

Overview of South Carolina

Agriculture dominates the small state of South Carolina, a region of rolling hills, fertile farmland, and grand antebellum plantations. The pastoral landscapes are charming but hold little interest, with most visitors drawn to the South Carolina coast, which contains most of its attractions.

White sandy seashore stretches from the Grand Strand in the north to the mouth of the Savannah River in the south. The resort of Myrtle Beach is the glitzy heart, which is famous for its family entertainment, amusement park attractions, and recreational activities, especially golf.

Resorts populate the coast to historic Georgetown, sitting between the carnival atmosphere of Myrtle Beach and the old port grandeur of Charleston, one of the most elegant cities in the country. South of Charleston, the coastline breaks into small marshy islands that preserve traces of Gullah culture.

The Sea Islands are home to descendants of West African slaves, brought to labour on the plantations but given land when freed in 1865. They speak a dialect known as Gullah that's unique to the African Americans of the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia.

Nicknamed the 'Palmetto State', it has a rich history documented in the historic district of Charleston and restored plantation estates. Civil War enthusiasts and those interested in the history of slavery in the USA enjoy a wealth of attractions in South Carolina, while those less engaged can simply soak up the distinct southern culture.

Key Facts

Language:

English is the most common language spoken but Spanish is often heard in the south-western states.

Passport/Visa:

It is highly recommended that travellers' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. A visa is required for short visits unless travellers qualify for entry under the Visa Waiver Program. The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) enables citizens of certain countries to travel to the US for a stay of up to 90 days without a visa. Visitors under the VWP need to register online three days before travel and have an Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA). This allows the US government to screen all visitors before travel. Visitors entering the country under the VWP must have a machine-readable passport (MRP) that has a barcode on the photo page. Travellers under the VWP must have passports that include biometrics if they wish to enter the country without a visa, which means that passports must contain unique personal data such as fingerprints or iris details. All passports must contain a digital photo image in order to travel visa-free. All visitors to the USA have a photograph and two fingerprints taken by an inkless scanner on arrival, including those travelling visa-free under the VWP. As part of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), all travellers travelling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, and the Caribbean region are required to present a passport or other valid travel document to enter or re-enter the United States. If departing from the USA, a valid passport is required by immigration authorities. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Currency:

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD), which is divided into 100 cents. Only major banks exchange foreign currency. ATMs are widespread and credit cards are widely accepted. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 120 volts, 60Hz. Plugs are mainly the type with two flat pins, though three-pin plugs (two flat parallel pins and a rounded pin) are also widely used. European appliances without dual-voltage capabilities will require an adapter.

Travel to South Carolina

Climate for South Carolina

The climate of South Carolina is subtropical, with plenty of humidity in its long, hot summers. Temperatures tend to be higher on the coast, with colder conditions in the mountains. But on average, winters are short and mild.

With predominately low altitudes in the state and the protection of the Appalachian Mountains screening South Carolina from cold interior air, average temperatures tend to range from 58°F (14C) in the northwest to 68°F (20C) on the coast.

Summer temperatures usually climb to 90°F (32C) and up, particularly in the central part of the state. Rainfall occurs mostly in the spring and summer, with more precipitation occurring in summer along the coast and in spring further inland.

Health Notes when travelling to United States of America

There are no specific health risks associated with travel within the USA. Medical facilities are excellent, but expensive. Only emergencies are treated without prior payment and treatment can be refused without evidence of insurance or proof of funds. Good medical insurance is essential. Visitors must be fully vaccinated with the primary series of an accepted COVID-19 vaccine to travel to the United States by plane if they are non-U.S. citizens.

Safety Notes when travelling to United States of America

Travel within the United States is generally trouble-free, though travellers should be aware that the US shares with the rest of the world, an increased threat from terrorist incidents. Security has been heightened, particularly at airports. Restrictions on hand luggage apply and travellers are advised to check on the latest situation with airlines in advance. Travellers should also be alert to the dangers of car and street crime in cities and should use common sense and take basic precautions. Hurricanes are common between June and November, putting the southern USA, including the Gulf Coast and the eastern US at risk. There is a risk of wildfires in many dry areas in the US, particularly on the West Coast from March to November.

Customs in United States of America

Laws vary from state to state, including speed limit, fines and punishment. The age at which alcohol may be legally bought and consumed is 21 years.

Duty Free in United States of America

Travellers to the United States who are returning residents of the country do not have to pay duty on articles purchased abroad to the value of \$800 provided their stay was longer than 48 hours and their duty-free allowance was not used in the 30-day period prior. For passengers arriving from Samoa, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands, a duty-free allowance of \$1,600 is allowed. The following items are included in this: 50 cigarettes and 10 cigars and 150 millilitres (5 fl. oz.) of alcoholic beverages or 150 millilitres (5 fl. oz.) of perfume containing alcohol. Restrictions may apply to goods from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Burma (Myanmar), Angola, Liberia and Sudan. It is prohibited to import Cuban cigars from any country.

Travellers to the United States who are non-residents do not have to pay duty on the following items: 50 cigars or 200 cigarettes and gifts to the value of \$100 provided their stay in the USA is not less than 72 hours and that the allowance has not been used in the preceding six-month period.

Prohibited items for residents and non-residents include meat or meat products, poultry, narcotics, absinthe, plants, seeds, vegetables, fruits, soil, live insects and other living plants or animal pests. Fish is prohibited unless it carries disease-free certification. Wildlife and animals or their by-products carry restrictions. Dairy products and eggs from specified countries are not allowed. Firearms and ammunition are not allowed without the necessary license and permit.

Doing Business in United States of America

In such a large country, filled with so many diverse groups, business practices may differ according to each state, however rarely to any large degree. The East Coast is traditionally more formal than the West Coast, though in states such as California, dress code and conservative appearance are as common as they would be in New York. Punctuality is important throughout the country and it is considered rude to be late for a meeting. Gift-giving is uncommon as it may be construed as bribery. Appropriate titles (Mr, Mrs, Ms) are used upon introduction and until otherwise stated. Americans favour politeness and greetings of 'Hello' and 'How are you?' are often expressed with sincerity. Business hours may vary in each state, but an 8am start and 5pm finish Monday to Friday is the most common with an hour over lunch.

Status and age are not necessarily indicative of seniority, nor do they carry much weight in themselves. Those doing business in the States should be mindful of this fact; foreigners should never make assumptions about someone's position or rank. Best practice is to be respectful to all parties. That said, the US upholds a hierarchal business structure, in which 'the boss' is the ultimate decision-maker. Senior leaders have the power of the last word, and can go against the grain just as easily as they can follow popular opinion. Foreigners should concentrate on winning over this individual, even if the greater group seems unsupportive. Americans value a direct style of communication. In this fast-paced, consumer culture 'time is money', and small-talk is viewed as unnecessary and wasteful. It's best for foreigners to get to the point quickly, speak about issues in a frank and open manner, and to avoid taking offence if someone questions or challenges them outright.

Communication in United States of America

The international country dialling code for the United States is +1. Mobile networks cover most of the country, especially all urban areas, and WiFi is widely available.

Tippling in United States of America

A 15 percent tip is expected by taxi drivers, bartenders, hairdressers and waiters, but travellers shouldn't tip in fast-food or self-service restaurants. In expensive restaurants or for large parties, the tip should be 20 percent of the bill. It is normal to tip staff such as valets and porters in hotels; this is discretionary, although a minimum of \$5 is expected. Most services are customarily tipped if the service is good.

Passport/Visa Note

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Airports in South Carolina

Myrtle Beach International Airport (MYR)

Myrtle Beach International Airport

www.flymyrtlebeach.com

Location: Grand Strand and Myrtle Beach The airport is situated three miles (5km) southwest of downtown Myrtle Beach.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Contacts: Tel: +1 843 448 1589.

Getting to the city: Coast RTA provides public bus service to and from the airport every day. There are hotel shuttles that run to and from the airport, as well as taxis and rental cars.

Car rental: Car rental companies located at the airport include Avis, Alamo, Thrifty, Budget, Hertz, National, Thrifty, and Enterprise.

Airport Taxis: There are a number of taxi companies operating from outside the baggage claim section of the airport. Passengers are urged to take the first taxi waiting in line.

Facilities: Airport facilities include a variety of restaurants and snack bars, a newsagent, information booths, and ATMs.

Parking: Short-term parking is free for 15 minutes and \$3 for the first 30 minutes, with each additional 15 minutes costing \$1. There is a daily maximum of \$21. Long-term parking is \$12 per day. Credit card parking costs \$10 a day.

Columbia Metropolitan Airport (CAE)

Columbia Metropolitan Airport

www.columbiaairport.com

Location: Columbia The airport is situated eight miles (13km) southwest of Columbia.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Getting to the city: Taxis and rental cars are available and many hotels provide airport shuttles. Limousines can also be arranged.

Car rental: Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar, Enterprise, Hertz, National, and Thrifty are represented at the airport.

Airport Taxis: A large number of taxi companies service the airport and a taxi can usually be found without pre-booking. Taxis can be found just outside the terminal.

Facilities: Airport facilities include a business centre, eateries, gift shops, a bookstore, and ATMs.

Parking: Covered parking in the multi-level garage is free for 20 minutes, \$3 for up to 40 minutes, then \$1 for each subsequent 20 minutes up to a daily maximum of \$12. Surface parking is \$1 per 20 minutes up to a maximum of \$8 per day. Valet parking is available for \$14 per day.

Charleston International Airport (CHS)

Charleston International Airport

www.iflychs.com

Location: Charleston The airport is situated 12 miles (20km) northwest of downtown Charleston.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Getting to the city: CARTA offers services to and from the airport on the NASH Express between about 8am and 9pm on weekdays and Saturdays, and 12pm and 6pm on Sundays. Bus tickets cost \$3.50 per person per trip. Once in town, passengers can access the free DASH shuttle service that travels to numerous destinations. There is a shuttle bus that makes multiple stops and is shared among multiple passengers. Adult shuttle fare to downtown Charleston is \$15, departing every 15 minutes. Taxis and rental cars are also available. There are also ride-hailing apps available such as Uber.

Car rental: Avis, Alamo, Budget, Hertz, National, and Enterprise are represented at the airport. Dollar and Thrifty sites are located off the premises.

Airport Taxis: Taxis operate at the airport. The taxi fare to downtown Charleston is roughly \$30.

Facilities: Airport facilities include pay phones, ATMs, bookstores, restaurants, and shops.

Parking: In the surface lot, parking costs \$1 per 20 minutes and up to a daily maximum of \$10. On the parking deck, hourly rates are the same but the daily maximum is \$15. Valet parking is \$21.

Greenville–Spartanburg International Airport (GSP)

Greenville–Spartanburg International Airport

www.gspairport.com

Location: Greenville The airport is situated about 13 miles (21km) from Greenville.

Time: GMT -5 (GMT -4 from mid-March to the first Sunday in November).

Contacts: Tel: (864) 877 7426

Getting to the city: There are various shuttles and transportation companies servicing the area, with Eastside Transportation being the official shuttle service. As well as limousines and rental cars, there are also ride-hailing apps such as Uber.

Car rental: Alamo, Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Thrifty, and Hertz are represented at the airport.

Airport Taxis: Eastside Transportation is the authorised airport taxi service. Uber also services the airport.

Facilities: Airport facilities include an ATM, conference rooms, business workstations, a restaurant, snack bars, and a gift shop.

Parking: All airport parking costs \$1 for every 30 minutes. A full day costs \$15 in the garages, \$9 in the daily lots, \$9 in the Sky Lots, and \$7 in the Economy Lot.

Charleston

Charleston is one of the loveliest cities in the country, despite having weathered great fires, earthquakes, epidemics, civil war, and a devastating hurricane. It is consistently classed among the most elegant and picturesque cities nationwide.

The port of Charleston is the oldest city in the state, sat on the peninsula separated by the Ashley and Cooper Rivers. A large downtown district boasts hundreds of preserved and restored buildings built over brick and cobblestone streets, housing old-fashioned inns, antique shops, and pubs.

Narrow houses festooned with wrought-iron balconies and wooden shutters line the streets, and ornate gates enclose pretty gardens and shaded porches. Many of its double-storey houses are authentically furnished museums that once belonged to wealthy colonial merchants, while many are still the beautiful private homes of wealthy residents.

The city started as an important seaport serving the rice and cotton plantations throughout the region. It was a major slave-trading centre with about a third of America's slaves being bought and sold at the riverfront market.

Populated by ancestors of West African slaves, the Gullah culture of the islands has a tangible presence. This is especially evident at the Old City Market that vibrates with the humming of traditional spirituals, local vendors, iron makers, basket ladies, and distinctive Gullah dialects.

Getting around in Charleston

Charleston is fairly compact and it's easy to explore many attractions on foot or on a rented bicycle. To visit plantations and other attractions outside the city, hiring a car is the best option. A comprehensive and efficient bus service covers most areas in the city, operated by the Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA).

The most useful public transport for visitors is the tram system (DASH), offering free transport in the historic downtown area every day of the week. It's possible to reach many of the city's top attractions on the system. Taxis are available but must be called for; Lyft and Uber are available.

Climate in Charleston

Charleston has a humid subtropical climate. Summer, between June and August, is hot and humid, with temperatures averaging between 70F (21C) and 91F (33C). The city's coastal situation helps to keep summers a bit cooler than inland.

Summer is also the wettest season, although Charleston receives significant rainfall throughout the year. Hurricanes are a threat in summer and early autumn. Winter, between December and February, is short and mild, with occasional snow flurries.

In the winter months, temperatures average between 38F (3C) and 62F (17C). Spring is generally a mild and pleasant season, perhaps better than summer because of the comfortably warm temperatures.

Sightseeing in Charleston

To holiday in Charleston is to travel back in time to the Old South. This lovely city preserves the ambience and distinctive architecture of its past, boasting fascinating historic sites and buildings, including forts, museums and old plantations with picturesque mansions and sprawling gardens.

Those who travel to Charleston will leave with a better understanding of the historic slave trade and the Civil War, the first shots of which were fired in Charleston at Fort Sumter. Visitors will most likely also leave with plenty of unique souvenirs picked up at the popular riverside market.

The best time to travel to Charleston is during spring (April and May), when the city is in bloom and the weather is dry, warm, and sunny. Most rain falls during the summer months (June to August) when thunderstorms are common. During autumn, there's the threat of hurricanes while winter is short but chilly.

A holiday in Charleston is best suited for those who enjoy sightseeing and soaking up history in a laidback manner, whether in a horse-drawn carriage or on a walking tour. A Charleston holiday is educational and fun for children, with the South Carolina Aquarium a particular drawcard for kids.

The city is compact and much of it is comfortably explored on foot or by hired bicycle, adding another element of fun and freedom for the whole family.

Charleston Attractions

Fort Sumter

Situated on a small manmade island in the bay, the Fort Sumter National Monument guards the entrance to Charleston Harbour. It's one of the most important historic military sites in the country, built using 70,000 tons of granite and rock brought from as far afield as New York City. The first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter in 1861. With the secession of South Carolina, the Confederates demanded the surrender of the fort and after 34 hours of continuous bombardment, the Union forces had no choice but to relinquish their hold. The Union troops became the first prisoners of the Civil War. The fort became a symbol of resistance until it was retaken by Union forces in 1865 after nearly four years of continual attack, reducing most of the fort to rubble. Park rangers conduct free tours around the restored structure, which includes a museum with historical displays.

Website: www.nps.gov/fosu

Plantations

Magnificent plantations sit along the Ashley River and the highway towards Georgetown, the main attraction being Boone Hall Plantation. A majestic oak avenue leads to the estate, where travellers can visit the original slave quarters, cotton gin house, and the mansion, furnished and decorated according to the period. Still near the river and closest to Charleston, Drayton Hall is the oldest preserved plantation house in the USA. Dating from 1742, the Georgian masterpiece is a National Historic Landmark and the only plantation house on the Ashley to survive the Civil War intact. Conversely, Middleton Place was largely destroyed. But the south wing has been restored and contains an impressive collection of historic documents, silver, furniture, and paintings. Interestingly, its grounds are the oldest landscaped gardens in the country, designed in 1741. The estate also boasts stable yards filled with heritage breeds of cows, goats, pigs, and chickens. The ornamental lakes and surrounding gardens are home to roaming peacocks and other farm animals. Magnolia Plantation was founded in 1676 by the Drayton family. The plantation opened its doors to the public in 1870, allowing all comers to view the gardens. It thus became the oldest public garden in the country.

South Carolina Aquarium

Charleston's most visited attraction, the South Carolina Aquarium features thousands of amazing aquatic animals. These include river otters, sharks, and loggerhead turtles in over 60 exhibits, representing the rich biodiversity of South Carolina from the mountains to the sea. The aquarium also affords visitors fabulous views of Charleston Harbor, and there are daily interactive exhibits and programmes for guests of all ages. Every visit reveals something new, with glimpses of new animals, budding plants, baby animals, and more. The institution provides a variety of opportunities to learn about conservation, animal life, endangered species, and environmental issues. It also houses creatures from further afield, with different exhibits illustrating various habitats. South Carolina Aquarium is involved in a few initiatives too, such as Good Catch. Organisers hope to foster awareness in the community around responsible harvesting and consumption of local seafood. They work with restaurants, fisheries, and caterers, in an attempt to protect the ocean.

Website: www.scaquarium.org

Charleston Museum

Founded in 1773, the Charleston Museum opened while the United States was still a British colony. It encompasses three historic buildings, aiming to preserve the unique culture and natural history of Charleston and the surrounding South Carolina Lowcountry. Exhibitions include cultural, historic, and natural artefacts, alongside two National Historic Landmark houses: the Heyward-Washington House and Joseph Manigault House. They are good representations of the graceful architecture and wealthy lifestyles of days gone by. Daniel Heyward built the Heyward-Washington House for his son, Thomas Heyward, who was among those who signed the Declaration of Independence. George Washington stayed here during a weeklong visit to Charleston, giving the house its name. Joseph Manigault House is a clear example of Federal architecture, influenced by the French Huguenots who moved to America to escape religious persecution. Both houses are furnished and decorated to appear as they would have done in the 1700s.

Website: www.charlestonmuseum.org

Angel Oak

Angel Oak is thought to be one of the oldest oak trees east of the Mississippi River. This extraordinary live oak is between 400 and 500 years old and boasts a vast canopy in excess of 17,000 square feet, despite it not being very tall. It's survived countless hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes, including severe damage from Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The tree's forest home may have been one of the islands' many lumber sources for ship-building back in the 18th century, yet nowadays the park and tree are owned by the city of Charleston. The Angel Tree features in various local legends and books. Keeping the tree safe from encroaching urban development has lately become an issue, although so far it is still located deep enough in the forest to be safe.

Caw Caw Interpretive Center and Charleston County Park

Set in the Caw Caw Swamp, the Caw Caw Interpretive Center is home to vast natural, cultural, and historical displays. Dating back to the 18th century, this formerly slave-worked rice paddy exhibits earthen dikes, rice trunks, and canals. Many species of animals and plants make their homes in the wildlife sanctuary, with a landscape of beech and holly forests servicing resident otters, frogs, squirrels, and more. Self-guided canoe trips are possible, as is cycling, hiking, and rock climbing. The park features six miles (9km) of walking trails, including elevated boardwalks through the wetlands where visitors can sometimes spot alligators creeping through the swamps. Birdwatchers will delight in searching for rare swallow-tailed kites and bald eagles.

Website: www.ccprc.com

The Hunley

The Hunley was the world's first successful combat submarine, built on President Abraham Lincoln's orders during the Civil War. The submarine first arrived in Charleston by train 1863, proceeding to sink the warship USS Housatonic in 1864. During the attack, it sank and remained a mystery for many years. Modern navigation tools finally discovered the submarine in 1995, brought to land both for preservation and in order to piece together the history of the submarine's final hours. The submarine is now on display in a conservation tank at the Warren Lasch Conservation Center on the Cooper River. Visitors can see facial reconstructions of the Hunley crew, artefacts excavated from the submarine, and the legendary gold coin that supposedly saved the captain's life.

Website: www.hunley.org

Provost Dungeon and Old Exchange Building

The British used Provost Dungeon for prisoners during the American Revolution. In 1774, the Old Exchange Building hosted the delegate elections for the First Continental Congress. Built in 1771, its original purpose was to assist with heavy import and export trade in Charleston. The Exchange was built in the Palladian style of architecture with a facade constructed from imported Portland stone. Having withstood war, earthquakes, and hurricanes, the building is strong. Part of the Half-Moon Bastion was excavated here and is the only visible section of the old Charlestown fort. Today, the South Carolina Daughters of the American Revolution run both the Old Exchange Building and the Provost Dungeon. All three floors of the main building are open to the public as a museum focused on the city's history and its role in American history. On tours through the dungeon, visitors are educated about the many pirates jailed during the 1800s. The Old Exchange Building regularly hosts symposiums on topics relating to Charleston's history, with the building also available to rent after hours as a function venue.

Website: www.oldexchange.org

Airports in Charleston

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Charleston International Airport

<http://www.iflychs.com>

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Grand Strand and Myrtle Beach

The Grand Strand stretches 60 miles (97km) along the South Carolina coastline, from Little River to Georgetown. Myrtle Beach lies at its core, a mega entertainment centre replete with beach resorts, seaside communities, and a glitzy collection of uninterrupted commercial development.

The population at Myrtle Beach swells during summer, with vacationers flocking to the funfairs, waterslides, arcades, and shops at its amusement park. When the bright lights and relentless entertainment wear thin, Myrtle Beach State Park offers nature trails, camping, fishing, and swimming.

At the southern end of the Grand Strand lies Georgetown. It's a picturesque historic district and a restored waterfront that buzzes with activity. During colonial times, it boasted a successful plantation culture and was the centre of America's rice empire. A number of estates can still be visited in the area.

A visit to the collection of islands sprinkled about the coast is a popular excursion. Named the Sea Islands, they make up more than half of the South Carolina coastline and are separated from the mainland by estuaries and marshes.

The Sea Islands are traditionally home to black communities called Gullah people, descended from slaves brought to the Carolinas during the 18th century. When freed by the Union army in 1865, the slaves were granted the lands.

They have preserved much of their culture as well as their dialect, a speech heavily influenced by several African languages. During the labour-driven height of the rice culture, slaves from West African rice kingdoms were in high demand so they could teach colonists how to plant and grow rice.

Getting around in Grand Strand and Myrtle Beach

Hiring a car in Myrtle Beach is generally the most convenient way to see the city, with a number of car hire companies operating in the area. It's worth remembering that roads can be quite congested, especially during the busy tourist season.

There are a number of taxi companies in Myrtle Beach. Taxis are often found congregated around popular tourist spots and at the airport. They can also be arranged via the telephone. While taxis are convenient, they can be quite expensive relative to other transport options in the city. Lyft and Uber are also available.

Public transport in Myrtle Beach takes the form of a bus network, managed by The Coast RTA. Buses run regular routes within Myrtle Beach as well as to other towns and cities along the Atlantic Coast. Exact change is required when paying for a ticket on the bus, as drivers do not have change. Bus passes are available for frequent travellers.

Climate in Grand Strand and Myrtle Beach

Myrtle Beach has a humid subtropical climate, with hot summers tempered by ocean breezes and winters that stay cool and comfortable. The influence of the warm currents of the Gulf Stream just offshore ensures that this holiday strip is warm enough for fun in the sun most of the year.

Summers (June to August) are hot and humid, and experience frequent thunderstorms. Average highs during the summer hover around 86F (30C). Winters are mild, with highs averaging around 57F (14C) and lows dropping to 37F (3C).

As the city's climate is pleasant all year, any time of the year is a good time to visit Myrtle Beach. Although for travellers wanting to avoid the crowds, travel outside of the summer season is a good idea.

Tropical cyclones can sometimes affect Myrtle Beach but major storms are not common. It does rain suddenly, and heavily, particularly during summer. But the sandy soil allows for quick drainage and even the emerald green golf courses are ready for action again as soon as the showers let up.

South Carolina Attractions

Overview

South Carolina conjures images of antebellum plantation houses, scents of jasmine and notions honeysuckle floating over long stretches of sun-drenched coastline. It's in many ways an ornamental state, thanks to a heritage of elegant British architecture from a time of aristocratic colonial rule.

The turbulent history of slavery and civil war adds an edge to this otherwise entrancing rural state. Yet travellers embrace this aspect, educating themselves with trips to restored plantations, battlefields, and museums promising rich sightseeing fodder.

Although Columbia is the capital and largest city of South Carolina, famously atmospheric Charleston is the most popular travel hub of the state. It invites visitors to step back centuries, with horse-drawn carriages one of the most popular forms of touristic transport.

Alongside this old-fashioned cultural powerhouse, the coastal resorts of glitzy Myrtle Beach offer a different sort of holiday fun, with water sports, outlet malls, amusement parks, and arcades warring for attention with the lovely beaches.

Most of South Carolina's popular attractions sit along the coast and the majority of visitors don't explore further inland. But for those looking to get off the tourist track, the interior promises dramatic mountains, mysterious swamps, rolling farmlands, and sleepy old towns, best explored by hiring a car and getting a bit lost.

Fort Sumter

Situated on a small manmade island in the bay, the Fort Sumter National Monument guards the entrance to Charleston Harbour. It's one of the most important historic military sites in the country, built using 70,000 tons of granite and rock brought from as far afield as New York City. The first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter in 1861. With the secession of South Carolina, the Confederates demanded the surrender of the fort and after 34 hours of continuous bombardment, the Union forces had no choice but to relinquish their hold. The Union troops became the first prisoners of the Civil War. The fort became a symbol of resistance until it was retaken by Union forces in 1865 after nearly four years of continual attack, reducing most of the fort to rubble. Park rangers conduct free tours around the restored structure, which includes a museum with historical displays.

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Magnificent plantations sit along the Ashley River and the highway towards Georgetown, the main attraction being Boone Hall Plantation. A majestic oak avenue leads to the estate, where travellers can visit the original slave quarters, cotton gin house, and the mansion, furnished and decorated according to the period. Still near the river and closest to Charleston, Drayton Hall is the oldest preserved plantation house in the USA. Dating from 1742, the Georgian masterpiece is a National Historic Landmark and the only plantation house on the Ashley to survive the Civil War intact. Conversely, Middleton Place was largely destroyed. But the south wing has been restored and contains an impressive collection of historic documents, silver, furniture, and paintings. Interestingly, its grounds are the oldest landscaped gardens in the country, designed in 1741. The estate also boasts stable yards filled with heritage breeds of cows, goats, pigs, and chickens. The ornamental lakes and surrounding gardens are home to roaming peacocks and other farm animals. Magnolia Plantation was founded in 1676 by the Drayton family. The plantation opened its doors to the public in 1870, allowing all comers to view the gardens. It thus became the oldest public garden in the country.

South Carolina Aquarium

Charleston's most visited attraction, the South Carolina Aquarium features thousands of amazing aquatic animals. These include river otters, sharks, and loggerhead turtles in over 60 exhibits, representing the rich biodiversity of South Carolina from the mountains to the sea. The aquarium also affords visitors fabulous views of Charleston Harbor, and there are daily interactive exhibits and programmes for guests of all ages. Every visit reveals something new, with glimpses of new animals, budding plants, baby animals, and more. The institution provides a variety of opportunities to learn about conservation, animal life, endangered species, and environmental issues. It also houses creatures from further afield, with different exhibits illustrating various habitats. South Carolina Aquarium is involved in a few initiatives too, such as Good Catch. Organisers hope to foster awareness in the community around responsible harvesting and consumption of local seafood. They work with restaurants, fisheries, and caterers, in an attempt to protect the ocean.

Website: www.scaquarium.org

Charleston Museum

Founded in 1773, the Charleston Museum opened while the United States was still a British colony. It encompasses three historic buildings, aiming to preserve the unique culture and natural history of Charleston and the surrounding South Carolina Lowcountry. Exhibitions include cultural, historic, and natural artefacts, alongside two National Historic Landmark houses: the Heyward-Washington House and Joseph Manigault House. They are good representations of the graceful architecture and wealthy lifestyles of days gone by. Daniel Heyward built the Heyward-Washington House for his son, Thomas Heyward, who was among those who signed the Declaration of Independence. George Washington stayed here during a weeklong visit to Charleston, giving the house its name. Joseph Manigault House is a clear example of Federal architecture, influenced by the French Huguenots who moved to America to escape religious persecution. Both houses are furnished and decorated to appear as they would have done in the 1700s.

Website: www.charlestonmuseum.org

Angel Oak

Angel Oak is thought to be one of the oldest oak trees east of the Mississippi River. This extraordinary live oak is between 400 and 500 years old and boasts a vast canopy in excess of 17,000 square feet, despite it not being very tall. It's survived countless hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes, including severe damage from Hurricane Hugo in 1989. The tree's forest home may have been one of the islands' many lumber sources for ship-building back in the 18th century, yet nowadays the park and tree are owned by the city of Charleston. The Angel Tree features in various local legends and books. Keeping the tree safe from encroaching urban development has lately become an issue, although so far it is still located deep enough in the forest to be safe.

Caw Caw Interpretive Center and Charleston County Park

Set in the Caw Caw Swamp, the Caw Caw Interpretive Center is home to vast natural, cultural, and historical displays. Dating back to the 18th century, this formerly slave-worked rice paddy exhibits earthen dikes, rice trunks, and canals. Many species of animals and plants make their homes in the wildlife sanctuary, with a landscape of beech and holly forests servicing resident otters, frogs, squirrels, and more. Self-guided canoe trips are possible, as is cycling, hiking, and rock climbing. The park features six miles (9km) of walking trails, including elevated boardwalks through the wetlands where visitors can sometimes spot alligators creeping through the swamps. Birdwatchers will delight in searching for rare swallow-tailed kites and bald eagles.

Website: www.ccprc.com

The Hunley

The Hunley was the world's first successful combat submarine, built on President Abraham Lincoln's orders during the Civil War. The submarine first arrived in Charleston by train 1863, proceeding to sink the warship USS Housatonic in 1864. During the attack, it sank and remained a mystery for many years. Modern navigation tools finally discovered the submarine in 1995, brought to land both for preservation and in order to piece together the history of the submarine's final hours. The submarine is now on display in a conservation tank at the Warren Lasch Conservation Center on the Cooper River. Visitors can see facial reconstructions of the Hunley crew, artefacts excavated from the submarine, and the legendary gold coin that supposedly saved the captain's life.

Website: www.hunley.org

Provost Dungeon and Old Exchange Building

The British used Provost Dungeon for prisoners during the American Revolution. In 1774, the Old Exchange Building hosted the delegate elections for the First Continental Congress. Built in 1771, its original purpose was to assist with heavy import and export trade in Charleston. The Exchange was built in the Palladian style of architecture with a facade constructed from imported Portland stone. Having withstood war, earthquakes, and hurricanes, the building is strong. Part of the Half-Moon Bastion was excavated here and is the only visible section of the old Charlestown fort. Today, the South Carolina Daughters of the American Revolution run both the Old Exchange Building and the Provost Dungeon. All three floors of the main building are open to the public as a museum focused on the city's history and its role in American history. On tours through the dungeon, visitors are educated about the many pirates jailed during the 1800s. The Old Exchange Building regularly hosts symposiums on topics relating to Charleston's history, with the building also available to rent after hours as a function venue.

Website: www.oldexchange.org

Currency

The official currency is the US Dollar (USD), which is divided into 100 cents. Only major banks exchange foreign currency. ATMs are widespread and credit cards are widely accepted. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Exchange rate for 1 USD - U.S. Dollar

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.93 EUR Euro	0.80 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	152.99 JPY Japanese Yen	1.37 CAD Canadian Dollar	0.91 CHF Swiss Franc
1.52 AUD Australian Dollar	39.40 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	443.91 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	93,075.00 LBP Lebanese Pound	4.86 LYD Libyan Dinar	6.86 BOB Bolivian Boliviano
0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	1.35 SGD Singapore Dollar	10.82 SEK Swedish Krona	0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar
0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	58.11 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	16.95 MXN Mexican Peso	610.53 XOF West African CFA Franc	0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina
0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	133.87 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat	0.00 BWP Botswana Pula
3.72 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	938.44 CLP Chilean Peso	386.84 AMD Armenia Dram	23.29 CZK Czech Koruna	17.63 MDL Moldova Lei	139.89 ISK Icelandic Krona
12,582.40 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	3.72 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.71 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	38.15 UYU Uruguayan Peso	0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee
0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	10.88 NOK Norwegian Krone	4.03 PLN Polish Zloty	3.75 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee	36.79 THB Thai Baht
3.66 AED U.A.E Dirham	5.09 BRL Brazilian Real	4.63 RON Romanian New Leu	7.81 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	610.53 XAF Central African CFA Franc	25,405.70 VND Vietnamese Dong
878.36 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	10.06 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar	1.00 PAB Panamanian Balboa
1.70 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	3,920.00 COP Colombian Peso	88.42 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	362.00 HUF Hungarian Forint	10.89 TJS Tajikistan Ruble	16,073.70 IDR Indonesian Rupiah
47.95 EGP Egyptian Pound	1,358.84 KRW South Korean Won	7,456.52 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	4.74 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	508.31 CRC Costa Rican Colón	1.67 NZD New Zealand Dollar
277.87 PKR Pakistani Rupee	91.39 RUB Russian Rouble	18.51 ZAR South African Rand	3.13 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	1.82 BGN Bulgarian Lev
32.33 TRY Turkish Lira	57.28 PHP Philippine Peso	32.31 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	1,164.84 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	108.90 RSD Serbian Dinar	7.24 CNY Chinese Yuan	6.94 DKK Danish Krone
3.49 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	83.42 INR Indian Rupee				