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Introducing Charleston...

When people think about the American Deep South it's not often that our thoughts flit to the timeless cobbled promenades of Charleston; – our minds are usually clouded by the conjuring of desolate ranches, cowboy hats, country music and mouth-watering BBQ ribs and iced tea. Not to say that these things can't be found in Charleston, but there is a certain feel to the city that makes it a real gem in the southern state of South Carolina. Maybe it's the grand stature of the residential houses encased in antebellum fascias or the warm welcome you are greeted with when wandering the streets of Rainbow Row. Whatever it is, there aren't words to describe it and, sadly, people can't bottle it either – it's something you have to experience for yourself.

Charleston's history is a fascinating one; it almost leaps off the page in eager anticipation to be told. It begins with a couple of Englishmen, who founded the city in 1670. Charleston started off as a lowly seaport before propelling itself into a competitive destination for business and wealth. The city is responsible for many fine talented individuals, including magnificent architects and designers who helped carve a unique groove for this jewel of the south to call its own. This includes the oldest arts venue for acting and music – 'Dock Street Theatre', a myriad of shops and cafés in Downtown Charleston and the oldest college in the country.

Did you know Charleston is the birth place of Robert Mills, the creative mind behind the infamous Washington Monument?

A devastating earthquake struck in 1886, tearing down many of the antebellum buildings. This paved the way for the founding of The Historic Charleston Foundation, established in 1947 in order to savour and preserve the city's architectural heritage.

To this day, the society holds festivals and fundraising events to channel into new projects. The most recent of these being the Waterfront Park, complete with lavish fountains, picnic-friendly wide open spaces and trails for runners and the not-quite-so-keen-on-exercise, leisurely strollers.

Charlestonians (as they refer to themselves), are culture affluent and keen attendees of theatre, jazz bars and art galleries – all which can be found on the mighty King Street boulevard. Everything you could possibly desire can be found here, from luxury restaurants and boutiques to individual book stores and candle shops. The best way to travel is by horse drawn carriage so you can get a full flavour of Charleston. You will take in some magnificent sights on these lovely trails, such as The Great Episcopal Church, Old City Jail and The Old Exchange to name a few.

Popping into the local shop or café in Downtown Charleston isn't your usual urban setting where the staff are rushed off their feet and hurrying you out

the door. Instead, it's the kind of haunt where they know your coffee is a flat white, with one sugar and served with a smile and a 'hello, how are you today?'. You will soon see why this captivating city is known for its hospitality.

Join *Balmoral* on her [Voyage to the American Deep South](#) in September 2015 and enjoy Fred. Olsen's maiden call into charming Charleston.

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