



Tour: 'Flying High over Charleston' has the best view of Lowcountry

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belts and Jim ensures that the doors are locked. We all put on head phones with microphones attached and hear the exchange of information between pilot and air traffic controller. The engine drones to life and the propeller turns rapidly as we ease out of our spot on the tarmac.

The static and squawk of the radio blares out instructions from the Charleston Tower and we began our take-off down the runway.

"Skyhawk, nine six Echo, runway 33, cleared for take-off," the voice says.

"Thank you now, and you have a good day," Jim replies with a slow, southern drawl. Jim explains to us that his wife, a Lowcountry Fair blue ribbon winner, bakes the Charleston air traffic controllers sweets on a regular basis. Homemade strawberry and honeybun cakes are just a couple of the delicacies that our controllers enjoy while directing military, commercial and private aircraft traffic in and out of the Charleston airport.

The Cessna lifts off the runway effortlessly, and we quickly reach an altitude of 1,000 feet. Our takeoff, similar to the person responsible for it, is smooth and easy.

We're able to talk to each other by speaking into our microphones and we head toward Middleton Place. The view is spectacular; the sky a clear blue with a few, cirrus clouds streaming across it. We see the Butterfly Lakes, aptly named, with wings of sparkling water and a vivid, green strip of grass bisecting the twin ponds. The 18th century plantation was the site for Mel Gibson's movie, *The Patriot*, Jim tells us. We circle the plantation's mansion and head southbound over the Ashley River. From our view, our four rivers, the Ashley, Wando, Stono and Cooper flow



PHOTOS BY BRIGITTE SURETTE
The view of The Battery at the southern tip of the Charleston peninsula shows houses grouped closely together. Charleston is one of the most densely populated cities in the United States.



Cessna Skyhawk is parked on the tarmac, awaiting the next group of people who want to soar over the Lowcountry.

along the landscape, merging together as one body of water into the Charleston Harbor and finally into the Atlantic Ocean or "Big Pond," as it's referred to by pilots.

On our way to downtown, we see The Citadel with its red, checkerboard grounds and our speed of 120 miles per hour quickly has us circling over downtown Charleston. Rainbow Row appears as colorful dollhouses lined up and nestled within a tiny neighborhood of churches, lush tree-tops, and minuscule cars. With every turn, it's apparent why Charleston is referred to as the Lowcountry. Its waterways snake through much of its landscape.

Heading south, we fly over Fort Sumter, then to Morris Island descending 400 feet to have a better view of its lighthouse standing like a lone sol-

dier on an empty, narrow beach. Jim tells us that the movie, "Glory" was shot here and that the actual battle was fought at this same location.

We make our way southwest and see Folly Beach and its houses lined up on either side of the Folly Beach pier as it juts out over the Atlantic ocean. We make a 180 degree turn and head toward the new Ravenel Bridge, over the bustling harbor where sailboats look like toy boats bobbing in the water and the ships that hold red, blue, green and yellow containers on board its decks sit waiting to load or unload its cargo.

Heading home we go over Patriots Point, along Shem Creek and then to Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms where pastel homes create a little girl's neighborhood of dream dollhouses.

Flying over Mount Pleasant, Jim comments on the progress of East Cooper. "I remember 10 years ago flying over this area when there was nothing but one-lane roads and trees and now look at it!" he says. From our view, it's even more evident of the expansion and growth of east of the Cooper; we see clumps of homes that make up Mount Pleasant's many neighborhoods, the bustling Towne Centre and busy traffic moving up and down Highway 17.

Crossing the Wando

Crossing over the Wando River we hover over Daniel Island. The Family Circle Tennis Stadium looks like a tennis ball that's been split open, its four flaps revealing its impressive courts. The lush green of the Daniel Island Golf Course

is dotted with pale spots of sand traps, and we watch tiny golf carts taking players to the next hole.

We fly along Interstate 526 toward the airport and our tour is complete. As we approach, the runaway, the radio squawks, "Enter left base, runway 21." Jim repeats the instructions back to his friends at the Charleston Tower, and we hear, "Runway 21, cleared to land."

"Thank you, now," is Jim's reply as we touch down on the runway.

We're back at our spot on the tarmac and walk away with a memory that will last a lifetime.

Flying High Over Charleston offers Historic Charleston and Sea Islands, Taste of Charleston Sightseeing and City of History Tours ranging in price from \$125 to

\$165. If you prefer, a customized tour can be arranged, and shorter tours begin at \$95. In December, holiday tours are available that give unparalleled views of the downtown Charleston Christmas lights and the floating Christmas tree in Colonial Lake.

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Ellison states, "I've heard many marriage proposals and no refusals."

For more information call 843-569-6148 or visit them online at www.flyinghighover-charleston.com.

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