



Rainier's Guide to Charleston

A SHORT FIELD GUIDE FOR COFFEE, BOOKS, FOOD, ART, WATER, AND WANDERING

*for the curious, the hungry,
and the mildly lost*

CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Created for guests of Create Yourself Alive



A note before you go

Charleston does not need another exhaustive list of everything you could possibly eat, drink, tour, or photograph.

This is simply a collection of places I love: where I take visitors, where I go when I want a good meal, and where I would send you if you had a few unhurried hours to spend before we begin.

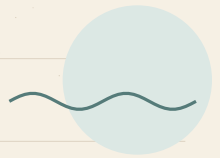
Use it loosely. Wander off course. The best parts of a city are rarely found by completing it like an assignment.

choose a few places

leave room between them

walk farther than necessary

Begin with coffee



Vintage Coffee Cafe

If you are staying in Mount Pleasant, begin here. Vintage is only minutes from Alhambra Hall, with a beautiful outdoor space and the easy neighborhood feeling you want before a full day. It is an especially convenient stop before Monday or Tuesday's gathering.

Harken Cafe

Harken is tucked into downtown Charleston and feels like the sort of place where you should bring a notebook. Go for coffee, something from the bakery, and a quieter beginning before walking through the city.

The Daily

The Daily is livelier and slightly less contemplative, but excellent for coffee and breakfast when you want to get moving. It is a good first stop before exploring Upper King Street, Hampton Park, or the surrounding neighborhoods.

Buy a book you did not come for

Buxton Books

Buxton is my favorite bookstore in Charleston. It is independent, thoughtfully curated, and located in the heart of downtown. Go in looking for nothing in particular. Let a book choose you. That is still one of the better ways to spend an hour.

Eat very well

Leon's Fine Poultry & Oysters

My favorite, hands down. Leon's serves fried chicken, oysters, excellent salads, frozen drinks, and food that is serious without the room becoming self-important. If you ask me where you should eat one meal in Charleston, this is probably where I will send you.

Bar 167

Bar 167 is a beautiful downtown stop for seafood, cocktails, and a meal that feels a little more celebratory. It is especially good when you want the evening to feel like part of the trip rather than simply a solution to hunger.

Lewis Barbecue

Charleston has no shortage of barbecue opinions. Mine is that Lewis is worth your time. The brisket is the reason to go, but arriving hungry and ordering too much is part of the ceremony.

A friendly warning

Charleston restaurants fill quickly, particularly over a holiday weekend. Make reservations where they are accepted and expect a wait where they are not.

Drink somewhere with atmosphere



Lowland

Lowland is warm, moody, and beautifully designed without feeling staged. Come for a cocktail and stay long enough to forget that you had somewhere else to be.

The Bar at Husk

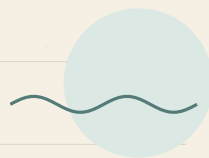
The porch at Husk is one of my favorite places to have a drink in Charleston. It carries the particular pleasure of sitting outside in an old Southern house while the city moves around you.

Citrus Club

For the opposite perspective, take the elevator to Citrus Club on the eighth floor of The Dewberry. It is Charleston from above: church steeples, water, rooftops, and citrus-forward cocktails. It is open to the public, though it is reserved for guests 21 and older and has a dress code. Plan ahead.

*porch light or skyline?
there is no wrong answer.*

Walk until the city speaks



Hampton Park

Hampton Park is where I would send you when you need trees, water, room, and fewer people holding phones in front of historic buildings. Walk slowly. Sit somewhere. Bring your notebook and resist turning the experience into content.

The Battery

Yes, you should walk the Battery. Begin near White Point Garden and follow the water. Look at the harbor, the live oaks, and the impossible houses. Then wander north without paying too much attention to your route. Charleston rewards getting mildly lost.

Look at art

The Gibbes Museum of Art

The Gibbes is small enough to experience without museum fatigue and substantial enough to shift an afternoon. Its collection and exhibitions connect Charleston's visual history to the wider world. Give yourself time to look rather than merely confirming that you saw everything.

Cross the bridge

Shem Creek Park

Shem Creek gives you boardwalks, marsh, shrimp boats, birds, restaurants, and the particular Lowcountry smell of saltwater and mud. Go near sunset if you can. It is close enough to Alhambra Hall to visit before dinner or after the immersion.

Sullivan's Island

This is where we take visitors when we want them to understand why people fall in love with this part of the world. Walk the beach, wander near the lighthouse, and stay for something to eat. Do not overplan it. The island is best when it feels like you happened upon it.

LOWCOUNTRY RULE NO. 1

*Go near the water.
Stay for the light.*



If you have only one free day

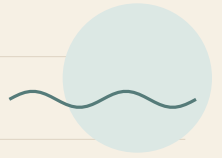
THE CITY DAY

Begin downtown with coffee and breakfast at Harken. Walk through the lower peninsula to the Battery, then make your way to the Gibbes Museum and Buxton Books. Have a late lunch or early dinner at Leon's. End with a drink on the porch at Husk or above the city at Citrus Club.

THE WATER DAY

If you prefer water and fewer cobblestones, begin at Vintage Coffee in Mount Pleasant, spend some time at Shem Creek, and continue to Sullivan's Island for the afternoon. Return downtown for dinner if you still have energy. Or don't. There are worse things than ending a day barefoot beside the Atlantic.

*The itinerary is a suggestion.
Getting distracted is encouraged.*



One final note

Charleston can tempt you into trying to see all of Charleston.

Don't.

Choose a few places. Leave room between them. Walk farther than necessary. Sit somewhere beautiful without immediately deciding what it means. The city will still be here when you return.

*And then, on Monday morning, bring whatever found you to
Alhambra Hall.*

CREATE YOURSELF ALIVE

November 2-3, 2026 / Charleston, South Carolina

Hours, menus, reservations, and access policies can change.
Please check directly with each place before you go.