

travel



HAWAII'S BACKYARD
Tasting Kauai takes visitors on a flavorful ride from farmers market to kitchen to table >> G3

SIGNS OF HAWAIIAN LIFE >> G8
LAS VEGAS ADVISOR >> G8



The Hay House, a 24-room Italian Renaissance villa, was built by Macon bookman William Butler Johnston in 1855. Construction took five years. At right, The Unitarian Church in Charleston, S.C., is the oldest Unitarian Church in the South.



White Point Gardens is a 6-acre public park marking the end of The Battery, a defensive seawall and promenade in Charleston, S.C.



Rainbow Row in Charleston, S.C., consists of 13 blocks of row houses painted in colorful pastels. The area is a favorite destination for tourists.

EXPOSURE

Charleston, S.C., and Macon, Ga., offer visitors plenty of U.S. history, fine architecture, great food and truly friendly folks

By Julie L. Kessler
Special to the Star-Advertiser

When it came time to plan a spring break getaway with my daughter Remi, who attends university back East, a plan was hatched for us to see a bit of America's Deep South.

We both flew into Atlanta from our respective cities, then drove 90 minutes to Macon, a town of 91,000 in the center of the state, thus its nickname, the "Heart of Georgia."

Historically, Macon thrived because of its location on the Ocmulgee River, enabling easy export of the state's chief product: cotton. Construction of the railroad in 1843 led to greater economic opportunities, and during the Civil War, Macon became the site of the Confederacy's official arsenal. The city is also noted for Wesleyan College, which was the first U.S. college to grant degrees to women.

While Macon is somewhat off the beaten track for tourists, for me the city is a poignant reminder of family. By an odd twist of historical fate, my father and his parents

were in Macon in 1938 just six weeks before the wave of Nazi violence known as Kristallnacht overtook their hometown of Vienna and World War II engulfed Europe. My grandparents remained in Macon for 50 years and are both buried there.

On arrival, we checked into the charming 1842 Inn, a Greek Revival, antique-filled, historic bed-and-breakfast where visitors can easily picture Union Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman making an appearance for an afternoon mint julep. A five-minute stroll from the Inn is Macon's historic center, where my grandfather ran a thriving business and where it seems time has stood still ever since.

A block away is the Hay House, a magnificent, sprawling antebellum mansion built by William Butler Johnston, keeper of the Confederate treasury. Down the street is the Cannonball House, an 1853 Greek Revival home that was struck by a cannonball during a Union Army attack in 1864. It contains impressive

Please see SOUTH, G6



The Dovesell Restaurant is in the historic downtown district of Macon. The popular eatery serves traditional Southern cuisine in a rustic atmosphere.

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The Old Slave Mart in Charleston, S.C., is a reminder of the nation's history of injustice to African-Americans who were brought to the market to be sold as laborers on the region's many cotton plantations. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and now houses a museum.

SOUTH: Visit in spring for festival celebrating cherry trees

Continued from C1

period furnishings and Civil War military paraphernalia. Across the street is Mercer University and Law School (our alumna is television legal commentator and Macon native Nancy Grace). A few blocks over is the Tubman Museum, the South's largest museum devoted to African-American art, history and culture.

DURING our visit in Macon, Macon residents were eagerly preparing for the annual cherry blossom festival, including tying reams of pink tulle onto Doric columns adorning homes and businesses. Macon has more than 300,000 Yoshino cherry trees, and the festival normally attracts about 200,000 people over a two-week period. We paid our respects to my grandparents' final resting place, giving thanks to the small Georgia town that allowed them to survive and thrive during an uncertain time in world history.

Then we pressed on to Charleston, South Carolina's oldest and second-largest city with a population of approximately 128,000. Founded in 1670, it was originally named Charles Town after England's King Charles II. This was an easy four-hour drive, made easier since gas along the way was under \$2 a gallon.

We checked into the King George IV Bed-and-Breakfast. To get our bearings — and avoid the rain — we hopped onto the free trolley car that circumnavigates the city. When the weather cleared, we got off and meandered through Charleston City Market, enjoying a coffee and visiting vendors selling beautiful baskets and other items made from sweetgrass, a craft brought to the area by African-American slaves from the West Indies.

The most striking physical aspect of historic Charleston is the architecture. Federalist, Greek Revival, Italianate and antebellum. Everywhere one turns, there is real estate eye candy: Pastel-colored mansions along the Battery, museums, restaurants, churches of every denomination, shops, even law and medical offices, are lovingly preserved to perfection.



A grand marble staircase graces the lobby Charleston's Historic Post Office Building at the corner of Broad and Meeting streets. Built in 1886, the lobby also features carved woodwork and iron railings. A small museum contains historical artifacts from the early days of the Charleston postal service.

Two of the most impressive religious buildings are the French Huguenot Church and the Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Synagogue.

The original French Huguenot Church was destroyed by fire in 1796, and its 1845 replacement was Charleston's first Gothic Revival structure. During services the original pipe organ serenades churchgoers.

Beth Elohim Synagogue, built in 1840, is a gorgeous, Classical Revival-style building and a National Historic Landmark. It's also the second-oldest synagogue in the U.S. since Charleston was one of the first Southern cities with a large and prosperous Jewish population. The American Reform Judaism movement was established there in 1842.

Needing sustenance, we had dinner at Justine's Kitchen, where traditional Southern cooking is served in a homey atmosphere. It's deservedly famous for its fried chicken and spicy collard greens.

Food is a serious business in Charleston, and while some of it might not meet with a dietitian's approval, it is uniformly delicious. There is probably nowhere else on the planet where a macaroni and cheese is deemed a vegetable and iced tea is served so sugary sweet that you get a head rush (ask for it unsweetened; no one will be insulted).

For less artery-clogging fare, great meals were had at FIG (short for Food Is Good), known for its fish stew in coquette, a saffron-scented, aromatic broth served in a casual dining room. Hyman's Seafood

Company is also a good choice. It offers more than a dozen fresh seafood choices daily, and while it can be prepared many ways (Caribbean-jerk, Cajun, broiled or steamed, etc.), fried is the way to go. The crispy flounder was divine and so were the homestyle soups. We also enjoyed a healthy lunch at Bull Street Gourmet & Market, sampling quinoa salads and savoring room for an enormous chocolate whoopie pie. One of our favorite meals was dinner at Gault & Malciet, a small French diner founded 31 years ago by a Parisian couple. They sold the restaurant a few years ago to three longtime employees who have carried on their delicious tradition. Dinner specials come with a glass of good French wine, and the French country appetizers comfortably transport you without airline to Bordeaux.

WE EXPLORED the dark side of the Deep South's heritage at the Old Slave Mart, where slave traders came to buy and sell enslaved African-Americans to work the region's many cotton plantations. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and now houses a museum.

As a die-hard fan of the Netflix series "House of Cards," we drove to main character Frank Underwood's alma mater, The Citadel. (Spoiler alert: None of the filming of Citadel scenes, including the famous library scene, were actually filmed there.) Founded in 1842, the Moorish-style campus is one of the six senior military colleges in the United States. The original building is now the pink-

pointed Embassy Suites Hotel downtown. One can take a cadet-led tour on campus during the academic year or pick up a walking tour brochure at its museum. Inside the Daniel Library, murals illustrate The Citadel's history. If you happen to be there on a Friday afternoon, you can see the cadets in their dress uniforms impressively marching along Summerall Field.

No trip to Charleston would be complete without a visit to one of the many nearby plantations. Just a 20-minute drive away is Drayton Hall, with Georgian-Palladian-inspired architecture on 630 acres near the Ashley River. Drayton is the oldest unaltered plantation in America open to the public and one that survived both the Revolutionary and Civil wars intact. We coupled this visit with a stop at the nearby Antique Mall & Auction, which has some interesting, reasonably priced period pieces and where we had a wonderful lunch of homemade soup, Caesar salad, and crab cake sandwiches with sweet potato fries at The Livelihood Cafe.

The Deep South is chock-full of American history, notable architecture and fabulous cooks. It also boasts some of the kindest, most hospitable people in our country. Spring may be the best time to visit as Deep South summers can be miserably hot and humid. Still, you can't complain too much about a place where "y'all" is the only permissible proper noun, fried chicken and pecan pie are basic food groups and the words "bless your heart" are uttered all day long.

IF YOU GO . . .

MACON, GA., AND CHARLESTON, S.C.

THE BEST WAY

Delta, American, United and USAir offer service from Honolulu to Atlanta starting at \$896. Delta offers nonstop service for \$2,244.

GETTING AROUND

>> Given Macon's location in the center of the state, you will need a car to get there. (Fortunately, the city has no parking meters.) All of the historic sites are within walking distance. >> Charleston is also a walking city, and that's the best way to see it. A free trolley service goes to all of the main tourist sites in historic downtown. You will need a car to see The Citadel and plantations in the region.

WHERE TO STAY

MACON

>> The 1842 Inn, 353 College St. Phone: 478-741-1842. Website: 1842inn.com. Rates are \$189 per night for two, including breakfast and afternoon hors d'oeuvres. Free parking.

CHARLESTON

>> Meeting Street Inn, 173 Meeting St. Phone: 803-842-8022. Website: meetingstreetinn.com. Rates are \$139 to \$299 for two, depending on day and season, includes breakfast and happy-hour wine and cheese reception daily in the lobby. Parking is \$14 per night. >> King George IV Inn, 32 George St. Phone: 888-724-1667. Website: kinggeorgeiv.com. Rates are \$199 for two including breakfast. Free parking.

WHERE TO EAT

MACON

>> Dovetail Restaurant, 541 Cherry St. Good wine selection and innovative food in historic downtown. Dinner for two, \$60. Phone: 478-238-1893. Website: dovetailmacoon.com. >> Natalius Restaurant, 201 N. Macon St. Classic Italian food in romantic setting. Dinner for two, \$75. Phone: 478-741-1390. Website: www.natalius.net.

CHARLESTON

>> Bull Street Gourmet & Market, 120 King St. Great salads, sandwiches, coffee, desserts. Lunch for two, \$25. Phone: 843-722-6464. Website: bullstreetgourmetandmarket.com. >> Gault & Malciet, 98 Broad St. Delicious, traditional French country food, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner in a casual atmosphere with group tables. Dinner for two, \$35. Phone: 843-577-9797. Website: eastandfrenchcharleston.com. >> Justine's Kitchen, 251 Meeting St. Great Southern comfort food. Save room for dessert if you dare. Dinner for two, \$30. Phone: 843-722-7224. Website: justineskitchen.com. >> The Livelihood Cafe, 1337 Ashley River Road. Wonderful Southern food made by the owner, John Sigler. Great place to stop en route or after a visit to Drayton Hall Plantation. Lunch for two, \$25. Phone: 843-212-5042. Email: livelihoodcafe@gmail.com. >> FIG Restaurant, 232 Meeting St. Classical Southern food with an upscale twist in bistro setting. Dinner for two, \$90. Phone: 843-865-5000. Website: atalig.com. >> Hyman's Seafood, 215 Meeting St. A Charleston institution in a historic building. Dinner for two, \$60. Phone: 843-722-6000. Website: hymansseafood.com.

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