

# Charming!

By Robert Janger

That's the best word to describe Charleston, South Carolina. Traveling either north or south along the ICW, you'll encounter this jewel city of the South. Charleston is a warm, gracious city filled with history, enterprise, fabulous cuisine and hospitality. I'll tell you all about it in this article.

## Where It's At

Charleston is located on a peninsula bounded by the Ashley River on the west and the Cooper River on the East. These rivers form a natural harbor that is sheltered from the Atlantic Ocean by barrier islands. Originally named Charles Towne, the city was established on the Ashley River side but was later relocated to the Cooper River side and eventually engulfed the entire peninsula.

At approx. 32.46.47 N and 79.55.44 W, the city is accessible by land, sea and air. By the way, don't use those coordinates for navigation unless you want to end up in the middle of City Market.

If you're not going by boat, Charleston is 8.5 hours driving time south on 95 from Baltimore and about the same amount of time driving north on 95 from Ft. Lauderdale. We've driven it both ways.

## It's Got Atmosphere

If slate sidewalks and cobblestone streets lined with palm trees that echo the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages past rainbow-colored homes conjures a vision in your mind then you've got the picture of Charleston. The pace is slow and relaxing. Do yourself (and everyone else) a favor and take it easy. No one runs in Charleston, it attracts attention. Even criminals stroll away from the scene of the crime.

Should you happen to enjoy the smell of horse manure then you're in luck. There's just enough of it in the air to go around, mostly in the vicinity of Market Street where horse-drawn carriages depart every few minutes, courtesy of the Charleston Polo and Carriage Company or the Old South Carriage Company. If this particular aroma isn't for you, don't worry about it, it's not over-powering. Though it might give you an idea of how things used to be before the internal combustion engine came along.

The town doesn't get going until somewhere around 10:00 am so there aren't many breakfast shops. The people are friendly and will usually wish you a "good day" even before you can say "Hi". I got a warm "Hi there" from the mayor, whom I recognized from TV.

## **Weather**

Most of the year is lovely. Summer, however, is down-right hot and humid as both the temperature and the humidity are in the 90's. Any summer that it doesn't rain every afternoon is called a drought. The good news is that if it does rain, it doesn't last long. Bring an umbrella. Summer storms are inevitable in the "Low Country" and Charleston can flood if it rains too much, as evidenced by the numerous sand bags kept close to the doors of many of the shops in the historic district. Hurricane Hugo did some real damage here in 1989. The city has been lucky since then.

## **Marinas and Hotels**

There are about 16 marinas in the immediate vicinity of Charleston; however I didn't see any marinas in the vicinity of Historic District. The City Marina is actually located on the west side of the city, which is the Ashley River side.

Hotels are everywhere. The most expensive are in the heart of Charleston and get less expensive as you get farther from downtown. Parking will cost about \$20 a day in the Historic District, and is an additional cost. If you do stay downtown you're better off getting the parking from the hotel as the public lots are the same price but have no multiple in/out privileges.

## **Getting Around Town**

Walking is the best way. Get yourself a copy of the Charleston Map Guide and Coupons which is free from any hotel and most shops. It's really all you need to navigate. Take some of the side streets and even the alleys where you'll get a glimpse of some of the finest gardens and fountains in town.

For historic sightseeing, try a carriage tour which will take you past the major sights in the city. The tours are narrated by the driver and you'll get 347 years of history in 60 minutes (\$20 per person). Charleston Tours also has an air-conditioned van.

There are several pedi-cabs usually found hanging out around City Market. The Charleston Bike Taxi (843.532.8663) will take you around in the area for \$4.50 per person for 30 minutes.

There's an air-conditioned bus system. It goes most places you would want to go. \$1.20 per fare for an adult. ½ price for adults over 55.

If you want to go in modern style, try the Charleston Black Cab Company (843.216.2627). A fleet of 16 black cabs reminiscent of the London cabs. Each cab seats 5 adults and has an integrated child seat. Anywhere in the Peninsula below the bridges is a \$10 one-way fare. They are slightly more expensive than a regular taxi as they are registered as a limousine.

## Attractions

If you've got some extra money that you want to part with, there is upscale shopping on King Street and upscale dining on Queen Street. Otherwise, City Market on Market Street is the place to go for an open air market filled with vendors. Jewelry, leather goods, T-Shirts and sea grass baskets and hats are the wares here. Contrary to popular belief, City Market was never used for the slave trade. There are also a hundred boutique type shops in the Historic District and lots of restaurants (see below).

I couldn't begin to list the historic value of this city. Suffice it to say that there are plenty of guided tours, guided walks, ghost tours, carriage tours and water tours to learn about Charleston.

Things you should see while you're here include:

**The Old Exchange** - Completed in 1771, this is one of three of the most historic buildings in America. Only three buildings still remain where the Constitution of the United States was ratified, the other two being Independence Hall in Philadelphia and Faneuil Hall in Boston. It's \$7 for the entrance fee and the guided tour of the Provost dungeon.

**The Battery and White Point Gardens** - At the end of White Point where the Ashley and the Cooper River meet is the Battery where the defenders of the city of Charleston successfully repelled a 1706 attack from a combined French and Spanish fleet. There's a nice park here with monuments and a great view of Fort Sumter, which is allegedly where the Civil War began.

**USS Yorktown** - If you've never been on an aircraft carrier, here's your chance. Whitehats, dungarees and chukka boots are not required. Located at Patriot's Point you'll also find the submarine Clagamore, the destroyer Laffey and the Coast Guard cutter Ingham along with the Medal of Honor museum, 25 vintage aircraft and displays of military weapons.

**Waterfront Park** - Along Concord street and bounded by the Cooper River (only a few blocks from the Historic District) is this wonderful park with long bricked walkways under overlapping tree canopies. There's a great pier on the north end and two working fountains are strategically placed along the 1,280 feet pathway.

## Restaurants

There are plenty of places to eat in and around Charleston. You'll get recommendations from everyone but here are my best picks from personal experience:

**Hanks** - Corner of Hayne and Church Streets - This is a local seafood restaurant and is usually not listed on the guide maps. I'm from the Chesapeake Bay area so I've tasted crabcakes just about anyway they can be made but I have never tasted anything so wonderful as the Sautéed Lump Crabcakes with sweet corn, leek and Basil with Champagne Citrus Beurre Blanc that are listed under the Hot

Appetizers section on Hanks' menu. Hanks is in the historic district and is only open for lunch and dinner.

**Fleet Landing** - At 186 Concord Street this old former US Navy Fleet Club is located just behind the US Customs House. It's on the waterfront. Definitely try the Fried Green Tomatoes w/ lump crabmeat appetizer. The Shrimp & Grits, which has nice slices of andouille sausage, will melt in your mouth and make you feel good inside. This is real comfort food. Every place on the southern Atlantic coast makes Shrimp & Grits. Nobody makes them as good as Fleet Landing.

**The Griffon** - #18 Vendue Range - This is a local's pub with a good fried fish sandwich and Guinness on tap. Mostly frequented by young professionals, the most fascinating thing about the Griffon are the walls. They are stapled, taped or otherwise affixed with dollar bills from previous customers that just could not resist the urge to write their name and a clever saying on a George Washington and affix it to the wall, or the overhead beams, or the railings or any other wood in the place, save the tables and chairs. Go for lunch.

**The Wreck of the Richard & Charlene** - 106 Haddrell Street in Mount Pleasant - An amazing place. Actually getting there is even more amazing. It's only 6.4 miles from the historic district of Charleston, across the Cooper River Bridge via Route 17 but finding it via GPS is probably your best bet. Technically it's located on the south side of Shem creek. It's not on any of the guide maps. There's no sign to indicate it's a restaurant. There's a gravel parking lot and a big old rusty anchor out front. The place is held together with gray plywood and large bolts and the shrimp boats pull up to the dock out back. It's cash only, paper plates and no air conditioning and no reservations. Thank goodness the porch is screened in and there are overhead fans. All of the food is fried or grilled, but mostly fried. So why on earth would you ever come here? Only to get the best fried shrimp and oysters I've ever tasted in my life, that's why. They start serving at 5:30 pm and you won't get in without a wait.

## Groceries

**Harris Teeters** - Located on East Bay Street at Pinckney Street - This is a full service grocery store with everything you need. They have a nice deli and already prepared roasted chickens and pork loins. You can get a bottle of wine a six-pack or whatever else you need to fill the menu. Bon Appetite.

So there's the low-down on the low-country city of Charleston, SC.  
See you next time!

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