, the original [Butcher & Bee](#), when it moved north to Morrison Drive) for Stumptown coffee and a pastry. Then drive over the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge — a stunning cable-stayed bridge that crosses the Cooper River — to Sullivan's Island. It will be early enough to park without a permit along a sleepy residential street. Follow one of the new wooden catwalks to traverse the marsh and dunes and find the vast expanse of one of the East Coast's great beaches. Sandpipers skitter along the gullies, springer spaniels chase the waves and classic old beach houses on stilts share the coastline with newer modern follies.

10. Olde Times, 10:30 A.M.

Brunch at [McCrary's Tavern](#) — reopened by the chef Sean Brock last summer with an eye toward the Gilded Age — comes with a side of history: George Washington ate here in 1791. While the exposed brick and timber of the circa 1778 Georgian building along busy East Bay look unchanged, the menu is respectfully modern. Try the house's version of Charleston's

toward the Gilded Age — comes with a side of history. George Washington ate here in 1791. While the exposed brick and timber of the circa 1778 Georgian building along busy East Bay look unchanged, the menu is respectfully modern. Try the house's version of Charleston's hallmark she-crab soup — blue crab bisque with vermouth and tarragon (\$14) — before embarking on a fried pork chop sandwich (\$13 including fries) or the daintier quiche Lorraine (\$14).

11. Art as Sanctuary, 1 P.M.

Gleaming with glass and sunlight, the [Gibbes Museum of Art](#) has just emerged from a five-year renovation. The back side of the handsome Beaux-Arts building (which faces Meeting Street) is now strikingly modern, with a public garden that looks plucked from Paris and leads to bustling King Street. The Gibbes has open studios, uncluttered galleries, a permanent collection anchored by pieces from the Charleston Renaissance (1915 to 1945) and an illustrious past: In 1936, it was the first museum to exhibit Solomon R. Guggenheim's collection of modern art. (New York's Guggenheim would not open until 1939.) Admission \$12.

• • Lodging

In a cluster of renovated buildings at the eastern edge of town, [Zero George Street](#) (0 George Street; [zerogeorge.com](#); doubles from \$359) has 18 rooms, proximity to the [Gaillard Center](#) for the performing arts, free use of bikes and a [small restaurant](#) with an enticing tasting menu that the requisitely tattooed chef, Vinson Petrillo, produces from a minuscule kitchen.

[The John Rutledge House Inn](#) (116 Broad Street; [johnrutledgehouseinn.com](#); doubles from \$268), once a grand private mansion where drafts of the Constitution were written, spreads 18th-century charm across 19 rooms, with sherry served on the piazza and breakfast in the courtyard.