

DINING HIGH

In the Lowcountry

By Angela Shoultz

Imagine that you're four stories above the cobblestone streets of historic downtown Charleston, sipping on your beverage of choice, eating fantastic fare so far from the typical bar food you'd swear you're at an upscale restaurant. And, to round it all out, a 360-degree panorama of church steeples, Colonial rooftops, ocean waters and clear skies flood your vision.

So what is this place? It's one of Charleston's renowned rooftop bars, and yes, they really are as amazing as they sound.

Touted as the city's original rooftop bar, The Rooftop at The Vendue Inn (843-414-2341) is situated three stories above the corner of East Bay and Vendue Range in Charleston's French Quarter, just steps from the waterfront. From this perch, the view is nothing short of spectacular. As from any rooftop in Charleston, you can gaze upward into the

great beyond while ocean breezes stir your senses. You see Waterfront Park, and in the distance the peaks of the newly finished Cooper River Bridge stand their post over ocean waters. Across the harbor, the legendary Fort Sumter sits stout and strong, a timeless reminder of the vast history surrounding you. Beyond the views, the bar itself boasts some pretty great perks. It tops off The Vendue Inn—a luxurious little Charleston hotel—and its restaurant, The Library, which is perfect if you're looking for great American cuisine with distinct Charleston flare. At the bar, patrons can enjoy live music seven days a week, a great selection of tasty entrées, appetizers and tempting specialty drinks. For those of you not into the nightlife, The Rooftop opens its doors daily at 11:30am, so you can enjoy this spectacular spot in a more family-oriented environment.

If you're in the mood to bar hop, descend from The Rooftop at The Vendue Inn and stroll on over to the corner of East Bay and Market Street. There, in the epicenter of downtown, you'll find the Market Pavilion Hotel (843-723-0500), winner of the AAA Four Diamond Award and member of the prestigious Leading Small Hotels of the World. With just 66 guestrooms and suites and its very own gourmet restaurant, Grille 225, Market Pavilion is a wonderful boutique hotel that's as luxurious as it is beautiful. And to top it off, literally, is its rooftop bar—the Pavilion Bar and Café. This swanky bar overlooks the busy City Market and is just across from the U.S. Customs House. But like other rooftop bars in Charleston, it's not just the view that draws a crowd. Once you reach the rooftop, you could spend hours perusing the bar's menu of fine wines, specialty drinks and sumptuous food. But that's just the beginning. After you've settled down with the libation of your choice, cool down at the cascading pool, complete with fountains and lush vegetation, sit back and surf the Web on the wireless Internet network or simply watch the sun set behind the historic rooftops and steeples of the Holy City. All in all, time spent at the Pavilion Bar and Café is a grand experience you'll want to revisit each time you return to Charleston.

If you're looking for something a little more laid-back, cruise across the Cooper River and drive through Mt. Pleasant to Isle of Palms. Quiet and scenic, this tiny island is just four miles long and one mile wide, but don't be fooled, there's plenty on this little patch of paradise to keep you entertained. Besides the beach itself, residents and visitors alike love the island's local restaurants, bars and shops. And, of course, they love the views from the top at Coconut Joe's (843-886-0046). Located beachfront on the island's main drag, the restaurant wears a permanent coat of bright colors, making it look as though it were pulled straight out of the Caribbean and plopped on the sandy South Carolina shore. The friendly year-round staff hustles across the restaurant's double-decker porches carrying trays of tropical drinks and island-inspired entrées, and the acoustic strumming of a lone guitar can be heard when local musicians grace the rooftop with their unique renditions of your favorite songs. You'll quickly see that a trip to Coconut Joe's is like having a vacation within a vacation.

Your trip to Charleston will reveal a long list of these sky-high locales. But no matter what type of elevated experience you're in search of, the vantage point from any of these rooftop bars will show you more than a good time.



Pavilion Bar and Café, Charleston



Coconut Joe's, Isle of Palms



Vickery's, Mt. Pleasant



The Boathouse, Isle of Palms



The Rooftop at the Vendue Inn, Charleston