



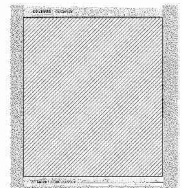
CHARMED BY **CHARLESTON**

Explore coastal beauty and pay tribute to history in this scenic South Carolina city

— *by* ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES

WITH FRAGRANT MAGNOLIA TREES lining cobblestone streets and horse-drawn carriages passing candy-colored 19th-century mansions, Charleston, South Carolina, looks as though it could be the set for a historic film. But a thriving nouveau Southern foodie scene—along with hip boutiques, galleries and festivals—proves this love-

ly port city isn't only about the past. Indeed, although Charleston is home to Fort Sumter, where the first shots of the Civil War were fired, the city also will feature the International African American Museum in 2020. Billed as one of the most important sites in American history, the museum will open on Gadsden's Wharf, where almost half of en-





slaved Africans landed in the United States. It will display the overlooked experiences and contributions of African-Americans in Charleston and beyond.

Another impactful event in Charleston was the horrifying 2015 massacre at the 200-plus-year-old Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which is also being remembered as a tragic and cautionary touchstone in the city's history. A permanent memorial to the nine victims of the shooting attack is being designed by the same architectural team that created New York's 9/11 memorial. "The status quo, on this side of the tragedy, doesn't work anymore," says Doug Warner, director of media for the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. As a result, a renewed focus on African-American history has also led to the future development of an interactive map of Black history sites on the Charleston peninsula called the Charleston Justice Journey, as well as fresh prominence for established attractions. They include the Denmark Vesey monument, dedicated to the carpenter who bought his freedom, and then plotted a slave revolt that was thwarted; Philip Simmons Museum Home, in honor of the famous blacksmith; and, of course, "Mother" Emanuel AME Church, which was founded in 1816 by free Blacks, including Vesey.

Charleston boasts an African-American population of 26.9 percent, but the evidence of Black impressions on the city's culture and history reveals a much bigger influence. The signature dishes of shrimp and grits and she-crab soup owe much to the traditions of the Gullah Geechee people, who were transported from West Africa and enslaved to grow rice in the South Carolina low country. Visitors can sample authentic Gullah cuisine at down-home restaurants including Bertha's Kitchen, Hannibal's Kitchen and Martha Lou's Kitchen. Yes, there's a lot of Southern hospitality on tap in these welcom-



ing kitchens! From Feb. 28 to March 4, you can also try flavors at the Charleston Wine & Food Festival.

Stop by the Charleston City Market for a handcrafted sweetgrass basket, a Gullah art form passed down through generations for 300 years. Stroll pass oak trees draped in Spanish moss at McLeod Plantation, a 37-acre historic heritage site that offers interpretive tours of Sea Island cotton plantation life and the rise of Gullah culture.

CHARLESTON-AREA EVENTS

- **Charleston Fashion Week**, March 13-17: Check out the city's emerging fashion scene with runway shows, shopping events and after-parties. (charlestonfashionweek.com)
- **Annual Festival of Houses & Gardens**, March 15-April 21: Explore the city's distinctive architecture and famed gardens with daily tours that showcase seven to 10 houses in 11 neighborhoods. (charlestoncgvb.com/events)
- **Blessing of the Fleet & Seafood Festival**, April 29: Join the Mount Pleasant, South Carolina tradition of paying tribute to the area's shrimp and fishing industries. Enjoy a boat parade and the ceremonial blessing of the fleet, as well as seafood delicacies, live music and crafts with the Charleston Harbor as a backdrop. (experiencemountpleasant.com)
- **Gullah-N-Geechie Mahn Tours**, St. Helena Island: About an hour and a half outside of Charleston, St. Helena Island beckons with deep-seated Gullah history and lore. Sea Island is where Julie Dash filmed the seminal feature *Daughters of the Dust*, and the island bus tour will take you to important cultural sites, including the historic Penn Center, where Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech. Top off your cultural excursion with a visit to Gullah Grub restaurant for a complete low-country feast. (gullahngeechietours.net)

