

AUGUST 15, 2022

Family



familymedia.com

The Magazine For Military Families

SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

**Military Families Receive a Warm & Welcoming
Reception In This Traditional, Historic Mid-Atlantic Locale**

PAGE 16

Cover Story

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

MILITARY CITIES SERIES: CHARLESTON

Amber and Russ Ludeman
with their two daughters

Southern Hospitality

Military Families Receive a Warm & Welcoming Reception
In This Traditional, Historic Mid-Atlantic

The weather may be hot and steamy, especially in the summer, but the vibe is about as warm and welcoming as you can get for military families relocating to Charleston, SC.

"Charleston and North Charleston are very military friendly; there are military nights at all the local sports teams'

venues and you see someone in uniform in practically every community you visit," points out Amber Ludeman. Ludeman returned to Charleston in 2020 with her husband of 10 years, Master Sergeant Russ Ludeman, who serves in the 14th Airlift Squadron, an active unit of the U.S. Air Force assigned to the 437th Airlift Wing at Joint Base Charleston.

"I think, overall, the South is very welcoming to military families," she adds. "I'm originally from Murrells Inlet, SC, and have family in Charleston, so I feel very comfortable with the area."

Joint Base Charleston was formed in 2010, when the Department of Defense merged the Charleston Air Force Base and Naval Support Activity Charleston. The facilities are located in the cities of North Charleston and Goose Creek, both part of the greater Charleston metropolitan area, which has a population of nearly 800,000.

Today, Joint Base Charleston comprises more than 20,877 acres

and is home to 67 military commands and federal agencies, supported by some 79,000 military personnel and dependents. Joint Base Charleston houses units from the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, Army, and Marine Corps. Military forces at Joint Base Charleston maintain \$2 billion worth of physical infrastructure across 23,000 non-contiguous acres, and they also provide mission-ready expeditionary airmen to combatant commanders in support of joint and combined operations.

Additionally, the former Charleston Naval Base is now a 231-acre, multi-use federal complex with 17 government and military tenants, including the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Courts, Veterans Administration, Department of State and Maritime Administration, among others. The complex is also the home port for six Roll-On/Roll Off (RO-RO) Ready Reserve ships, three Coast Guard National Security Cutters, and two National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research ships.

The Ludemans have a strong connection with Charleston, according to Amber. "My husband and I met when I was going into

my senior year of college in Charleston," she relates. "We lived here from 2008 to 2015, when we were PCS'ed to Altus, OK. We extended a year in Altus and came back to Charleston in July 2020. We're hoping that he can retire here."

While in Oklahoma, the Ludeman family added two daughters, which fueled their desire to live off-base when returning to Charleston. "I wanted to live off-base and grow our local roots for our kids," Ludeman points out. "Military life is wonderful but it moves their friends far too often."

The family has established a firm foundation in the area. "I met my husband at a RiverDogs game in 2007," she recalls, noting that Charleston boasts multiple sports teams, including the Minor League Baseball Charleston RiverDogs. "We bought our first house together in 2009 in North Charleston. I founded my company – the social media marketing firm Matchstick Social – and opened a King Street office in 2013; we just won Best Marketing Firm in 2021. So I guess you could say that nearly everything wonderful that has happened to me in my adult life happened in Charleston!"

"We chose to move to Clements Ferry Road in a neighborhood called Beresford Creek Landing," she continues. "It had everything we want: young families, a close-knit community, a boat dock, and close proximity to everything. My company is in West Ashley and it's about a 20-minute commute; he can be on base in about 15 minutes."

Families new to the area may want to consider living on base at first, she recommends, noting that the Charleston area "grew a lot in the five years we were in Altus. We visited often, but it still feels like it exploded in popularity and population! I think that Charleston is much more sprawling and therefore, if you don't live on base, it can be harder to connect with your fellow spouses. In Altus, everyone and everything was about six minutes away, so it was easier to feel a part of the fabric."

However, there are numerous resources to help spouses and families adjust to the area, Ludeman points out. "Key spouses are assigned by neighborhood/community, so you'll be able to connect with someone who lives nearby and throws events for your community," she says. "Also, Family Life & Readiness (AFRC) are so helpful if you need help finding a job, friends, day cares and schools, and more."

One downside to the area can be cost. "I think the biggest drawback to Charleston is that it can be pricey," Ludeman remarks. "Especially in the West Ashley area, daycares are very expensive. However, we do have a thriving job market and spouses will probably find it easier to work outside of the home here than at other bases. Other than that, I think it just takes a lot more effort to meet other spouses if you don't live or work on base. You just need to go to the events and get involved if that's holding you back."

Another potential downside is the weather: "It's hot and it's the humidity that gets ya," she declares. "If you're coming from the Midwest or Pacific Northwest, it will require an adjustment."

Ludeman strongly urges people to get out and explore the region. "A lot of military families I know don't do enough venturing around the area and they really miss out," she notes. "Go downtown! Go to Folly! Go to Kiawah! Go to Edisto! There are tons of little national parks within two hours. You can tube the Edisto River in the summer; visit Brookgreen Gardens and Atalaya Castle in Murrells Inlet; rent bikes on Kiawah, etc. Ask the locals where to eat. They'll always point you in the right direction."

"You don't have to spend \$200 or go to Hall's to get a fantastic meal," she continues. "For example, Angel Oak Restaurant and Tomato


Shed Cafe on Johns Island are Southern cooking that's worth the drive and won't break the bank. I love O-Ku for sushi and they do half price apps and rolls for happy hour from 5-7 on some weekdays. The best pizza in town, in my opinion, is Orlando's on Daniel Island and Mt. Pleasant.

"There are national and county parks that are affordable and provide all-day fun for the family," she adds. "We love James Island County Park and Palmetto Islands County Park. They both have splash pads, paddleboats, parks, and more. I also love the petting zoo and to walk around Magnolia Gardens with my girls."

Spouses looking for continuing education opportunities have a wealth of options in and around Charleston. "The College of Charleston, The Citadel, and Charleston Southern all offer part-time and evening classes," Ludeman explains, adding "I worked full-time and got my master's degree from College of Charleston in 2012, only going in the evening."

Overall the region is very welcoming, with a strong tradition of Southern hospitality. "The Charleston vibe is laid back," Ludeman notes. "It used to be a lot more 'hippie-dippy' downtown, but that has vanished with the rising prices of housing and food. Still, it preserves a coastal vibe even if it's more 'Sperry' than 'Rainbow and Keen' these days.

"Embrace the Southern lifestyle," she advises. "If you're not familiar, everyone is polite and says 'y'all,' no one honks the horn, and please read the invitation's dress code – it's far more acceptable to be overdressed than underdressed.

"Ask a local where to eat, where to park, and what to do on Saturday," she adds. "There are so many options that aren't touristy that you probably wouldn't know otherwise. People are so proud of this town and are working to preserve the charm." 

All About Charleston

From the Charleston website:
<https://www.charleston-sc.gov/>

Charleston is a historic city – founded in 1670 – and blends traditional Southern culture, English, French, and West African traditions. The region is known for its strong tourism industry, and was ranked as the "best city in the world" by *Travel + Leisure Magazine* in 2016.

The region boasts many art, music, cuisine, and fashion venues, including the famous Spoleto Festival USA, held annually in late spring. The festival was founded in 1977 by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who sought to establish a counterpart to the Festival dei Due Mondi – the Festival of Two Worlds – in Spoleto, Italy, Charleston's sister city.

Charleston's historic buildings, art and historical museums, public parks and other attractions include:

- Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art
- The Calhoun Mansion
- The Charleston Museum, America's first museum, founded in 1773
- The Powder Magazine
- The Gibbes Museum of Art
- The Nathaniel Russell House
- The Gov. William Aiken House
- The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture
- Fort Sumter
- The South Carolina Aquarium
- Old Slave Mart Museum

There are also a number of professional, minor league, and amateur sports teams, including the Charleston Battery, a professional soccer team; South Carolina Stingrays, a professional hockey team; Charleston RiverDogs, a Minor League Baseball team; Lowcountry Highrollers, a women's flat-track roller derby league; and The Citadel Bulldogs football and basketball teams.