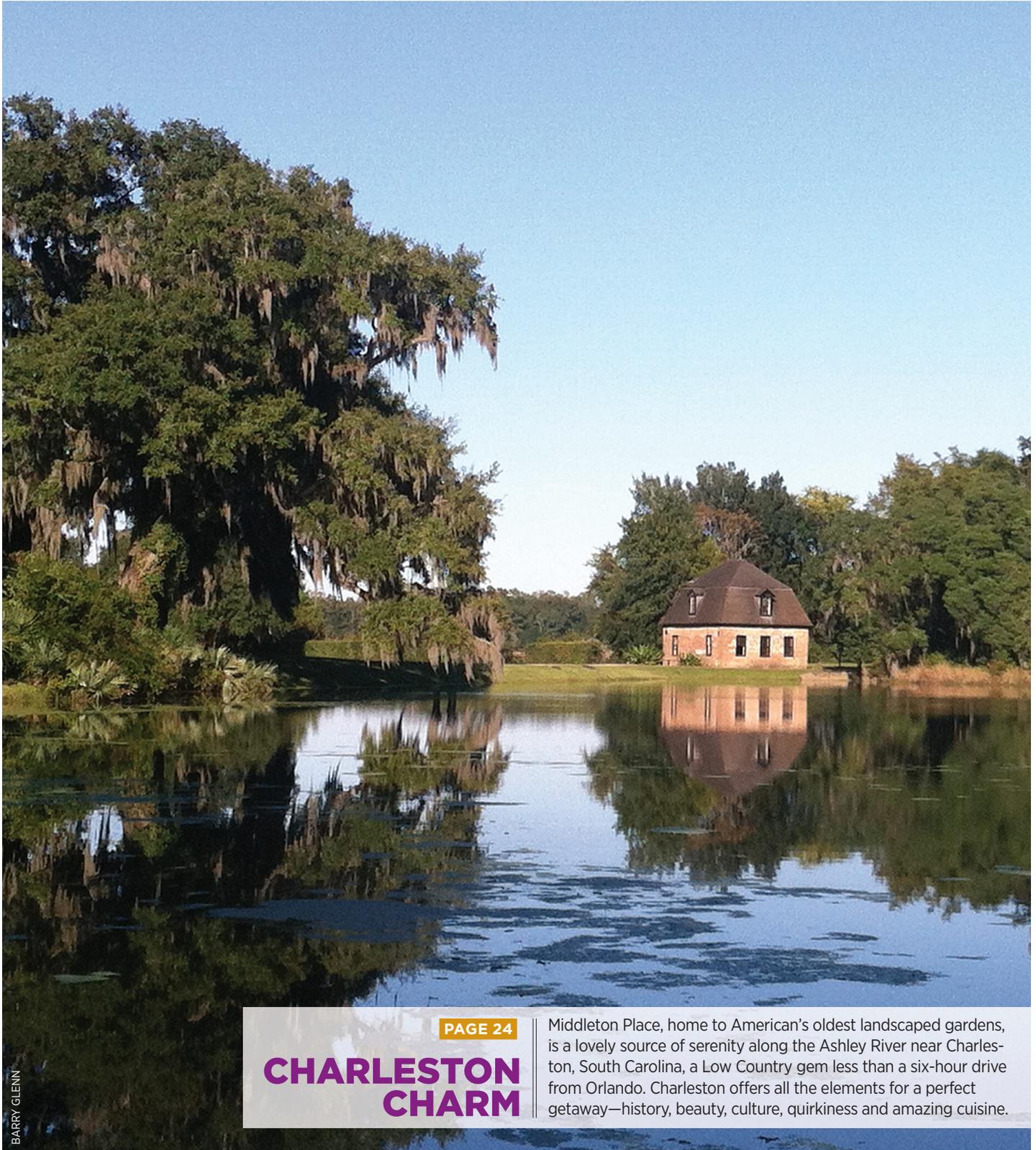


# PULSE

SPOTLIGHT • STORY OF A... • THE FIND • BODY & SOUL • **GETAWAY**



BARRY GLENN

**PAGE 24**

## CHARLESTON CHARM

Middleton Place, home to American's oldest landscaped gardens, is a lovely source of serenity along the Ashley River near Charleston, South Carolina, a Low Country gem less than a six-hour drive from Orlando. Charleston offers all the elements for a perfect getaway—history, beauty, culture, quirkiness and amazing cuisine.

# Southern Charmer

In Charleston, simple beauty, historic luxury and quirky excursions make for a memorable Low Country experience. BY BARRY GLENN

**SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY—LOTS OF** destinations brag about it. Charleston, South Carolina, delivers it, in a setting steeped in rich Colonial and Civil War history amid historic homes and cobblestone streets. You'll find no thrill rides here. Instead, the thrill is in the storied charm of this Low Country jewel, rated favorite U.S. city by the readers of *Conde Nast Traveler* four years in a row.

Here's a Charleston sampler. Dig in, y'all.

**TASTE:** Whether you prefer unpretentious or elegant dining, know this: Charleston is a foodie haven for both. Start your day with the fried chicken breast with biscuit, sausage gravy, fried egg and cheese at the friendly no-frills Dixie Supply Bakery & Café. Or try the magnificent shrimp and grits on a Sunday morning in the courtyard at Kitchen 208, in the antiques district. Lunch is an extraordinary adventure at Butcher & Bee, with offerings ranging from a scallion pancake with okra and peppers to a fried chicken sandwich with arugula and dill. If it's seafood you're craving, head to the waterfront Fleet Landing, where shrimp pot pie and a lump crab cake sandwich highlight the extensive menu.

For dinner (also called supper in these parts), prepare to be dazzled: Two downtown mainstays—Hall's Chophouse and Circa 1886—were recently named among the top 25 restaurants in the nation by TripAdvisor. Hall's is a bustling family-run steakhouse, which means it's nearly certain you'll get an effusive welcome from co-owner Billy Hall

or another family member during your time here. Choose from the wide selection of mouthwatering strip steaks or the long-bone lamb chops, and be sure to partake of the sweet and sour collard greens. At Circa 1886, which has come to life in the original carriage house of a mansion built in 1886, the atmosphere is decidedly romantic. Chef Marc Collins offers a superb seasonal menu to match, with creative twists on items like antelope, beef shoulder tender and rainbow trout.

**BEAUTY:** For spectacular views, take a sunset cruise into Charleston Harbor on the 84-foot *Schooner Pride*. To the east is Fort Sumter, where the first shots of the Civil War were fired (tour boats run there several times daily). To the west you look back toward the city, with its grand old homes along the Battery and the silhouetted steeples of historic churches. The Charleston area is also known for its legendary gardens in a plantation setting, so by all means venture up Ashley River Road to Middleton Place and Magnolia Plantation & Gardens. Both are spectacular any time of year and if you happen to visit during spring azalea season, all the better. (The boat tour at Magnolia offers a fascinating journey back in time through old flooded rice fields.) A nearby must-see: Drayton Hall, a plantation house remarkable in that it has been preserved, rather than restored. Therefore, you tour a home devoid of furnishings, admiring instead the amazing architecture of a grand dame just as it appeared when it was built in the 1740s.

**QUIRKINESS:** Would you prefer tea or moonshine? You can sample both—locally produced. South of the city on Wadmalaw Island is the 127-acre Charleston Tea Plantation, which offers a trolley excursion through the only working tea plantation in the United States, along with a fascinating factory tour. (Trivia break: Only the top few leaves of the bushy tea plant are harvested for what you drink.) Also just outside of downtown is the Striped Pig Distillery, where affable owner Todd Weiss concocts eye-opening spirits and offers tours during which he demystifies the process of making bourbon, spiced rum and, yes, moonshine. Free tastings of the latter will make your jowls quiver a bit, but rest assured you will still be capable of purchasing bottles of the Pig's amazing product at tour's end.

**REST:** Charming downtown hotels abound but there are two standouts: Belmond Charleston Place features beautifully appointed rooms and this amazing luxury: a heated saltwater pool on the fourth floor that features a retractable glass roof. The Mills House Wyndham Grand Hotel is peachy, as in the color of the exterior that contrasts against the blue sky as you lazily sip a specialty martini during happy hour in the courtyard of this restored gem, built in 1853. Outside of town, The Inn at Middleton Place (at the aforementioned gardens) offers rustic rooms with wood-burning fireplaces, along with a fine-dining restaurant that specializes in classic Southern dishes. ☑

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Travelers can find a wealth of information at the Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau site at [explorecharleston.com](http://explorecharleston.com)

### GETTING THERE

Charleston is a 5½-hour drive from Orlando, mostly via Interstate 95. However, Silver Airways has just introduced daily nonstop flights between the two cities. In late March, the fare was \$304 roundtrip on Orbitz.com. You can also book through other online travel sites or at [silverairways.com](http://silverairways.com)

### GETTING AROUND

Walking is the best daytime mode of transportation in the close quarters of the historic district—the colorful Charleston City Market is a delightfully pedestrian-friendly venue. But how do you get from your hotel to a restaurant five blocks away in the 8 p.m. darkness? Catch a pedicab. These friendly pedalers are plentiful and eager to please in return for a negotiable fare.

### SPOLETO FESTIVAL

The annual theater/music/dance/opera extravaganza runs for 17 days each spring, with performances staged in Charleston's historic theaters, churches and outdoor spaces. This year's dates are May 22-June 7. Tickets go fast, but you still may be able to obtain admission to select events. Whatever the case, it's never too early to start planning for next year. [spoletousa.org](http://spoletousa.org)



CARRIAGE, DRAYTON HALL, HOME, BELMOND PLACE; COURTESY OF EXPLORECHARLESTON.COM; PANCAKE, SPICES, CRUISE; BARRY GLENN

(Clockwise, from top left): The scallion pancake with okra and peppers at Butcher & Bee; a horse-drawn carriage downtown; Drayton Hall, a true original because it has been preserved rather than restored; a historic house along the waterfront Battery; the look of luxury at Belmond Place Charleston; a sunset cruise aboard the *Schooner Pride*; homemade spices and fixins' at the Charleston City Market.

