

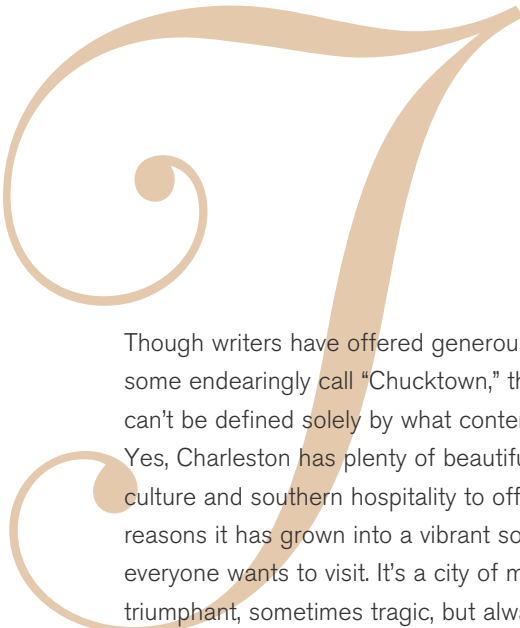
A scenic garden path with pink azaleas and cypress trees. The path is paved with gravel and leads through a lush garden. On the left, there are large, vibrant pink azalea bushes. On the right, there are tall, slender cypress trees with Spanish moss hanging from their branches. The background is filled with more greenery and trees, creating a sense of depth and tranquility.

D I S C O V E R
CHARLESTON

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LIVING LEGACY

CHARLESTON'S OLDEST CHURCHES OFFER A PEEK INTO ITS VIBRANT HISTORY.



Though writers have offered generous glimpses of what some endearingly call “Chucktown,” the city as a whole can’t be defined solely by what contemporary eyes can see. Yes, Charleston has plenty of beautiful architecture, festive culture and southern hospitality to offer; but there are specific reasons it has grown into a vibrant southern destination that everyone wants to visit. It’s a city of mesmerizing stories, often triumphant, sometimes tragic, but always showcasing the resilient spirits of its residents — past and present. In large measure, Charleston is what it is today because of the loyalty, courage and fortitude of those who have always called it home.

If you want to know what has shaped this fascinating city, there’s perhaps no better way than looking through the lenses of its churches and synagogues. Those who aren’t particularly religious may initially shy away from this perspective, but we’re not talking about church history here. If you look at the city’s timeline, you can learn about its major milestones and events by researching the experiences of those who lived through these events. Throughout American history, communities of faith

have provided some of the most accessible options for people to assemble, especially during the 17th and 18th centuries. Charleston’s earliest settlers included English Congregationalists, Scotch and Irish Presbyterians, Dutch and German Lutherans, and French Huguenots, among others. The members of each of these religious communities not only worshipped together but also faced the hardships of colonial life side by side, assumed civic duties together and worked collectively to establish the strong and thriving community Charleston is today. Throughout history, the “Holy City of the South” has been vexed by various forces that could have easily destroyed it. But against all odds, Charleston has become a rich, vibrant community that is recognized worldwide as an American treasure.

You don’t have to get bogged down in dry details to appreciate the city’s compelling beginning. Charleston began as Charles Towne in 1670, named after King Charles II of England. Several years earlier, he granted the Province of Carolina to eight of his friends — the Lord Proprietors — but it would take a while before any expeditions were planned and executed.



Though various religious congregations would spring up in Charleston over the next hundred years, they operated under tight constraints. “Until we won the Revolution, we were not allowed to be called a church,” says Joanne Calhoun, author of *The Circular Church: Three Centuries of Charleston History*. “Only the Church of England could have that title. It was popularly called the ‘white meeting house’ or just the ‘meeting house.’ All folks paid the church tax to support the Church of England, and this was one of the reasons for the Revolution.”

In 1780, parishioners were caught by surprise when a British cannonball landed in the meeting house graveyard during Sunday services. The church was vacated shortly thereafter and for all practical purposes remained non-functioning for the next six years. During the Revolutionary War, it was used as a British hospital and storehouse. When the war ended, says Calhoun, “they left a shell of the church.”

A few blocks away, another congregation suffered a structural casualty at the hands of the British. St. Michael’s Episcopal Church, the oldest church building in Charleston, was built with a large steeple that served as a navigational landmark for the harbor and as a lookout tower during military conflicts. The steeple contained a ring of bells that were cast in London in 1764, but when the British retreated as a result of the Treaty of Paris, they stole the bells as a prize of war. The bells were eventually recovered and returned to the church, though they’ve made two subsequent trips back to England to be repaired and recast. Today, local ringers are learning this time-honored and uniquely Anglican art form as the bells ring out again over the city.

Another influence that has profoundly shaped Charleston is its propensity for natural disasters – particularly fires. In June 1796, a fire broke out and swept through the city. Because of the high winds, firefighters had to resort to extreme measures to try to stop the blaze. The original French Huguenot Church, which was built in 1687, was deliberately destroyed with explosives in order to keep the fire from spreading. But that was just a shadow of things to come.

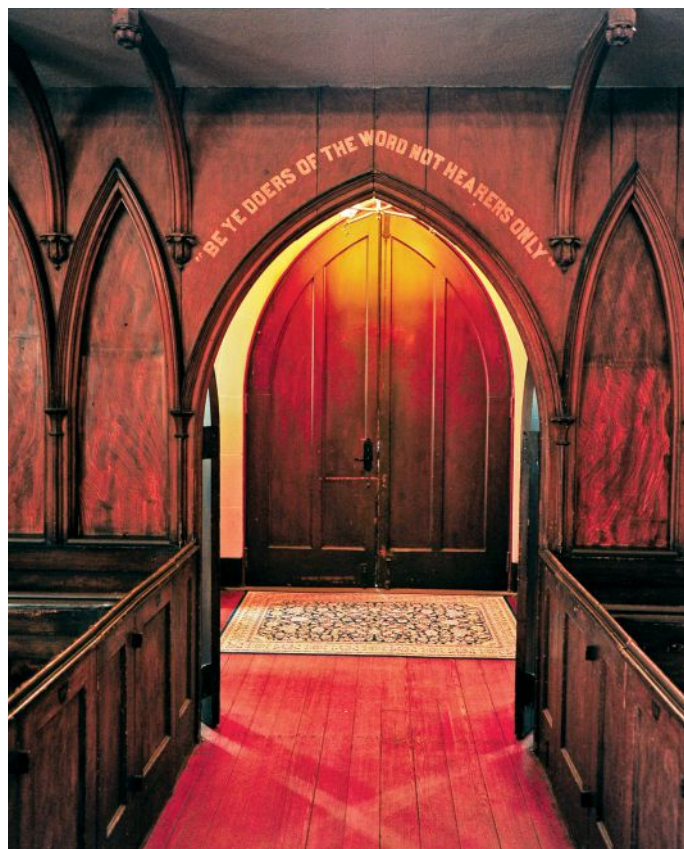
In the 1830s, Charleston was plagued by a series of fires that destroyed more than a fourth of the city. The Great Fire of 1838 alone is said to have burned more than 1,000 buildings. Four houses of worship were destroyed, including Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Synagogue (KKBE), which at the time was the largest synagogue building in North America. The structure was rebuilt in 1840 on the same Hasell Street site where it stands today. KKBE’s current edifice is often



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described as one of the country’s finest examples of Greek Revival architecture, a style that was enormously popular in Charleston during the 19th century.

A short time after the new synagogue was dedicated, the American Jewish Reform movement began within its walls and eventually extended across the country. KKBE offers tours of their Coming Street Cemetery, where guests can visit the graves of people who were visionaries and leaders in the building of progressive Charleston. Joshua Lazarus, for example, founded



The French Huguenot Church

reconstructed its building twice after it was blown up in the 1796 fire, and had been in their current building for 16 years when the Civil War started.

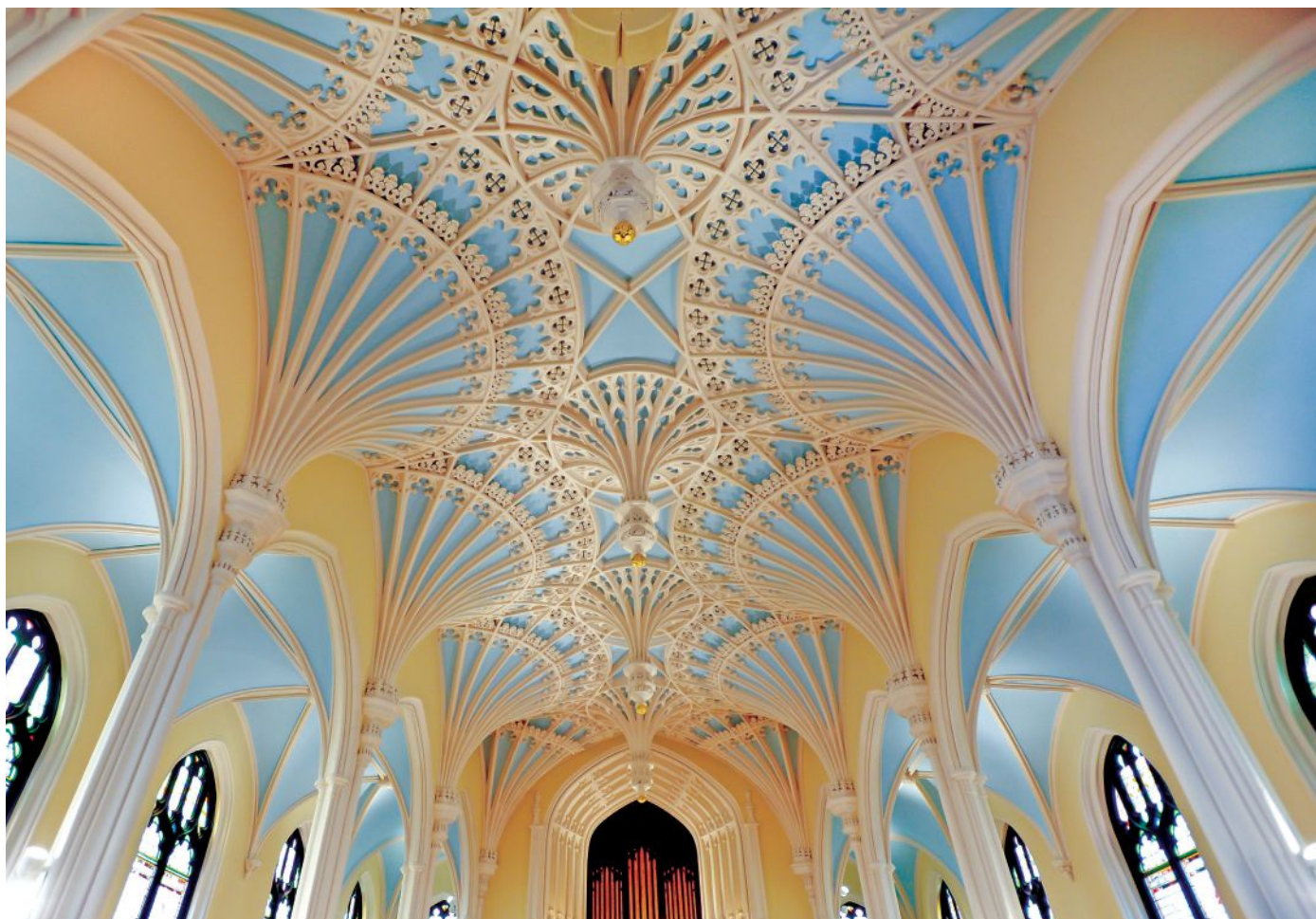
the Charleston Gas Light Company and introduced gas lighting to the city. The synagogue itself also provides a generous glimpse into Charleston's rich history and ornate beauty.

Not only was Charleston the birthplace of Jewish Reform; it's also where the first shot of the Civil War was fired. After seven Southern states made declarations of secession, they ordered Union forces to vacate Charleston Harbor. When the Union failed to surrender, Confederates bombarded Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Though that conflict ended less than two days later, the Civil War had clearly begun.

As was true for the city as a whole, the War Between the States had a profound effect on Charleston's communities of faith. The French Huguenot Church, for example, reconstructed their building twice after it was blown up in the 1796 fire. By the time the Civil War broke out, they had been in their third (and current) building for only 16 years. It survived the war

but was badly damaged by shellfire during the long downtown bombardment. And when Charleston fell to the Union in 1865, federal soldiers disassembled the church's rare Erben pipe organ and began loading it on a ship that was headed to New York. Fortunately, the organ was returned before the ship sailed, as the church organist assembled a team that successfully pled for its return. Today, that same organ still sits regally behind the pulpit.

As you might imagine, the city had to undergo major reconstruction after all the fires and wars. Some estimate that the Great Fire of 1861 destroyed up to a third of the city. As always, Charlestonians pulled together to rebuild their beautiful city. But just a little more than two decades later, a powerful earthquake took them by surprise and once again shattered their city. The magnitude of the 1886 earthquake is estimated to have been 7.3, the most



damaging quake ever recorded in the southeastern U.S. One of the structures hit hardest was the Unitarian Church. The beautiful Gothic Revival-style building was badly damaged, losing half of its lumbering tower; most of its intricate fan vaulted ceiling was also in ruins. Fortunately, the original interior was eventually restored, thanks to donations that poured in from across the country.

The 20th and 21st centuries have been much kinder to Charleston. Though Hurricane Hugo ransacked the city in 1989, it has since bounced back to become one of the top travel destinations in the world. Most of its historic churches still stand and continue to play a starring role in Charleston's progressive development. Members of numerous congregations have championed civil rights, advanced education, spearheaded civic growth and supported the arts. And the churches themselves are beloved fixtures within Charleston's cultural landscape.

Each year, the downtown churches host musical portions of the illustrious Spoleto Festival USA. It's not every day you can sit in a pew where George Washington worshipped

The Unitarian Church was damaged by the 1886 earthquake. The beautiful Gothic Revival-style building was eventually restored.

and listen to a pipe organ performance. It's quite uncommon to enjoy a vocal concert at a church where a signer of the Declaration of Independence is buried. But then again, Charleston is anything but commonplace. Fires, hurricanes and an epic earthquake could not destroy it. Two prolonged wars didn't crush it. When all was said and done, America learned that adversity could not extinguish the soul of a city that was determined to endure. To say that Charleston has survived is only half of the story; it has thrived in a way that defies reason. You can read the history books and talk to locals, both of which are wonderful ways to get to know more about this fascinating place. But you might also try sitting in one of the local sanctuaries where much of Charleston's history actually unfolded. If walls could talk, you'd get an earful.

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY

SKIP THE METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION; THESE TOURS CAN BE ENJOYED ON FOOT.

There's something wonderful about being within walking distance of where you're going. Rather than having to fight traffic, you can stroll peacefully down scenic sidewalks.

Downtown Charleston has a plethora of savoring and lingering opportunities, so it's no surprise that it's been named a highly "walkable" district by walkscore.com. In short, all you need to get a plentiful taste of the city is a healthy curiosity and a pair of comfy shoes.

There's a lot to see in downtown Charleston, and a great deal of it is most easily accessible on foot. For those who prefer to discover things on their own, there are a number of free, self-guided walking tours you can check out online. Explore Charleston offers a two-part French Quarter Tour that focuses on the historic area that was within the original "walled" city. They also offer a South of Broad self-guided walking tour, which reveals the beauty of Charleston's residential architecture. Printable maps and information on distance and duration are all available online. There are also

several Apple and Android apps that offer varying levels of self-guided tour information.

Another delightful stroll is the Charleston Gateway Walk, the first civic project of the Garden Club of Charleston. This scenic trail winds through lush gardens and old cemeteries, leading sightseers to several historic churches. There are 10 exquisite iron gates on the path that testify to Charleston's enduring fascination with wrought iron.

Though self-guided tours offer a measure of freedom, they lack one significant thing: expertise. There's nothing like discovering the intricacies of a city alongside someone who knows it inside and out. And make no mistake, Charleston's tour guides know what they're talking about. One of the few cities that has a tourism ordinance and certification process, Charleston requires that guides pass a rigorous exam in order to be licensed (app-based and online self-guided tours are not regulated). Prep courses include historic lectures by some of Charleston's top educators and



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historians, which means that licensed guides have learned a great deal from a variety of experts.

Because Charleston was founded in 1670, there is a staggering number of angles to explore. If a visual summary of the city is what you want, options abound. Michael Trouche of Charleston Footprints is a seventh-generation Charlestonian who guides visitors down cobblestone streets, through picturesque gardens and to an assortment of historic locations. Lowcountry Walking Tours offers downtown tours that showcase the beauty of the city and provide a significant overview of Charleston's history. Mary Coy of Charleston 101 takes visitors through the oldest section of the historic district, pausing at buildings that have rich cultural and architectural histories.

For those who want to explore a piece of Charleston history up close, visit Boone Hall Plantation & Gardens in Mount Pleasant. The 738-acre plantation was originally founded in 1681. Upon entering the grounds, visitors are greeted by the world-famous Avenue of Oaks, huge Spanish moss-draped oaks that line the entrance to the plantation. Its current 10,000-square-foot home was built in 1936 as part of the "Second Wave of Reconstruction." During a guided tour of the first floor of the Georgian-designed home, visitors can see how the interior blends recovered materials and antique furnishings to re-create what the plantation would have once looked like. Another popular tour at Boone Hall, journey through the plantation's lush, expansive grounds in an open-air coach, viewing the naturally preserved wetlands, creeks and ponds. Not only will visitors understand why the property boasts being "America's most photographed plantation," but they will also see why NBC "Daytime" television says it is "a must-see on any trip to Charleston, S.C."

For Civil War buffs, there are several tour companies that examine Charleston's starring role in the War Between the States. Jack Thomson and his staff at Civil War Walking Tours offer an in-depth look at how the Civil War began in Charleston and how profoundly the conflict affected the city. Thomson is a local history consultant and a re-enactor and was also a career army photographer. Free Tours By Foot, a name-your-own-price tour company, also offers a Civil War tour, as well as several other thematic excursions.

Some of the most popular tours in Charleston, however, explore the city on a much more peculiar level. Bulldog Tours offers several walking expeditions that examine Charleston's ghost culture and other paranormal phenomena. "I think the

ghost tours are so popular because Charleston is known as one of the most haunted cities in America," says Theresa Stratford, director of marketing at Bulldog Tours. "We have buildings here that date from before the 1700s, and the Civil War started here. There's so much history in this city."

Bulldog's Charleston Ghost and Dungeon Tour is the only ghost tour authorized to visit the depths of the Old Exchange & Provost Dungeon after dark. "It's a museum during the day," says Stratford, "but the dungeon in the bottom was used to hold some of the more notorious criminals, like some of the more famous pirates, for example. Some people were chained to the wall; it got pretty bad down there." Bulldog also hosts a Haunted Jail Tour, which takes people "through the cells, hallways and into the places where Charleston's worst criminals lived and died."

No one under 18 is admitted on Bulldog Tours' The Dark Side of Charleston tour, which is billed as "an uncensored tour of Charleston's treacherous past." Topics include brothels, prostitution and crime, as tourists are guided

Bulldog Tours offers several walking expeditions that examine Charleston's ghost culture and other paranormal phenomena.

through what was once the Holy City's seedy underbelly. Finally, for paranormal enthusiasts, Bulldog offers paranormal investigations of the Old City Jail. "We do those at midnight," says Stratford. "Participants get to investigate the Old City Jail, and it's kind of like a ghost hunter or ghost adventure type of experience. If they have equipment like EVP readers, they can bring it; but if they don't, our tour guide does."

"A lot of people have a scary experience at the jail," continues Stratford. "People get weird pictures, where there's something unexplained in the picture. That actually happens a lot. The paranormal investigation tour isn't for everyone, but fortunately we have tours that cater to a wide variety of interests. There's something for everyone."



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