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DISPLAY UNTIL JUNE 30, 2009



Heart of the City

A great city can be just the right place for your first days together.



FOR A SPRING OR SUMMER WEDDING, YOU DON'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT WHERE TO GO TO ESCAPE THE COLD, SO WHY NOT HEAD TO A CITY KNOWN FOR ROMANCE?

There are many that are far from our shores, of course, notably Paris, the fabled city of love. But there are also many on the U.S. mainland (or not far offshore) that are known for providing just the right blend of romantic backdrop and city delights. Join us as we travel to Charleston, New York City, San Juan and San Francisco. Let the honeymoon magic begin here.

Clockwise from top left: The storied Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco; the bright lights of the Big Apple; antebellum charm in Charleston; lovely El Convento in Old San Juan.

honeymoons

Charleston

by Dale B. Salm

Nothing spells romance like the sweet smell of jasmine and honeysuckle on a warm Southern night, the sight of an allée of live oaks as you approach a *Gone With the Wind* plantation, the sounds of jazz beckoning down a lamp-lit Southern lane. And all can be yours in the port city of Charleston, S.C.

Any time is high time in Charleston, whose signature pastel homes and horse-drawn carriages exude charm and grace. (Remember what Rhett said: "I'm going back to Charleston . . . to see if there isn't something left in life of charm and grace.") And if you honeymoon in late spring, you will be doubly blessed: with the city's natural charm and grace, and the cultural riches of the Spoleto Festival USA, a 17-day extravaganza of theater, opera, dance and music that this year runs from May 22 to June 7.

The heart of the city is Charleston Place, the luxe 440-room Orient Express hotel where we settled into a, yes, charming and graceful room, one painted in warm and welcoming yellow accented with "Charleston black" (dark green), furnished in traditional rich mahogany and overlooking a giant magnolia. We got our *GWTW* fix on the hotel's Tara-worthy double-spiral staircase, our first taste of Southern hospitality in its acclaimed Charleston Grill, where manager Mickey makes all guests, and especially young marrieds, feel like old friends. The grill offers four menus—Pure, Lush, Cosmopolitan and Southern—and we mixed Southern crab cakes and creek shrimp with Lush diver scallops and lobster risotto with delicious results. The next day we invested in the spa's 24-karat gold facial, which yielded visible dividends.

But enough plush digs and self-indulgence, soon it was time to get out and about. We began with a tour of the city, starting with her lovingly preserved homes, their signature wrought-iron gates and hidden gardens, and ending with The Battery across the harbor from Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began. We then moved out (in space) and back (in time) to Middleton Place, once a working plantation, now a National Historic Landmark with exquisite formal gardens and old-time stables where a blacksmith, weaver and potter bring antebellum crafts to life.

Charleston itself is eminently walkable and back in the city we took to the streets, starting with the colorful outdoor market across from the hotel—think everything from T-shirts to the famous Lowcountry sweetgrass baskets. Nearby we found two fine restaurants, the innovative Tristan (imagine chocolate-barbecued lamb ribs—divine) and the Peninsula

Grill in the landmark Planter's Inn (seven-layer coconut cake—double divine). Another day we'd explore the Gibbes Museum of Art, a showcase of Charleston's artistic riches past and present, in the afternoon, and later amble down one of those lamp-lit lanes to dine at McCrady's, all romance and candlelight and historic to boot (Washington dined here in 1791). Late night found us scaling the heights at Vendue Inn, where all of Charleston seems to gather for drinks, rooftop views and jazz. During Spoleto the night scene explodes, of course—2009 will showcase *Louise* (a French *La Bohème*), *Noche Flamenca* and *Don John*, a send-up of the infamous Lothario.

A bit off the beaten path but perfect for privacy is the grand Wentworth Mansion. We stayed here later in our visit and fell hard for its Tiffany glass, marble fireplaces and air of gentility—afternoon tea or sherry, evening wine tasting, anyone? And as it has but 21 rooms, we felt supremely pampered. Speaking of which, we took advantage of its spa (in the old stables) and restaurant, Circa 1886 (in the carriage house), where we enjoyed the signature crab-cake soufflé and were charmed by Miss Betty, recognized for her winning ways by the state's hospitality association. Back at the mansion, meanwhile, it was old home week with concierge Douglas, a Connecticut transplant. The mansion is a short drive by rickshaw (a fun, fast bicycle-taxi built for two) from Hominy Grill, where weekend brunch—fried green tomatoes, shrimp 'n' grits, buttermilk pie—is a couples' favorite (lots of hand holding in the garden).

Proud history, rich cultural scene, gracious accommodations, wonderful restaurants, friendly people—still charming and graceful Charleston has the makings of honeymoon magic. Finally, it's all just minutes from . . . the beach! We spent our last day sunning and surfing at Wild Dunes, a 1600-acre year-round luxury resort complex on beautiful Isle of Palms—just beachy.

For information on Charleston, visit CharlestonCVB.com; for Charleston Place, charlestonplace.com; for Wentworth Mansion, wentworthmansion.com; for Spoleto, spoletousa.org; for Wild Dunes, wilddunes.com.

New York City

by Charles Monaghan

From *Breakfast at Tiffany's* to *Manhattan* to *Serendipity* (not to mention *King Kong*), Manhattan has long served as a bustling, dramatic backdrop for high romance in the movies. It can provide the same storybook setting for your honeymoon, too, especially if you're in the mood to take the money you might have spent on travel fare to other destinations and put it into a luxury hotel room, theater and concert tickets, fabulous meals, cab fare and shopping in one of the world's great cities.