

Charleston: old and new



Rainbow Row on Bay Street

South Carolina's historic port city is a centre of fine museums and American Civil War monuments, as well as a magnet for modern fusion restaurants, contemporary art galleries and freestyle sports.

👁️ SIGHTS

Aiken-Rhett House

(historiccharleston.org;
48 Elizabeth St)

The only surviving urban town-house complex, this 1820 abode gives a fascinating glimpse into pre-Civil War life on a 45-minute self-guided audio tour. The role of slaves is emphasized and visitors wander into their dorm-style quarters behind the house before moving on to the lifestyle of the rich and famous.

Charleston Museum

(charlestonmuseum.org;
360 Meeting St)

Founded in 1773, this is the oldest museum in the US. It's helpful and informative if you're looking for historical background before strolling through the Historic District. Exhibits spotlight

various periods of Charleston's long and storied history.

Fort Sumter National Monument

(nps.gov/fosu)

The first shots of the Civil War rang out at Fort Sumter, on a pentagon-shaped island in the harbour. A Confederate stronghold, this fort was shelled to bits by Union forces from 1863 to 1865. Original guns and fortifications give a feel for the momentous history here.

Hampton Park

(30 Mary Murray Dr)

A gorgeous park that locals love for its arboreal and floral displays, fitness trail and large swaths of open space, often utilised for things like Frisbee matches. It has public restrooms and parking.

Heyward-Washington House

(charlestonmuseum.org;
87 Church St)

As the name hints, this 1772 Georgian-style town house is kind of a big deal because George Washington rented it for a week, and visitors can stand in what was likely his bedroom. The owner, Thomas Heyward, Jr, was one of South Carolina's four signers of the Declaration of Independence, and it's fun to think about all the talk of revolution that must have taken place in the withdrawing room.

Rainbow Row

(83 E Bay St)

With its 13 candy-coloured houses, this stretch of Georgian row houses on lower E Bay St is one of the most photographed areas in Charleston. The structures date back to 1730, when they served as merchant stores on the wharf. Starting in the 1920s the buildings were restored and painted over in pastels. People loved the result and soon much of the rest of Charleston was getting a similar makeover.

✂️ EATING

167 Raw

SEAFOOD ££

(167raw.com/charleston;
289 E Bay St)

There are no reservations at this tiny hole-in-the-wall that serves up the city's best seafood. People wait in lines down the block for the lobster roll, and the tuna burger and sea scallop po' boy are also off-the-charts toothsome. Oysters arrive fresh daily from Nantucket (where the restaurant runs its own oyster farm).

Circa 1886

SOUTHERN US

£££

(circa1886.com; 149 Wentworth St)

In a renovated, elegant carriage house, this is Lowcountry fine dining at its most rewarding, with healthful, seasonal offerings that reflect the region's bounty and build on its traditions. Bolder diners will appreciate the coffee-brined antelope, which comes with sorghum sweet-potato mousseline and shishito peppers. Everybody will lose it for the benne-crust (sesame-crust) duck breast with white peach grits.

Gaulart & Maliclet

FRENCH £

(fastandfrenchcharleston.com;
98 Broad St)

Locals crowd around the shared tables at this tiny spot, known as 'Fast & French,' to nibble on Gallic cheeses and sausages, fondues or nightly specials that include soup, a main dish and wine.

Tu

FUSION £

(tu-charleston.com; 430 Meeting St)

From the food geniuses who brought us Xiao Bao Biscuit a few blocks away comes this fusion place where there are no phones, no spoons and seemingly no rules. The playful, strange menu includes items like guava, habanero and cheese ice, which arrives and simply blows your mind. You won't forget this place.

🛍️ SHOPPING

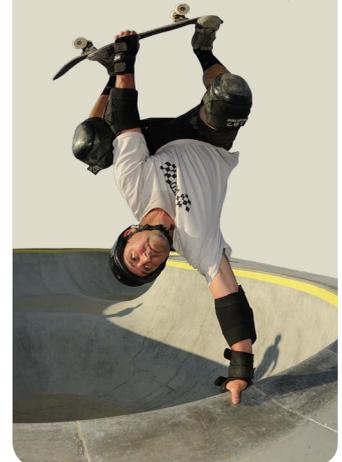
Robert Lange Studios

(robertlangestudios.com;
2 Queen St)

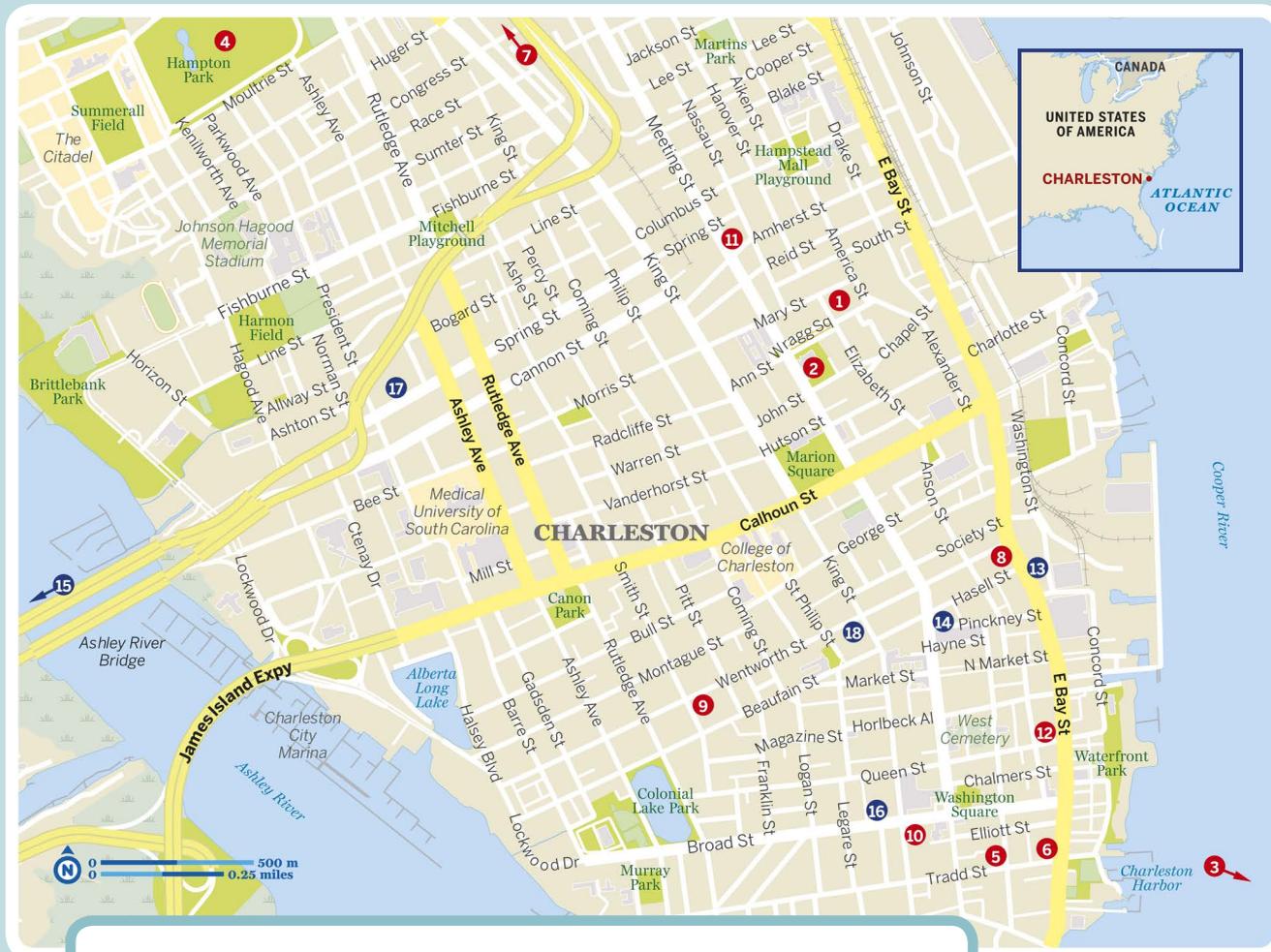
Some of the best contemporary art in Charleston regularly appears in this long-standing downtown gallery. Artist Nathan Durfee's experimental work is a highlight. During the monthly Art Walk (artwalkcwv.com) this place is a madhouse.

Don't miss

SK8 Charleston is a 32,500-sq-ft skate park just north of NoMo, overlooking the Ashley River. There's a 200ft snake run, a pro bowl, an intermediate bowl and a 315ft street course. There's also live music, concessions, giveaways and skateboarding demonstrations (ccprc.com/1725/SK8-Charleston).



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TOP PICKS

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Sleeping

Ansonborough Inn

Best for dog lovers (ansonboroughinn.com)
Droll neo-Victorian touches like the closet-sized British pub and formal portraits of dogs bring fun to this Historic District hotel.

Indigo Inn

Best for al fresco evenings (notsohostel.com)
This snazzy inn has an oasis-like private courtyard, where guests can enjoy complementary wine and cheese around a fountain.

Inn at Middleton Place

Best for holidays with kids (theinnatmiddletonplace.com)
Family friendly with a serene, riverside locale, relaxing pool and convenient kayak rentals.

John Rutledge House Inn

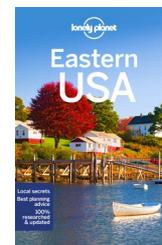
Best for history buffs (johnrutledgehouseinn.com)
Governor John Rutledge was one of four South Carolinian signers of the US Constitution. Stay in his lovingly restored mansion with a great central downtown location.

Not So Hostel

Best for a hostel stay (notsohostel.com)
A wonderful 1840 dwelling complete with blue porches – a lovely hostel that is creaky and inviting.

Restoration

Best for stylish surroundings (therestorationhotel.com)
This all-suite enclave is miles more hip and contemporary than antebellum and antique – this is a trend-setting place.



FURTHER READING

Our *Eastern USA* guide (£15.99) covers Charleston in its chapter on The South, which you can download as a separate PDF for £2.99 (lonelyplanet.com).