

DESTINATION

SPRING HAS SPRUNG IN CHARLESTON

THE HOLY CITY BLOSSOMS BEFORE TEMPERATURES HEAT UP AND CROWDS RUSH IN.

BY KELSEY OGLETREE

You'd be hard pressed to find a destination more beautiful than Charleston, South Carolina, in spring. With average temperatures in the mid-70s in April and early May, this season is a perfect time to explore the colorful streets and revel in the beauty of dozens of plants in bloom, from delicate jasmine to vibrant azaleas, fragrant honeysuckle and cascading wisteria. Every spring for 75 years, the Festival of Houses and Gardens (this year, March 15 – April 16), provides rare glimpses into private homes and gardens around the city, along with history walks, wine tastings, gardening workshops, musical performances and more.

You'll find a wide mix of modern and traditional hotels within downtown Charleston, and some that are the perfect blend of both. The Loutrel, which opened in late 2021 a few blocks from Rainbow Row, is a boutique hotel with a design-forward lobby featuring a large-scale mural by local artist Linda Fantuzzo, and one of the best rooftops in town. Each of its 50 genteel rooms are bedecked in



soft hues of blue, grey and gold — a restful, quiet respite from the busy cobblestone streets outside.

The iconic pink Mills House hotel, first established in the 1850s and located steps from the famous Gibbes Museum of Art (hosting the second-annual Art Charleston visual arts festival, April 26-30), recently completed a grand renovation that added a rooftop bar and terrace and the charming Black Door Cafe.

If you'd like to live like a local in Charleston, book one of 16 luxurious guest rooms at Zero George, a hotel tucked inside early 19th-century restored buildings in the city's residential Ansonborough neighborhood. Be sure to snag reservations at the exclusive eight-seat caviar bar for a pre-dinner



treat complete with Champagne pairings. And, if you wish to linger longer, Zero George also has five exquisite Residences that can be rented by the week or month.

If you're in town for a festival, peruse the latest styles at Hampden Clothing, a local favorite filled with perfect-for-spring-strolling dresses from top designers. Croghan's Jewel Box, a family-owned shop for more than a century, is a must-stop for both new and estate jewelry. Pick up a piece from the Goldbug Collection, designed by the family's fourth-generation sisters, for a touch of Charleston you can take home — think peanut-shaped charms or palmetto frond earrings. Shopping for vino to enjoy back at your hotel, or in one of Charleston's many romantic gardens or parks? Pop into Graft



The Loutrel



Zero George Caviar Bar

Wine Shop, a neighborhood hangout known for its unusual and trendy bottles (plus free tastings on Tuesdays).

No trip to The Holy City is complete without a historic walking tour. Book a private excursion through Exclusively Charleston, which customizes routes according to your interests, so even those who've been many times will discover something new. And, if you time your trip right, you may be able to visit the long-anticipated International African American Museum. After many delays, it's finally expected to open in the first half of 2023 (watch iaamuseum.org for details). The \$120 million architectural marvel, located along the Cooper River, will guide visitors through the stories of thousands of Africans who passed through Gadsden's Wharf, and feature beautiful botanic gardens, art installations and an infinity fountain for reflection and remembrance.



Black Door Cafe at the Mills House



Gibbes Museum of Art