

TRAVEL & CULTURE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE SOUTH NOW



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To see
complete lists
of all the
winners, go to
***southern
living.com/
souths-best***

The South's Best

LAST FALL, our editors decided to launch an annual, digitally crowd-sourced feature around the South's best places—and your response was overwhelming. As we pored through nearly 22,000 online surveys, one thing was clear: Southerners are passionate about their favorites. From an Irish pub in Mobile, Alabama, to an elegant hotel in Asheville, North Carolina, from a charming shop in Savannah, Georgia, to the great city of Charleston, South Carolina, this was a reminder of the spectacular sights, inspiring people, and cultural institutions that define our region. In the pages that follow, we celebrate your favorites.



Visit "The Pond"

Thanks to the Charleston Parks Conservancy and the city government, beloved Colonial Lake recently got a \$5.9 million update. Find it at the corner of Broad Street and Rutledge Avenue.



SOUTH'S BEST CITY

NO. 1 CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

CHARLESTON, South Carolina, is having a moment. Again. Nearly 350 years after a group of enterprising colonists settled what was to become the

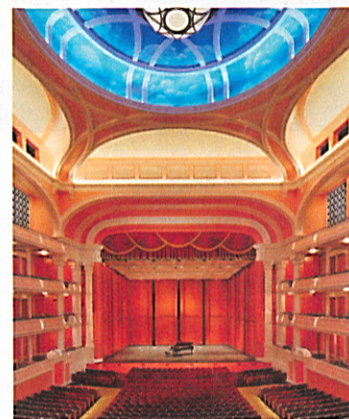
jewel of the Lowcountry—a seaport that would later be synonymous with Southern charm, skimmer boats, and the clip-clop of carriage tours—the Holy City continues to cast its spell on visitors from far and wide.

A primary ingredient in Charleston's special sauce is its knack for reinvention. Over the past decade alone, an influx of bright young people—artists, chefs, entrepreneurs, and makers of all stripes—has literally transformed the look and feel of the city with fresh ideas and a modern aesthetic. But there's more to its enduring appeal than that.

What sets Charleston apart—the real secret to the city's centuries-spanning allure—is not just that it keeps offering more to visitors or that there's always something new to discover here. It's that

there's always something new for *everyone* to discover, regardless of what you're interested in, where you're coming from, or what you're looking to find. Outside New York City, you'd be hard-pressed to find a place so steeped in history that also embraces the future in the sweeping, wholesale way Charleston does.

Take the local food scene: Walk for 10 minutes in any direction downtown, and you'll find cracker-crumble seafood stalwarts such as Fleet Landing Restaurant & Bar packing the house alongside experimental



newcomers—from chef Mike Lata's money bank-turned-seafood temple, The Ordinary, to Goat Sheep Cow, an upscale takeout boulangerie run by seriously informed cheesemongers and bakers. Uptown, you'll find yourself in the midst of a mini barbecue boom, with both the exotic (John Lewis' Texas-brisket joint, Lewis Barbecue) and the familiar (Rodney Scott's whole-hog emporium, Scott's BBQ, complete with a smoking room out back).

Sometimes the evolution is evident within a single chef's restaurant collection.

Just witness Craig Deihl's commitment to both Cypress (a beloved East Bay establishment he has helmed for decades) and his more recent neo-butcher shop, Artisan Meat Share, an Upper King ode to cured, smoked, and preserved meat.

On the drinks front, you will find the revamped Blind Tiger Pub—which was temporarily shuttered last year but is now as perfectly no-nonsense as ever—just blocks from the insane wine flights available at Bin 152. Two blocks north, on King Street, you'll find The Thoroughbred Club, a

reimagined lobby-level cocktail spot perfect for people-watching, located inside the Belmond Charleston Place hotel.

Charleston Place isn't the only hotel upping the ante. From the mid-century marvel The Dewberry (complete with its field-to-massage table spa and next-level cocktails) to boutique properties such as the exquisitely designed 86 Cannon (with its unremitting attention to detail), people aren't just preserving old spaces for new visitors; they're also reinventing hospitality overall.

As for art and culture, there has never been a better time for thinking types to visit. The newly refurbished Gaillard Center has hosted sold-out shows for everyone from Loretta Lynn to Louis C.K. Around the corner is the landmark Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr., and Septima Clark both addressed crowds in the 1960s and where nine parishioners lost their lives in a tragic shooting in 2015. The church remains a beacon for civil rights.

Nearby, find lessons in American and Southern art

Lewis Barbecue: A Texas pitmaster comes to the city.



at diverse museums, from the Gibbes Museum of Art to the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art. Galleries like The George Gallery and artists' co-ops like Redux constantly challenge the status quo. The literary tradition here is also alive and well, reflecting the city's artistic sensibilities.

Yet—and this must be said—despite all the change and reinvention, there are some things about Charleston that will always be part of the draw: a stroll through an old graveyard that has been around for centuries, a walk around the Battery, a meander down moss-lined cobblestone lanes, the feel of soft white sand underfoot, and the awe of standing under a majestic old oak tree.

Even with all its changes, Charleston is still Charleston—a little glossier around the fringes, perhaps, but still a

place where boomers and babies, bankers and bartenders, artists and tech types come together to create something wonderful—and utterly memorable.

A South Carolina Tourism booklet from the early 1980s sums up the city's universal appeal with this invitation: "When you get bored with history, you're never far from a beach. A golf course. A garden. An island. No wonder the British put up such a fight when we asked them to leave."

But the locals have a much more poetic expression for the city's irresistibility: *trouville*. An old Frenchism, the term means "something lovely found by chance." And that is Charleston in a word—almost 350 years old and still defined, and redefined, by the thrill of the surprise.

—JESSICA MISCHNER

BEST OF THE REST CITIES

2. SAVANNAH, GA

Like a time capsule of historic architecture and city planning, Savannah's old-school exterior belies its status as a progressive art, design, and culinary hub.

3. NEW ORLEANS, LA

A global cultural capital, home to some of the country's best restaurants and an incomparable music scene, the Big Easy beautifully blends new and old like no place else.



4. NASHVILLE, TN

Music City is booming, and not just in its famed recording studios. From downtown development to an influx of newcomers calling the city home, Nashville is as hot as its chicken.

5. ASHEVILLE, NC

Known as Beer City, USA, Asheville has seen a recent burst of acclaimed farm-to-table restaurants complementing its brewery scene.

6. ATLANTA, GA

Atlanta's open-arms approach to diversity—from industry and food to design and music—has made it one of the most vibrant cities in the country and worthy of its nickname, Hotlanta.

7. AUSTIN, TX

Musicians might still head to America's live-music capital in hopes of hitting it big, but now so do those looking to



launch start-ups and work in the tech industry.

8. RALEIGH/DURHAM, NC

Once in the shadow of its sister city, Durham has become a formidable cultural counterpart to Raleigh.

9. RICHMOND, VA

Off-the-radar Richmond has the South paying attention. The beautifully restored Quirk Hotel, an unconventional music scene, and restaurants that are redefining Appalachian cooking have made us all take notice.

10. BIRMINGHAM, AL

A new generation of Birmingham residents have committed themselves to putting the magic back in their city, and it has never been more visible than now—especially downtown, where a sprawling park, a new food hall, apartment buildings, cocktail bars, and creative start-ups coalesce.



Best Restaurants State by State



ALABAMA

Highlands Bar and Grill
Chef Frank Stitt brought farm-to-table dining to Birmingham in 1982, before there was even a moniker for it. Since then, Highlands has only become more fresh and relevant in the Southern dining landscape.

ARKANSAS

The Pantry Eatery
Chef Tomas Bohm has introduced Little Rock to a different kind of European fare using his Czechoslovakian roots as his guide.

FLORIDA

Bud & Alley's Restaurant
So many beachfront restaurants rely on the view to make up for lackluster food, but Bud & Alley's matches sparkling

Gulf vistas with delicious baked oysters and locally caught fish.

GEORGIA

The Grey
Savannah found a golden ticket with The Grey. Inside an impeccably renovated, Art Deco-style former Greyhound bus station, chef Mashama Bailey is raising Lowcountry cuisine up high with dishes like Roasted Yardbird and Red Pea Pancakes with Cracklin'.

KENTUCKY

Dudley's on Short
Its location across from the Lexington Farmers' Market makes this spot produce-centric. Owner Debbie Long holds a reputation as horse country's consummate hostess.

MARYLAND

Duck Duck Goose
This contemporary French bistro brings D.C. dwellers to Bethesda for delicious classics like beef tartare, dry-aged duck, and wild mushroom risotto. And every dish is plated with modern sensibilities.

MISSISSIPPI

City Grocery
Having a drink upstairs on the fabled porch of City Grocery, which overlooks Oxford's town square, has become a Southern rite of passage.

MISSOURI

Sidney Street Cafe
Chef Kevin Nashan continues to conjure exciting dishes here at the crossroads where Southern ingredients meet Spanish and French cooking techniques.

NORTH CAROLINA

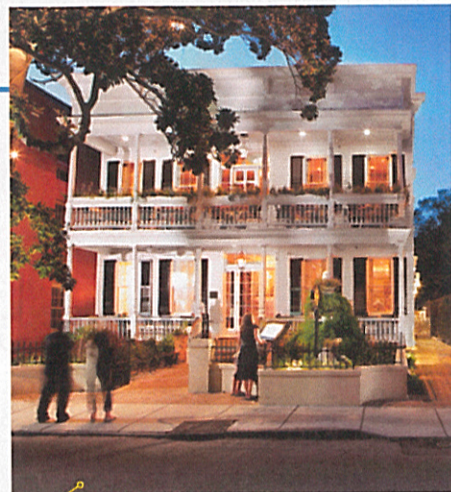
Chef & the Farmer
Most folks hadn't heard of the tiny town of Kinston until Vivian Howard moved back home to open a restaurant. Over a decade later, patrons still flock to it for a taste of Howard's creative interpretations of local dishes.

OKLAHOMA

The Drake
Like a futuristic, fashionable, 1960s diner in Los Angeles, The Drake has made the words "seafood" and "Oklahoma City" as natural of a pairing as the fresh oysters and rose mignonette.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Husk
Globally renowned as a pilgrimage site for Southern food, chef Sean Brock's Husk, currently in Charleston and Nashville, will open new locations in Savannah, Georgia, and Greenville, South Carolina, later this year.



TENNESSEE

The 404 Kitchen
Inside a former shipping container in Nashville's Gulch District, you'll find a staggering whiskey selection alongside chef Matt Bolus' Italian takes on country cooking.

TEXAS

The Original Ninfa's on Navigation
Whether you believe this to be the home of the first fajitas or not, there's no denying Ninfa's as the archetype of Tex-Mex food.

VIRGINIA

Pasture
Both Pasture and its sister restaurant, Comfort, are love letters to Virginia ingredients and

mountain cooking. Pasture takes a few more liberties with tradition, like the Country Captain chicken dish with tomato-curry gravy.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Old Ebbitt Grill
With animal heads bagged by Teddy Roosevelt, the Old Ebbitt Grill is as much an unofficial museum off the National Mall as it is a steak-and-oyster house.

WEST VIRGINIA

Prime 44 West
This homage to NBA legend Jerry West is a full-court press, from the 44-ounce porterhouse to the famed lobster mashed potatoes.

