

TRAVEL

THE INSIDE STORY FOR BUSINESS TRAVELLERS

BUSINESS CITY GUIDE

CHARLESTON GREENER PASTURES

History, hospitality, natural beauty and a diverse economy are the foundations of this growing tech hub, says **Stinson Carter**

Quality of life has been the driving force behind Charleston's tech and startup scene: people who cut their teeth in Silicon Valley and other major tech centres have come here in search of greener pastures. After all, it was Anthony Bakker's decision in 1989 to move Blackbaud, the software company he founded, down from New York that first put Charleston on the map as a potential tech town. But the 40,000 students in its colleges and universities, its bustling port, and its robust healthcare and advanced manufacturing sectors are also reasons why it has grown in such a healthy and sustainable way.

Charleston is home to more than 300 tech companies, and its tech wages are twice the regional per-capita average.

There are currently more than 9,250 IT jobs (an 80 per cent increase over the past five years), and more than 20,500 jobs in science, technology, engineering and maths. Every day, 28 people move to the area. It was ranked the number one mid-sized metro area for job growth in the US between 2010-2015. And it's been ranked America's number-one mid-size metro for Millennials, and for IT job growth.

"As of today I have not made a single visit or outbound call to recruit a tech company to Charleston," says Ernest Andrade, executive director of Charleston Digital Corridor, an incubating asset for tech in Charleston founded in 2001.

"I have not made a single visit to recruit a tech company to Charleston. All our success has been inbound"



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MINS

DID YOU KNOW...

- Charleston's nickname, Holy City, is widely believed to be a reference to the many churches that dominate its skyline, but its earliest uses were actually a quip about how worshipped the city was by its inhabitants.
- Some of Charleston's famous cobblestones are said to have originally arrived as ship ballast from England – a stroke of luck for a rockless city.
- The 'soft-R' accents of Charleston and Boston are both believed to be remnants of Received Pronunciation from close trading ties to England.
- The Charleston peninsula was originally known as Oyster Point, because of the accumulation of oyster shells on its shores. The city itself was even called Oyster Town.
- In 1743, a Charleston merchant received a shipment of 432 golf balls and 96 golf clubs from Scotland, and the first golf ever played in the USA was on Harleston Green near Pitt and Bull Streets.

INSIDE

Are hydrogen fuel cells the future of flight?

Meet Firdale's Anna Jackson

News and offers from British Airways

Going places

The new Charleston Technology Center, slated for completion in 2020. Below: an event organised by Charleston Women In Tech



"All the success that we have enjoyed has been inbound, people contacting me." Charleston Digital Corridor is currently planning a new 'flagship' at a new building in an area on the Upper Peninsula that's been called the Charleston Innovation Corridor, and which will have four major tech hubs by 2020.

It was not always this way. "For 100 years, Charleston's economy was dependent on tourism and the military," says Claire Gibbons, director of global marketing and communication for the Charleston Regional Development Authority, a nonprofit tasked with fostering economic diversity in the Tri-County area of greater Charleston, and created after the closure of the Navy base in the 1990s that cost the region 22,000 jobs. The area has since become a model of economic diversity.

Boeing produces its Dreamliner in Charleston, and it's home to the new North American headquarters for Volvo, and a new Mercedes Sprinter van plant. These advanced manufacturing companies are moving into autonomous vehicles, IoT devices, and AI-enabled devices. In short, they're looking more and more like tech.

"Those assets used to be very separate from the software and digital economy, and now they've merged into one," says Stanfield Gray, the CEO of Dig South, a multimedia tech hub for the South. "So I'm now anticipating even more spinoffs and interesting developments just by virtue of having all those companies based in South Carolina."

But diversity of industry is not the only kind of diversity that matters. Charleston is also fairly progressive, and there's an awareness of the need to embrace social diversity in the tech community. "It's a great time to be a woman in technology in Charleston," says Nina Magnusson, executive director of Charleston Women In Tech, a group with more than 2,000 members.

In addition to regular meet-ups, CWIT also sponsors a programme called CodeON, which teaches coding to disadvantaged children, and helps foster links between their community and the tech community.

"When I moved here seven and a half years ago, and I had friends who said, 'We'll give you \$20m to invest,' I thought, where am I going to invest it? There wasn't a deal flow," says Amy Salzhauer, co-founder and managing partner for Good Growth Capital, a venture capital fund based in Charleston with partners and an operation in Boston.

Publicly traded local tech companies such as Blackbaud and Benefit Focus were certainly success stories, but not from a venture capital perspective. Now the capital is catching up with the area's rich intellectual capital and entrepreneurial drive, allowing Good Growth Capital to aim to raise \$100m for their second Charleston fund. "To be able to do that shows how the tech ecosystem is growing here, says Salzhauer. "Charleston has long been known for its hospitality, and that hospitality extends to the businesses that are locating here."

"It's now time, finally, that this region can support a true venture fund," says David Mendez, a partner at Good Growth Capital for its first fund, and a venture partner for the new fund. He has also been recruited by the seed accelerator Techstars to run their new accelerator programme in Amsterdam.

"If there's a person interested in getting involved with entrepreneurs, or getting involved with a startup, they can come down here and immediately have opportunities," says Mendez. The South will never be Silicon Valley, nor is it trying to be. "We have reached the point where Silicon Valley is no longer a geographical location, it's a state of mind spreading around the world," says Gray. If tech can be anywhere, then the smartest people in tech will opt to live in a place like Charleston.

"Charleston has long been known for its hospitality, and that hospitality extends to new businesses"





LOCAL VIEWS

"La Farfalle is my go-to place. I typically go after work and start the evening with a Hendrick's Gibson. Then the whipped ricotta appetiser and linguine for my main. You can't go wrong."

Amir Golestan, CEO and founder of Micfo, a global cloud provider

"I live and work in the Upper Peninsula, which is a bit off the tourist path right now. I love Graft wine bar – cool vibe, great owners, and good music. And you have to try southern BBQ – go to Rodney Scott's for whole hog, and Lewis for brisket."

Marc Murphy, CEO of ATLATL Software

"Start the morning with a beach walk on Sullivan's Island, then head to Beardcat's for espresso and butterbean toast. Then hit downtown and the Charleston Library Society for one of its Wide Angle Lunch Series talks."

Amy Salzaue, co-founder of Good Growth Capital

"My favourite place right now is Riverfront Park, which is the location for two awesome annual events: the Charleston Digital Corridor i5k and High Water Festival."

Nina Magnusson, executive director of Charleston Women In Tech, and catalyst for Citizenship and Social Innovation at BoomTown

"Get in a boat and get a real perspective on the natural beauty. It will raise your awareness of the quality of life and the conservation important to sustaining it."

Stanfield Gray, CEO of DIG SOUTH



Southern beauty
Take a seawall stroll along The Battery or taste the only 100 per cent American tea



FOOD & DRINK

Charlestonians love to dine out, and their city has a massive foodie footprint, with wine and cocktails to match. And it's all within relatively close proximity. If you've a craving for seafood, there's no more refined place to enjoy it than **The Ordinary**, where tiered seafood towers pair with rum cocktails in a neoclassical former bank. If you've had your fill of Carolina shrimp and grits, try lunch at **Xiao Bao Biscuit** – consistently good Asian fusion in a former gas station. French-inspired **Chez Nous** figures in the date-night goals of most locals – a two-storey house with a tiny courtyard and a small but mighty wine list. For a change in atmosphere, book in advance for Sullivan's Island for a meal at **The Obstinate Daughter**, known for its wood-oven pizzas and homemade pastas with Lowcountry touches, set in a driftwood-chic dining room and windows often open to the ocean breeze.

OUT AND ABOUT

You can explore by foot or bicycle, as the downtown peninsula is a manageable eight square miles packed with Instagram-worthy architecture, serious restaurants, and an eclectic mix of shops and galleries. The seawall stroll along **The Battery** is required and, if shopping is your vice, King Street has everything from an Apple Store to local icons like **M Dumas** and **RTW**. Upper King is a bit edgier (with **Havens**), and **Candy Shop Vintage** and **Indigo and Cotton** are on nearby Cannon Street. On the upper peninsula, get coffee from **Park Café** and stroll through **Hampton Park**, with a duck pond and gardens under a canopy of Spanish moss. Afterwards, try a craft whiskey tasting at nearby **High Wire Distillery**. If you need a beach fix, head out past the fishing and paddleboarding haven of **Shem Creek** to the chic beach hamlet on **Sullivan's Island** or, if you prefer a Harley, healing crystals and longboarding vibe, **Folly Beach** was made for you. Also take a day trip to the

plantations on the banks of the Ashley River: **Middleton Place**, **Drayton Hall** and **Magnolia Plantation**. Or seek shelter beneath the sprawling boughs of centuries-old **Angel Oak**, where you can watch Gullah women handcraft sweetgrass baskets, then tour the nearby **Charleston Tea Plantation** to taste the only 100 per cent American tea.

WHERE TO STAY

THE HOTELS BELOW CAN BE BOOKED AT BA.COM

THE DEWBERRY

It's all about the details here, such as the brass-inlaid wood panelling, linen wallpaper and mid-century modern furniture hand-selected by owner John Dewberry. The Living Room is the city's best meeting point, and the newly opened rooftop bar, The Citrus Club, has a Rat-Pack-in-the-Tropics vibe with commanding views of the city.

BELMOND CHARLESTON PLACE

Long the gold standard of Charleston luxury hotels, located between the market and the heart of King Street shopping, this is home to one of the city's best restaurants, Charleston Grill. Well-heeled locals patronise its spa, which adjoins a rooftop pool and terrace. Steps away from the best shopping in the city.

HAMPTON INN CHARLESTON HISTORIC DISTRICT

Adjacent to the Charleston Museum, steps away from Charleston Music Hall and the Children's Museum of the Lowcountry, and a half-block from upper King Street – the city's nightlife hub. With a free hot breakfast for all guests, and room rates are good value. ■



HOW TO GET THERE

From April, British Airways will fly direct to Charleston two days a week from London Heathrow. The Charleston International Airport is 12 miles from the city centre; 25 minutes by car. Rideshare service (Uber/Lyft) \$20-25, taxi service \$30-35, Shuttle vans \$15. Visit ba.com/charleston