



The Magnolia Plantation is one of the closest to the Charleston Int'l Airport (CHS) and could be toured during a few hours of downtime there.

# *Stopover, Daytrip or Longer ...* **Discover South Carolina's Historic Treasures**

by Matthew McDaniel

**S**o much has been written about the aviation history of North Carolina that one wonders what is left to be covered there. One of its state mottos is “First in Flight” with obvious reference to the Wright Brother’s history making flight testing and ultimate successes in the Outer Banks, Kittyhawk and Kill Devil Hills areas. Consequently, it seems like the Carolina’s southern sister is rarely spoken of in aviation circles. Yet, like most U.S. states, South Carolina has much to offer the casual tourist and nearly all of it can be accessed via general aviation.

## **The Capital City: Columbia**

Touring the capital city and/or capitol building of any state always holds opportunities for learning, entertainment and inspiration. All such cities are teeming with history and historic sites. In addition to being the center of government, most are also central locations for finance and/or industry for their respective

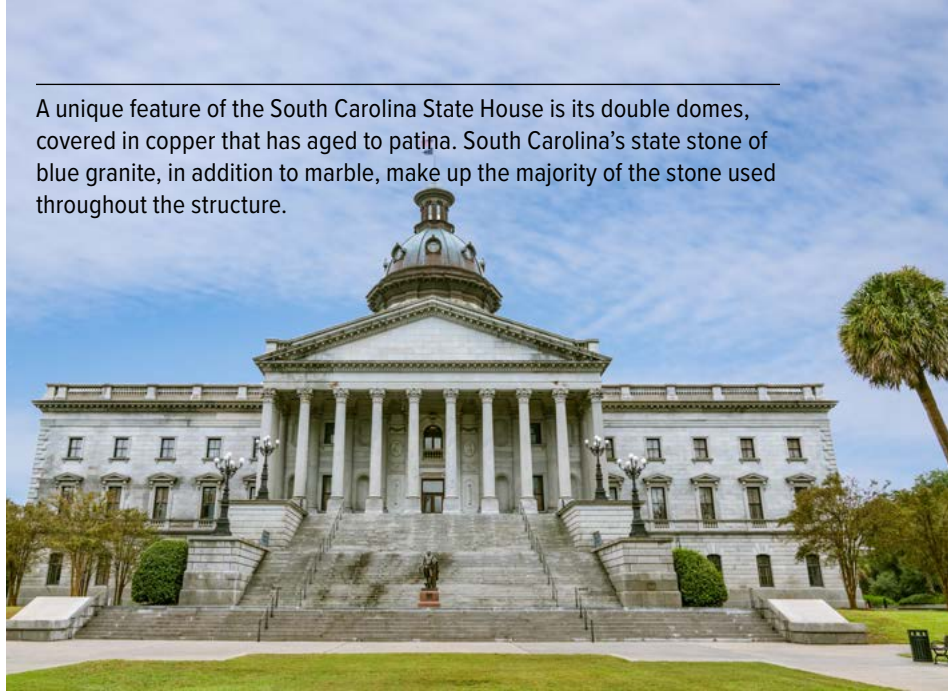
state. In turn, most have a well-developed aviation infrastructure that invites corporate aircraft to frequent them. Columbia, located in the geographic center of South Carolina, is no exception.

The Columbia Metropolitan Airport (CAE) lies at the southwest edge of the city and is only 15-20 minutes driving time from the City Center and Historic Capitol Building District. It’s a Class C airport with two runways, each exceeding 8,000 feet, with instrument approaches to all runway ends (including ILS Cat. I, II, and III and RNAV/GPS approaches with LPV minimums). Two full service FBOs offer all the assistance and amenities any King Air crew would typically need. For those wishing to arrive even closer to downtown Columbia and/or wishing to avoid the higher costs often encountered at the primary Class B and C airports, Hamilton-Owens Airport (CUB) is a pilot controlled airport, lying under the CAE Class C’s eastern, outer shelf. Barely 10 minutes driving time from the capitol building, this single, 5,000-foot runway airport would be well suited for missions requiring

quick access to downtown Columbia, with a minimum of fuss upon arrival or departure. While rental cars are not available on the field, it's close proximity to Columbia's business district would make using various car services (Uber, Lyft, private limos, etc.) a simple affair.

Once downtown, Columbia is a walkable city. Within a one-mile radius of the capital building you'll find a wide variety of restaurants, cafes, and coffee shops. Additionally, the South Carolina State Museum, visitor center, multiple riverfront parks, the Columbia Museum of Art, and much more, are equally close. The capitol building itself, is a bit of a sleeper among the 50 we can each tour in the U.S. Nonetheless, it is both unique and steeped in complicated history. Its construction period was much longer than most state houses. The original architect, who began construction in 1851, was fired. Most of the initial groundwork had to be completely dismantled and work began anew in 1855. Progress slowed as civil unrest in the South leading into and throughout the Civil War began to affect available funds, materials and labor. In 1865, United States Union Army

A unique feature of the South Carolina State House is its double domes, covered in copper that has aged to patina. South Carolina's state stone of blue granite, in addition to marble, make up the majority of the stone used throughout the structure.



General Sherman entered Columbia while leading his infamous "March to the Sea," halting all progress on the structure. Union gunnery crews used the large target to sight and range their artillery. Today, six bronze stars mark the exterior, noting locations where artillery shells impacted the unfinished building. While the war



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Congaree National Park's Boardwalk Wilderness Trail allows visitors to stroll among the old-growth floodplain forest without getting their feet wet. Many of the trees are some of the largest of their species known to exist.

ended soon after, post-war economics in the South kept advancement on the building to a crawl and another decade was needed just to complete the main structural elements. The interior was completed between 1881 and 1891. Finally, it was not until 1907 that the exterior was completed. This 56-year construction timetable is one of the longest for any U.S. state capitol building.

### **Air of the Ancients**

Twenty miles southeast of Columbia, lies one of South Carolina's hidden gems. There, a tiny stand of old-growth floodplain forest still flourishes. Now known as Congaree National Park, it protects 27,000 acres. Of those acres, 11,000 are nearly all that remains of what was once 35 million acres of such floodplain forests, stretching from Virginia to Texas along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. It is, by far, the largest tract of old-growth bottomland

hardwood forest remaining in North America. Such forests were decimated for the wood used in ships, buildings and the railroad industry. Those trees will never repopulate, as the floodplains they are so well suited for were lost along with the trees; drained to create pasture, farmland and cities. It is only by a combination of luck and a few tireless individuals that this stand remains as an example of what once was. Massive trees stretching well over 100 feet tall, spreading their roots far and wide for stability in the swampy ground, and enduring for hundreds of years through hurricanes, fires and infestations. Congaree's floodplain forests are home to some of the largest trees east of the California Redwoods and Sequoias and many of the largest known examples of many specific species (Bald Cypress, Pawpaw, Sweetgum, Loblolly Pine) anywhere in the world.

While Congaree National Park is best known for its impressive trees, the forest makes up only about a third of its protected area. The remaining acreage is mostly natural floodplain and is teeming with amphibious creatures, waterfowl and insects and many species (both plant and animal) are rebounding as preservation efforts have brought forth positive results. Congaree contains many miles of hiking trails for closeup viewing of the forests, wetlands and wildlife. A 2.4-mile raised boardwalk loop trail is accessible year around, including by wheelchairs and strollers. The remaining miles of trails are natural and, given their floodplain home, vary

greatly in condition from season to season and even day to day. While it is a perfect day trip from Columbia to visit Congaree, one word to the wise – it is not necessarily a year-round destination for those adverse to mosquitoes. The blood thirsty creatures are abundant in these soggy bottomlands and rarely do the winter's get cold enough to really knock down their population. They can be a nuisance throughout both spring and fall and torturous during summer. To avoid them (mostly anyway), winter is the best time to visit.

### **Heart of the Low Country**

In South Carolina, Columbia and most other non-coastal areas are often referred to as Up Country; and it's the Low Country that is better known and more tourist driven. The Low Country is generally considered to be the coastal counties encompassing Myrtle Beach to the



As the operating hours come to a close at Fort Sumter and the sun beams descending towards the horizon, the flag is lowered. Volunteers line up downwind of the flag to prevent it from contacting the ground. Two active duty military members lower the flag, while a Park Ranger coordinates the ceremony and moves into position to disconnect the flag and direct its folding.

north and extending south to Hilton Head, Savannah, Georgia, plus the adjacent coastal sea islands. Precise definitions of the boundaries of the Low Country are debatable, but the location of its heart is commonly said to be Charleston.

Many airports and destinations in the Low Country would be inviting to King Air pilots for business or pleasure purposes. Beginning to the north, Myrtle Beach has three such airports; the Class D Grand Strand Airport (CRE), the Class C Myrtle Beach International (MYR), and the smaller, pilot controlled Conway-Horry Co. Airport (HYW). Georgetown Co. Airport (GGE) is also positioned along the coast, nearly equidistant between the Myrtle Beach and Charleston metro areas. Down south, the Class C Savannah-Hilton Head International (SAV) serves as the primary airport for both sides of the state line and is well known for being the home of Gulfstream Aerospace. While it is the Class D Hilton Head Airport (HXD) that puts you right in the center of one of the most popular tourist cities, Charleston is the largest city and metro area in the Low Country by a wide margin. A King Air pilot might find themselves there for any number of reasons and if there is any time for touring, Charleston can fill a few idle hours or keep you on the move for many days.

The pilot inbound to Charleston itself has choices. Charleston International (CHS) is a joint-use Air Force Base and civilian airline and corporate airport.

While mighty C-17 Globemaster III military cargo planes loom large on the field, corporate iron and general aviation are equally well represented on the Atlantic Aviation and Signature Flight Support FBO aprons. CHS is supplemented by reliever airports on all sides of the city. Along the coast, south of the city and very near the popular Folly Beach area, is Charleston Executive Airport (JZI). “Exec” would likely prove the most popular for King Air missions, with its two runways (4,300 and 5,300 feet long), ILS and LPV approaches, and service-oriented FBO (Atlantic Aviation). Due east of Charleston, and also near the coast is the town of Mt. Pleasant (which has effectively become a Charleston suburb as the urban sprawl has practically connected the cities). Mt. Pleasant Regional – Faison Field (LRO) is a more general aviation-oriented airport just outside the CHS Class C with a single 3,700-foot runway, pilot control and basic services. Finally, north and northwest of CHS are the Berkeley Co. (MKS) and Summerville (DYB) airports. Both have slightly more runway length than LRO but are similar in facilities and services available. Regardless of which airport suits your mission or agenda, all are within 15 miles of CHS and even the furthest away (Berkeley Co.) is still well under a half-hour drive to the historic and tourist areas of Charleston.

## Revolution to Dissolution

For any history lover with some idle time on their hands, Charleston has much to fill your time. Foremost is the area’s rich military history. As a prime shipping port for the trade of goods between both Europe and the American colonies and, later, between the northern and southern states, Charleston Harbor contained turbulent waters in both



A cannon aimed through a lower gun port of the left flank wall of Fort Sumter. A section of Charleston skyline can be seen in the background.

the American Revolution and the Civil War. Interestingly, Charleston's most famous events were dramatic losses for what we would now call "The United States" in both conflicts. Sites, memorials and museums dedicated to one or the other can be found scattered throughout the Historic District and surrounding the harbor.

Locked in stalemate in the northern theater of the Revolutionary War, the British decided to shift their focus to the southern theater, beginning in December of 1779, when over 13,500 British troops set sail from New York, bound for Charleston. There, in March 1780, they rendezvoused with additional British troops and quickly began to surround Charleston and lay siege upon her residents and defenders. By April, the American colonists were trapped in the city and British warships controlled the harbor, as well. American commander, Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, offered to surrender to save his men. British commander, Gen. Henry Clinton, would not agree to the terms and continued to bombard the city while demanding that Gen. Lincoln surrender himself and his men without condition (terms Lincoln refused). So, the British answered by heating their cannon balls and artillery shells and proceeded to set most of Charleston ablaze. With little choice, on May 12, 1780, Lincoln surrendered unconditionally, dissolving his 5,000-man army and dealing the Americans their worst loss of the Revolution. Today, the Historic District on Peninsula Charleston can be toured on foot or via a variety of tourism trolleys, carriages or shuttles. More stories of the Siege of Charleston, its aftermath, and the eventual liberation of the city come into focus as one

steps foot inside the sites preserved from a time before the United States existed.

Three generations later, the still-new United States was crumbling under the weight of its own contradictions. Were all men created equal, or was it morally just for some humans to be owner and enslaved by others? South Carolina led the charge on Dec. 20, 1860, by seceding from the Union, effectively dissolving the United States as it existed prior to that day. Immediately thereafter, the rogue state demanded that the U.S. Army surrender control of its military facilities in Charleston Harbor. Instead, U.S. forces secretly consolidated into Fort Sumter (the most heavily fortified of the facilities in and around the harbor). There, they hunkered down for the 1860-61 winter season, surviving and preparing for war on the few supply shipments that could reach them unencumbered. By April 1861, they were as dangerously low on supplies as they were in imminent danger of attack from their non-defensive side (in that their fort was designed to defend harbor attacks from the Atlantic, rather than to defend itself from attacks from its sister-forts which ringed the harbor). Finally, the fateful day arrived and at 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, a single 10-inch mortar was fired upon Fort Sumter from nearby Fort Johnson. It was the shot that set off the deadliest conflict in American history. When the signal mortar exploded above Fort Sumter, illuminating its prey, 43 additional guns and mortars began what would be a

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Some of Charleston's streets still date back to the 18th century. Walking tours of the city's historic district are popular, whether self-guided or as part of a tour group. As with this street, it feels as though one is never more than a short stroll from a seaside vista in Historic Charleston.

34-hour bombardment. Hellfire rained down upon Fort Sumter from all directions – Fort Johnson (to the west), Fort Moultrie (to the east), Cummins Point (to the south), and Floating Battery (to the north). Union forces surrendered at 2:30 p.m. on April 13. The Confederacy had won this first battle but, as we all know, would ultimately lose the war. Nonetheless, Fort Sumter would remain in Confederate hands for almost the entire war, playing havoc with the Union's naval blockade. It wasn't until four years later (to the day) that Fort Sumter would officially be, again, under Union control. Though, by that time, much of it lay in piles of rubble from the many attacks and bombardments it endured while in Confederate hands.

All of these sites are readily accessible and enjoy some level of tourism today. Being part of the National Park System and designated a National Monument, Fort Sumter itself is by far the most popular. Ferries to the fort depart regularly from Liberty Square (where the Fort Sumter Visitor Center and Ferry Terminal are located) and visitors can tour the fort and the museum that now reside within it at their own pace. Of particular interest are the daily flag raising and lowering ceremonies, both for their built-in history lessons and their patriotic flair. If your timing coincides, be sure to be at the central flagpole to watch (or participate).



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The sun rises on the John Rutledge House (circa 1763). This beautiful B&B is just one of scores of old manor homes in Charleston that now function as B&Bs, fine dining restaurants, cafes, boutiques, etc. If your Charleston stay includes one or more overnights, skip the chain hotels and seek out such a B&B for a real taste of Charleston history, culture, and hospitality.

## Changing Tides

Back on the mainland, Charleston is filled with historic homes and surrounded by historic plantations that are open for tours. Such places are great for filling an hour, a half-day, or more, depending on their size and location relative to your chosen airport. While some (myself included) may recoil at how most of these places came to be (built by slave labor), they still hold an important history. If nothing else, they can serve as critical reminders of what enslaved people endured and of the utter inequity of the “system” in place in those times. The Magnolia Plantation and Drayton Hall are both popular destinations and very close to CHS airport. Whereas the picturesque Charleston Tea Plantation is closest to JZI. If Mount Pleasant and LRO airport is your area of choice, the Boone Hall Plantation and the Charles Pinckney National Historic Site are both mere minutes away.

Like so many of our coastal areas, Charleston and treasures such as Fort Sumter are under imminent threat from climate change and rising sea levels. The sea level in the Charleston area is now 10 inches higher than it was in 1950. The pace of rise is accelerating and is currently at about one-half inch annually. Multiple studies of the problem estimate that, without significant intervention, the rising sea levels will begin to swamp Fort Sumter’s parade grounds within a decade. If South Carolina is on your flight agenda in the near future, plan some extra time for touring or consider how best to utilize your downtime to take in some of the sites of this beautiful state. **K&A**

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Matthew McDaniel is a Master & Gold Seal CFII, ATP, MEI, AGI, & IGI and Platinum CSIP. In 30 years of flying, he has logged over 19,000 hours total, over 5,600 hours of instruction-given, and over 2,500 hours in various King Airs and the BE-1900D. As owner of Progressive Aviation Services, LLC ([www.progaviation.com](http://www.progaviation.com)), he has specialized in Technically Advanced Aircraft and Glass Cockpit instruction since 2001. Currently, he is also an Airbus A-320-Series Captain for an international airline, holds 8 turbine aircraft type ratings, and has flown over 90 aircraft types. Matt is one of less than 15 instructors in the world to have earned the Master CFI designation for 9 consecutive two-year terms. He can be reached at: [matt@progaviation.com](mailto:matt@progaviation.com) or (414) 339-4990.



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