



## HILTON HEAD ISLAND-BLUFFTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

### **ARTS & CULTURAL COMMUNITY THRIVES**

Hilton Head Island is well-known as a golf and tennis haven. However, visitors discover a culturally rich and diverse vacation experience. The Island's splendid beauty and rich history have inspired a vibrant arts and cultural community that rivals many metropolitan areas. In his recent book, "The 100 Best Small Art Towns in America," author John Villani ranked Hilton Head Island number 22, and it's no wonder. From museum exhibits to gallery openings to big-name Broadway shows, the Island offers a wide variety of artistic and cultural venues to explore.

#### **Gullah Culture Year-Round**

Originally descended from African slaves who worked the Southern plantations, the Gullah people of the Lowcountry and nearby coastal areas of South Carolina and Georgia are the most culturally distinctive African-American population in the United States. In addition to a special language (a Creole blend of European and African tongues), the Gullah people developed a unique culture based on folktales, superstitions and a distinct cuisine which shaped generations of families living on Hilton Head Island and in the Lowcountry today. Visitors to the Island during the month of February can attend the annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration, a spirited festival that features the arts, crafts, history, music and food of the Gullah people. Other opportunities to experience Gullah culture on Hilton Head Island year-round include Gullah-N-Gechee Mahn Tours (843-838-7516); Gullah Heritage Trail Tours (843-681-7066); Hallelujah Singers (843-525-6129); and The Voices of El Shaddai (843-684-1110).

#### **Arts & Cultural Activities for the Whole Family**

The Arts Center of Coastal Carolina is a multi-million-dollar fine arts facility which showcases some of the country's most renowned visual and performing artists in a variety of events throughout the year. Broadway-style theatre, pop, jazz and classical concerts, children's events and gallery exhibitions are among the enriching, family-friendly experiences offered at the center. For a schedule of events call (888) 892-ARTS or go to [www.artshhi.com](http://www.artshhi.com)

In addition to the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina, families seeking new learning experiences can visit the Coastal Discovery Museum located at historic Honey Horn. It features a hands-on interactive museum and walking tours that highlight the Island's history, ecology and cultural heritage. Children will delight in the Museum's exhibits, which include live animals, dioramas and historical replicas. Visitors of all ages will enjoy the museum's beach and nature walks, dolphin cruises, Civil War and Gullah heritage tours, conservation programs and renowned archaeological research. Call (843) 689-6767 or go to [www.coastaldiscovery.org](http://www.coastaldiscovery.org) for more information.

The Sandbox: An Interactive Children's Museum provides a unique place for educational play between children and their parents, grandparents or caregivers. Little ones from infant to (8) eight will be captivated by the fun filled play centers and engaging activities. "Our greatest natural

resource is the minds of our children” –Walt Disney. For more details about programs and exhibits call (843) 842-7645 or visit [www.thesandbox.org](http://www.thesandbox.org).

### **On-Island Performing Arts**

Visitors to the Island can appreciate live performances of the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra and Hilton Head Dance Theater throughout the year. Begun as an informal meeting for local musicians, the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra, guided by conductor Music Director and Conductor John Morris Russell, plays a spectacular season from October to May. With programming and performances that engage both mind and spirit and resonate well beyond the final chord and roaring ovations, the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra has become a cultural phenomenon that few regions can boast. For more information about the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra's program lineup, call (843) 842-2055 or visit [www.hhso.org](http://www.hhso.org)

Another of the Island's performing arts groups is the Hilton Head Dance Theater, an organization dedicated to fostering a public interest in dance through an outstanding repertoire of classic and modern dance performances. For over 30 years, Hilton Head Dance Theatre has been committed to fostering an appreciation of dance as an art form among Lowcountry residents and visitors alike. For more information or a schedule of performances call (843) 785-5477 or visit [www.hiltonheaddance.com](http://www.hiltonheaddance.com).

### **On-Island Visual Arts**

For fans of the visual arts, the Island offers the over two dozen art galleries and studios including the Art League of Hilton Head Island, located in the Walter Greer Gallery at the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina. Serving a diverse group of 2 million annual Hilton Head Island visitors and nearly 40,000 full-time residents, the Art League and its teaching academy work to enhance Hilton Head Island's position as one of the premier arts destinations in the country. For more information call (843) 671-3242 or visit [artleaguehhi.org](http://artleaguehhi.org).

The Island's art galleries host a number of local and traveling exhibits during the year, and many hold studio workshops for those who want to improve their artistic skills.

### **Historical Tours**

Built as a summer home for plantation owners, the Heyward House Historic Center combines Lowcountry history, crafts and culture. An 1840s structure in near original condition, the Cole Heyward House hosts events throughout the year and offers guided tours and living history exhibits highlighting Lowcountry lore, domestic arts and details of upcoming preservation and restoration efforts. Please call (843) 757-MAYE for more information.

History buffs also can learn of the nation's first "freedman's" community and explore an African American Civil War stronghold through the historical tours at Fort Mitchell and Fort Howell. Call (843) 689-6767 for details.

The Heritage Library Foundation is established to promote and preserve local history and the study of genealogy. Presenting classes, lectures and tours, The Heritage Library is a non-profit, member library offering services in ancestry research and documenting the history of Hilton Head Island from the earliest discovery of the Island by Captain William Hilton to the development years of Charles Fraser. The Heritage Library owns two locations, Ft. Mitchel in Hilton Head Plantation and the Historic Zion Cemetery & Baynard Mausoleum on the corner of William Hilton Parkway & Mathews Drive.

The Mitchelville Preservation Project: In 2005, a diverse group of Hilton Head Island citizens joined forces to preserve, protect and promote the heritage of Mitchelville, America's first post-Civil War settlement for freed slaves, educate the public and share the story of how these brave men and women planted strong and enduring familial roots for generations of future African-Americans.

Set against the natural backdrop of Hilton Head Island, The Mitchelville Preservation Project was awarded the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission's 2014 "Preserving Our Places in History" Group or Organization Award.