

# Itinerary: Three days of exploring Charleston's history, art and architecture

There's no doubt that [Charleston](#) offers visitors an endless array of arts and culture attractions. But with only a long weekend to explore the city, the choices can be overwhelming. This week I'm sharing my favorite three days in Charleston.

## Day 1: History

### Morning:

First, get a sense of the history of the city at the [Charleston Museum](#). The museum, founded in 1773, has the distinction of being America's first museum, and its collection provides a wonderful overview of the Holy City. Be sure to spend some time in the Historical Textile Gallery. Looking at the actual clothes people wore is a wonderful window into history, and the museum's collection is fantastic. The current exhibit is Threads of War: The Clothing and Textiles of the Civil War, running now through September 5. The Charleston Museum is open Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children.

### Lunch:

Just down the block from the museum is one of my favorite Charleston lunch spots. Not only does [39 Rue de Jean](#) offer delicious French café fare like quiche, fried goat cheese salad and fluffy omelets, but located at 39 John St. (or 39 Rue de Jean in French) it's always easy to find.

Before moving on, head down the block for a little dessert. You might find it strange at first that this bakery is named the [Macaroon Boutique](#), but one bite of the place's light-as-air confections and you will see that their macaroons are couture you can eat. If you have never had a traditional French macaroon, you are in for a real treat. What's more -- the Macaroon Boutique makes their light, sweet, delicately flavored macaroons with 99 percent local ingredients.

### Afternoon:

Walk off lunch (and several macaroons) by heading downtown towards the [Old City Market](#), which has been a hub of activity in Charleston for 200 years. More than 100 vendors stretch for several blocks behind the lovely 1841 Greek Revival building. Although you will find every kind of souvenir – clothing, artwork, jewelry, food – pay special attention to the stunning traditional sweetgrass baskets on display. Enslaved Africans brought this form of basket weaving to America in the 18th century and passed the craft down through the generations.

Next, continue down to Cumberland and Church for a visit to [The Powder Magazine](#). This small but excellent museum gives great insight into Charleston's life before the American Revolution, when it was a walled city named Charles Towne after the English king. It won't take long to tour the exhibits at the Powder Magazine, but the guides are exceptional and their passion for Charleston's history is infectious. The Powder Magazine is open Monday-Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. Admission is a modest \$2.

Wind your way down Church Street, taking a moment to revel in [St. Phillip's Church](#) and its glorious, 201-foot steeple. This Anglican Church was established here in 1641 and delights visitors and residents alike with its chimes.

When you reach Chalmers Street, take a left. There you will find the [Old Slave Mart Museum](#). This museum, located on the site of a former slave market, is a chilling and educational look at Charleston's involvement in the slave trade. The Old Slave Mart Museum is open Monday-Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors and youth, and children younger than 5 are free.

Finish up your day with some window-shopping along East Bay Street (I could spend hours in drooling over kitchen gadgets and pouring over cookbooks in [Charleston Cooks!](#)), stopping for a cup of coffee at [Baked](#) or by watching the sunset from a park bench in nearby [Waterfront Park](#).

### **Dinner:**

The perfect soundtrack to an evening in Charleston has got to be the music of one of the many talented jazz musicians who call the city home. Visit the [Jazz Artists of Charleston website](#) for their “Jazz Around Town” calendar. Several area restaurants offer nightly jazz concerts, including [The Charleston Grill](#), which features live jazz with dinner seven nights a week.

## **Day 2: Architecture**

### **Morning:**

Today you will get a chance to explore Charleston’s magnificent architecture and grand historic homes.

Start the day by touring the city with [Architectural Walking Tours of Charleston](#). The tours, conducted by a local art historian, depart daily (except Tuesday and Sunday) at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. from the front of the Meeting Street Inn, 173 Meeting St. Tours cost \$20 per person and last about two hours. The morning tour focuses on the city’s 18th century architecture: the Dock Street Theatre, historic churches, private homes and the historic Rainbow Row, which served as the inspiration for the Gershwin opera Porgy and Bess.

After the tour is over, you might take some time to stroll through White Point Gardens on the Battery before heading to lunch. The waterfront green space is lined with gorgeous, antebellum homes. Also, look under the oak trees for a monument commemorating the hanging of the notorious “Gentleman” pirate, Stede Bonnet, and more than 20 of his men. After being hanged, local legend holds that the pirates were left on the gallows here in the Battery as a warning to other pirates not to mess with Charleston.

### **Lunch:**

The area near the Battery is quite residential, so your best bet for lunch is to head up to Broad Street where there are several low-key lunch possibilities. [Gaulart and Maliclet](#) is a good place to have a tasty, inexpensive salad or sandwich.

### **Afternoon:**

Charleston is filled with historic homes that you can tour. On a short visit, I suggest the [Nathaniel Russell House](#) and the [Aiken-Rhett House](#).

Start downtown with the [Nathaniel Russell House](#). This important neoclassical home is a National Historic Landmark and has been lovingly restored by [the Historic Charleston Foundation](#) using local craftspeople to recreate the elaborate decorative painting and to repair architectural details. The showstopper of this tour is the magnificent cantilevered staircase. Tour guides will show you around the house and give you some insight into the history of the people who lived there.

It’s a long walk to the [Aiken-Rhett House](#) so I suggest hopping in a cab or hailing a [Charleston Rickshaw](#) to get to your next stop.

The Aiken-Rhett House offers a very different take on historic home preservation. Rather than trying to restore the house to its past glory, the curators at the Aiken-Rhett House look to preserve any original detail of the house that they can. So the walls are not covered with a gleaming, new-looking reproduction wallpaper; instead, you can see remnants of the actual original paper hanging on the walls. The place might not look as magnificent as the Nathaniel Russell House, but with the help of an informative audio guide,

touring the house is just as fascinating. The Aiken-Rhett House also allows a unique glimpse into the lives of Charleston's enslaved people with its preserved slave quarters in the back yard.

Both the Nathaniel Russell House and the Aiken-Rhett House are run by the Historic Charleston Foundation and are open Monday-Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Admission to each house is \$10, but there is a combination ticket available offering admission to both houses for \$16.

#### **Dinner:**

Head to [FIG](#) for dinner. FIG stands for "Food is Good" and it certainly is at this laid-back bistro focusing on seasonally inspired dishes and local, sustainable providers. James Beard Award-winning chef Chef Mike Lata serves up magnificent dishes in an atmosphere that is both romantic and comfortable.

#### **Evening:**

A perfect way to end a day dedicated to Charleston's architecture is to see a show in the [historic Dock Street Theatre](#). The theater, which was built as a hotel in 1809, reopened a year ago after a multi-million dollar renovation. [Charleston Stage](#) is in residence at the Dock Street Theatre from September-July and if you are in town during the [Spoleto Festival](#), the theater is a major venue.

#### **Day 3: Art**

##### **Morning:**

Start your day at the [Charleston Farmer's Market in Marion Square](#). Running from mid-April-December, the market is a great place to sample the bounty of South Carolina produce, but it also offers a chance to get to know local artists and artisans. Some of the area's best painters, jewelry-makers and craftspeople display their wares here every week.

You might consider getting breakfast from one of the many food vendors at the Farmers' Market before heading down King Street to check out some of the best shops in the city. Antique shops, clothing stores and upscale chain stores offer something for everyone.

Stop by [Christophe Artisan Chocolatier](#) to satisfy your sweet tooth, get to know some of our local designers as you scour the racks at the many small boutiques, or browse the treasures at [Croghan's Jewel Box](#), a lovely little jewelry store that has been owned by the same Charleston family for more than 100 years.

##### **Lunch:**

For lunch, head to [Poogan's Porch](#). Located inside a Victorian-style house on charming Queen Street, it's a great place to go to sample Southern classics like she-crab soup, fried green tomatoes and shrimp and grits. If you are really daring, order up a plate of the fried alligator for a uniquely Southern culinary experience.

##### **Afternoon:**

After lunch, head to the [Gibbes Museum of Art](#). The museum's permanent exhibit, The Charleston Story, uses the city's art treasures to give life to Charleston's history. The Gibbes also hosts a diverse array of temporary exhibits. Recent exhibits have included work by masters like Picasso and Jasper Johns, as well as in-depth collections of Southern artists. The Gibbes Museum is open Tuesday-Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is \$9 for adults, \$7 for seniors, students and the military, \$5 for children ages 6-12 and children 5 and younger are free.

After you leave the museum, wander the cobblestone streets of the French Quarter and visit some of the neighborhood's terrific art galleries. Several times a year, the French Quarter offers special evening art

walks that are free and open to the public, but any time of year you can plot your own course through the streets of the old walled city and check out some of the best artwork the Holy City has to offer. [Click here](#) for more information on French Quarter Art Walks and for a listing of neighborhood art galleries.

**Dinner:**

The perfect place for your final meal in Charleston is [James Beard Award-winning chef Sean Brock's](#) latest restaurant: [Husk](#). Not only is the food here exceptional, the restaurant is a celebration of the South. Brock won't let anything into the kitchen that has not been produced in the South. Treat yourself to a bit of history in a glass by ordering a drink from [Husk's](#) "historic" menu of handcrafted and creatively named cocktails like the "Monkey Gland" or a "Swizzle." Lift your glasses and toast to your stay in the Holy City!

---