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TODAY

## Travel

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## Dispatches

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**In San Diego:** Before festival visitors enjoy the buds in Balboa Park, there will be a moment of silence for earthquake and tsunami victims.



Japanese Friendship Garden

## Japan gets help from cherry blossom fests

U.S. cherry blossom festivals, typically joyous rites of spring, will have a more somber tone this year. Because of the natural disasters that have decimated parts of Japan, festivals are urging attendees to aid relief efforts. A sampling:

- **The National Cherry Blossom Festival** in Washington, D.C., which runs March 26-April 10 and whose centerpiece is trees given as a gesture of friendship by Japan, is soliciting donations for the American Red Cross at [nationalcherryblossomfestival.org](http://nationalcherryblossomfestival.org).
- **Japanese Friendship Garden San Diego** will start its day-long Cherry Blossom Festival on Saturday in Balboa Park with a moment of silence for earthquake and tsunami victims. Visitors can write messages to the people of Japan's hard-hit Sendai region and donate to the Red Cross there and on [niwa.org](http://niwa.org).
- **Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival** in San Francisco April 9, 10, 16 and 17 is seeking donations for northern Japan at [nccbf.org](http://nccbf.org).

— Kitty Bean Yancey

## New Orleans throws Williams a party

Playwright/author Tennessee Williams would have turned 100 on March 26. New Orleans, the city whose spirit imbues some of his best-known works, is celebrating in a big way.

This also marks the 25th anniversary of the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival (March 23-27), which draws actors, writers and scholars. Not to mention buff guys in T-shirts who yell "STELLAAAAA!" at the top of their lungs.

Events range from theater performances and scholarly discussions to "mixologists" creating Williams-inspired drinks and a Stanley and Stella shouting contest (contestants mimic Marlon Brando's impassioned cry in *A Streetcar Named Desire*).

The writer, born in Columbus, Miss., considered New Orleans his "spiritual home." He first moved there in 1939 and described it as "the last frontier of Bohemia." Guided walking tours during the festival will take in places he lived and frequented.

— Jayne Clark



By Mark Wessels, ABC

**Romance in the air:** Brad Womack proposed to Emily Maynard in Cape Town in the finale.

## 'Bachelor' shows South Africa the love

The *Bachelor's* Brad Womack may have given Emily Maynard his heart and Chantal O'Brien the boot during Monday night's finale of the popular ABC series, but South African tourism promoters are hoping they'll be the real winners.

Womack proposed to Maynard after a string of exotic dates that included a helicopter ride at the blustery Cape of Good Hope and an encounter with great white sharks on Dyer Island.

Meanwhile, globe-trotters who want to jumpstart their own adrenaline-fueled romances can book "The Bachelor Ultimate South Africa Get-away," a package that includes round-trip airfare from New York or Washington, D.C., flights within South Africa, four nights at Cape Town's One&Only resort, a shark dive, three nights at the Lion Sands River Lodge, and more. Rates start at \$6,875 a person, including taxes. Info: [flysaavacations.com/south-africa-travel/south-africa-tours](http://flysaavacations.com/south-africa-travel/south-africa-tours) or 855-359-8228.

— Laura Bly



**Fort Sumter:** The pentagonal fortress was built on a mound of sea shells and Barre granite at the entrance to Charleston Harbor. On April 12, 1861, it came under fire from Confederate forces, an event that started the Civil War.

## Charleston's past, present collide in a landmark year

## Civil War sesquicentennial could be an 'emotionally charged' event for the city

By Laura Bly  
USA TODAY

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Fifty years ago next month, this famously genteel city celebrated the opening salvos of the Civil War with a Miss Confederacy contest, a 15-float parade and a local hotel's refusal to host an African-American delegate at a meeting of the national Civil War Centennial Commission.

Now, as its residents ready for the 150th anniversary of the April 12, 1861, bombardment and takeover of federal-held Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, the civic mood is far less self-congratulatory but still conflicted. Case in point: the uproar after a private "Secession Ball," complete with hoop skirts and the playing of *Dixie*, that honored South Carolina's role as the first Southern state to leave the Union in December 1860.

In the wealthy port town that served as the entry point for three out of four enslaved Africans during the 18th century and where slaves were in the majority before the Civil War, the sesquicentennial observance is "emotionally charged," says Robert Rosen, president of Charleston's Fort Sumter-Fort Moultrie Historical Trust.

"We've used 'commemorate,' which says we're acknowledging that this happened and we want to learn from it," he says. "But I think some people don't even like that word."

"We're trying to mark one of the most important and tragic moments in American history," adds Rosen, whose non-profit consortium is sponsoring a four-year series of events incorporating Northern, Southern and African-American viewpoints on the conflict. "Charleston and South Carolina were on the wrong side of history, but it still happened here. We're going to recognize that, remember, and reflect on the people who lost their lives and what was accomplished."

And while the anniversary of what old-guard Charlestonians called "The Late Unpleasantness" will be a "big draw from a tourist standpoint," Rosen says, "I think the commercial part has been low-key, because people don't know exactly what to do. They don't want to be involved in something that could create a controversy."

## Inescapable reminders of slavery and secession

One perspective on that controversy is on tap at the Confederate Museum, which is run by the Charleston branch of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and housed in an imposing, city-owned Greek Revival landmark that anchors the four-block-long City Market.

Up a pair of steep staircases, above African-American craftspeople selling traditional sweetgrass baskets, about 15,000 visitors a year file past glass cases displaying such prized mementos as a lock of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee's hair and the first Confederate flag to fly over Fort Sumter.

A few blocks away on a cobblestoned street flanked by antebellum homes, the city-owned and operated Old Slave Mart Museum tells the story of Charleston's crucial role in the slave trade from the confines of a former slave showroom that operated from 1856 to 1863.

Most people sold here were "born in America, the children and grandchildren of enslaved Africans," notes museum director Nichole Green, who says the museum plans to mark the upcoming sesquicentennial with audiotapes of local schoolchildren reading from the wartime narratives of enslaved South Carolinians. Visitors leave, she says, with "a peek into the minds of not only slaves, but slaveholders and slave traders."

At the old Charleston Navy Yard, the Friends of the Hunley lead weekend tours of another piece of Civil War history, the "Rebel Beneath the Waves."

In 1864, the nearly 40-foot-long H.L. Hunley became the world's first submarine to sink an enemy ship — a Union blockade vessel called the *Housatonic* — before vanishing from Charleston Harbor with all eight crewmembers aboard. Raised from the open waters of the Atlantic in 2000, the vessel is now under restoration in a freshwater tank.

## The flashpoint of a bloody war

As his sons hunt for souvenirs in a gift shop selling Billy Yank pistols, fake Confederate currency and "Hunley Crew Rations" (chocolate-covered almonds), history teacher Keith Rice of Mobile, Ala., says he appreciates the valor and conviction of the Hunley's doomed crew.

Although Rice used the family's drive from Alabama to Charleston to talk about slavery's crucial role in igniting regional conflict in the years leading up to the war, "most of my ancestors fought for the Confederacy," he says, "and this place honors their memory. As a histori-



By Laura Bly, USA TODAY

**Reliving the H.L. Hunley:** Visitors to the Warren Lasch Conservation Center get a sense of the innovative sub's claustrophobic space.



By Laura Bly, USA TODAY

**Cruise into history:** SpiritLine Cruises offers the only commercial transportation to Fort Sumter National Monument.



By Laura Bly, USA TODAY

**Local folk art:** Sweetgrass basketmaking, brought to the area by slaves, has been part of the community for more than 300 years.

an, I certainly don't agree with everything they believed in. But they were standing up for what they thought was right."

Perhaps the best place to plumb the city's sesquicentennial state of mind is at Fort Sumter itself — the National Park Monument and symbol of Confederate resistance that, notes the park service's Michael Allen, remains "near and dear to the hearts of many Southerners."

Captured after 34 hours of shelling, the island fortress prompted a declaration of war in Washington and stayed in Confederate hands for nearly four years. Today, it attracts about 275,000 visitors a year via tour boats from downtown Charleston and nearby Mount Pleasant — and is the focal point of next month's anniversary.

Confederate and Union re-enactors will hold living-history programs at the fort in the days surrounding the April 12 dawn attack, and special sesquicentennial dinner cruises will include period music and three-course, Southern-style meals. But instead of the lavish fireworks display that greeted centennial observers, two large, entwining lights will separate to indicate the split of the nation.

"If both sides had known what they were getting themselves into that day, maybe things would have gone differently," Ranger Jennifer Zobelein tells tourists gathered at the fort's crumbled remains.

"Is it difficult to talk about? Yes," she continues. "But not talking about it, and pushing it under the rug, is no answer."

Philadelphia visitor Michael Harrah agrees. "The thing that impresses me most is how quickly they thought this (war) would all be over," Harrah says. "I guess it's a cliché to say that nobody knew what was to follow."

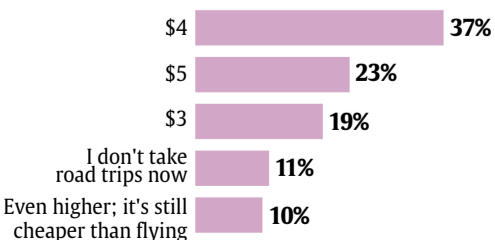
"This is in many ways a very sad, tragic place. There was a certain amount of heroism, but it's a reminder that once things go one way, it's out of our control."

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## Reader survey

Results of this week's joint survey by USATODAY.com and TripAdvisor.com.

## At what level would gas prices affect your travel plans?



## Next week

What sporting event are you most likely to travel for? Vote at [travel.usatoday.com](http://travel.usatoday.com).

At [travel.usatoday.com](http://travel.usatoday.com):

- Fort Sumter video
- Charleston photo gallery
- Guide to Charleston Sesquicentennial events