**Dining in Charleston: An Insider’s View**

Before turning to restaurants it would be useful to consider briefly certain of the signature foods of Charleston and the Lowcountry (the coastal strip of land extending from Jacksonville NC to Jacksonville FL).

Certain things every expects to encounter in a Charleston visit would be shrimp and grits, she-crab soup, Lowcountry boil, Carolina Gold Rice, red rice, hoppin’ john, okra soup, benne wafers, boiled peanuts, and butterbeans. The grits in Charleston are white, not yellow, the field peas in hoppin’ john are red peas not black-eyed, and the okra soup usually has some meat in it as well as corn and butterbeans. The foodways that gave rise to these dishes amalgamated Native (corn, butterbeans, squash, sweet potatoes), African-American (Gullah benne, okra, field peas, eggplant, peanuts), and European (collards, turnips, and mustard greens, wheat, rye, barley, and most fruit varieties).

Seafood is a hallmark of Charleston cookery, and you can get fine grouper, sheepshead, blackfish, whiting, shad, tile, and sea trout in season. The local oysters tend to grow in the shape of blades. Blue crabs about, but some restaurants serve the pincers of stone crabs as well. Native shrimp include the white, brown, and deep sea royal red. Locals thing the smaller creek shrimp are the sweetest tasting.

SEAFOOD RESTAURANTS--Downtown

Hanks <https://www.hanksseafoodrestaurant.com/> an institution

The Darling Oyster Bar <https://thedarling.com/> best décor here

Chubby Fish <https://www.chubbyfishcharleston.com/> creative

Leon’s Oyster Shop <https://leonsoystershop.com/> [a New Orleans vibe]

The Ordinary <https://eattheordinary.com/> costly but superb

FISH CAMP STYLE—not found on the penninsula

A local style of fried battered (cornmeal) fish and seafood served in rustic settings and a cheaper price point

Ellis Creak Fish Camp <https://elliscreekfishcamp.com/>

Bowen’s Island <https://bowensisland.com>

The Wreck of the Richard & Charlene <https://wreckrc.com>

CULINARY INSTITUTIONS—Downtown

Restaurants of more than 10 years standing that have contributed substantially to Charleston’s culinary reputation:

Magnolia’s [Charleston’s home of shrimp & grits] <https://magnoliascharleston.com/>

Poogan’s Porch [Charleston’s New Orleans restaurant]

<https://www.poogansporch.com/>

82 Queen [home of she-crab soup]

<https://82queen.com/>

Peninsula Grill [surf & turf in an elevated key]

<https://peninsulagrill.com/menu/>

Fig [multiple James Beard awards]

<https://eatatfig.com/>

Husk [the flagship of the southern food revival of the 2010s]

<https://huskcharleston.com/>

Circa 1886 [kitchen mastery and service consistency]

<https://circa1886.com/>

The Grocery [sustainable Lowcountry]

<https://thegrocerycharleston.com/>

COCKTAIL CULTURE

Belmont <https://www.thebelmontcharleston.com/>

Bar George <https://www.bar-georgechs.com/>

Last Saint <https://www.lastsaintchs.com/>

Doar Bros <https://www.doarbros.com/>

Dalila’s https://www.dalilasonspring.com/

The bar at Husk

BARBECUE

South Carolina has a barbecue tradition with an emphasis on whole hog barbecue—Vinegar & Pepper sauce predominates in the Northeast and is found in the city at Rodney Scott’s barbecue. The Mustard-based sauce of the midlands may be found at Bessingers. The tomato based sauce of the western part of the state may be found at Home Team barbecue. Texas style barbecue (brisket, sausage, et. al. at Lewis’s).

Rodney Scott’s Whole Hog Barbecue : <https://rodneyscottsbbq.com/>

Bessinger’s Barbecue: <https://www.bessingersbbq.com/>

Home Team: <https://hometeambbq.com/location/downtown-charleston/>

Lewis’s Barbecue: <https://www.lewisbarbecue.com/>

GULLAH COOKING

Lowcountry African-American cookery is not properly speaking soul food. It has a different set of ingredients, a broader spectrum of proteins, and is rice-centric.

Bertha’s Kitchen: 2332 Meeting Street N, Charleston SC

Page’s Okra Grill: [Mt. Pleasant] <https://www.pagesokragrill.com/>

Nigel’s Good Food [North Charleston] <https://nigelsgoodfood.com/>

WHERE LOCALS EAT

Breakfast: Early Bird Diner [West Ashley] <https://www.earlybirddiner.com/>

Breakfast all day: Millers All Day [downtown] <https://millersallday.com/>

Lunch: Gaulart and Maliclet Fast and French [downtown]

<https://fastandfrenchcharleston.com/>

Coffee/Café: Harken

<https://www.harkencafe.com/>

Beer & Nosh: Edmund’s Oast

<https://edmundsoast.com/>

High Tea: John Rutledge House

<https://johnrutledgehouseinn.com/>

Dinner: The Glass Onion [West Ashley]

<https://www.ilovetheglassonion.com/>

HOT SPOTS

These are new, display a striking décor, and have a distinct culinary attitude.

The Archer: <https://www.thearchercharleston.com/>

Legami [21st century Italian] <https://legamichs.com/>

Volpe [Family Style fine Italian] <https://volpecharleston.com/>

Jackrabbit Filly [new Chinese-American] <https://www.jackrabbitfilly.com/>

Iron Rose [$$$] <https://www.ironroserestaurant.com/>

Chez Nous [French] <https://www.cheznouschs.com/>

A good many of the restaurants offer vegetarian mains and sides. It is wise to secure reservations in advance for many of these. Besides these which I have personally experienced, there are a plentitude of eateries, some with fine reputations—I think of Baba’s Café or Thai Basil—that I can’t personally attest to the quality. So by all means go exploring. If you have a car at your disposal, the range of offerings expands tremendously.

Good eating! David Shields