

Charleston, South Carolina: The Historic District

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Message Board Guide (Moderator)

As the place where the American Civil War started and with a history dating back to 1670 and the days of the English settlers, Charleston certainly has a rich and varied history. It's that history that is the city's main attraction, bringing in nearly four million visitors each year.

Any visit to Charleston needs to include the beautiful Historic District. At the southern end of downtown Charleston, it overlooks the harbor to the east. As you drive through, you're transported back a couple of hundred years in time, helped by the gas lamps that still stand on the sides of the streets.

East Bay Street and Meeting Street are the places to head to find historic homes and it's immediately clear that this has always been a rich and affluent area. There are plenty of highlights here, but perhaps the one that most people head straight for is the Nathaniel Russell House, now a National Historic Landmark. Russell was one of the city's wealthiest merchants and construction of the house, considered at the time to be one of the finest residences in Charleston, took five years. Perhaps what sets it apart from other buildings in the Historic District is the sheer beauty of the property, both inside and outside, with a formal English garden to explore. If you're visiting on a Sunday, be aware that the Nathaniel Russell House is only open in the afternoon, from 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm.

Perhaps the highlight - and certainly the most photographed part - of East Bay Street is the stunning Rainbow Row. Look at any rack of postcards in Charleston and without doubt, an image of these brightly coloured colonial townhouses will jump out at you. The idea of bright pink, blue and yellow historic buildings may sound unappealing, but it's a sight worth seeing, although getting photographs yourself isn't easy due to all the trees in front of the properties.

That's a theme that continues down towards the Battery, a stunning tree-lined area, where almost every building is worth taking a look at, whether it's listed in the guidebook or not. There must be few places in the world where there are so many beautiful buildings all next to each other and all preserved for generations to come.

The Battery itself got its name from its former military use and even today, you can see cannons lined up, facing the harbor As you stand

there, you can understand why this area was so important for armies. The view over Charleston Harbor and the Cooper River are beautiful. Standing there on a beautiful day, it's almost impossible to imagine that this place was ravaged by Hurricane Hugo in 1989, which flattened 60 buildings in downtown Charleston and took the roof off the Nathaniel Russell House.

As well as historic homes, Charleston is packed with something else - churches, which is how it earned its nickname of the "Holy City." The easiest way to see that is to take to the water, on one of the many cruises that are offered. It's also a good way to get some of the best views of the Battery, and you can combine your cruise with lunch or dinner. Another great way to take a look at Charleston is on a carriage ride - and trust me, you'll also become a tourist attraction, with people snapping photos as you ride by. Horse drawn carriages make for a great photo, especially if you can catch them as they trundle past one of the beautiful colonial buildings.

The historic district of Charleston is also a great place to shop. The Old City Market is three blocks long and home to all sorts of traders and their goods, including sweet grass baskets, a traditional craft that was first brought to the area by slaves from West Africa. If you think that the price tag is a bit high, it's worth remembering that the baskets can take days or weeks to make.

From there, it's worth heading down East Bay Street, which is home to a range of art galleries. If you're struck by the beauty of Charleston, this is the place to head for to take a piece of it home with you.

Charleston has much more to offer than just the Historic District. Fine plantation homes are nearby, and Fort Sumter, where the first shots of the American Civil War were fired, stands in the middle of the harbor.

But whatever you do on your visit to Charleston, be sure to head for the Historic District. The number and quality of colonial houses here is almost unrivalled in America, and as you walk or take a carriage ride through the area, you almost expect to come face to face with one of the original English settlers. There are not many places in the world where you can say that.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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