

LOCALS ONLY · REGION NO. 05

Charleston

The oldest money in the South, a barrier island that banned Airbnb, and the only invitation-only ocean club in the state, all within thirty minutes of each other.

A field guide to 6 communities, each scored out of 100.
Reported by Damian Hall · Current to June 2026

THE BRIEF

Charleston, at a glance.

Greater Charleston is the South's most internationally recognized luxury market, and its addresses are genuinely distinct: the historic peninsula, the barrier islands, the master-planned river town, and the established neighborhoods of Mount Pleasant. The constant the brochures skip is water risk. Flood and wind insurance is a real and rising line item here, and we flag it where it matters.

Charleston set its all-time residential record in 2025 with a \$21.5M peninsula sale, and the ultra-luxury tier above \$3M is busier than it has ever been. The right address depends on whether you want history, beach, a private club, or a town center, and how you feel about a bridge.

THE SCORECARD

Kiawah Island	PETE DYE OCEAN GOLF · INVITATION CLUB	86/100
Downtown / South of Broad	HISTORIC PENINSULA	85/100
Mount Pleasant: Old Village	HISTORIC WATERFRONT · DUNES WEST · HOBCAW	82/100
Daniel Island	MASTER-PLANNED TOWN · REES JONES GOLF	80/100
I'On	NEW URBANIST VILLAGE	77/100
Sullivan's Island	BEACH · NO SHORT-TERM RENTALS	75/100

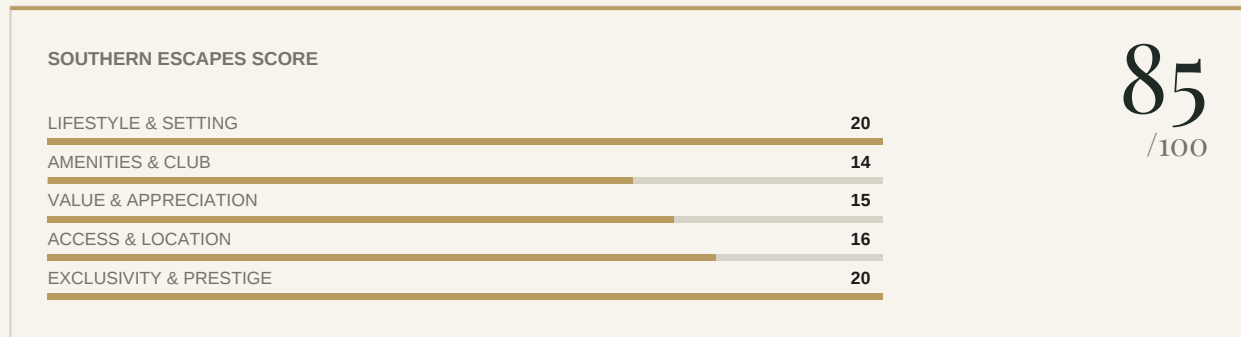
HOW THE SOUTHERN ESCAPES SCORE WORKS

Every community is rated out of 100 from five pillars worth twenty points each: Lifestyle & Setting, Amenities & Club, Value & Appreciation, Access & Location, and Exclusivity & Prestige. It is one editor's working opinion, not an appraisal. On this plateau of addresses, a 79 is not a failing grade.

No. 01

Downtown / South of Broad

The oldest money address in the American South, a living museum where the city itself is the amenity.



South of Broad occupies the tip of the peninsula, from Broad Street down to the Battery, where narrow streets run under live oaks past antebellum single houses and the harbor sits at the end of the block. Life here is walkable in the old-city sense, with King Street dining, White Point Garden, and the Historic Charleston Foundation calendar all minutes away on foot. There is no private club; the city is the club.

Single-family homes run from roughly \$2M into the teens, and 2025 brought three sales above \$15M in the historic district, capped by a \$21.5M record. The honest costs are flood insurance, which can run several thousand dollars a year on lower-elevation lots, plus heavy tourist foot traffic and the maintenance of very old bones. For a legacy buyer who wants the most prestigious address in the South and the walkability to match, this is it.

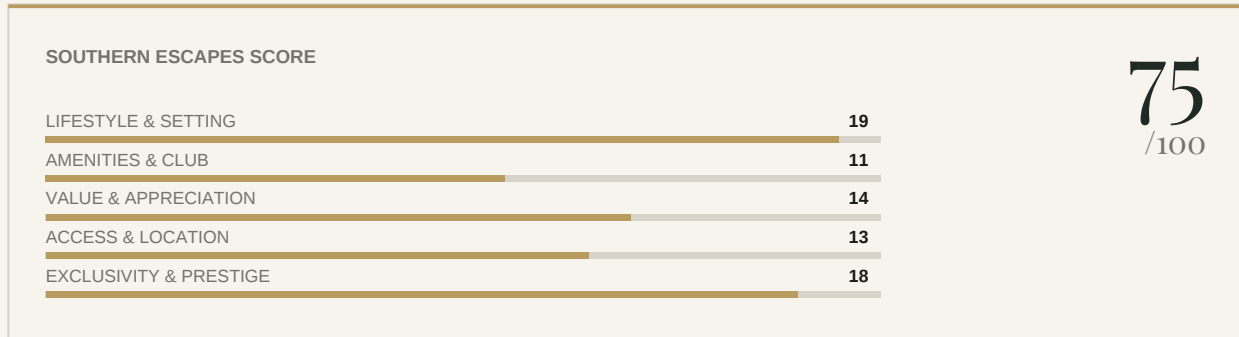
<p>HOMES</p> <p>~\$2M to \$20M+</p>	<p>CHARACTER</p> <p>Antebellum, walkable, harborfront</p>	<p>WATCH</p> <p>Flood insurance and tourist traffic</p>
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<p>WHY LOCALS RATE IT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irreplaceable architecture and international cachet • Genuine old-city walkability to dining and the harbor • Strong appreciation at the top of the market 	<p>WHAT TO WEIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood insurance is a serious, rising cost • Heavy tourist traffic spring through fall • Old housing stock means real maintenance
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No. 02

Sullivan's Island

The Hamptons of Charleston, a barrier island that banned short-term rentals in 2002 and kept its full-time soul.



Sullivan's Island is a small barrier island at the mouth of the harbor, fewer than two thousand residents, defined by elevated beach houses, a tiny Middle Street commercial strip, and Fort Moultrie at the western end. The short-term-rental ban, in place since 2002, is the reason the island feels like a neighborhood and not a resort: the beach is wide, uncrowded, and overwhelmingly owner-occupied. Twenty minutes to downtown over the Ben Sawyer Bridge.

The market is thin and pricey, with a median list near \$6M and a wide range from rare smaller homes to oceanfront estates above \$16M. Costs are real: combined wind and flood premiums can run well into five figures on a seven-figure home, and a 2026 court ruling on fractional ownership has put a question mark over the rental rules. For a buyer who wants a real beach address with full-time character and no Airbnb churn, the island has no equal.

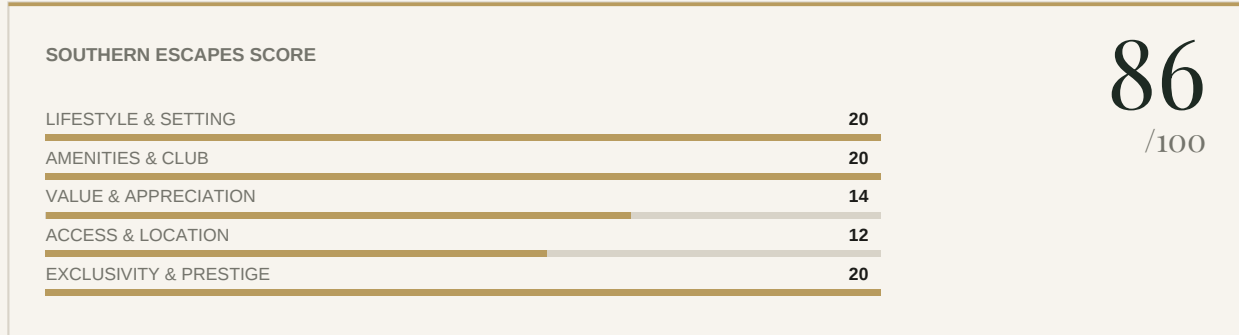
<p>HOMES</p> <p>~\$900K to \$16M+</p>	<p>CHARACTER</p> <p>Owner-occupied beach, no STRs</p>	<p>WATCH</p> <p>Wind/flood insurance, single bridge</p>
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<p>WHY LOCALS RATE IT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A genuine full-time beach community, no tourist churn • Wide, uncrowded beach and Fort Moultrie history • Scarcity and the rental ban protect long-term value 	<p>WHAT TO WEIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wind and flood insurance run high • One bridge on and off; evacuation and traffic • No grocery or fine dining on the island
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No. 03

Kiawah Island

South Carolina's only truly elite oceanfront resort community, the Ocean Course address for people who mean it.



Kiawah is a ten-thousand-acre barrier island twenty-five miles southwest of Charleston, with ten miles of Atlantic beach and a deliberately nature-forward setting of marsh, palmetto, and wildlife. The Ocean Course, a Pete Dye design that hosted the 2021 PGA Championship and the 2012 Ryder Cup, headlines five courses, and the invitation-only Kiawah Island Club reaches a beach club, spa, and the member-only Cassique and River courses. The Sanctuary hotel anchors a five-star resort layer few communities can match.

The island median sits around \$4.5M, with Club-community homes from \$1.5M into the teens and oceanfront estates above \$10M; 2025 was the third-highest sales year on record. The trades are distance and water. It is genuinely remote, forty-five minutes to an hour from downtown, the Club is by invitation with a six-figure buy-in on top of the real estate, and beach erosion at the east end is a documented and worsening issue. For a buyer who wants the most prestigious ocean address in the state, it is worth every mile.

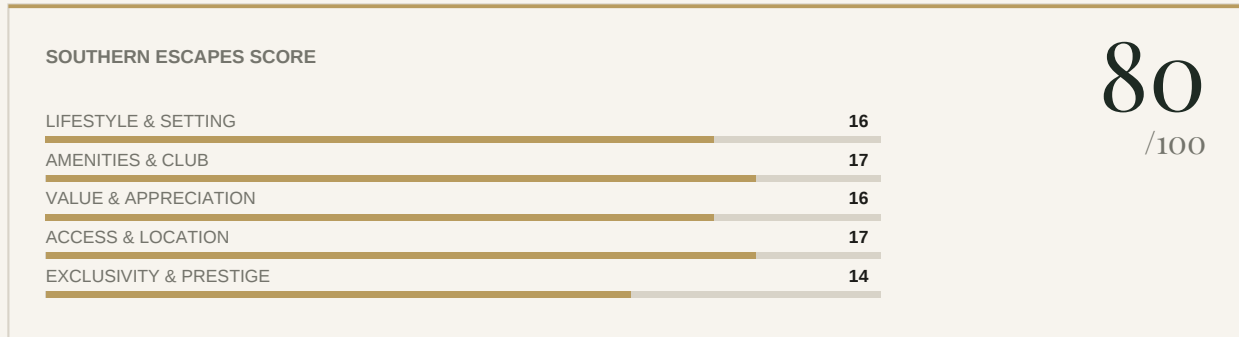
<p>HOMES</p> <p>~\$800K to \$15M+</p>	<p>THE DRAW</p> <p>Five courses incl. the Ocean Course; beach club</p>	<p>MEMBERSHIP</p> <p>Kiawah Island Club, invitation, six figures</p>
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<p>WHY LOCALS RATE IT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten miles of private Atlantic beach • The best private club infrastructure in the region • International prestige and a record-setting market 	<p>WHAT TO WEIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Genuinely remote, up to an hour from downtown • Club is invitation-only with a six-figure buy-in • Beach erosion and storm insurance are real headwinds
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No. 04

Daniel Island

The only master-planned island town near Charleston with real urban amenities and a private club to match.



Daniel Island is a four-thousand-acre planned town between the Wando and Cooper rivers, with a genuine town center, a waterfront park, and a major ATP tennis stadium, all about fifteen to twenty minutes from downtown. The most upscale section, Daniel Island Park, surrounds the private Daniel Island Club and its two Rees Jones courses. It is the rare new-construction option at this price level, and a real draw for corporate relocators given the employers nearby.

The overall median runs around \$1.8M, with single-family homes generally \$1.6M to \$2M and entry townhomes near \$1.1M. The Club's golf membership carries a multi-year waitlist, and confirming current fees is worth doing. The trade is character: it is beautifully executed but planned and suburban, with no ocean and no historic fabric. For a family that wants turn-key luxury, a club, and a true town center, it is the most complete package in the region.

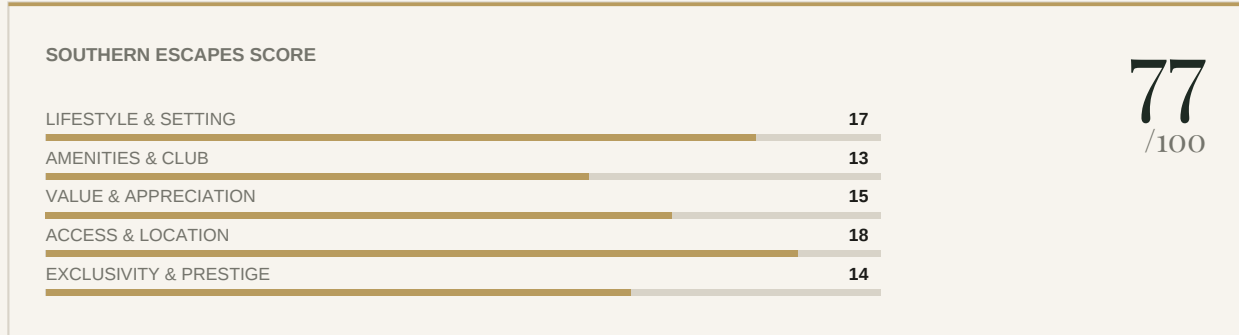
<p>HOMES</p> <p>~\$800K to \$5M+</p>	<p>THE DRAW</p> <p>Town center, Rees Jones golf, tennis stadium</p>	<p>MEMBERSHIP</p> <p>Daniel Island Club, waitlist; fees by inquiry</p>
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<p>WHY LOCALS RATE IT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New construction with a real, walkable town center • Two golf courses and a strong club • Family-friendly with excellent on-island schools 	<p>WHAT TO WEIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No beach; fifteen to twenty minutes to the sand • Planned and suburban rather than historic • Golf membership waitlist can run years
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No. 05

I'On

Charleston's most architecturally intentional neighborhood, a New Urbanist village that actually delivers on the idea.



I'On is a two-hundred-forty-acre village in Mount Pleasant, designed in the late 1990s by Duany Plater-Zyberk, with canals, pocket parks, a town green, and a coherent mix of Charleston single-house and Craftsman architecture. Most homes are a five-minute walk from a town center with a wine bar and a couple of restaurants, and creekside docks and community lakes add a Lowcountry outdoor layer. It is ungated by design, ten minutes from downtown and fifteen from the Sullivan's Island beaches.

Homes typically run \$1.2M to \$5M-plus, with an average near \$1.85M that has eased from its peak, making the entry friendlier than it was two years ago. There is no beach and no golf, and the architectural review is strict. For a design-conscious buyer who wants genuine walkability and proximity to both downtown and the beach without a barrier-island insurance bill, I'On is the best location value in the region.

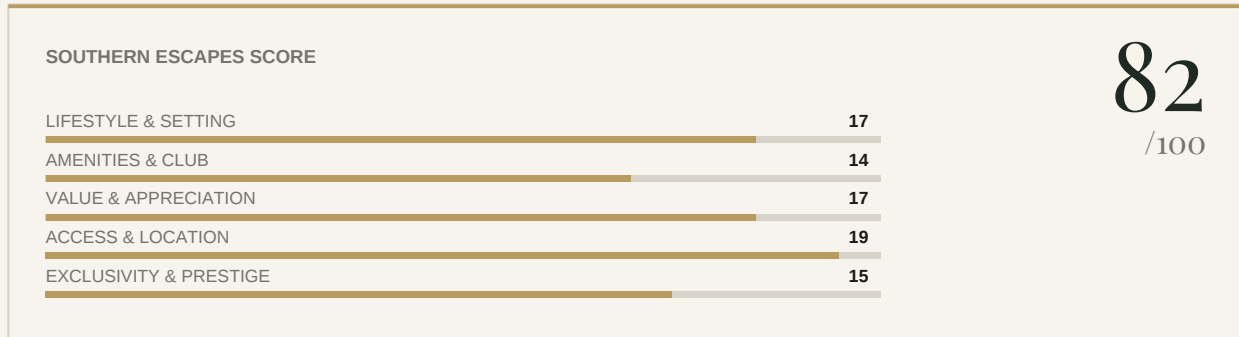
<p>HOMES</p> <p>~\$1.2M to \$5M+</p>	<p>CHARACTER</p> <p>Walkable New Urbanist village, ungated</p>	<p>THE DRAW</p> <p>Ten min to downtown, fifteen to the beach</p>
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<p>WHY LOCALS RATE IT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real walkability, rare for Mount Pleasant • Architectural coherence and a true town center • Best location value: near downtown and the beach 	<p>WHAT TO WEIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No beach and no golf within the community • Prices have cooled from the 2022 to 2024 peak • Strict design rules are not for everyone
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No. 06

Mount Pleasant: Old Village

The most authentic neighborhood outside the peninsula, waterfront, walkable, and chronically undersupplied.



Old Village is the original settlement of Mount Pleasant, predating the planned developments by centuries: pre-Civil War cottages and custom waterfront estates, the pedestrian Pitt Street Bridge, a Saturday farmers market, and harbor views from Alhambra Hall. It pairs historic character and water views with a safer flood profile than the peninsula or the barrier islands, ten minutes from downtown. Homes run roughly \$900K to \$3.5M-plus, with waterfront higher, against a Mount Pleasant median far below that.

Two other Mount Pleasant addresses round out the picture. Dunes West, the area's only twenty-four-hour guarded golf community, offers an Arthur Hills course and the broadest luxury inventory, with strong resale liquidity. Hobcaw Creek Plantation is the discreet, low-density choice for boaters who want deepwater docks and harbor access. Across all three, the location is the asset: bridge access to downtown, the Sullivan's Island beaches close by, and value that holds.

<p>HOMES</p> <p>~\$900K to \$3.5M+</p>	<p>THE DRAW</p> <p>Old Village history; Dunes West golf; Hobcaw docks</p>	<p>THE DRAW 2</p> <p>Ten min downtown, near the beaches</p>
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<p>WHY LOCALS RATE IT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Village holds value and walks to the water • Dunes West adds a guarded golf option with liquidity • Hobcaw offers deepwater docks for serious boaters 	<p>WHAT TO WEIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Village inventory is very tight; buyers wait • No single club ties the area together • Broader Mount Pleasant is more accessible than exclusive
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Considering one of these addresses?

Before you tour a single home, an Advisory Conversation tells you which community actually fits the life you are building, and what the move is worth under the new Carolina tax math. Schedule one at calendly.com/damianhallgroup, or run the numbers yourself with the Tax Alpha Calculator at southernescapes.com.

The Southern Escapes Score is an editorial opinion, not an appraisal or investment rating. Price ranges, club fees, and market figures are estimates current to June 2026, drawn from sources believed reliable but not guaranteed, and they change. Confirm any figure with the community and your own advisors before acting on anything you read here.