

TRAVEL

Charleston preserves its past while keeping its charm

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Charleston, South Carolina. It is steeped in history, yet still maintains its Southern charm. Maybe it's the beauty of the magnolia trees or the eerie, yet wondrous stillness, of the swamps at the Magnolia Plantation.

Perhaps it's your own imagination wondering what a guest at the Edmonston-Alston house thought and said to colleagues as they watched the first shots of the South Carolina soldiers of the Confederacy firing on Union soldiers at Fort Sumter.

Then again, maybe you'll experience an overall enjoyment and appreciation of seeing history preserved with homes built in the 1700s restored and so well-kept, you'll marvel as you walk several blocks near Battery Park and venture to peek at gardens and yards behind brick walls.

Preserving a past

Charleston mixes its history well with its newness and vibrancy, yet keeps a dogged determination to preserve its past. It features the South Carolina Aquarium, which just opened in 2000. You'll enjoy cuisine from the packed luncheon

eatery at Just North of Broad to the posh, four-star Charleston Grill and its wonderful ambience. Then there are the historic homes open to the public for tours.

For my wife, Cheryl, and I, it was the history we wanted, and gardens. We drove 2,400 miles in nine days on a recent trip and viewed stark contrasts of the most opulent historical home in America at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C., to the simple gravesites of slaves buried at the Magnolia Plantation just north of Charleston.

The plantation and the Middleton Place were among the first English settlements in the United States, located on the Ashley River, about 14 miles northwest of Charleston. Homes on those sites were originally built in the 1740s. Middleton Place contains America's oldest landscaped gardens.

The Middleton family had an incredible line of witnesses to American history, including a president of the First Continental Congress (Henry Middleton), a signer of the Declaration of Independence (Arthur Middleton), and a signer of the Ordinance of Secession (Williams Middleton), with its signer so strongly believing in the Confed-

erate cause, he signed, then underlined, his name. Few families had so many of such prominence.

Today's visitors to Middleton Place truly understand the family's place in history once they see a book on display at the home that features pictures with French writing on the funeral procession of Alexander the Great. Oh, and scenes from "The Patriot" were filmed here, too.

The gardens at Middleton are incredible, and give you a wonderful, colorful walking tour. The gardens were divided into "rooms," featuring an Azalea Hillside, a Sundial Garden, and the Middleton Oak, believed to be used by Indians to mark a path before the Middletons settled here.

More history highlighted

Just a few miles away, the Magnolia Plantation features a self-guided walking tour as well. Tour guides inside the home reflect on the history of the Drayton family, whose history goes back to when the family received property in England as a result of the Norman Conquest in 1066.

During the 1680s Thomas and Anne Drayton completed the first residence of Magnolia. The

home survived the nearby encampment of British troops, who used a nearby bluff to encircle Charleston during the Revolutionary War, yet the residence burned down accidentally three decades later.

A second home was built, only to be burned during General Sherman's infamous march to the sea. The owner during the Civil War period, the Rev. John Grimke Drayton, sold some of the plantation's land to rebuild the home, disassembling his summer house in nearby Summerville and moving it via a barge.

Today, the home's Greek Revival structure is preserved well. Inside Oriental rugs, fine porcelain and heirlooms recall the elegance of an earlier era. The early American antiques are beautiful. An 1840 Plantation cabin still stands, depicting the harsh work and living conditions of slaves.

Drayton also developed the gardens. He hoped to create an "earthy paradise" for his wife, Julia, so she would forget Philadelphia and her desire to return there. Drayton is credited with introducing the first azaleas to America and the first to utilize Camellia japonica in an outdoor setting.

Today's garden contains an 18th century herb garden, a 16th century horticultural maze, a Biblical garden and a tower to view wildlife. Open to the public in 1870, it remains America's oldest man-made tourist attraction.

The adjacent Audubon Swamp Garden is an ecological gem, containing great blue herons, wood ducks, snowy egrets and anhingas. Knobby cypress trees bump their way through the swamp to help contain soil. Wildflowers burst with color.

Alligators are known to sun themselves here, though we did-

n't see any, and turtles are everywhere.

Home tours also are offered in Charleston, including the Edmonston-Alston house, the Calhoun Mansion and a host of others. At least two tour guides raved about the Fall Candlelight tours, which were scheduled in late September and October, presided by the Preservation Society of Charleston.

In December, visitors to Charleston can enjoy the following: Christmas in Charleston, Dec. 1-31; Plantation Christmas at Middleton Place, Dec. 3-31; Holiday Tour of Homes, Dec. 8; Holiday Festival of Lights, James Island County Park, Dec. 9-Jan. 2, and Family Yuletide in the Stables at Middleton Place, Dec. 13.

Visit www.charlestongateway.com for information.

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Tickets... \$85 Per Person
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Do you know a Farmington school student who has turned his or her life around?

Students age 7 - 12, who have made positive changes in their lives will be honored at a luncheon in Farmington Manor on March 5, 2002.

In an effort to salute students who don't qualify for recognition in academics, sports or arts, this new Farmington Public Schools program will focus on young people who have improved their lives in a broad range of other areas—from behavior to school work to community service.

Nomination forms are available in all Farmington Middle and High Schools and must be submitted by Friday, December 12, 2001.

The program is sponsored by the Farmington Public Schools, Farmington Observer, Farmington Public Safety Department and the Farmington Hills Police Department.

If your company would like to sponsor this new program of encouragement, call Cathy Young,
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