

## Charleston is Travel + Leisure’s No. 1 city for 9th year; SC islands take top 2 spots

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23 HRS AGO



Charleston was ranked the No. 1 city in the U.S. by readers of Travel + Leisure magazine for the ninth straight year. File/Grace Beahm Alford/Staff

Charleston is one year shy of a decade-long sweep for the top spot on Travel + Leisure magazine’s annual list of the best cities to visit in the country.

The Holy City was also the only place in the U.S. to make the publication’s 2021 ranking of cities worldwide, coming in at No. 18.

And, on a list of the best islands in the continental U.S., South Carolina claimed the two top spots with Hilton Head and Kiawah.

Unlike last year, when Travel + Leisure’s rankings were rolled out amid a major downturn for tourism caused by COVID-19, the 26th annual awards are coming out after a summer season marked by recovery for many parts of the industry, particularly in places like Charleston that have been able to lean on assets like beaches and outdoor activities that have remained in demand during the pandemic.

In an announcement of the ranking rollout, the magazine’s editor-in-chief, Jacqui Gifford, said this year’s results are “a testament to the travel industry’s resilience under enormous strain.”

### TOP 10 U.S. CITIES

Below are the top 10 cities in the U.S., according to the results of Travel + Leisure magazine’s 2021 “World’s Best” awards:

1. Charleston, S.C.
2. Santa Fe, N.M.
3. Savannah, Ga.
4. New Orleans
5. New York City
6. San Antonio, Texas
7. Chicago
8. Bend, Ore.
9. Williamsburg, Va.
10. Honolulu

Source: Travel + Leisure

Along with the top spot going to Charleston again, much of the U.S. rankings, which were posted Sept. 8, were consistent with last year’s results. Only two cities on the list weren’t on the 2020 version: Bend, Ore., and Williamsburg, Va.

The rest of the cities slightly shuffled places but stayed on the list. Savannah edged up one spot to No. 3. Santa Fe, N.M., bumped New Orleans out of second place, and New York and Chicago switched places, landing at No. 5 and No. 7 this year, respectively.

At nine years and counting, Charleston’s streak as Travel + Leisure’s best U.S. city is second only to its run with another major travel magazine. Last fall, the Holy City **reached the 10-year mark** of consecutive

No. 1 city titles with Condé Nast Traveler.

Condé Nast’s 2021 survey is still open. Results for that ranking have typically been announced in October.

Reader comments featured in Travel + Leisure’s latest list described Charleston as “heaven for foodies” and a “historic treasure.” A visitor who ended up moving to the city wrote that it is “one of the friendliest places” they’ve been.

Via reader surveys, Charleston was assigned a score of 88.61 out of 100, just behind Jaipur, India, (88.68) and slightly ahead of Tokyo (88.59) on the world rankings.

Charleston is considered a “Hall of Fame” nominee since it’s been on the publication’s U.S. cities list for more than 10 years straight.

Explore Charleston CEO Helen Hill said the rankings give the region “incredible exposure” as the market tries to regain ground. During 2020, Charleston-area tourism shrank by about a third, generating \$6.2 billion in impact compared to nearly \$10 million in 2019.

“The competition in our industry will be more intense than ever as more destinations fully reopen post-pandemic,” Hill said.

Some local lodgings got nods in the awards, like the historic John Rutledge House Inn on Broad Street which sits at No. 12 on a list of top hotels in U.S. cities this year.

The magazine also included separate lists for Charleston hotels and Palmetto State resorts. Hotel Bennett, which recently was named the best luxury lodging in the country in a **USA Today ranking**, came right behind the John



Kiawah Island Golf Resort ranked first on a list of the best resorts in South Carolina compiled by Travel + Leisure magazine from reader surveys. Kiawah Island itself also earned an accolade, as the No. 2 island in the continental U.S. File/Provided.

Rutledge House Inn on Travel + Leisure’s dedicated Charleston list. The Sanctuary hotel at Kiawah Island Golf Resort, where the PGA Championship was hosted May, topped the resort rankings, followed by Montage Palmetto Bluff, a resort in Bluffton which earlier this year became the state’s **second Forbes Five-Star-rated hotel**.

Savannah’s airport, which also serves nearby Hilton Head in South Carolina, placed second on a list of the best domestic airports. Respondents were impressed with the terminal’s amenities, despite its small size, according to the list, and noted the friendliness of staff and the ease of parking.