

NASHVILLE

LIFESTYLES



HOT 91 *list*

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WAYS TO
STEAM UP YOUR SUMMER

Low Country Culinary

Charleston's Food + Wine Festival is a feast of a trip

BY LIZ DANIEL

IT'S NOT AS IF CHARLESTON DOESN'T have all the best of everything when it comes to culinary delights, but each spring brings even more as the city celebrates its Food + Wine Festival each March.

Before choosing what events to attend, it's important to pick the perfect hotel. I chose Charleston Place for its Southern charm and hospitality. In the heart of downtown, this luxurious hotel is a gathering point for local society. The Thoroughbred Club is a favorite spot conveniently located adjacent to the grand staircase, where patrons enjoy cocktails, tapas and sweets until late evening. This Orient-Express property merges Old World and cutting edge styles along with fine-quality accommodations. Room furnishings are Charleston-inspired, with classic furniture and Italian marble baths.

Charleston Food + Wine has an event for everyone and every palate. It's the festival's Culinary Village that keeps most guests excited and coming back for more with dozens of vendors and plenty of tasting opportunities. With the Culinary Village and Grand Tasting Tent ticket, guests found a new layout with more than 90 food, wine and spirit stations.

Some of my favorite events were on a smaller scale. La Wine La Luncheon involved being greeted by champagne and owner and operator of Social Restaurant + Wine Bar, Brad Ball, who guided diners through an amazing three course meal accompanied by wines from his La Wine Agency.

Guests enjoyed shops on Lower King Street, a memorable shopping experience if you haven't been. At Shop, Sip & Savor, visitors browse while sampling fare and tasting an array of wines, cocktails and beer. At Bubbles, Bites & Bling at The Restoration on King, partygoers visited multiple set-ups in lofts on each floor, where six chefs paired sparkling wines and champagne with seafood. The boutique hotel's rooftop was the perfect place to end the night noshing on chocolate and enjoying city views.

My culinary adventure led me to a tasting of Pascual Toso wines with Enrique Toso. I learned about his great-grandfather, Pascual Toso, who set out toward Argentina from its hometown, Canale D'Alba, in Piemonte, Italy in the mid 1880s. In 1890, he established his first winery, which is one of today's oldest and most prestigious in Argentina.



View from Charleston Place

While in Charleston, I stepped away from the festival to hit a few of my favorite spots. Circa 1866 Lowcountry restaurant marries Southern cuisine with local and seasonal ingredients. Chef Collins' dishes are a delight, as they are prepared with healthy ingredients that still thrill the palate. The Broken Arrow Ranch Antelope Schnitzel is a signature dish that will change your thinking about trying wild game. The Black Cod is also melt-in-your-mouth-good, and pairs perfectly with their 2009 Schug Pinot Noir.

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Poogan's Porch is another Charleston original. Longtime menu highlights include homemade buttermilk biscuits and sausage gravy for brunch, a bowl of she-crab soup for lunch and signature buttermilk fried chicken for dinner.

Of course, there's so much more to be explored. For details visit charlestonwineandfood.com, then book your Southwest Airlines flight directly to Charleston from BNA or plan a road trip. Either way, it's an experience not to be missed.

Tickets for the 2013 Festival (Feb. 28 - March 3) go on sale Aug. 30 at charlestonwineandfood.com. BB&T Charleston Wine + Food Festival Charleston Place, 205 Meeting St., Charleston, South Carolina 29401, charlestonplace.com