



A view along Broad Street in Charleston with the steeple of St Michael's Church

## **Southern Friendliness Meets History in Charleston, South Carolina** **This is America**

From VOA Learning English, welcome to This is America. I'm Steve Ember. Today, Shirley Griffith and I take you to one of the most beautiful and historic cities in the United States – Charleston, South Carolina. The Civil War began at its waterfront.

Come along with us.

Charleston sits on a piece of land in the southeastern United States that points like a finger to the Atlantic Ocean. Rivers flow by either side of the city. They are the Ashley and the Cooper Rivers.

The people of Charleston will smile and tell you the Ashley and the Cooper join to form the Atlantic Ocean. They know this is not true, but they like to tell the story anyway. It shows how proud the people of Charleston are of their city.

Charleston has a very rich history. It is the only city in the United States that can claim to have defended itself from American Indians, fierce pirates, Spanish ships, French soldiers, and British forces. It was first in many things.

[Sound of old steam-powered train]

Charleston had the first continual train service in the United States.

It built the first museum and the first public flower garden in America. And the first battle of the American Civil War took place on a very small but important island in its port.

Charleston has some of the most beautiful and unusual homes in America. One travel writer has called Charleston the most friendly city in the United States. Charleston is all of these things and much more.

Plan your visit to Charleston for early spring, late autumn or the winter months. The citizens of Charleston will tell you their lovely city is not fun in the summer. It is extremely hot. The summer heat is important to the history of Charleston.

Early settlers owned huge farms called plantations. In the 1700s, these farms produced a plant called indigo which is used to make cloth the color blue.

Many plantation owners forced slaves to do the work needed to grow indigo in the extreme heat. Slavery became important to the economy of Charleston. The plantations, indigo and slavery are part of the history of the city.

At least three Indian tribes were living in the area that became Charleston when Spanish explorers arrived in 1521. The Spanish explorers, and later, French explorers tried to establish settlements near that area but none lasted.

English settlers first came to the area in 1670. They established a town. They called it Charles Town in honor of the English King, Charles II. The people of the city changed its name to Charleston in 1783.

Many people came to live in Charleston because it produced indigo and had a good port. The people who settled the area were hard working and independent. They considered themselves citizens of England.

Still, they did not like some of the laws declared by the English government. The colonists successfully defended their city many times in the early 1700s. They defended it against both French and Spanish forces, and against raids by Yamasee Indians and by pirates.

In 1719, the citizens of Charleston rebelled against the group of English men who controlled their colony. They wanted more self-government. Britain's King George agreed. This change gave the people of Charleston a feeling of independence.

Charleston is still proud of its part in the war for independence. The city provided several political and military leaders during the American Revolution.

British forces attacked it two times, but were defeated by the people of Charleston. The third time, the British captured the city and held it for more than a year.

Charleston continued to grow after the American colonists had won their independence from England. The new federal government knew that the city was important.

Workers began building a strong base to guard Charleston in 1828. This base was on a small island in Charleston Harbor. It was named Fort Sumter. It was designed to guard the city from any future enemy.

There were no thoughts of war or future enemies while Fort Sumter was being built. The plantations near Charleston had begun to plant new crops like rice and cotton.

With the help of slave labor, cotton became extremely important to the economy of Charleston and much of the South. Many people in the northern United States began to think that slavery was very wrong, however.

Slave owners in the South wanted things to remain as they had always been. They believed the federal government had no right to tell them what they could or could not do.

A national crisis began when Abraham Lincoln was elected president in 1860. The people of South Carolina believed he would try to end slavery by force. They voted to leave the United States. They were quickly followed by other southern states. These southern states soon created the government of the Confederate States of America.

Federal troops controlled Fort Sumter when South Carolina voted to leave the Union. The people of Charleston demanded the federal troops leave. The Union commander refused.

[Cannon shot]

On the morning of April 12, 1861, a cannon was fired at Fort Sumter. It was the first shot of America's long Civil War.

Charleston suffered a lot of damage during the Civil War. Several major battles were fought there. Late in the war another battle for control of Fort Sumter continued for almost two years. Much of Charleston had been destroyed by the time the war ended. Rebuilding the city was a long and slow process.

The people of Charleston tried to save the historic buildings from the 1700s. They wanted to keep those buildings they felt were an important part of their city.

The huge plantations near Charleston were also in need of rebuilding. Many owners failed in their efforts because they could no longer use slave labor. Their farms became much smaller.

The historic buildings of Charleston were affected by weather as well as wars. Through the years, ocean storms have severely damaged the city. A major storm struck Charleston in September 1989. It killed 18 people and caused more than three billion dollars in damage.

The huge storm had winds of more than 217 kilometers an hour. It caused high waves that severely flooded city streets.

The federal, state and city governments and individual citizens have spent millions of dollars to rebuild and repair historic areas. So in some places, Charleston looks a lot like it has for several hundred years.

In the center of the city are stores in small 100-year-old buildings. The same family has owned one of the stores for almost 150 years. Fine eating places throughout the city serve southern food.

The people of Charleston will tell you they have some of the best eating places in the United States. Many visitors agree.

Beautiful, old buildings are a major reason thousands of people visit Charleston each year. One of the famous buildings is the Old Exchange and Provost Dungeon. It was built in the early 1700s. It was a jail that held the famous English pirate Stede Bonnet and his crew before they were hanged.

Several of the old plantation farms near Charleston also are open to visitors. One is called Boone Hall Plantation. It is still a working farm. Boone Hall Plantation looks much like it did before the American Civil War. It has been used as the setting for a number of movies and television programs about the American South and the Civil War.

From almost anywhere along the waterfront in Charleston, you can see a large American flag flying over the small island that still holds Fort Sumter. Most visitors go to the historic fort during their time in Charleston. Several companies provide boat rides to the fort.

Much of the fort was destroyed during the Civil War. But what remains of Fort Sumter is protected by the National Park Service. Park workers meet each boat and explain about the battles that took place.

Charleston has many interesting places to visit. However, the people who live in the city really make it special. They are extremely friendly in a way that is part of the culture of the American south. The people of Charleston continue to keep their city beautiful using modern technology to protect their historic past.

Our program was written by Paul Thompson. Internet users can read and listen to more stories on our website: [learningenglish.voanews.com.com](http://learningenglish.voanews.com.com). With Shirley Griffith, I'm Steve Ember. Join us again next week for another This is America from VOA Learning English.