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Charleston

Gracious! America's most genteel city is behaving like a frisky debutante.
By Geraldine Campbell Photographs by Morgan & Owens

1 Modell city

The first Charles Towne was established in 1670 across the river from the city's current location, which was designed according to an elaborate, somewhat utopian plan referred to as the Grand Modell. It called for 70-foot-wide main streets and a town center at the intersection of Meeting and Broad. **The Original Charleston Walks** leads daily tours through the historic area. 45 Broad St., 800/729-3420, charlestonwalks.com, from \$18.50.

2 Greenery worth envying

Grassy public spaces abound in Charleston: **White Point Garden** overlooks the harbor and the city's Battery Park homes (2 Murray Blvd.); **Marion Square** hosts Thursday night movies in the spring (Calhoun St. and King St.); **Waterfront Park** has views of the Cooper River and a pier (1 Vendue Range). **Ted's Butcherblock** sells everything you need for a picnic: potato salads, paninis, and macaroni and cheese with gouda (334 E. Bay St., 843/577-0094, tedsbutterblock.com).

3 Not your grandma's fried chicken

In a tiny yellow 18th-century house on Pinckney Street, the two-room **Cru Café** is the perfect retreat from the bustle of downtown. Diners can sit at small banquettes or at a bar-cum-chef's table facing the open kitchen where chef John Zucker cooks his upscale comfort food. The poblano-and-mozzarella fried chicken with a honey-chipotle salsa is a definite must. 18 Pinckney St., 843/534-2434, crucafe.com, entrées from \$14.

4 Southern hospitality

Charleston has plenty of grand hotels, but the rooms at the **Market Pavilion Hotel** come with a gentler price tag; some even have views of the Old City Market, where women have been weaving sweetgrass baskets since 1841 (225 E. Bay St., 877/440-2250, marketpavilion.com, from \$229). The vistas from the Roof Top Bar & Restaurant at the **Vendue Inn** are also spectacular—and the beers are \$3. The interior queen rooms, a mix of French provincial and American colonial decor, are a good deal at \$139 per night (19 Vendue Range, 843/577-7970, vendueinn.com).

5 A spot of tea

Bigelow Tea got its start in 1945 because Ruth Bigelow was looking for a little more zest in her morning cup. At the company's **Charleston Tea Plantation**, the only commercial tea farm in the continental U.S., visitors can follow the production process from raw leaf to finished tea bag. 6617 Maybank Hwy., 843/559-0383, charlestonteaplantation.com, free.

6 Where there's Smoak...

Stephen Smoak, known as Smoak to regulars, is one of the city's best bartenders. At **Red Drum Gastropub**, he mixes special-recipe ginger mojitos and espresso martinis that make for a nice pairing with chef Ben Berryhill's Southwest-influenced cuisine: crab tostaditas with red voodoo sauce, tuna tacos served with cowboy beans, and clams in a chili broth. 803 Coleman Blvd., 843/849-0313, reddrumpub.com, entrées from \$12.