

Meet me at Queen and Meeting streets



Photos provided by Leigh Cort

The picturesque Mills House Hotel was designed in 1853 and is situated within walking distance of many of Charleston's best attractions.



Leigh Cort Special to The Recorder

One could easily get lost in Charleston — lost in the extraordinary gardens, refined architecture, vibrant restaurant kitchens, tempting art and antique galleries, legendary museums and cobblestoned streets. It's a jewel of pleasurable pursuits, vivaciously enjoying a renaissance era. It's one of the South's acclaimed cities where today's savvy traveler yearns to know more about its historic evolution and fashionable lifestyle. Come along to a beautiful city of sensory thrills — from the moment you arrive amidst the wondrous homes and sun-splashed maze of the historic downtown.

Where are Queen and Meeting Streets? What stories do they share with the historic and picturesque Mills House Hotel? Staying at this artfully designed 1853 boutique hotel, you find your place quickly on the corner of two of Charleston's streets with a pedigree. It's perfect for walking to all of the city's neighborhoods and activities. During the mid 1850s, Otis Mills (the Jacob Astor of Charleston) saw the

need for a fine hotel where ladies and gentlemen could feel at home among marble staircases, priceless antiques and impeccable service. Today it's still a place where business people can discuss issues over a snifter of brandy and leisure guests feel as if they're visiting someone's private residence of the Grand Old South.

The Mills House Hotel's warm welcome — from valet, front desk and everyone encountered — is genuinely given and received. It is a gracious representative of true Southern hospitality. The staff greets you as if you're family and not a name on their register; this acknowledgment didn't wane for a moment during my stay. They are as polished as the beautiful antique furnishings, marble hallways and brilliant crystal chandeliers. Internationally recognized decorator Anthony Hail was awarded the task to find 17th and 18th century antique furniture, rare oil paintings, custom fabrics and wall coverings for 214 guest rooms and suites.

Tripp Hays, Hotel Director of Sales, is expert at describing and sharing the Hotel's tales and treasures. A native



Photos provided by Leigh Cort

Mark Kelvin Horton paints in oil while discussing Charleston's beauty.



Spiced pecan salmon at Eli's Table

of Charleston, he has served in his position for 24 years. The catalog of famous guests began with Robert E. Lee and Teddy Roosevelt, continuing today with iconic celebrities, Medal of Honor recipients and Pat Conroy who has referenced the Hotel in four of his most famous novels. Hays is proud that the Hotel continues to make history!

Fitting for Charleston, the First Shot Lounge (named for the infamous Fort Sumter shot that began the War Between the States) and Tea Cozy rooms are designed whereby they open onto the hotel's courtyard so that guests can enjoy al fresco breakfast, lunch, dinner and cocktails. Featuring a grand fountain and meticulous landscaping, Low Country culinary specialties are also served in the Barbados Room and Lounge from early morning until the last guest has drifted off into dreamland.

Stepping out for a Charleston adventure, the crossroads of Queen Street and Meeting Street hold the city's ancestry in their hands. It's hard to say where the past ends and today begins. Meeting Street, before named in 1672,

was described as "The Great Street that Runneth from the Ashley River to the Market". Queen Street was one of the original streets of the 'Great Modell' and first called Dock Street for its importance on the river. It was renamed Queen Street for Caroline of Ansbach, the consort of George II.

A history buff? The South Carolina Historical Society is situated across the street from the Mills House with personalized attention to whatever historic research is important to you. Their Winter Lecture Series runs from January 22 – March 12, 2013 featuring 'Major Milestones over the Past Three Centuries'. www.SCHSonline.org

Imagine yourself in the original 'Charles Towne'. You would be visiting The Peninsula, surrounded by two rivers that bookend the city — the Cooper to the east, Ashley on the west. Each neighborhood of the historic area (approximately one mile square) deserves its own visit. This city, where the first shot of the American Civil War exploded over Charleston's harbor, is defined by its relationship with the sea. Listen and hear a special sound as you

walk over cobblestone streets that are paved with centuries-old ballast.

A theater aficionado?

Begin your exploration at the famous Dock Street Theater within a stone's throw from the Mills House on Queen and Church Street. Hard to believe that they presented theater for two seasons in 1736! But as all of Charleston witnessed devastating fires, earthquake, wars and the Great Depression, the grand structure fell into disrepair until the mid 1930s. Currently owned by the City of Charleston, its glamour and place in history have been restored. The Charleston Stage Company has served as its theater's resident company since 1978. The historic Dock Street Theater is entering its fourth century as the heart of Charleston's artistic life and also home to the famous Spoleto Festival USA.

A gallery hunter?

Find a brilliant diamond, examine its sparkling facets and envision that it's the art scene of Charleston offering unique perspectives in paint, photog-

raphy, sculpture and fabric. It's a city that inspires imagination. Every street offers open doors and windows to the soul of hundreds of creative and complex personalities. In fact, Charleston's skies are known for suggesting a palette of colors one can't see anywhere else.

On Queen Street, the Horton Hayes Fine Art Gallery's allure became a surprise encounter for me with partner/artist Mark Kelvin Horton. Learning that Mark was in the second floor studio painting, I imagined there might be a possibility to see his 'moody skies and landscapes' as he painted. An artist whose passion is also teaching in the Charleston gallery studio as well as 'on location' throughout the world, distinctive destinations like Corsica, Iceland, Tuscany and Colorado become a part of his landscapes as well as for his students and protégés. Subjects in the Gallery vary and include still-life, landscapes, figurative works and architectural depictions rendered in oil, pastel and watercolor. www.hortonhayes.com

Unbound Travels

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A wild foodie?

From casual and funky dining to impeccable 4-star restaurants, from bbq and low country specialties to exquisite celebrity chef tables, Charleston's restaurants set the bar on an international scale. This year, Conde Nast Traveler readers gave Charleston their No. 1 City award. According to Fodor's, "Foodie-centric Charleston" is a leader in the Southern food revival... and the New York Times reported "Charleston is one of

the great eating towns of the American South." One must be prepared to face a dining quandary from the moment the sun rises until you just can't eat another meal. Where do you begin? Read, study, ask around and just jump in. Be spontaneous and enjoy the luxury of strolling the avenues while studying menus outside every doorway.

I luxuriated in impulsiveness and had a master plan. This visit dictated dining on either Queen Street or Meeting Street and sampling the Mills House cuisine too. It made selections a bit easier than trying to digest the entire city and nearby islands!

My first food encounter was in the

Mills House First Shot Lounge that offers weary travelers the most appetizing, easy to enjoy contemporary Southern 'comfort food' all day and night. The cornmeal crusted pickle spears (\$5.95) with four dipping sauces prepared me for restaurant manager Eric Foor's eloquent dish descriptions and hotel food philosophy. Both Lounge and Barbados Dining Room offer the same casual menu with a few nightly dinner specials. Even a mundane Mini Slider Combo (\$11.95) features pulled pork BBQ, pan seared crab cake and island spiced chicken served on dill potato rolls. Their clever 'tasting trays' are perfect for sharing, especially the

From the Sea with local whitefish, shrimp skewers, corn meal oysters, southern slaw and killer house-made potato chips (\$19.95). As hotels are known for mediocre food and hearty prices, the Mills House Hotel is masterful at dispelling the myth. Their food is excellent and the prices realistic with Charleston's famed eateries.

Yes, there was one drizzly southern afternoon, just perfect for spotting '82 Queen' across cobblestoned Queen Street. I was tempted to reserve my own table for the ensuing three days after my first lunch. Nestled in the heart of Charleston's historic French Quarter, the trio of buildings known as 82 Queen Street is located on the site of a famous Square, once part of the original walled city of Charles Towne. But it was the She Crab Soup that set my day on a sunny course. Lusciously composed, the aroma and beauty of the bowl (\$7) swept me away. I wanted to sample every dish on the menu. There wasn't one lackluster description, including the quintessential Carolina Crab Cake with red pepper bacon coulis and the most incredible roasted corn tartar sauce. (\$11).

Recommendations for Eli's Table were plentiful — a bustling lunch crowd that looked like business folks sprinkled with visitors. Waiting for a table was just fine, giving me time to enjoy the art, cheery ambience and open kitchen starring Chef Scott Vosburgh.

Crispy Roasted Half Duck with Asian Soy Glaze couldn't have been more succulent (\$26). Chef's Spiced Pecan Salmon with Sweet Potato

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Dear loyal readers,

We work very hard throughout the year to keep you informed with the latest news that matters most to you. Local information is of significant importance because it concerns the various subjects that affect you as well as the projects of the people we have elected, our school commissions, the local economy and the businesses in our area.

As your local newspaper, it is our mission to inform you and we are very proud to be the local resource for news and information in this community. We sincerely thank you for making our newspaper what it is today. Your loyalty means the world to us.

Ponte Vedra 

Recorder

Not your average newspaper, not your average reader.

We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a happy New Year filled with joy and happiness.

THE PONTE VEDRA RECORDER STAFF
Susan, Rob, Kelly, Ed
April, Elizabeth, Kristin, & Carrie

On the road to Charleston

When driving to Charleston via I-95, get off Exit 33 and head directly to the Low Country Visitors Center and Museum. The historic 'Frampton House' (circa 1700s) was part of an original King's Grant that is worthy of a visit. Helpful and knowledgeable docents will supply you with Charleston area maps, valuable information and a feeling of nostalgia in a beautifully restored farmhouse. It's an additional 65 miles along Hwy. #17 to Charleston, giving you time to read and prepare for your vacation. www.discover-southcarolina.com

Tours

If you have a special interest when visiting Charleston, there is one company that I personally recommend. Linda Wohlfel Jones, founder of www.AbsolutelyCharleston.com will customize your excursion and open the doors to history, architecture, grand homes, churches, people and absolute abundant charms of the City. Her company maintains its own fleet of vehicles and offers total destination management for groups and individuals that includes a Classic American Trolley Collection. Absolutely Charleston is your guide to distinctive destinations on the South Carolina coast... even to places that you may not have yet dreamed about.

Unbound Travels

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Hash and Brown Sherry Glaze (\$25) trumped every dish of my Charleston adventure. And it was the Bacon-Brie Knish that wiggled its way into my heart — a jumbo eggroll filled with luscious mashed potato, crispy crumbled bacon and melted brie (\$6). Chef's three exquisitely warm fried powder-sugared beignets actually brought tears to my eyes. How could I consider leaving my two hour lunch and be late for my three hour dinner?

Chef Michelle Weaver is the matriarch of cuisine at Charleston Grill, last dinner of the journey. The res-

taurant is a nightly jazz and cocktails favorite! Known for its 1,300 wine labels and impeccable service, Weaver's award-winning menu is offered in four categories: Pure, Lush, Cosmopolitan and Southern. Each dish is masterfully presented. The Seared Foie Gras accompanied by a mini Cherry Hand Pie, Marcona Almonds and Candied Ginger compelled me to eat it very slowly, savoring the brilliant flavor combinations (\$19).

Intoxicating Brazilian music escorted me back onto Meeting Street. As I strolled home to the Hotel, there was a moment in time when I felt that I had discovered a beautiful blending of contemporary southern soul with a place in history that will last forever.

In this magical city where every-

one appears to know everyone, the common goal seems to be preserving its natural spirit and special culture.

When I return, I'll start where I left off — not being lost at all.

Send us your news!

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Holiday Worship

Please join us for our

Christmas Worship Services at Christ Episcopal Church

Christmas Eve at CHRIST CHURCH PONTE VEDRA

400 San Juan Drive, Ponte Vedra Beach ~ 285-6127

Services with nursery available are designated with an asterisk *

* 2 p.m. **Traditional Christmas Eve liturgy** and music is offered at this convenient mid-afternoon service in the Church on the San Juan campus.

New time! * 2 p.m. **Toddler Service** in the Contemporary Worship Space – This service focuses on our preschool age children as they help Father Justin tell the story of the birth of Jesus!

New! * 4 p.m. **Contemporary celebration** using praise music, visual media, and other contemporary elements to create an alternative worship experience.

* 6 p.m. **Children's Service with Christmas Musical, "The 'Fear Not' Factor."** This energy-charged musical delivers the Christmas message in new style to inspire children of all ages. A story written about a mission of sending the heavenly army to earth and unveil God's perfect plan with angel Gabriel being front and center to make the announcement of the "fear not" factor to a few choice people.

* 8 p.m. & 10 p.m. **Traditional Christmas Eve service** in the Church at our San Juan Campus. Festival liturgy is celebrated with Christmas hymns and instrumentation.

* **Christmas Day** - 10 a.m. **Traditional Christmas morning service.**

Christmas Eve at CHRIST CHURCH SAN PABLO

2002 San Pablo Rd, Jacksonville - 221-4777

* 5:30 p.m. **Christingle Children's Service** is used to help children understand the story of Christmas and has become a tradition for families at our San Pablo Campus. 11 p.m. **"Midnight" Service at our San Pablo campus** celebrates Christmas Eve using traditional liturgy and Christmas hymns.

Christmas Eve at CHRIST CHURCH SERENATA

Serenata Beach Club, 3175 South Ponte Vedra Blvd, Ponte Vedra Beach

4 p.m. **Christmas on the Beach!** Christ Church Serenata celebrates worship on the beach in front of the Serenata Beach Club, using the wonder of creation to inspire on Christmas Eve.



Discover more about Christ Episcopal Church on www.christepiscopalchurch.org
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Palms Presbyterian Church wonder

Service of Lessons and Carols

Sunday, December 23 at 5:45 p.m.

Christmas Eve Worship Services

- 5:00 p.m. Children and Families, also featuring children's musical, *The Grumpy Shepherd*
- 7:00 p.m. A Candlelight Service with Choir & JSO Strings
- 9:00 p.m. A Candlelight Service with Choir & JSO Strings
- 11:00 p.m. A Communion Candlelight Service with Harp & JSO Strings

Blue Christmas Service

Blue Christmas is a time when we can, with others, acknowledge the "blue" feelings we have at Christmas time, the reasons for them, and offer them to God.

Wednesday, December 26 at 6:30 p.m.



Check out all our upcoming events!

3410 South Third Street, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32259

JOIN US FOR

Christmas Eve

2 Services - 4:00pm and 5:30pm

- Live Nativity with Animals
- Refreshments
- Crosswater Christmas Program



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