



TRAVEL FILE

THE KLARA GLOWCZEWSKA REPORT

SOUTHERN HIGH

Charleston has it all: the fine houses, the food, the fun. It also has endless ways to get fit and feel fantastic.

BY KLARA GLOWCZEWSKA

LOCAL MOTION

The quiet, tony streets of the South of Broad area are made for bikes—most hotels have them—and for running.

“It’s the vibe here,” a physical trainer in Charleston tells me. “People want to look good, to dress well.”

She is explaining something I noticed on an earlier visit: the city’s flair for fitness. Surprising, maybe, in this land of Geetchie Boy grits, buttered beans, coconut layer cakes, and James Beard Award-winning craft cocktails. But the evidence was all around: a profusion of yoga studios—12, I was told, just in the five-square-mile peninsula that comprises Charleston’s historic downtown. And stores on King Street, the main shopping artery, loaded with surfing, skateboarding, and cycling gear, as well as fancy sports apparel. Most hotels seemed to have fleets of color-coordinated bicycles. And runners were everywhere: along the city’s breezy water-

front promenades and amid the green, humid hush of the streets “south of Broad”—trophy house territory.

Lynn Easton, an event planner and co-owner of the romantic Zero George hotel, puts a more philosophical spin on it: “Charleston just inspires a very high standard in everything. It all goes back to the architecture.”

For its depth of history and richness of culture—including 100 buildings dating from before 1776 and 1,000 from before 1861—Charleston has been called America’s Rome. I’ve come back here alone,

intent on doing as the Romans do: to experience all the things that people typically come to Charleston for—the restored antebellum buildings, the gastronomic glories—but also to exercise to my heart’s content. If the body, as Corinthians teaches, is a temple, I am here in the “Holy City” to discover just how much restoration and renewal this temple of mine can take.

My plan: to stay in five different hotels and sample as many fitness offerings as I can. Some I have booked (private lessons, treatments, excursions), and I will improvise the rest. I will do yoga and Pilates. I will lift weights. I will swim, bike, kayak, walk, and run. I will recover and repeat. (That I will be eating well along the way goes without saying—see “Where I Ate.”) Charleston may be a small city, but I’m going to treat it—as well as



its barrier islands, beaches, and salt marsh estuaries—like a giant gym.

THE HISTORIC DISTRICT

“You are scheduled for a salt scrub and moisturizing massage at 6 p.m. and a Tata Harper all-natural facial at 7 p.m.,” I am reminded as I check into the **Belmond Charleston Place**, my first stop. It is 2 p.m. and I’m starting things off with a two-hour run, for context—call it power sightseeing.

I zig and zag, moving at whatever pace and in whatever direction I choose along the peninsula’s grid of streets, which go north-south and east-west. I warm up around six-acre Marion Square Park, named for Revolutionary War commander Francis Marion (known as the Swamp Fox for his guerrilla tactics). I slow down to read the plaques on the houses of Edward Rutledge, who signed the Declaration of Independence, and of his older brother John, who signed the Constitution. (So rich, educated, and powerful were the white citizens of Charleston—merchants as well as plantation owners with second homes in town—that the city produced four signers of each of America’s two seminal documents.) The Exchange Building, on Broad Street, is one of three structures left (out of 13) where the Constitution was ratified. Brings me to a momentary stop.

I pick up speed along emptier, water-facing East Bay, where ships from around the world used to dock during colonial and post-Revolutionary times. This was the site of slave auctions—40 percent of all people who arrived from Africa and the Caribbean set foot on American soil for the first time right here—“ground zero of black culture and of the African-American experience,” as Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. characterized it.

Nearby Rainbow Row, the longest cluster of intact Georgian buildings in the United States, requires a slow meander (the ironwork detail, the flower boxes). The Dock Street Theater, one of the venues of the Spoleto Festival USA, is a 2010 renovation on the site of the 1736 original, America’s first playhouse, destroyed by fire. Pleasure-loving Charleston, home to innumerable scions of British nobility making a killing in the New World, also had the first racetrack in America and the first golf club. ➡➡



CITY HOTELS

BELMOND CHARLESTON PLACE
At 434 rooms, it lacks the intimacy of the historic inns, but it has a genius Club Floor (all-day buffet-style dining), a shopping arcade, and a saltwater pool with sun deck, spa, gym, and city views. Ideal for families.

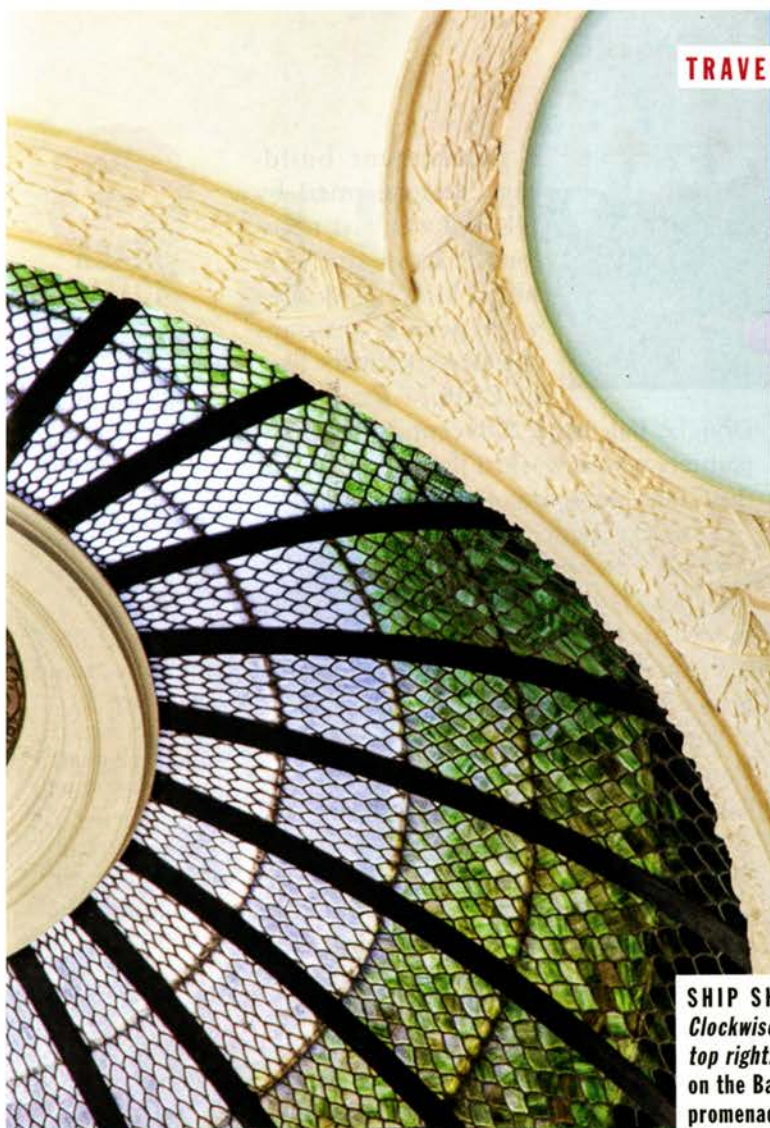
THE DEWBERRY
Uniquely for Charleston, this is a reimagining not of an antebellum beauty but of one from the 1960s. Its Living Room, with a bar and multiple seating areas, is the city’s buzzy new hangout. The event space/garden is striking.

HARBOURVIEW INN
Location, location. While there’s no restaurant or spa at this small hotel, the setting, right on Waterfront Park, is gorgeous and energizing. Bike, run, stroll, book a private trainer. Happy hour happens on the roof. There will be seagulls.

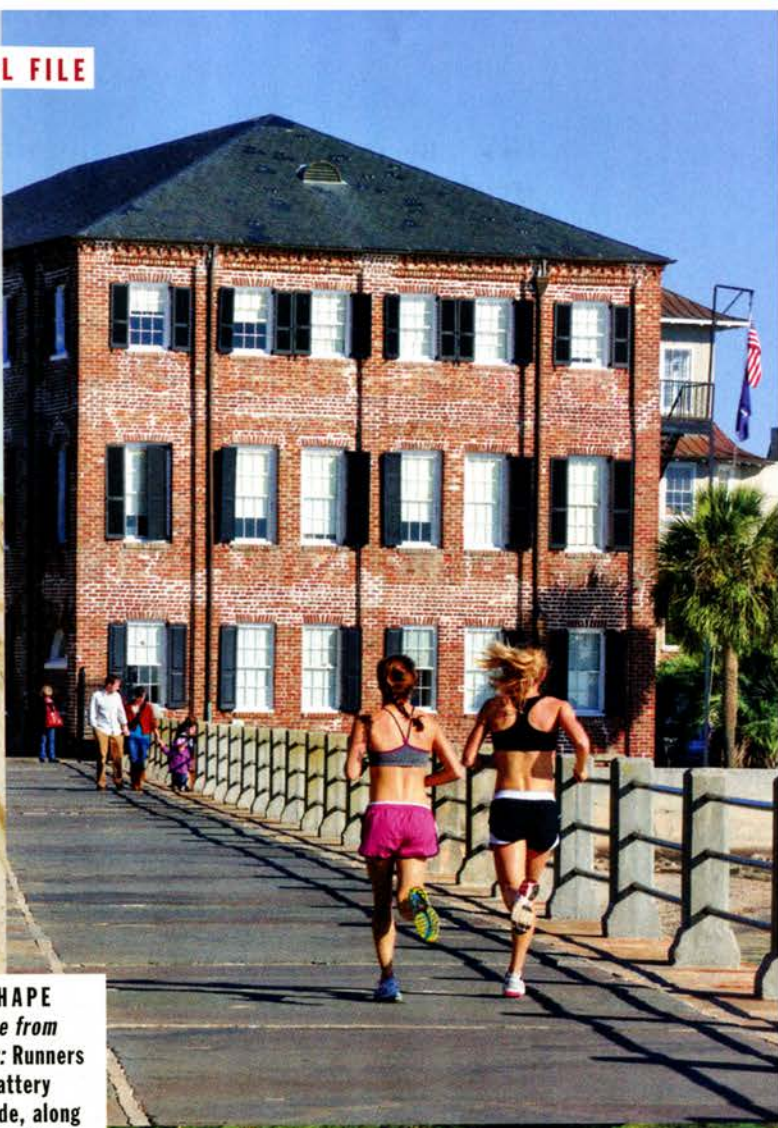


STEEPLE CHASE
The Dewberry Hotel and the Citadel Square Church—you’ll hear bells during rooftop yoga. **Top:** A primavera pizza at Indaco. **Right:** Kicking it on Folly Beach.





SHIP SHAPE
*Clockwise from
top right: Runners
on the Battery
promenade, along
Charleston Harbor;
Osprey Point, on
Kiawah Island; the
dome of the Gibbes
Museum of Art.*



➔ By the time I reach the peninsula's southern tip, White Point Garden, which overlooks Charleston Harbor and Fort Sumter (a speck in the distance where the first shots of the Civil War were fired), I'm breathless. Not from exertion but from nerdy historical excitement fueled, I'm sure, by endorphins. So much of the history of this country happened right here.

As I head back to the Belmond, I can see the town revving up for the night. Much of the innovation around food and nightlife here is driven by entrepreneurs in north Charleston's newly booming tech corridor ("Silicon Harbor"). But not for me, not tonight. Weights await in the hotel gym, and laps in the rooftop saltwater pool. I hear Aretha Franklin's "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" blasting from a restaurant on the corner of Hasell and Meeting. So far, Charleston, you do!

"Listen to the church bells," says Tamara Nuenighoff, the yoga instructor at the **Dewberry**, where I move to next. We're wrapping up a private yoga class on the roof deck. (The Dewberry has the highest usable rooftop in

Charleston, and it's accessible only to guests who have signed up for yoga. Exercise here has its privileges.) "The bells take you from the ordinary to the extraordinary," she says.

This is true. Not that anything here has been ordinary. Not the Dewberry itself, a 1960s landmark that was originally

a government building commissioned by JFK and was later transformed into a chic temple of Midcentury style with period antiques and artworks by the likes of Clifford Bailey and

Douglas Balentine, 20th-century Southern painters whose works I'll also see later in the Gibbes Museum of Art.

Also excellent was the private Pilates class the hotel booked for me at the sleek Longevity Fitness studio. "People who have moved here from New York, Chicago, and L.A. appreciate the aesthetic," says owner Jennie Brooks (who trained with Nora St. John, the guru of Pilates "balanced body" instruction). I'm sure they appreciate the workouts, too, because I certainly appreciated the deep tissue massage I had afterward in the Dewberry's spa.

As for the morning yoga, I'm able to strike poses I never thought I could. "Remember," Nuenighoff says, "it's not pain, it's *sensation*." And now I'm relaxing on a mat, listening to the bells, feeling the breeze, and noticing that the intervals between my breaths are growing longer, as if soon I will hardly need to breathe at all—the closest I've ever come to meditation.

My next challenge is Ravenel Bridge. I noticed it earlier, its graceful lines arcing up over the Cooper River on the peninsula's east side and connecting downtown to the suburb of Mount Pleasant and the Isle of Palms beyond. "It's the only hill in town," the concierge at the **HarbourView Inn**, my next address, confirms as she points me in the right direction. And, just in case, she hands me two carefully annotated running maps of downtown, showing shorter three- and five-mile routes on tear-proof paper.

The Ravenel is tough, the arc not so gentle when you're on it, the distance to Mount Pleasant seemingly infinite in the subtropical sun. I try to not be a wuss from the North. It helps that below the biking and running lane (WONDERS WAY, says the sign) South Carolina's Lowcountry unfolds in all its subtle beauty, a vista of muted greens, browns, and blues, the flat bits of land intersected by marshy waterways lined with pluff mud and teeming with bird life.

Back at the HarbourView, my next workout begins immediately: rooftop yoga again (it's very much the thing), with another first-rate instructor, Michelle Fitzgerald of Pivotal Fitness. Seagulls wheel above us. "Listen ➔



BEACH HOTELS

WILD DUNES RESORT

This vast complex on the Isle of Palms offers a choice of rooms, suites, villas, vacation homes, and condos, all of them either beachside, poolside, court-side, or courseside. The beach stretches for 2.5 miles, the guest services desk will hook you up with whatever local activity you may desire, and it's all a 30-minute drive from the historic downtown.

THE SANCTUARY AT KIAWAH ISLAND

With its grand public spaces, large pool, and beautiful 10-mile beach, this resort manages to be both formal and sand-in-your-toes casual. And you would need at least two weeks to take advantage of all the sports and wellness activities on offer.

After two hours of nonstop kayaking, my arms are sore, my core feels tight, and my head is abuzz with nature facts.



STAIR MASTER
Above: The Belmond Charleston Place's open-arm staircase. Right: Lowcountry paddleboarders. Top: The lobby bar at the Sanctuary at Kiawah Island.

