

Middleton Place

Brings the
Antebellum South
to Life

By Betty Soskin

A haunting, otherworldly aura pervades Charleston's Ashley River Road. Ancient live oaks cast ragged shadows. Spanish moss drifts in the breezes, and winding drives lead to a string of old rice plantations. The most iconic of these, Middleton Place, offers a glimpse of plantation life and a stroll through America's oldest and most historic gardens.

The original plantation house was built sometime in the early 1700s to front the river, which served as a highway during Colonial and antebellum times. Here slaves loaded barges with Carolina Gold, the rice grown on this sprawling plantation that at its height was home to one of South Carolina's most influential planter families and a large African-American slave community.

Experience Generations of History

The gardens at Middleton Place were laid out in 1741 by Henry Middleton, president of the First Continental Congress. Henry's son, Arthur, signed the Declaration of Independence. His grandson and namesake, Henry, served as governor of South Carolina, and his great grandson, William, signed the Ordinance of Secession.

When the original plantation house was torched by Union troops during the Civil War, the family relocated to what had been a "gentlemen's guest wing." It now serves as the Middleton House Museum, complete with

collections of Middleton family furniture, paintings, books and documents.

Tour the Oldest Landscaped Gardens in America

The classic gardens begin with an imposing expanse of open lawn that gives way to manicured formal spaces, woods and water. Sweeping grass stairs, designed to mimic the stairs of the former plantation house, lead to two butterfly lakes and the winding Ashley River. The garden unfolds into lanes walled by trimmed trees and shrubs, past sundials, canals, reflection pools and shaded ponds in which black swans drift.

Despite the garden's formality, the site offers a relaxing atmosphere. Children romp in patches of sunlight. A young couple loll on a bench, and sheep graze in the distance.

A Peek at Plantation Life

Behind the elegant façade of the house and gardens lie the stables, where a hive of activity kept the self-contained plantation running. It still houses water buffalo, sheep, goats, pigs and cows.

Using methods and tools from long ago, blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, potters, millers and weavers demonstrate their crafts, while interpretive guides answer questions about plantation life and slavery.

A board inside Eliza's Cottage, a preserved freedman's

cabin on the site, lists the names of 2,600 former slaves owned by the Middleton family, a dark reminder of the heavy cost of slavery. Beside each name is a figure denoting the price paid for the slave or a tiny hint of a life passed in bondage.

The Inn and Restaurant

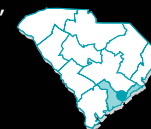
Located on the bluffs of the Ashley River, the Inn at Middleton Place serves as a counterpoint to the formality of the gardens. Each of the 55 beautifully simple rooms offer stunning views of the river. Tariffs of \$139-\$199 per night include admission to the site, a full breakfast, and a wine and cheese reception.

Guests can choose from a selection of recreational activities, or they can board a plantation carriage and roll through forests and along the banks of the river.

Later, at a candlelit table overlooking the Rice Mill Pond, guests enjoy Lowcountry plantation fare: okra soup, pan-fried quail, Carolina Gold rice and Huguenot torte. A moonlight stroll through the gardens end the day as it began, with a haunting dreamscape of antebellum life.

Find out more in *Places...*

Turn to page 107 in the "green pages" for more on Middleton Place.

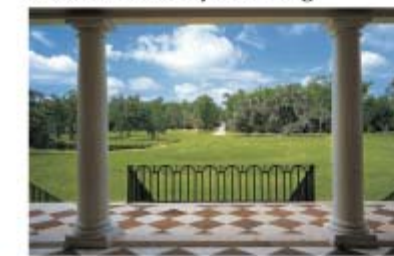


MORE THAN A HOUSE.

Have you ever wondered what a true southern plantation might have been like? Then DRAYTON HALL should be at the top of your list of places to see while in Charleston.

Built in 1738, it has survived the centuries in near-original condition, affording visitors an authentic look back through time. While renowned for its architectural significance, Drayton Hall's broad vistas and rare period features represent one of America's most significant, undisturbed historic landscapes.

To learn more about all that this National Trust historic site offers, including Special Saturday programs and other events (many included with regular admission), visit our website at www.draytonhall.org.



Discover why Drayton Hall is more than a house:

- Outstanding Guided Tours on the hour
- African-American Connections Program
- New Historic Landscape Tour on DVD
- Scenic Marsh and River Walks
- African-American Cemetery
- Artisan-Inspired Museum Shop

Drayton Hall



A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
AND
A NATIONAL TRUST HISTORIC SITE

(843) 769.2600

3380 Ashley River Road Charleston, SC
www.draytonhall.org