

GREAT PLANTATIONS OF THE CAROLINAS AND GEORGIA

by Rachel Roberts Quartarone



Southern belles in hoop skirts and gentlemen smoking cigars are part of the cultural image of the Old South. Grand white-columned mansions, like Tara, the storied plantation home in *Gone with the Wind*, were the stage where life's dramas played out. Having survived the Civil War and the collapse of a way of life, today the "big houses," restored and open to the public, provide a way to see the Old South in a new light.

At the plantations of the Carolinas and Georgia, you can experience history, tour impressive and elaborate homes, and wander beautiful grounds and gardens. Fulfilling the mission to present a more balanced view of history, these

heritage sites also tell the stories of enslaved people on the plantation. Visiting these historic places provides insight into the real lives of people—free and enslaved—in a time often shrouded in romance and myth.

Above, Drayton Hall

LIFE IN THE BIG HOUSE



IMITATING THE EUROPEANS

The planter elite fashioned their homes after the European aristocracy they came from or strove to emulate. Greek Revival was the architectural style of the day, hence the white Doric columns, gabled roofs, and broad porches now associated with the South.

Wealthy planters enjoyed throwing lavish parties. Most grand houses, like Drayton Hall in South Carolina, contained a large sitting room that could easily be transformed into a ballroom. They traveled abroad and prized European-style furnishings and ornamental gardens like those found at Middleton Place and Magnolia Plantation near Charleston, South Carolina.

To escape the oppressive heat, bugs, and disease, they summured up north or in nearby cities like Charleston or Savannah, Georgia where they owned townhomes. Their plantation homes, meanwhile, were left to be operated by an overseer—sometimes a trusted slave.

HOUSES LARGE . . . AND SMALL

The oldest and grandest mansions are along South Carolina's coast in the heart of rice country. While grand for their time, some plantation homes may appear small and plain by today's standards. At the core, plantations were large working farms. Most plantations were diversified, growing a cash crop, such as cotton, but also corn, wheat, and vegetables they needed for subsistence. The wealthiest planters like the Draytons and Middletons of South Carolina usually owned a network of large plantations.

While the planter elite enjoyed a lavish lifestyle, these families comprised only a very small percentage of the population. By 1860, a year before the Civil War, only 25% of Southerners owned slaves and only 12% of them owned more than 20 enslaved people. Especially on smaller plantations, the entire family worked in the fields alongside their slaves and plantation mistresses cooked, preserved food, and sewed.

The plantation house of the Magnolia Plantation, Charleston, South Carolina

LIFE IN THE SLAVE QUARTERS



CHARLESTON AND THE SLAVE TRADE

The story of slavery in the Carolinas and Georgia begins in Charleston, a key port in the British colonies. Throughout the 18th century, ships with human cargo arrived from Africa. Those who survived the perilous Middle Passage across the Atlantic were auctioned on the public square outside of Charleston's Exchange Building. It is estimated that 40 to 60 percent of the approximately 500,000 Africans who were brought to America during the slave trade came through Charleston's port. Although the U.S. government banned the importation of African slaves in 1808, Charleston continued to be a major center of interstate slave trading up until 1865.

THE PLANTATION COMMUNITY

Once on the plantation, most slaves lived in rudimentary shacks where an entire family might live in a space about the size of a modern-day bedroom. Slave quarters were usually clustered together a good distance away from the owner's compound. As a result, the enslaved formed very close family and community ties. They shared and passed down African music, folklore and other cultural traditions, and did their best to survive the grueling living conditions.

Slaves of Thomas F Drayton of Magnolia Plantation, South Carolina, 1862.



Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston

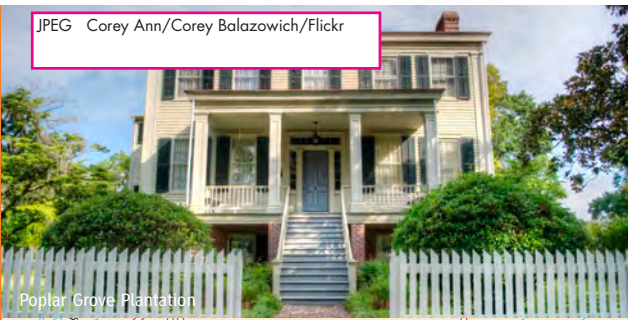


Georgia politician Alexander H. Stephens with a servant, formerly a slave

OLD SLAVE MART

For a quick history lesson about the transatlantic slave trade and to get a sense of how enslaved people were treated, bought, and sold, head to the Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston. African-Americans were sold here as part of the domestic slave trade from 1856 to 1863. Documents, shackles, and other eye-opening artifacts bring home the inhumanity of this sordid chapter in history. ⇨ See Chapter 7.

BEST NORTH CAROLINA PLANTATIONS



Poplar Grove Plantation



Latta Plantation



Somerset Place

While North Carolina plantation homes have the reputation of being more plain and utilitarian than their Deep South counterparts, these amazingly preserved plantations and yeoman farmsteads shed light on the realities of life in the Old South.

HISTORIC LATTA PLANTATION, Huntersville. The last remaining Cattawba River plantation, this living history site interprets 19th-century farm life in North Carolina's backcountry. James Latta, a traveling merchant, built the plantation's Federal-style home in 1800 and soon became a cotton planter. According to family documents, the entire Latta family and their 33 slaves assisted with production on the 742-acre farm. Today, visitors can tour the home as well as reconstructed slave quarters and a yeoman farmer's home. Historically appropriate farm animals and special weekend programs, such as folk craft demonstrations, round out the experience. ⇨ See Chapter 3.

POPLAR GROVE PLANTATION, Wilmington. Peanuts, not rice, were the claim to



HISTORIC LATTA PLANTATION
Notable For: Living history farm

Fodor's Choice
HISTORIC STAGVILLE
Notable For: Original two-story slave cabins

SOMERSET PLACE
Notable For: Well-preserved buildings, historically large slave community, in-depth tours

POPLAR GROVE PLANTATION
Notable For: Peanut agriculture, craft demonstrations

fame at this coastal plantation. James Foy, Jr., purchased the 628-acre plantation in 1795. The Foy family became pioneers in the textile industry, which helped the plantation to survive the post-Civil War economy. An 1850 Greek Revival-style home, smokehouse, kitchen, and tenant farmer's home recreate a 19th-century working plantation. Blacksmiths and weavers regularly demonstrate their

crafts—skills likely held by the Foy slaves. ⇨ See Chapter 2. **SOMERSET PLACE**, Creswell. Located in the rural upstate, Somerset Place was one of the largest plantations in North Carolina. The 100,000-acre plantation actively produced rice, corn, wheat and timber from 1785 to 1865. Home to 800 enslaved African Americans, the plantation was practically a small town with



a thriving slave community, hospital, chapel, sawmills, smokehouse, salting house, and dairy in addition to the owners' complex. Some of the original buildings remain, while others are reconstructed. The 1½-hour tour includes the Collins' 1830 Greek Revival home as well as the slave quarters and outbuildings. ⇨ See Chapter 2.



Historic Stagville

Fodor's Choice
HISTORIC STAGVILLE, Durham. Owned by the Bennehan and Cameron families, Stagville once stretched to 30,000 acres and was one of the largest plantations in the Southeast. The plantation's two-story wood frame home, built in 1799, may seem plain and even austere by today's standards. In its time, however, the house was quite a status symbol as it stood tall on a hill overlooking the fields. Around 900 slaves lived at Stagville. Remarkably preserved are the unusual two-story slave cabins, built in 1850, to help prevent disease among the slave population. Also impressive is the Great Barn, built and engineered by enslaved craftspeople in 1860. Guided tours of the property include the main house and other interesting buildings like the Horton Home, a yeoman farmer's homestead that owner Richard Bennehan purchased in 1823. The pre-Revolutionary War home was typical of other farm homes in the region—simple, sturdy and

the home was likely an overseer or slave family. It's interesting to note that corn, not tobacco, was the cash crop here. While tobacco was grown here, it did not become the primary crop of the region until after the Civil War. ⇨ See Chapter 3.



Somerset Place

BEST SOUTH CAROLINA PLANTATIONS



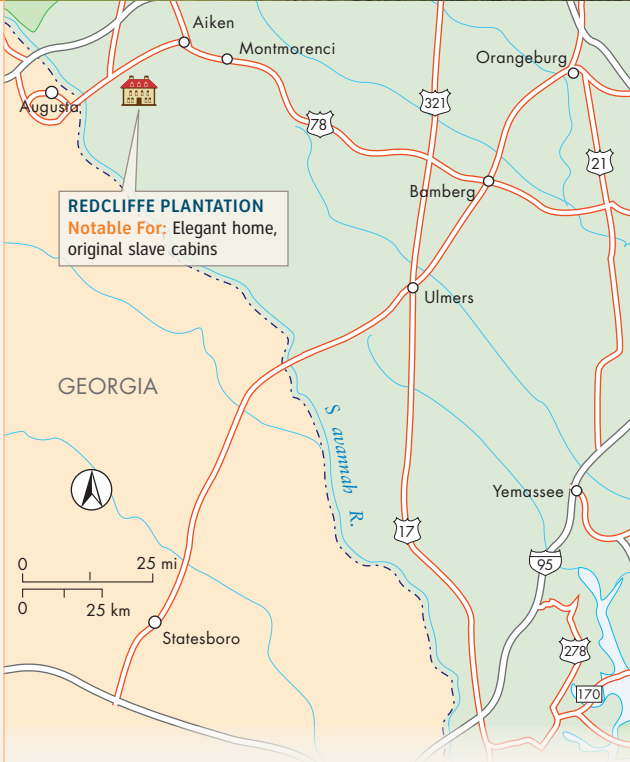
Drayton Hall

Some of the oldest and most ornate plantation homes are found in South Carolina. Planters here sought slaves from the Windward Coast of Africa (modern-day Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Liberia) because they were experienced in rice cultivation. Rice farming was especially arduous work, but because enslaved Africans were knowledgeable and their owners were not, they were able to bargain for a task system of labor that sometimes allowed for a shorter workday. Rice cultivation brought with it tremendous wealth you'll see reflected in the grand showplaces of the Lowcountry.

DRAYTON HALL, Charleston. Built in 1738, Drayton Hall is the oldest plantation house in the nation that remains in preserved form. The Drayton family ran an empire of rice plantations, but this home was built to be the primary residence and showplace, not a working plantation. House tours focus on the immaculate Georgian Palladian architecture and slave craftsmanship that made its construction possible.



Drayton Hall



REDCLIFFE PLANTATION
Notable For: Elegant home, original slave cabins

Offered daily, a separate "Connections" program focuses on African American history at the plantation. ⇨ See Chapter 7.

MAGNOLIA PLANTATION, Charleston. Another home of the Drayton family, the plantation boasts a massive informal garden with some parts remaining true to its original 1685 design. After the Civil War, rice production ceased and the gardens became the focus of the property. A new tour,

"From Slavery to Freedom," provides a look at restored cabins that were occupied by African-Americans at the plantation from 1850 through to the 1960s. A guided boat tour takes you through former rice fields. ⇨ See Chapter 7.

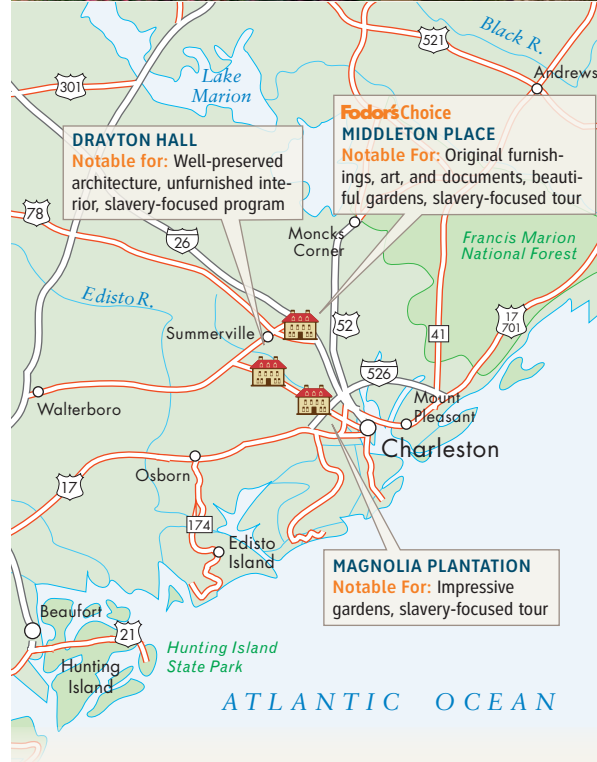
REDCLIFFE PLANTATION, Beech Island. Completed in 1859, this Greek Revival showplace was home to James Henry Hammond, the statesman who coined the phrase "Cotton



Middleton Place



Magnolia Plantation



DRAYTON HALL
Notable for: Well-preserved architecture, unfurnished interior, slavery-focused program

Fodor's Choice
MIDDLETON PLACE
Notable For: Original furnishings, art, and documents, beautiful gardens, slavery-focused tour

MAGNOLIA PLANTATION
Notable For: Impressive gardens, slavery-focused tour

is King." Aided by some 300 slaves, Hammond grew cotton on his three other Beech Island plantations. Redcliffe served as the primary residence and grounds for experimentation with sugar cane, viniculture, and indigo. Now a state park, tours of the home and grounds—including original slave cabins—are offered Thursday through Monday. ⇨ See Chapter 9.



Middleton Place

Fodor's Choice
MIDDLETON PLACE, Charleston. Established around 1742, Middleton Place was at the center of the Middleton family's empire of rice plantations which consisted of 63,000 acres and 3,500 slaves on properties throughout the South Carolina Lowcountry. With its massive three-story brick manor home and prized gardens, Middleton Place was a grand statement of wealth. The original manor home was destroyed in the Civil War, but one of its flanking buildings, which served as the gentlemen's guest quarters, was salvaged and transformed into the family's post-bellum residence. Still quite a showplace, the home displays original furnishings, documents, and works of art belonging to the Middletons. Restored in the 1920s, the breathtakingly beautiful gardens are considered the oldest landscaped gardens in the country.

To get the complete picture of life on a rice plantation, be sure to take time for the African Focus tour. The tour begins at Eliza's House, a restored 1870s sharecropper's home. Inside the house, a small exhibit provides details on the lives of the Middleton slaves. Next door, the reconstructed stableyards features farm animals and demonstrations by skilled craftspeople in period attire. ⇨ See Chapter 7.

BEST GEORGIA PLANTATIONS

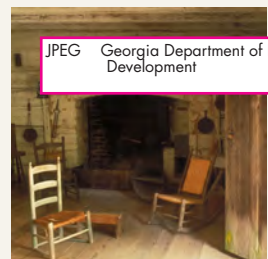


A coastal rice plantation and former cotton plantations, including the showplace of the Cherokee nation, are among the historic plantation homes that remain in Georgia.

ARCHIBALD SMITH PLANTATION, Roswell.

Among the group of prominent families who moved from the Georgia coast to former Cherokee lands to found the city of Roswell, Archibald Smith was the only planter. Built in 1845, the home's Plantation Plain style architecture is typical of most plantations in the region. Smith owned about 40 slaves, but held conflicted views on the practice. He experimented with paying his slaves wages and contemplated ways to teach them self-governance. An outbuilding, believed to have been slave quarters, is furnished appropriate to the time period and provides more information about slaves on the property. ⇨ See Chapter 13.

CALLAWAY PLANTATION, Washington. You can trace the Callaways' rise to prominence as cotton planters on the Georgia frontier from



Callaway Plantation



their humble beginnings in a settler's log cabin (1785) to their grand redbrick mansion (1869). Guided tours allow a glimpse into the mansion while the other buildings, such as a blacksmith's shop and kitchen, are self-guided. ⇨ See Chapter 14.

HOFWYL-BROADFIELD PLANTATION, Brunswick.

Now a state park, this former rice plantation owned by the Troup and Dent families

is representative of the kind of rice plantations that once flourished on the Georgia coast. The two-story Hofwyl House was built in the 1850s, although the plantation (known as Broadfield) dates to 1806. The museum and visitor center offer a short film and exhibits about the planter families, rice cultivation, and the lives of the enslaved people who worked and lived here. The home is furnished with original family pieces. ⇨ See Chapter 11.



Fodor's Choice★ CHIEF VANN HOUSE HISTORIC SITE, Chatsworth.

This beautiful home with all the trappings of the wealthy planter lifestyle is fascinating because of the intermingling of cultures that took place here. Known as Diamond Hill, this historic site was home to a 1000-acre plantation—the largest and most prosperous in Cherokee history. In 1804 James Vann, a Cherokee leader, built the plantation's stately redbrick mansion with the help of Moravian missionaries and enslaved workers. When Vann was murdered in 1809, his son Joseph took over the property until he was forcefully evicted in 1835. Diamond Hill and surrounding lands were then given away in a land lottery to white settlers, its Cherokee origins wiped away. Start your visit in the visitor center where you can view a short film and browse exhibits about the site's history. Rangers lead tours of the home, but outdoor exhibits, such as a recreated Cherokee farmstead and plantation kitchen, are self-guided. The kitchen outbuilding also houses a new exhibit focused on the daily lives of the 110 enslaved people who resided at Diamond Hill. ⇨ See Chapter 14.