Magazine: Charleston

City named No. 1 place in the world

By Warren L. Wise
Post and Courier

North Carolina residents John and Gale Sherrill never get bored when they come to Charleston.

"You could stay here for six months and never see the same thing twice," said John Sherrill as the anniversary-celebrating couple strolled through the Holy City where they honeymooned 24 years ago this week.

Carrie Schulte of Missouri drove 17 hours with a friend to come to the seaside city for the first time. "I had heard so much about it, I had to come see it," Schulte said while shopping in the City Market.

They are a few of the nearly 4.5 million tourists who descend every year on Charleston, the No. 1 tourist destination not only in the U.S. for the second year in a row, but also the top travel city on the planet for the first time ever, according to readers of Conde Nast Traveler.

"To be No. 1 twice in the U.S. is unbelievable, and to be named No. 1 city in the world, you can't do any better than that," said Helen Hill, executive director of the Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Last year, Charleston came in first in the U.S. and third in the world, behind Sydney, Australia; and Florence, Italy.

Readers of the renowned travel magazine chose Charleston for the accolade based on overall ambiance, culture and sites, friendliness, lodging, restaurants and shopping.

"I travel to a lot of places, and it's hard to find people who are more welcoming and friendly and charismatic than the people you find in Charleston," said Wendy Perrin of Conde Nast Traveler.

The CVB didn't waste any time capitalizing on the twin accolades. It posted a two-minute video Tuesday on companion site charlestonly.com that shows cobblestone streets, clopping horses and chopping chefs, just to name a few of the scores of sights and sounds highlighted around Charleston.

"Last year we were flattered," the CVB says in the video. "This year, we're on top

top tourist spot

of the world."

Cape Town, South Africa, came in second. Florence, Italy, came in third.

"To be recognized alongside some of the world's most popular visitor destinations is a distinction that Charleston will cherish for quite some time," Mayor Joe Riley said.

Duane Parrish, director of the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, said the announcement "gives us one more golden egg that the goose has laid."

The recognition could prove a big boost for Charleston International Airport as well, which last year saw a 30 percent rise in passengers and is about to embark on a $150 million terminal expansion to accommodate a projected doubling by 2030 of its 2.5 million passengers last year.

"This is a huge win for our community," said Rep. Chip Limehouse, chairman of Charleston County Aviation Authority.

"It's going to mean an increase in volume for our restaurants, hotels and the airport," he said.

Limehouse called the city's latest honor a "pinch-me-is-it-real-type situation," but he tempered his enthusiasm for the accolade by saying success will bring challenges.

"More people are going to come here, not just to visit but to live," he said.

"That will be the challenge for all of the elected officials — to manage the success we are having."