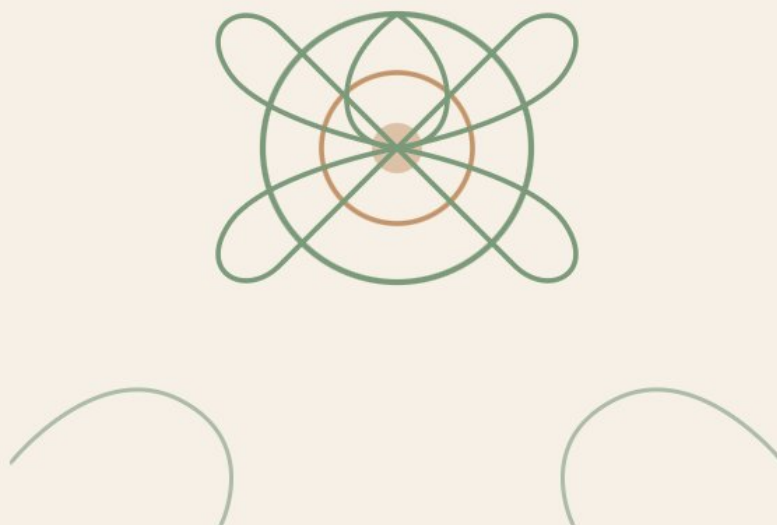




48 HOURS IN

Charleston, SC

SLOW DOWN · STAY AWHILE

WELCOME

GoingSolo.Life

Welcome to Charleston.

Charleston does not hurry. The city that calls itself the Holy City — for the steeples that have defined its skyline since the seventeenth century — operates at a pace that is not laziness but choice. The antebellum architecture on the Battery is genuinely extraordinary. The shrimp and grits have been getting better for thirty years and are now among the finest dishes in American cooking. The walking is easy, the light in the late afternoon is amber, and the gardens in spring are the finest on the East Coast. Two days here rewards the traveller who moves slowly enough to let the city come to them — the solo traveller, especially, will find Charleston opens quickly and warmly.

How to Use This Guide

- Read through once before you arrive — understand the shape of both days.
- Day 1 covers the Historic District, the Battery, and the Market.
- Day 2 moves to the plantations, the museum, and the best dinner in the city.
- Book Husk or FIG for dinner before you arrive — they fill up weeks ahead.
- The carriage tours are worth it once — the evening tour is better than the morning.

Essential Quick Facts

Currency	US Dollar. Cards accepted everywhere. Contactless standard.
Transport	Compact Historic District is walkable. Uber/Lyft for plantations. CARTA bus limited.
Weather	Humid subtropical. Hot humid summers, mild winters. Pack a layer and sunscreen.
Time Zone	Eastern Time (ET). UTC-5 winter, UTC-4 summer.
Emergency	911 for all emergencies.
Tipping	20% in restaurants. Generosity is noticed and remembered in a small city.
Sales Tax	9% Charleston County sales tax on meals and goods.

DAY ONE

The Battery · Rainbow Row · The Market

Start at the water's edge, walk the street that defines the city's architectural identity, and end in the market that has been the commercial heart of Charleston since 1788. Day One stays in the Historic District — the most intact colonial and antebellum streetscape in the American South.

MORNING 8:30 AM - 1:00 PM**8:30 AM**

The Battery & White Point Garden

Start at the southernmost tip of the Charleston Peninsula where the Ashley and Cooper Rivers meet the harbor. The Battery promenade is lined with antebellum mansions on one side and harbor views on the other — the spot where Confederate forces watched the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1861. White Point Garden contains Confederate monuments and ancient live oaks draped in Spanish moss. Walk the full promenade before the heat builds.

Insider tip: The Battery is best in the early morning before 9am when the light is soft and the streets are quiet. The antebellum mansions along East Battery are among the finest examples of the Charleston Single House style — a building type invented here to catch the sea breeze.

9:30 AM

Rainbow Row

Walk north along East Bay Street to Rainbow Row — thirteen Georgian row houses painted in pastel colors, built between 1740 and 1760, and the most photographed streetscape in Charleston. The houses were painted in their current colors in the 1930s when the neighborhood was being restored. The block is short but genuinely beautiful, best photographed from the street in morning light.

Insider tip: Rainbow Row faces east and catches the morning light directly. The best photographs are taken before 10am. The row runs between 83 and 107 East Bay Street — walk the full block, then turn onto the narrow residential streets behind it.

10:30 AM

Church Street & St. Philip's

Walk west into the French Quarter — the oldest part of Charleston's street grid, laid out in the 1690s. Church Street is the finest single block in the city: St. Philip's Episcopal Church (1836) at the north end and the Dock Street Theatre (the first purpose-built theater in America, built 1736) at the south. The Huguenot Church on Queen Street is the only independent Huguenot congregation remaining in America.

Insider tip: St. Philip's churchyard contains the graves of John C. Calhoun and Edward Rutledge (signer of the Declaration of Independence). The church interior is open most mornings — the plaster work and the gallery seating are exceptional.

12:00 PM

City Market

The Charleston City Market has operated continuously since 1788 — four blocks of covered market sheds running from Meeting Street to the waterfront. The sweetgrass basket weavers in the market maintain a craft tradition brought by enslaved West Africans that is now a UNESCO-recognized cultural practice. The baskets are not cheap; they are handmade objects that take days to complete. Buy one if you can.

Insider tip: The sweetgrass basket weavers are the market's most significant living tradition. The weavers are almost exclusively Gullah Geechee women from the Sea Islands — their families have practiced this craft for over three hundred years. Watch how it is made before you buy.

AFTERNOON 1:00 PM - 6:00 PM**1:00 PM****Lunch on East Bay or King Street**

Husk on Queen Street is the benchmark Charleston restaurant — Sean Brock's shrine to Southern ingredients, now carrying on under new direction but still one of the finest dining experiences in the South. Worth booking for dinner rather than lunch. For lunch: 167 Raw on East Bay for the finest oysters and lobster rolls in Charleston; or The Ordinary on King Street, a fish hall in a beautifully converted bank building.

Insider tip: 167 Raw operates a small raw bar that takes walk-ins — arrive before noon or after 1:30pm to minimize the wait. The lobster roll is definitive. For a faster option: Alluette's Cafe on King Street for the best biscuits in the city.

2:30 PM**King Street**

King Street is Charleston's main commercial artery — three distinct segments running north from the Market: Lower King for antiques and art galleries, Middle King for boutique retail and restaurants, and Upper King for the city's most interesting independent food and drink. Walk the full length from south to north.

Insider tip: The antique dealers on Lower King Street are serious — the concentration of 18th and 19th century American furniture and decorative arts is extraordinary for a street this short. Even if you're not buying, it's worth walking.

4:30 PM**Waterfront Park & The Harbor**

Walk east to Waterfront Park — a linear park along the Cooper River with direct harbor views and the Pineapple Fountain, one of the more graceful pieces of urban infrastructure in Charleston. The park gives the best view of Fort Sumter from the mainland. Walk south from here along the waterfront back toward the Battery.

Insider tip: The harbor view from Waterfront Park includes Fort Sumter directly ahead — the fort where the first shots of the Civil War were fired on April 12, 1861. Fort Sumter is accessible by ferry from Liberty Square, adjacent to the park. Allow three hours for the round trip.

EVENING 7:00 PM - LATE**7:00 PM****Dinner & Evening Carriage Tour**

FIG on Meeting Street for the finest farm-to-table cooking in Charleston — Mike Lata's kitchen has been one of the best in the South for two decades. Book ahead. Or Husk for the full Sean Brock Southern ingredient tasting experience — the smoked chicken, the country ham, the heritage grain grits. Both require reservations weeks ahead. After dinner: the carriage tours that run from the Market through the Historic District are genuinely informative and best at night when the streets are quieter.

Insider tip: The carriage tour operators (Palmetto Carriage Works, Old South Carriage) depart from near the City Market from 9am to dusk. The evening tours (last departure around 9pm) cover the same streets in better light and with fewer tourists. Allow 1 hour.

9:30 PM**Late Night on Upper King**

Upper King Street operates as Charleston's most interesting late-night stretch. The Gin Joint on Ann Street for serious cocktails with a genuine Southern herb garden behind the bar. Stars Rooftop & Grill Bar for harbor views and a reliable drink. The Cocktail Club on Upper King for one of the most thoughtful bar programs in the city.

Insider tip: Charleston's bar scene operates at a relaxed Southern pace — tables turn slowly, conversations extend, and no one is in a hurry. This is correct. Solo travelers are consistently welcomed at bar seats throughout the city.

DAY TWO

Plantations · Gibbes Museum · Hampton Park

The second day moves between the landscape that produced the wealth that built the city and the museum that holds its artistic record. The plantation visits require a rideshare and an honest reckoning — they are the most historically significant and the most ethically complex sites in the Charleston visitor experience.

MORNING 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM**9:00 AM**

Middleton Place or Magnolia Plantation

Two of the finest historic plantation gardens in America, both accessible by rideshare about 15 minutes from downtown. Middleton Place (1741) has the oldest landscaped gardens in America — terraced lawns descending to the Ashley River, butterfly lakes, and the Middleton Place House Museum. Magnolia Plantation has more extensive gardens and the most complete picture of plantation life including the Freedmen's Cottage exhibit. Go to one; allow three hours.

Insider tip: Middleton Place is the better choice for the gardens and the most honest interpretation of the plantation history. The enslaved quarters and the Eliza's House exhibit make the site more complete than a purely horticultural visit. Book tickets at middletonplace.org.

11:30 AM

McLeod Plantation Historic Site

On James Island, accessible by rideshare — a former Sea Island cotton plantation that is now one of the most important and honestly presented sites in the region. The focus is on the enslaved people who lived and worked here, not the planter family. The Freedmen's Bureau period after emancipation is also covered. One of the most significant historical sites in South Carolina. Free admission.

Insider tip: McLeod is the most important historical site in the Charleston area that most visitors never visit. The interpretation is honest and the setting — live oaks draped in Spanish moss — is extraordinary. Allow 90 minutes.

AFTERNOON 1:00 PM - 6:00 PM**1:00 PM****Lunch Back in the Historic District**

Leon's Oyster Shop on Upper King for the finest fried chicken and oysters in Charleston — order both, eat at the counter, have a cold beer. Or Butcher and Bee on Morrison Drive for creative sandwiches and seasonal dishes that have been reliably excellent for years. Both are walk-in and lunch-pace friendly.

Insider tip: Leon's Oyster Shop is consistently the best casual lunch in Charleston. The fried chicken — brined, double-fried, served with hot sauce and honey — is one of the genuinely great dishes in the American South. Order a dozen oysters alongside it.

2:30 PM**Gibbes Museum of Art**

Charleston's principal fine art museum on Meeting Street, with the most complete collection of American portraiture in the South. The collection documents Charleston society from the colonial era through the twentieth century — the faces of the city's planters, merchants, and politicians in paint, and behind them, in smaller numbers, the faces of the enslaved people who built their wealth. The contemporary collection is excellent. Allow 90 minutes.

Insider tip: The Gibbes holds over 10,000 objects. The colonial and federal period portraits are the primary reason to visit — the collection is unmatched anywhere in the South for this period. The miniature portrait collection is one of the finest in America.

4:30 PM**The Aiken-Rhett House**

The most intact antebellum urban plantation in the United States — a complete complex including the main house, slave quarters, carriage house, and kitchen building, preserved (not restored) exactly as the family left it. The preserved decay is intentional and more powerful than a conventional museum presentation. The kitchen house and enslaved quarters are the most historically significant spaces. Book at historiccharleston.org.

Insider tip: The Aiken-Rhett is unique in American preservation — it was donated to the Historic Charleston Foundation with the explicit instruction that nothing be restored. The peeling paint, the bare plaster, and the original wallpaper are all visible. It is one of the most historically honest sites in the American South.

EVENING 7:00 PM - LATE**7:00 PM****Final Dinner**

Husk on Queen Street if you haven't been — the ingredient sourcing, the heritage grains, the smoked meats make it the most complete expression of what Charleston cooking has become. Book well ahead. Or The Ordinary on King Street for a final oyster and fish dinner in the most beautiful room in the city. For something quieter: Edmund's Oast on Morrison Drive for the finest beer program and a thoughtful seasonal menu in a converted warehouse.

Insider tip: Edmund's Oast is the best restaurant in Charleston that the tourist circuit consistently overlooks. The house-brewed beers are exceptional, the kitchen is serious, and the room — a brick warehouse with twenty-foot ceilings — is one of the most comfortable spaces in the city for a solo dinner at the bar.

WHERE TO EAT

The No-Tourist-Trap Food Guide

Prices per person, excl. drinks. Bar seats available everywhere listed.

BREAKFAST & COFFEE

Callie's Hot Little Biscuit

\$5–12

550 King Street, Upper King

The finest biscuit in Charleston — made fresh every morning, served hot with house-made fillings. The pimiento cheese biscuit is the order. Line moves fast.

Harbinger Café & Bakery

\$6–14

Multiple locations

Best specialty coffee in the Historic District. Good pastries, relaxed pace, reliable morning option.

LUNCH

167 Raw

\$18–32

289 E Bay Street, French Quarter

The finest oysters in Charleston. The lobster roll is definitive. Bar seats available. Arrive before noon or after 1:30pm.

The Ordinary

\$22–40

544 King Street

Fish hall in a beautifully converted bank. Oysters, fish, cold plateaux. One of the most beautiful rooms in the city. Bar available.

Leon's Oyster Shop

\$16–28

698 King Street, Upper King

Fried chicken and oysters. Order both. The finest casual lunch in Charleston. Counter available.

Alluette's Cafe

\$8–15

80 Reid Street

Best biscuits in the city. Gullah Geechee cooking. Small, local, not on the tourist circuit.

DINNER

FIG

\$45–70

232 Meeting Street

Farm-to-table benchmark. Mike Lata's kitchen. Two decades of consistency. Book weeks ahead.

Husk

\$40–65

76 Queen Street

The Sean Brock Southern-ingredient kitchen. Heritage grains, smoked meats, country ham. Book ahead.

Edmund's Oast

\$30–50

1081 Morrison Drive

The most overlooked great restaurant in Charleston. House-brewed beers, serious seasonal kitchen, beautiful room. Bar available.

Butcher and Bee

\$18–30

1085 Morrison Drive

Creative sandwiches and seasonal dishes, consistently excellent. Walk-in friendly at lunch.

Xiao Bao Biscuit

\$18–28

224 Rutledge Avenue

Asian-Southern fusion that has been one of the most interesting menus in the city for a decade. The okonomiyaki pancake.

BARS & COCKTAILS

The Gin Joint

\$12–18

182 E Bay Street

Serious cocktails with a genuine Southern herb program. One of the most considered bar menus in Charleston.

The Cocktail Club

\$12–18

479 King Street, Upper King

Thoughtful bar program, elevated setting, consistently the most serious cocktails on Upper King.

Edmund's Oast Brewing

\$6–12

1081 Morrison Drive

The house beer program. 20+ taps of house-brewed and guest beers. The most serious beer bar in Charleston.

Proof Bar

\$10–16

437 King Street

Bourbon and American whiskey focus. Good bar food, knowledgeable staff.

The Shrimp & Grits Question

Husk and FIG both do definitive versions. They are not the same dish. Try both if time allows. Neither is optional.

NAVIGATING CHARLESTON

On Foot, By Carriage & Getting Around

Charleston's Historic District is one of the most walkable areas in the American South — compact, flat, and dense with things worth seeing. The peninsula is only about two miles wide and three miles long. Rideshare is essential for plantation visits and Morrison Drive restaurants.

On Foot

The Battery to the City Market: 15 minutes. Rainbow Row to King Street: 5 minutes. King Street full length (lower to upper): 25 minutes. The Historic District is entirely walkable if you're willing to cover it slowly. Wear comfortable shoes — the cobblestones are uneven.

Carriage Tours

Palmetto Carriage Works and Old South Carriage operate horse-drawn tours from near the City Market. Both cover the same Historic District route and provide genuine historical commentary. The evening tours (last departure around 9pm in season) are better than the morning tours — the streets are quieter and the light is warmer. Allow one hour. Book at the stand or online.

Rideshare

Uber and Lyft are reliable in Charleston and essential for plantation visits. Middleton Place and Magnolia Plantation are 15 minutes from downtown; McLeod Plantation on James Island is 20 minutes. Morrison Drive and the Upper Peninsula restaurants are 10 minutes.

Getting To & From Charleston

Charleston Int'l Airport (CHS)

10 miles north of downtown. Rideshare: 20–30 minutes, \$25–35. No reliable public transit option.

Amtrak — Charleston Station

4500 Gaynor Ave — the Silver Meteor and Palmetto serve Charleston from New York (12–14h) and Miami (11h). Station is 3 miles from downtown; rideshare required.

From Savannah

2 hours by car or bus. Direct Greyhound service. GoingSolo.Life Savannah guide available.

From Charlotte

3.5 hours by car. No direct train connection. Amtrak serves Charlotte from New York.

CONTINGENCY

Backup Plans

Charleston in the rain is a genuinely good city to be stuck in.

Charleston Museum

America's oldest museum, founded 1773. Natural history, decorative arts, and the most complete survey of Charleston history available in one building. The silver collection is exceptional.

Nathaniel Russell House

One of the finest Federal-period houses in America, built 1808. The free-flying staircase that appears to support itself without a central column is an architectural marvel. Beautifully preserved and interpreted by the Historic Charleston Foundation.

The Circular Congregational Church Graveyard

The oldest English-speaking congregation in the South, with a graveyard dating to 1695. Free, open daily, and one of the most quietly beautiful spaces in the Historic District.

Boone Hall Plantation

8 miles north of downtown — the oldest working plantation in the country, with the famous Avenue of Oaks (nine live oaks planted in 1743 still forming the entrance avenue) and a strong enslaved history interpretation in the Gullah Theater.

South Carolina Aquarium

At the foot of Calhoun Street, directly on the harbor. World-class collection of Atlantic coastal marine life. The Great Ocean Tank is four stories tall. Good for a half-day, especially in heat or rain.

Queue-Beating Strategies

- FIG and Husk: Book online at least 2 weeks ahead. Walk-in bar seats available but limited.
- 167 Raw: Arrive before noon or after 1:30pm. No reservations for bar seats.
- Aiken-Rhett House: Book at historiccharleston.org. Timed entry, small groups.
- Fort Sumter Ferry: Departs Liberty Square. Book at nps.gov/fosu well ahead in spring.
- Plantation visits: Weekday mornings before 11am are notably quieter than weekends.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORHOODS

Know Your Neighborhoods

Charleston's historic peninsula is compact. Here are the eight areas that matter most.

The Battery & South of Broad

HISTORIC ELITE

The wealthiest and most architecturally intact neighborhood. The Battery promenade, White Point Garden, and the grand antebellum mansions that define the Charleston waterfront.

The Market District

COMMERCIAL HEART

City Market, Rainbow Row on East Bay, Waterfront Park. Tourist-heavy but with good reason.

Upper King Street

RESTAURANTS & BARS

The most dynamic food and drink street in Charleston. Leon's, The Cocktail Club, Edmund's Oast is adjacent. Where the city eats and drinks.

Morrison Drive Corridor

EMERGING FOOD SCENE

Edmund's Oast, Butcher and Bee, and a growing concentration of independent restaurants in former industrial buildings. The most interesting 20-minute rideshare from downtown.

French Quarter

OLDEST & FINEST STREETS

The original colonial street grid — Church Street, Chalmers Street, and the cobblestoned Cabbage Row. The most concentrated historic architecture in the city.

Lower King Street

ANTIQUES & GALLERIES

The antique district. 18th and 19th-century American furniture, silver, and art. Not just for buyers — worth walking for the quality of the objects.

Hampton Park Area

LOCAL & QUIET

North of the tourist circuit — Wagener Terrace and Hampton Park are where Charleston's young professional residents actually live. Worth walking.

The Sea Islands (day trip)

GULLAH GEECHEE CULTURE

Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms for beaches; Johns Island and James Island for Gullah Geechee cultural sites including McLeod Plantation. 20–30 minutes by rideshare.

WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU**What Nobody Tells You About Charleston**

Eight things that actually matter.

The history here is not simple

Charleston was the wealthiest city in colonial America and the primary port of entry for enslaved Africans into North America. Both things are visible in the architecture. The most honest sites engage both.

Shrimp and grits is a real dish

It was invented in the Carolina Lowcountry as a breakfast dish for shrimp fishermen and has been elevated into one of the great dishes of American regional cooking. Order it.

Slow down

Charleston operates at a pace that is not laziness. The meals are long, the conversations extend, the evenings wander. This is the correct pace for the city. Do not fight it.

Spring is the best season

March through May, before the humidity peaks: the gardens are at their finest, the azaleas are extraordinary, and the outdoor dining is comfortable. The Spoleto Festival in May and June is one of the finest arts festivals in America.

The heat is serious

May through September, Charleston operates under heat and humidity that requires adjustment. Start early, rest between 1 and 4pm, carry water. The historic buildings are not always air-conditioned.

The sweetgrass baskets are worth the price

They are made by hand over multiple days by Gullah Geechee women maintaining a 300-year-old craft tradition. A small basket starts at \$50. The price is correct.

The Gullah Geechee culture is still living

The Sea Islands communities south of Charleston maintain a language, foodways, and cultural traditions distinct from broader African American culture. McLeod Plantation and Boone Hall both engage with this history honestly.

Book dinner before you arrive

FIG and Husk are regularly booked 2–3 weeks ahead. The best tables in Charleston operate on reservation time that assumes visitors plan in advance. Book before you land.

CONNECTIONS

The Southern Charm Connection

Charleston is the northern anchor of the Lowcountry — the coastal plain that stretches south through Beaufort, Hilton Head, and into the Georgia Sea Islands. Savannah is 2 hours south by car or bus and makes a natural companion city on the same trip. Charleston also serves as a cruise home port and an excellent pre- or post-cruise base for Caribbean sailings from Port Canaveral and Jacksonville.

The Southern Charm Series

Savannah, GA 2 hours · Car or Greyhound · from \$25

Direct bus service. AMTRAK Silver Meteor also serves both cities. The GoingSolo.Life Savannah guide is the natural companion to this one.

Beaufort, SC 1 hour · Car

The most intact antebellum small town in the South. No direct public transit. Worth a day trip or overnight.

Columbia, SC 2 hours · Car or bus

South Carolina's capital. The Governor's Mansion and the South Carolina State Museum are the primary draws.

Charlotte, NC 3.5 hours · Car

No direct train connection. Greyhound service. GoingSolo.Life guide coming.

Atlanta, GA 4.5 hours · Car or bus

Direct Greyhound service. The GoingSolo.Life Atlanta guide is in the Southern Charm series.

Before You Leave — Final Checklist

- Screenshot Day 1 and Day 2 schedules for offline use
- Book FIG or Husk for dinner — weeks ahead
- Book Aiken-Rhett House at historiccharleston.org
- Book Fort Sumter ferry at nps.gov/fosu if visiting
- Download Google Maps Charleston offline
- Load Uber or Lyft — essential for plantation visits
- Bring cash for sweetgrass basket weavers at the Market

Charleston awaits.

The steeples, the Battery at first light, the sweetgrass baskets,
and the shrimp and grits that have been getting better for thirty years.
Slow down. Stay awhile. The city rewards it.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE: FINAL CHECKLIST

- Screenshot Day 1 and Day 2 schedules for offline use
- Book FIG or Husk for dinner — weeks ahead, not days
- Book Aiken-Rhett House timed entry at historiccharleston.org
- Book Fort Sumter ferry at nps.gov/fosu if visiting
- Download Google Maps Charleston offline before you arrive
- Load Uber or Lyft — essential for plantation visits
- Bring cash for the Market sweetgrass basket weavers

Your interactive map is one scan away.

All locations from this guide, colour-coded by day, open on your phone.



goingsolo.life/maps/charleston

GoingSolo.Life

TRAVEL ALONE. LIVE FULLY.