

We're roaring on to CHARLESTON, SC

As most everyone knows the decision was made to have the next reunion in Charleston, SC. Charleston is known as the place "where history lives" and has been named for the fourth consecutive year "Choice Top U.S. City Award". It has a rich history, well preserved architecture, a celebrated restaurant community, and the beach! Please visit www.charlestoncvb.com for more info on Charleston.

Our reunion will officially begin with a Tuesday (June, 23, 2015) evening meal and will again conclude on Sunday (June, 28, 2015). We have also added a Sunday & Monday activity for those who will be spending the entire week with us. I will be in Charleston from Sunday to Sunday, (June 21 to June 28). The beautiful DoubleTree in North Charleston will be our host hotel during our Charleston reunion. My contact at the hotel is a marine veteran who truly understood our needs and is so anxious and honored to meet the members of the PVO. Our price per night is \$119.00 plus taxes.

The lowest I could get us downtown was 219.00 per night and that was at a Courtyard Marriott! So please if you are even thinking of coming to Charleston send me your reservation choices asap so I secure your desired room choice. As before you can always cancel it up to 24 hours of arrival. I would rather have the reservation made thus guaranteeing you a room than have to tell you I cannot get any more rooms.

Honestly, after seeing the city I truly don't feel the need to be directly downtown. It was a true effort to find a great hotel with banquet facilities to serve our needs. Charleston is not a "walkable" city as New Orleans was. Even if you are downtown you would still need to take the trolley wherever you wanted to go. In our area, North Charleston, you can take the NASH Express for \$3.00 and be downtown in ten to fifteen minutes. The NASH express is a direct bus, with no stops, stopping only at the downtown visitor's center where you can grab the free city trolley. It has a confirmed time pick up and drop off schedule for your convenience. Our first tour will be of the city and downtown so you can acclimate yourself to the area if you decide to venture out on your own.

I have listed the tentative tours for you to look at and see what interests you. So far I have these tours lined up for us:

Sunday, June 21, 2015... "Welcome Aboard the Schooner Pride"

Tour Charleston Harbor and experience the best in Charleston sailing on the Schooner Pride, a classic 84' tall ship. Considered one of the top five things to do in Charleston, join us for our exhilarating sunset sail. Take in the Holy City the way it was meant to be seen, from the peaceful waters of Charleston Harbor, as we mingle with dolphins, pelicans and gulls on a two hour sailing tour. There are no set courses, she sails with the winds and tides so every cruise is unique. You will always be in the sheltered harbor area and passengers are welcomed to raise and trim the sails with the crew or just sit back and enjoy. This is not a narrated tour, but more of a way to enjoy the serenity of Charleston Harbor and the soft breezes and beautiful views without having to take in nonstop information. This is truly a great way to relax and enjoy your time on the water as the sails are lifted and the cool breeze whisks us away.

Monday, June 22, 2015... "PVO party on the beach"

We will have a number of people arriving early to Charleston, therefore I have made some additional arrangements for activities. I have made arrangements with the local Isle of Palms VFW to host a beach barbecue- cook out at their post. The post is directly on the beach and they have been so very gracious to host us. This will be an afternoon filled with beach fun followed by a delicious dinner. You can relax on the beach, refresh in the cool water, enjoy cold refreshments in the post itself, or simply watch all of the bathers from the post's second floor deck under the shade of an umbrella , The deck is accessible via an elevator.

Tuesday, June 23, 2015... the day is yours to enjoy doing whatever you want

Wednesday, June 24, 2015... “See Charleston by Land & Sea”

We will begin the day with a narrated tour of historic Charleston along with a licensed tour guide. This tour will include at least 100 points of interest about Charleston history, with a stop at Charleston's picturesque battery for a closer look at Charleston harbor. We will learn about the city's pivotal role in our country's history and see many historical and architecturally significant sites such as Rainbow Row, Colonial Lake, the Old Exchange Building, many churches and Whitepoint Gardens. We will have a luncheon stop downtown.

After lunch we will board Spiritline Cruises for a relaxing intimate waterside view of the historic port while cruising past notable American landmarks, such as Fort Sumter, the aircraft carrier USS Yorktown, Battery Point and Castle Pinckney. The majestic span of the Cooper River Bridge will be our backdrop as our licensed city guide brings interesting history to life, with a dash of humor. This cruise is certain to educate and entertain all of us.

I am putting this tour first so that all can get acclimated to the city so that if you venture out on your own, you will have an idea of where you want to go and what you want to see and do.

Thursday, June 25, 2015... “Beautiful Magnolia”

Today we venture out to beautiful Magnolia Plantation, one of the 14 Most Beautiful Home and Garden Tours in America. Founded in 1676 by the Drayton family, Magnolia Plantation has survived the centuries and witnessed the history of our nation unfold before it from the American Revolution through the Civil War and beyond. It is the oldest public tourist site in the Lowcountry, and the oldest public gardens in America, opening its doors to visitors in 1870 to view the thousands of beautiful flowers and plants in its famous gardens.

I have planned for you to see and enjoy the plantation various ways. We start the morning with a video presentation of Magnolia Plantation, see the historically beautiful gardens, reflect in the conservatory, take in the nature boat tour and the nature train and still have ample time to enjoy their peacocks and miniature horses.

We will travel on their Nature Boat, The boat tour is a perfect way to take a break from walking. You can cool your heels and enjoy the breeze of the Ashley River as you glide through a water world unknown to most visitors. Come see the wild wetlands as the “locals” do – from the water. Slip back in time as your boat glides through Magnolia’s old flooded rice field along the Ashley River. While you explore the cattail-fringed canals, your naturalist captain will transport you to the age of rice growing and river-going. Alligators still slip silently across canals as egrets wade along shore, stalking fish or frogs. You might even surprise a flock of wood ducks or spy a grackle building its nest. Today the rice is gone, but the history is still alive.

We will also enjoy the Nature Train, also a great way to give your feet a rest. If you are tired of walking, you can sit back and still enjoy Magnolia’s wildlife experience. It’s perfect for those who prefer four wheels to two feet. Experience history and wildlife on this action-packed tram tour of the plantation’s wetlands, lakes, forests, and marshes. Naturalist guides help you spot alligators, turtles, egrets, and herons in native habitats. You never know what you might see. One minute you’ll glimpse an alligator sliding off a bank and the next you’ll turn your head to catch a great blue heron spearing a fish. And as you ride through the landscape, guides bring its history to life. From a row of slave cabins to 19th century rice ponds and a Native American ceremonial mound that evoke the plantation’s complex past. The tour will bring to life the true landscape and culture of the old South. With more than 600 acres of wildlife habitats and gardens, it can be difficult to see everything there is to see on foot. The nature train allows you to view a large portion of these wonderful areas in an entertaining and educational way.

And don’t forget the house... Step back in time with a half-hour guided tour of the Drayton family home, the third to grace the site in more than three centuries of Drayton family occupation. The current main House – the core of which was built prior to the Revolutionary War near Summerville, South Carolina and floated down the Ashley River to Magnolia after the Civil War — gives a glimpse of plantation life in the 19th century and beyond. Ten rooms are open to the public,

furnished with early-American antiques, porcelain, quilts, and other Drayton family heirlooms. Guides describe life in the 19th century, using furniture and household objects to bring plantation culture alive. You may visit the History Room after the tour where another guide is available to answer questions and provide more information on the current owners of the Plantation.. During the house tour you will learn the history of the Drayton family as well as the fate of the previous two family homes.

And yet you will have the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful gardens. The gardens at Magnolia Plantation are of such beauty and variety that they have brought tourists from around the world to view them since they were open to the public in the early 1870s. Lunch is included on this tour.

We will arrive back at the hotel by 2:30pm for some rest and relaxation before our evening dinner cruise.

Thursday, June 25, 2015... "Dinner Cruise with Entertainment"

This evening we will enjoy a starlight dinner dance cruise aboard the "Spirit of Carolina", a specially designed harbor cruising yacht. We will cruise Charleston's historic harbor, the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, past Fort Moultrie and Fort Sumter. We will enjoy the breathtaking view from beneath the two great bridges that span the Cooper River. Most importantly we will enjoy a delicious cooked to order 4 course gourmet dinner during this delightful evening cruise. We will be offered various entrees from which to choose our cooked to order meal.

Friday, June 26, 2015... "Walk in the Steps of Heroes"

Today we walk in the steps of heroes as we visit Patriots Point. This is the home of the USS Yorktown, an aircraft carrier, 28 historic military aircraft, the USS Clamagore submarine, the USS Laffey a battleship, the Vietnam Naval Support Base and the Congressional Medal of Honor Museum.

USS Yorktown is an aircraft carrier built during World War II for the United States Navy. The Yorktown was commissioned in April 1943, and participated in several campaigns in the Pacific Theater of Operations, earning 11 battle stars and the Presidential Unit Citation. Yorktown was decommissioned in 1970 and in 1975 became a museum ship at Patriot's Point. She is a National Historic Landmark. She houses 28 historic military aircraft. You will have ample time to explore each and every vessel. *The Yorktown has an elevator so all can enjoy the vintage aircraft on her deck.*

We will enjoy lunch in the CPO Galley.

After lunch we will have a private tour at the Warren Lasche center where the Confederate Submarine H.L. Hunley is preserved in a 90,000 gallon conservation tank. The Hunley had made history, becoming the first submarine to sink a ship in battle. The explosion caused the USS Housatonic to burn for three minutes before collapsing to the bottom killing five sailors. The Hunley then surfaced long enough for her crew to signal their comrades on the shore of Sullivan's Island with a blue magnesium light, indicating a successful mission. The shore crew stoked their signal fires and anxiously awaited the Hunley's safe return. But minutes after her historic achievement, the Hunley and all hands onboard vanished into the sea without a trace.

That night history was made. At the same moment, a mystery was born. The Hunley became the first submarine ever to sink an enemy ship. But why had she suddenly disappeared? What caused her to sink? And would she ever be found? Our tour guide will try to answer these questions that have been haunting the Charleston Harbor since 1864.

OPTIONAL TOURS FOR SATURDAY JUNE 27, 2015

Charleston Tea Plantation & Irvin House Winery & Firefly Distillery

Venture into the Lowcountry to visit America's only tea plantation...The Charleston Tea Plantation. We will board the trolley at the plantation for our tour. We will see the plantation's beautiful grounds, hear about the history of the plantation, the horticulture of the plants and how the tea is harvested. We should be there for harvest season so perhaps we

can actually see them harvesting the tea. Then we will get to tour the factory where we will learn how the different teas are produced. After the factory tour we will have the opportunity to sample all of their teas.

After leaving the Charleston tea plantation, we will proceed over to the Irvin House Vineyards for wine tasting. The Irvin House Vineyard is Charleston's only domestic vineyard and winery. We are invited to lounge under the oaks and sip their award winning muscadine wines. Unlike other wineries in the nation, their winery is rustic, country-chic, and focuses on producing wines using the native muscadine grape. We will be given a souvenir glass to keep.

On the same property we visit the Firefly Distillery, for another tasting. They don't have the bright lights of the city and the pace is a little slower down there. They are surrounded by plantations, hundred year old oak trees and dirt roads. Everyone is your neighbor and folks relax on their front porch swing. It's where you can hear the crickets chipping at night and you can still see the fireflies light up the sky. It is this wonderful environment and the special ingredients found here that inspired Firefly to create handcrafted vodkas unlike those made anywhere else. Firefly is the world's first hand-crafted sweet tea flavored vodka. Keeping true to its southern roots, Firefly is distilled four times. They also distill a variety of "shines" which are available for tastings. As they state, "Y'all are invited to stop by for some storytelling and easy sippin". We will also be given a souvenir glass to take home

On our way back we will make a stop at the "Angel Oak" tree. This is the Oldest Live Oak Tree east of the Mississippi. She is a glorious sight to behold.

On Saturday, if you do not want to do the tea plantation, we make an initial stop at the Charleston visitor center where you can grab the free trolley to various sites in Charleston.

Take the boat out to Fort Sumter... "the shot heard around the world" where the Civil War began

Shop at the City Market & enjoy a delicious lunch downtown

Tour the historical homes of Aiken-Rhett House, Heyward-Washington House, Calhoun Mansion, Nathaniel Russell House, or the Edmondston-Alston House

Take a carriage ride

Enjoy an afternoon on the Schooner Pride sailing vessel

I can also arrange a trip to the Isle of Palm Beach if you prefer just relaxing on the beach

Now bear in mind that these are just a few of the magnificent venues Charleston has to offer. I cannot show you all of the must see sights and things to do in Charleston in 3 days. This is such a beautiful and historical city that I encourage you, if possible, to come in early and enjoy the city on your own until the reunion officially starts. I will negotiate our group hotel rate from Sunday to Sunday so if you can arrive early you will still get our group rate.

Here are just a few options for you:

Visit Fort Moultrie

Walk across the Ravenel Bridge

Wade in the Pineapple Fountain

Take the trolley Summerline Tour

Kayak with the dolphins

Take an ecological tour of the wetlands

Take in a mystery theater or check out the Black Fedora a comedy theater

Visit the Lighthouse

Enjoy fresh seafood and entertainment at Shem's Creek

See the fishing boats come in with their daily catches at Shem's Creek
Enjoy shopping and dining downtown Charlestown
Visit the Slave Auction House
Take in a Gullah Tour
Go for a round of golf
Enjoy a culinary tour of the city

OR JUST RELAX AT THE BEACH

Of course, our evening dinners at the hotel will be themed events.
We will enjoy a "Beach Party", a "Gullah Gullah Island Party", and a "Roaring 20's Party"
....we will be doing the Charleston in Charleston!!!

NOTE: *Gullah Gullah Island* is an American musical children's television series that was produced by and aired on the Nickelodeon network from 1994-1998. The show starred Ron and Daise Natalie Diese, who also served as the cultural advisors, and was inspired by the Gullah culture of Ron Daise's home of St. Helena Island, SC. So all of you third generation panthers practice your songs and get ready to see Binyah Binyah Polliwog.

The Gullah are the descendants of enslaved Africans who live in the Lowcountry region of the U.S. states of South Carolina and Georgia. Because of a period of relative isolation in rural areas, the Gullah developed a culture that has preserved much of their African linguistic and cultural heritage from various peoples, as well as absorbing new influences from the region. Gullah story-telling, rice-based cuisine, music, folk beliefs, crafts, farming, and fishing traditions all exhibit strong influences from West and Central African cultures

On Friday evening at our "Gullah Gullah Island Party" I hope to have the Plantation Singers, along with a story teller and a Sweetwater basket weaver for our entertainment. You will have the opportunity to purchase a one of a kind basket from our weaver to take home as a cherished souvenir of our Charleston reunion.

As I have always said,
it doesn't matter where we are
as long as we are together!

Wayne Poorman gave me a wonderful quote by Vivian Greene concerning our rain issues:

"Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass...It's about learning to dance in the rain."