

FLORIDA

YOURS TO DISCOVER

An
**INSIDER'S
GUIDE** to
*the Florida you know
& the Florida you don't*



**OUTDOOR
ADVENTURE**
in the Sunshine State

6 beaches
**LOCALS
WANT TO
KEEP SECRET**

.....

5 things to do,
**ONLY IN
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FLORIDA

YOURS TO DISCOVER

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Traveller

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Editor-in-chief: Terrilyn Kunopaski

Executive editor:
Michael Baginski

Design & Production by:
Gordon Alexander

Contributors:
Candice Walsh, Jill Gleeson,
Andrea Yu, David Webb

Cover Photography:
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We are family:

Finding kinfolk in the Keys

There's something about this corner of Florida that makes you want to forget the rest of the world BY JILL GLEESON

I'm 51, an age when family size starts to shrink, especially if you and your kinfolk aren't producing many members of the next generation. Extended family becomes more important, even if they're extended all the way down in the Florida Keys, as my cousin, Mark, and his wife, Valerie, are. Mark's always been one of my favourite people, though I haven't had the chance to spend much time with him since he headed off to Key West more than two decades ago. I've seen the pictures on social media of his life there, though – Mark, Val and their passel of friends grinning widely, their tanned arms thrown around each other, in dim bars and on sun-saturated streets, in front of sherbet-coloured sunsets and ensconced in ritzy restaurants.

Key West always looked like the kind of place where the hackneyed phrase "making memories to last a lifetime" is actually accurate. But I never managed to take Mark up on his invitation to visit until last summer. And the island, in a way that almost never happens, didn't just live up to my dreams of it, but exceeded them. This experience is not unusual, apparently. Every year hordes of people, smitten with Key West while on vacation and looking to keep the good times going, pack up and move there. Most have a difficult time making a go of it – rents in paradise are high – and give up, heading back north.

Sometimes they manage to stay, like Clint Allen, my Key Lime Bike Tour guide. After eating absurdly

decadent French toast with Key lime pie filling at Two Friends Patio Restaurant, I wanted to work off a few of the million calories I'd consumed with a morning bike tour. Since the whole of Key West is only about 6.5 kilometres long and 1.5 wide, the peddle through Old Town wasn't exactly taxing. But it was beautiful, plenty informative, and even moving. In between interesting tidbits about Key West history, Clint told us he had moved there on a whim after his partner died unexpectedly following a heart attack. I could understand the impulse. All that sun and

those gorgeous green-blue waters can't help but be healing. I was glad Clint had been able to find his place there.

There was much more to the island than the endlessly raucous party I expected. After wandering the soothing confines of the Key West Butterfly and Nature Conservatory, I discovered the gallery, filled with acrylic cases containing mounted butterflies for sale. I knew my mother would love one, but I couldn't bring myself to purchase

something butterflies had been killed to make. George Fernandez, the conservatory's soft-spoken co-owner, charmed me instantly when he assured me he loved animals and would never, ever harm one – not even a butterfly. The insects, he said, come from farms all over the world, where they live out their short life cycle before they're collected and shipped off. The case I bought for my mother with George's guidance brings her joy every single day.

Because Mark and Valerie work long hours, there were places I investigated without them – like the Tennessee Williams Key West Exhibit, clearly a





Smathers Beach, Key West

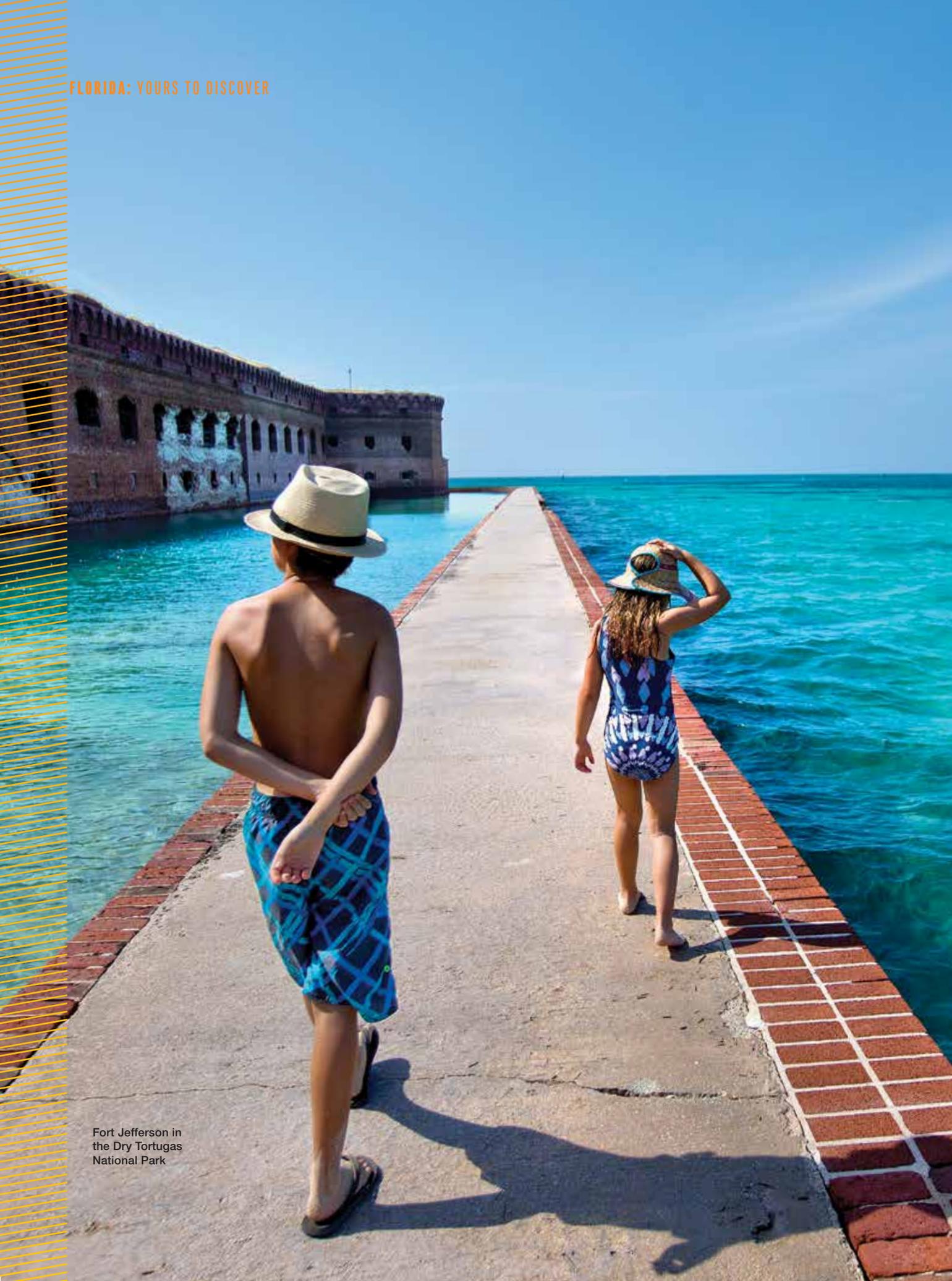
labour of love for its curator, Dennis Beaver, who appears to know everything there is to know about the playwright. I'm not sure if non-writers or folks less in love with Williams' works than me would find its ephemera as endless fascinating as I did, but the typewriter on display there alone almost sent me in paroxysms of joy. I hear from my cousins that the exhibit has expanded and reopened as a museum. If I were heading to Key West to check-out the literary festival this January – and I really, really wish I were – my first stop would be to take a peek at the new digs.

My favourite night in Key West turned out to be my last. The next day I'd have to rush home unexpectedly to tend to my mother, but that final evening was so perfect we wouldn't have been able to top it anyway. There's a lot to be said for going out on a high note. We began with a meal at La Trattoria, dining in the bar overlooking Duval Street while Mark and I rehashed stories of growing up as two parts of a quirky whole, an extended family we both love deeply. I felt a surge of gratitude to be there with my cousin, someone who understands me in a way few can because he knows the stories of my youth and the family who populated it.

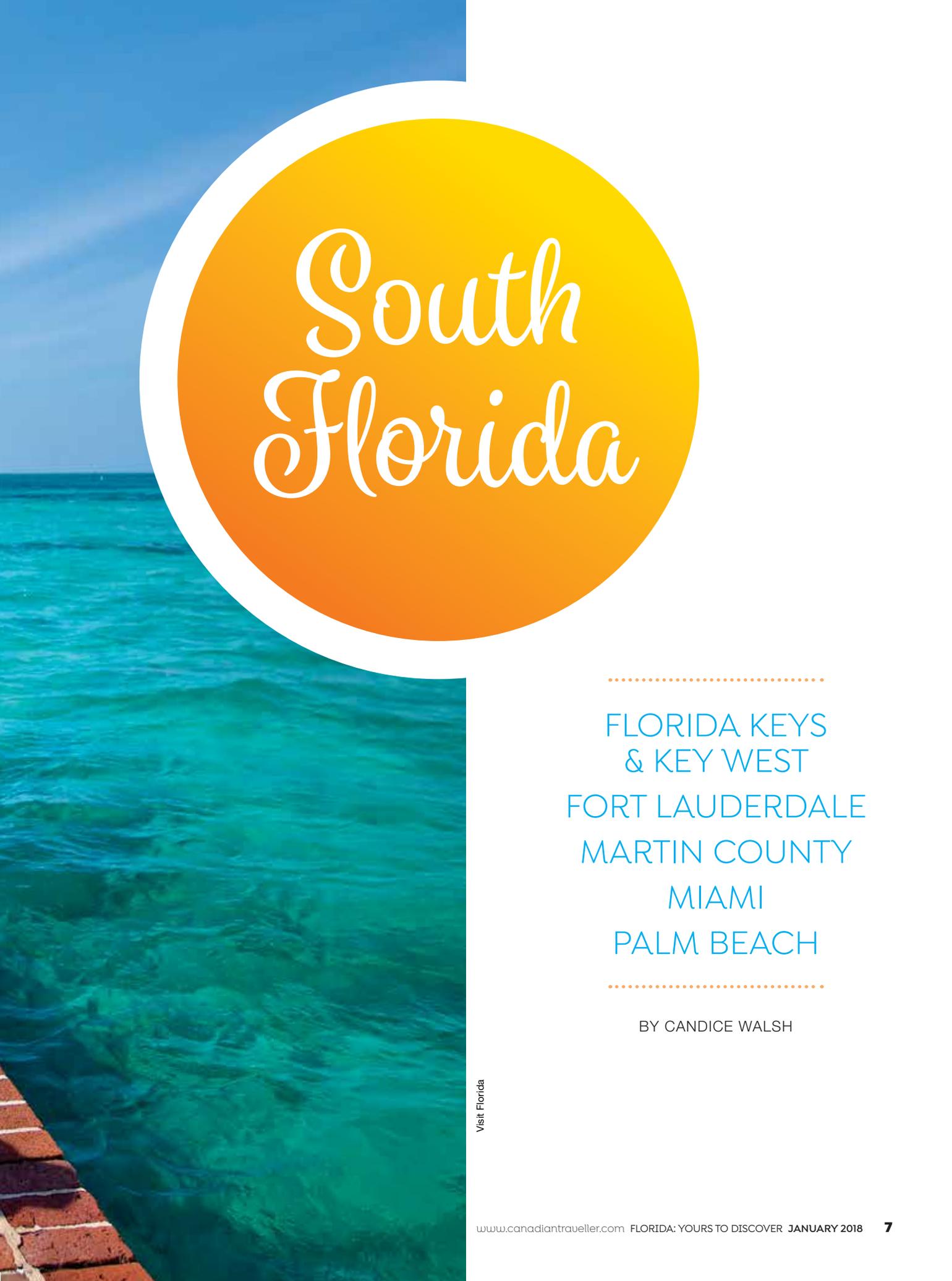
From there, we headed off to the legendary Green Parrot, said to be the oldest bar on the island, a massive corner dive filled with as many locals as tourists on a hot August night during low season. Val bartends there and she and Mark introduced me to a dizzying number of their friends, shouting names over music and laughter and the clack of billiard balls. Around this time, I began to fantasize – like so many do, no doubt often at the Green Parrot – of chucking it all; leaving the headaches of journalism and everyday responsibilities behind for a lighthearted life in Key West.

After a lingering stop at Bobby's Monkey Bar, where Val crooned karaoke tunes to the appreciative room, we returned home. Val cued up a video of her and Mark's wedding reception, and I watched, wide-eyed and grinning at the antics of my family, some of whom we've lost since. It was good to see them again; good, too, to spend those days with my cousin and his wife, who I adore even more than the island they call home. Blood really is thicker than water; even seawater, I suppose. ●

FLORIDA: YOURS TO DISCOVER



Fort Jefferson in
the Dry Tortugas
National Park



South Florida

.....

FLORIDA KEYS
& KEY WEST
FORT LAUDERDALE
MARTIN COUNTY
MIAMI
PALM BEACH

.....

BY CANDICE WALSH

Visit Florida



Fort Lauderdale Boardwalk

FOR CITY EXPERIENCES

Soak up a little bohemia on the bay at **Coconut Grove**, one of Miami’s hippest and most laidback neighbourhoods, with banyan-shaded sidewalks and peacocks wandering the streets (seriously). Shop everything from luxury to kitschy items at **Cocowalk** outdoor mall, grab brunch at **Greenstreet Café**, then wander the perfectly manicured renaissance gardens at the **Vizcaya Museum and Gardens**.

In Fort Lauderdale, stroll the four-kilometre **Boardwalk** hugging the beach, pausing to snorkel along the Lauderdale-By-The-Sea three-tiered reef system. For something higher energy, take the trolley downtown in the **Riverwalk Arts & Entertainment District** on Fridays and Saturdays to experience the upbeat atmosphere around Las Olas Boulevard.

When the sun goes down, **Clematis Street** in West Palm Beach lights up with nightlife and big entertainment. The entire stretch is lined with shops, bars and restaurants, and live music often continues on until the early hours of the morning. Hop on the free Downtown Trolley, and explore at will.



West Palm Beach vintage shopping



DON'T MISS

Art enthusiasts planning to visit the Palm Beaches might consider scheduling a trip for November, just in time for CANVAS Outdoor Museum – a street painting event that brings muralists and artists from around the world to Downtown West Palm Beach. Murals and installations are on display for interactive art experiences. canvasmuseum.org

FOR CULTURE, ART & HISTORY BUFFS

While in Palm Beach, swing by the **Flagler Museum** to take in this 75-room stately mansion, given to Henry Morrison Flagler's third wife as a wedding gift. The Whitehall is the must-see here, with its baroque ceiling and original furnishings from the early 1900s. It's designed in the *beaux-arts* style, adorned with white marble, and it rivals just about any palace in Europe.

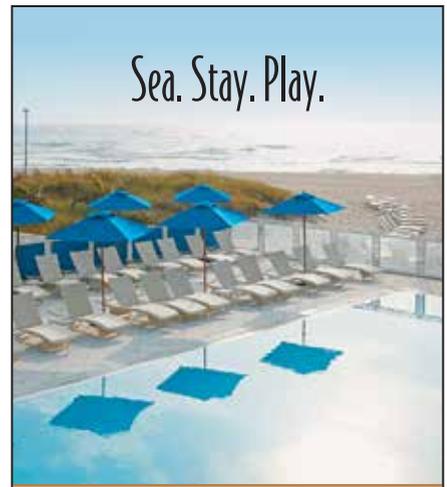
No trip to Miami is complete without a visit to **Little Havana**, a neighbourhood in the downtown core that's as authentically Cuban as it gets. This colourful spot is chock-full of shops, restaurants and cafés.

Wander around the **Downtown Hollywood Mural Project** in Fort Lauderdale, and take in the 20-plus curated contemporary art murals by

internationally acclaimed artists like Michelle Weinberg and Ruben Ubiera. It's worth your time to swing by the Muzart Studios to see Rob Rubi's "The Concrete Daydream," or the epic "The Floating World" underwater-themed mural created by wife and husband duo the Yuhmi Collective.



Flagler Museum, Palm Beach



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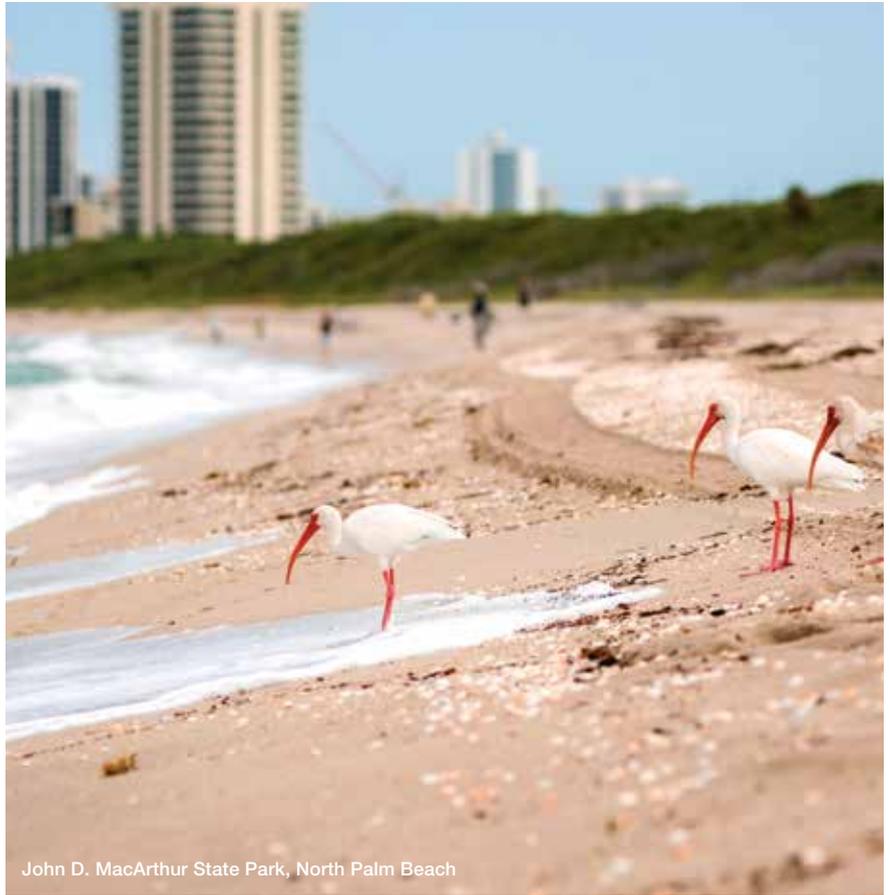
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Here in Martin County, we know a thing or two about natural beauty. Our warm waters and wave patterns are beloved by surfers, and our soft-sanded beaches are perfect for swimming and snapshots. If that weren't enough, Martin County is often called the sailfishing capital of the world, and also plays host to a native coquina reef, perfect for eye-catching snorkeling. And there's no better way to enjoy our breathtaking views than with a stroll at sunrise along our beachside boardwalk. It's all part of why Martin County home to *Coastal Living*® magazine's 2016 Happiest Seaside Town and just one of many things that makes our corner of paradise naturally quaint.

discovermartin.com



John D. MacArthur State Park, North Palm Beach

FOR BEACH BUMS

If the name Palm Beach conjures up images of powder sand beaches and palm trees dancing in the breeze, your imagination hasn't led you astray. In South Florida, [The Palm Beaches](#) region boasts 75 kilometres of exotic coastline and 29 beach parks. Take in the pristine beauty of [John D. MacArthur State Park](#), or head out on your own adventure to find a more remote, secluded experience. You won't have to wander far from the main drag.

Hop in a car rental (we suggest a convertible with the top down, because why not?) and drive the scenic [State Road A1A](#) from Fort Lauderdale, which winds its way through nine beach towns. At [Hillsboro Beach](#), stop and visit the lighthouse and the quirky Barefoot

Mailman statue, dedicated to the barefoot mailmen who once delivered mail along the beaches between Palm Beach and Miami.

There are more than a few choices at your disposal in Martin County, like [Ross Witham Beach](#), the location of the Georges Valentine Underwater Archaeological Preserve Shipwreck Dive Site, and [Hobe Sound Beach](#), a perfect refuge for soaking up the sun.

Did you know that the only way to reach [Dry Tortugas National Park](#) is by taking a two-hour catamaran ride from Key West? The reward for your efforts? Total silence and a world of your own to explore. The clear waters around the park are teeming with sea turtles, shipwrecks, colourful reefs, and plenty of sea life. It's the perfect place to snorkel or dive.

In South Florida,
The Palm Beaches
region boasts
75 kilometres of
exotic coastline and
29 beach parks.

Clock tower on Worth Ave., Palm Beach

FOR THE FOODIES

The **Warehouse District** is West Palm Beach’s new and eclectic food-and-drink area, spearheaded by a number of local food and beverage vendors (as well as other community members). Start your day with a strong cup of java at **Rabbit Coffee**, peruse the food vendors, and then top it all off with a Jackfruit IPA at **Ookapow Brewing Company**.

The Keys is famous for tasty fresh seafood – especially pink shrimp, yellowtail snapper, hog snapper and mahi-mahi. In Key West particularly, you’ll find the freshest eats – just swing by **Matt’s Stock Island Kitchen & Bar**, or the **Grand Café Key West** overlooking bustling Duval Street.

If you’re a boater, you’ve got to try the “dock and dine” experience on the Intracoastal Highway. You can dock your boat right at **Shooters** – Fort Lauderdale’s landmark restaurant with fresh seafood and handcrafted cocktails. Other options include the **Boatyard Restaurant**, or the more casual **Coconuts** restaurant. If you’re without a watercraft, you can still appreciate the gloriousness of waterfront dining with delicious eats and perfect views.



Grand Café Key West



Fort Lauderdale’s Shooters

INSIDER INSIGHT

“The Florida Keys & Key West have been home to a number of literary greats including Ernest Hemingway, Zane Grey, Tennessee Williams, Judy Blume and Robert Frost. Hemingway’s legacy still lives on in Key West today and each year, a celebration dedicated to Hemingway is held around his July 21 birthday. Events include a ‘Papa’ Hemingway Look-Alike Contest, a whimsical Running of the Bulls, a short story competition and a fishing tournament.”

- Mike Shubic, travel video blogger, @MikesRoadTrip, MikesRoadTrip.com



Hemingway look-alike Contest

FOR OUTDOOR & ADVENTURE ENTHUSIASTS

Blowing Rocks Preserve in Martin County is home to the largest Anastasia limestone shoreline on the U.S. Atlantic Coast. Hiking trails and boardwalks are there to entertain on land, while visitors can also opt for swimming, snorkelling or diving during permitted hours.

For something a little more adventurous, dive the 155-metre **Spiegel Grove** wreck in the Florida Keys. It's a retired U.S. Navy Landing Ship Dock, and it's the largest ship ever to be intentionally sunk to create a coral reef for diving purposes. Bizarrely enough, although the ship was sunk in 2002, the force of Hurricane Dennis turned the ship upright again in 2005. Nowadays, the wreck attracts large schools of small fish, as well as tons of colourful tropical fish.

While in Fort Lauderdale, hop over to the **Florida Everglades** for an airboat ride through marshlands, cypress swamps and mangroves. Keep your eyes peeled for alligators and other wildlife – if you're lucky, you might even see a panther.



Airboat ride through the Everglades

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Only in Florida

There are some things you can enjoy on vacation, regardless of where you go in the world. Then, there are other things that are only in the Sunshine State... BY ANDREA YU

You might be surprised at how many unique opportunities await in Florida, surely to elevate your vacation from an average sunny holiday to a culture-infused tour filled with fascinating history and insightful perspectives. Here are just a few of the distinctions that set Florida apart from the rest of the country and the best way to experience them, from exploring the oldest permanently occupied European settlement on the continent to a peek into America's first and largest Cuban communities.

ST. AUGUSTINE, THE OLDEST PERMANENTLY OCCUPIED EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT OF AMERICA

America's origin tales are typically traced back to English Pilgrims that settled in Massachusetts in 1620. But the country's oldest permanently occupied European settlement is actually found in Florida. The Spanish explorer Don Pedro Menéndez de Avilés arrived on the east coast on Aug. 28, 1565, the Feast Day of St. Augustine, which inspired the name of the new settlement. St. Augustine's Spanish roots are still strong in the city today, not only through its historical sites but its culture, too.

Don't miss a visit to the Castillo de San Marcos, a fortress completed in 1695 to protect and guard the region. It's St.

Augustine's oldest structure but also holds the distinction of being the oldest masonry fort in the continental U.S. Then, tuck into award-winning Spanish cuisine at any of the fabulous local restaurants such as Michael's Tasting Room, which serves reinvented Spanish classics alongside an impressive cellar of Old and New World wines.



Castillo de San Marcos



Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park

THE LIGHTHOUSE AT BILL BAGGS CAPE FLORIDA STATE PARK

The lighthouse at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park was first built in 1825 as a navigational tool for sailors, and served as a look-out point to protect the coast from intruders. But the historic structure, which has been reconstructed several times due to attacks and natural disasters, holds deeper symbolism and importance with the Underground

Railroad. While most slaves and abolitionists fled to the North, many also ventured South to Key Biscayne, where fisherman and boaters helped slaves traverse the Florida Straits to the nearby Bahamas. Situated at the tip of Cape Florida, the lighthouse in Bill Baggs State Park is recognized as a National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Site, being the southernmost end of the Underground Railroad. Aside from admiring vistas from the top of the lighthouse, visitors can learn more about the structure's symbolic role in freedom through maps that trace the network's paths.



Dunedin Stadium



Key lime pie

KEY LIME PIE

Florida's iconic dessert is none other than the Key lime pie. But pinning down the origins of this creamy, tart treat isn't as easy. Legend has it that the cook of a lavish Florida mansion, known only as Aunt Sally, had popularized the recipe. She may have been adapting a pre-existing recipe for lemon ice box pie, which is also made with sweetened condensed milk and egg yolks. But Aunt Sally swapped lemons for key limes, which grew locally in the region. Today, nearly every family in South Florida stakes claim to their own unique recipe for Key lime pie while eateries present their own creative twists on this classic. Try deep-fried slices from Porky's Bayside in Marathon or Dutch Miami's tropical pies, which are baked in a salted crust and finished with toasted coconut and passionfruit sauce.

SPRING TRAINING BASEBALL FOR THE TORONTO BLUE JAYS

Baseball season may end in October, but once the World Series champions are crowned and winter sets in, professional baseball players have some work to do before the next season starts up again the following April. In the middle of February, major league baseball teams make their annual pilgrimage south to Florida or Arizona for spring training, including Canada's own Toronto Blue Jays. Since 1977, the 5,500-seat Dunedin Stadium in West Florida has been home to Blue Jays Grapefruit League games. In fact, it's the only place the Jays have used as their Spring Training headquarters; the interior of the stadium is painted blue in their honour. Between Feb. 23 and Mar. 25, 2018, the Jays will play 32 games at home in Dunedin Stadium and away. It's a great opportunity to scope out your favourite players before the official season begins.

CUBAN CULTURE IN MIAMI & TAMPA

During the Cuban Revolution in the late 1950s, half a million Cubans fled their home country and settled just 160 kilometres away in Miami. Cuban-owned businesses and restaurants began to pop up, with the city's Little Havana district serving as the epicentre and a place for incoming Cubans to become

established in their new home. Miami is now considered to have the most

prominent Cuban community in the U.S., but the state of Florida is actually home to another lesser-known settlement.

After Cuban cigar manufacturer Don Vicente Martinez-Ybor relocated his factory to Tampa in the late 1880s, competitors soon followed and by 1895 the number of cigar factories in the city reached 200 with a sizeable

population of Cuban immigrants employed within. Today, there are more

than 80,000 Cubans living in Tampa. The Cuban influence is strong in both cities, whether at Miami's Domino Park, where people challenge each other to open-air games as they used to do in Cuba, or Tampa's Ybor City, where you can tour the region's last operating cigar factor, the JC Newman Cigar Company. Just don't ask which city makes the best Cubano sandwiches if you want to avoid a heated debate. ●



Domino Park

FLORIDA: YOURS TO DISCOVER



Clearwater Beach



Gulf Coast

.....

BRADENTON

LEE COUNTY
(Fort Myers, Sanibel,
Cape Coral)

ST. PETERSBURG
CLEARWATER

SARASOTA

TAMPA BAY

.....

BY CANDICE WALSH



Clearwater Beach, Beach Walk

FOR BEACH BUMS

Sink your toes into the sugar sands at **Clearwater Beach**, a favoured stretch of shoreline for many snowbirds who frequent the Gulf Coast. It offers the best of both worlds: tranquil moments lounging in a cabana, or boatloads of bustling activity around **Pier 60** and **Clearwater Marina**.

Caladesi Island (also known as Honeymoon Island) is regularly heralded for its pristine beach – and it's so unspoiled, it's only accessible by boat or ferry. Pure white sands framed by palm trees surround this uninhabited island, and visitors can walk the nature trail through the interior or kayak the mangroves. Keep your eyes peeled for wildlife, including exotic birds and nesting sea turtles.

For anyone looking for a low-key beach town experience, the **Passe-a-Grille Beach** neighbourhood at the southernmost end of St. Pete Beach is the place to be. Not only is the beach flawless, you'll never be too far from outdoor art markets, restaurants, fishing piers and boutique shops.



DON'T MISS

Crystal River is the only place in the U.S. where visitors can swim with manatees in their natural habitat. When manatees seek warm water during the Florida winters, the springs throughout the region (Kings Bay and Homosassa, primarily) make for an ideal choice. See the gentle giants from the water, either by swimming alongside them, via kayak, or stand-up paddle-boarding.

NO 07

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Tampa Bay food market



John's Pass

FOR THE FOODIES

Take advantage of the boardwalk foodie options at **John's Pass**, where food, music and waterfront dining combine for a perfectly pleasurable day on the Gulf Coast. Eat fresh seafood dishes on the deck at **Sculley's Restaurant**, or chow down on a grouper sandwich with yucca fries at **Walt's Fish Shak** – a shack made entirely of driftwood.

If there's only one thing you eat while on the Gulf Coast, make it **pink shrimp**. In the Fort Myers area, pink shrimp is famous for its uniquely sweet taste, especially when it's fresh out of the water. Grab some at the **Fish House Restaurant** or **Pinchers**. At most seafood markets, you can pick up a bag of frozen pink shrimp already packaged for your carry-on!

Ybor City in Tampa Bay is *the* place for the best baked goods and coffee on the Gulf Coast. Bakers, cigar makers, and coffee roasters once dominated the city's labour force, and nowadays you still don't have to wander far to fuel up on strong Cuban coffee. Knock back a cup of café con leche at **Buddy Brew** or **Foundation Coffee**, and grab some sweet treats at **La Segunda Central Bakery** or **The Blind Tiger Café**.



Seafood at Walt's Fish Shak



Florida pink shrimp



FOR THE BIG SPENDERS

What's better than one massage therapist? Two massage therapists! At the [Spa at Sanibel Harbour](#), opt for some extra well-earned bliss with a four-handed massage. The spa has more than 60 treatments, mostly using sea-based products. Try a Sea Shell Body Mask, or the Caloosa Experience – a soothing mind, body, and spirit treatment inspired by the Calusa Indians. You'll leave feeling like a million bucks.

While in Tampa, head west of downtown until you hit the [International Plaza](#), home to more than 200 luxury brands including everything from Hugo Boss to Tiffany's. This indoor mall is bright and airy, offering a comfortable shopping experience at a leisurely pace. And when it's time for a break, take advantage of the fine dining options at the open-air Bay Street district.

Set sail from Sarasota onboard a 12.5-metre Morgan Classic II Sloop with [Key Sailing](#), an award-winning experience from a husband and wife duo. Sailing trips are always limited to six people, and guests are treated to their choice of music, drinks, and other treats. Here's your chance to unplug and really enjoy your vacation in the sun.



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Manatee Village Historical Park

FOR ACTIVITY & ATTRACTION SEEKERS

For a little glimpse of the past in Bradenton, visit the **Manatee Village Historical Park**. This collection of restored buildings from the county's settlement period depicts what life was like in the mid 1800s – before automobiles and electricity. Visit the “Old Cabbage Head” steam engine, or swing by one of the heritage buildings, like the 1860 courthouse or the 1908 one-room schoolhouse.

All of **John's Pass Village and Boardwalk** is worth your attention, particularly for its epic 335-metre beach boardwalk lined with more than 100 shops, restaurants, and other attractions. Meander the tin-roofed village shopping for souvenirs, grab a seafood lunch, or hop on a boat for a little cruise on the water. There's even a special Pirate Ship cruise with treasure hunts, limbo contests, and water-gun battles (and plenty of wine and beer options, if that's more your style).

If you're travelling with children with a keen interest in science, check out the **Imaginarium Science Center** in Fort Myers, where topics like anatomy, weather, and wildlife are all explored in-depth through rotating exhibits. Kids can participate in dinosaur digs, watch a 3D movie, or have some hands-on fun at the touch aquarium.



Cabbage Key

DID YOU KNOW...

Located on one of Fort Myers' many off-shore islands, historic inn and restaurant **Cabbage Key** features walls, beams and ceiling papered in more than \$70,000 autographed dollar bills. About \$10,000 a year falls off, which goes to charity. The unique décor is said to be the inspiration for Jimmy Buffet's song, "Cheeseburger in Paradise."



Caladesi Island
(also known as
Honeymoon Island)
is regularly heralded
for its pristine beach
– and it’s so unspoiled,
it’s only accessible
by boat or ferry.

FOR CULTURE, ART & HISTORY BUFFS

Bradenton is an artists' haven, and the **Village of the Arts** is where they hang out. In this lively neighbourhood, local artists have lovingly restored bungalows from the 1920s and 1930s, and transformed them into art spaces and galleries. If you're lucky enough to be in town during the first Friday or Saturday of each month, join an ArtWalks tour to hop from gallery to gallery, meeting artists along the way.

Take a trip to **Sarasota's Historic Spanish Point** in Osprey, where you'll find one of the best museums and archaeological sites in the region. Prehistoric mounds, pioneer homesteads, walking trails and boat tours are all included at this living museum. A must-do before you leave: Step inside the 15-foot prehistoric shell mound at the **A Window to the Past** archaeology exhibit.

While in Tampa, spend time in **Ybor City**, a trendy part of town where brick buildings and iron balconies recall a time when the area was home to thousands of cigar workers. Nowadays, Ybor City is an eccentric blend of art and history, and is the heart of Tampa Bay's LGBT scene.



Ybor City



Bradenton's Village of the Arts



Cigar rolling

Florida's **best beaches**, off the beaten path

What's a trip to Florida without some sun, sand and surf? The state is overrun by beautiful beaches, so how is one to choose where to spend time? We have a few ideas for travellers interested in venturing slightly off the tourist track. BY TERRILYN KUNOPASKI



Mexico Beach



Cape St. George Lighthouse

ST. GEORGE ISLAND STATE PARK

The serenity of St. George Island makes it an ideal place to lay your towel, where clear Gulf waters are the perfect backdrop for a day at the beach. The 45-kilometre island is protected by low-density zoning and strict building codes, which ensures the laid-back vibe never changes. Visit the nearby Lighthouse Park, where you'll find The Cape St. George Lighthouse and lighthouse Keeper's House. Beach homes and cottages are the most common choice for accommodations, though there are a few hotels and inns on-island to choose from as well.

Enjoy the beautiful shorelines, majestic dunes and sandy coves or spend time exploring the various hiking trails, boardwalks and observation platforms. Look out for wildlife on land and in the sea – stingrays have been known to be seen in the shallow waters, while birding is a popular activity throughout. apalachicolabay.org

SANTA ROSA BEACH

Located in the quintessential Floridian area of South Walton, Santa Rosa is only one of many beaches in the area. But this gem of the Emerald Coast, located between Laguna Beach and Destin, has traditions and style all of its own. With luxury beach houses, upscale dining, and the unique artist colony known as Gulf Place, there is plenty of appeal beyond its sugar-white sand and bright blue-green waters.

If you're looking to indulge while catching some rays, beer tastings and tours are highly rated in the area, but for more active experiences, delight in the serenity of Eden Gardens State Park's moss-draped live oaks and the on-site historic mansion. Santa Rosa Beach also provides several entrances to Point Washington State Forest, a 6,070-hectare preserve with more than 10 natural communities. visitsouthwalton.com



Mexico Beach

MEXICO BEACH

There are eight kilometres of white sand beach in the city of Mexico Beach – a coastal community with small town charm along the Gulf of Mexico. A particularly unique claim to fame here is the composition of its sand; while there are typically 20 different materials in most beaches, there is only one here – evenly sized quartz crystals, said to have originated millions of years ago in the Appalachian Mountain range. The result? Not only a heavenly feeling between the toes, but the sand also remains cool.

Looking to spend some time in the water? Divers will find natural reefs, artificial reefs, and historically significant shipwreck sites not far from shore, while other ocean enthusiasts can opt for paddling, swimming, parasailing or kiteboarding. mexicobeach.com



Keewaydin Island



Crandon Park Beach

KEEWAYDIN ISLAND

Only reachable by boat and located off the coast of Naples, there's a piece of heaven that offers 13 kilometres of peace and quiet. The white sand and blue waters of Keewaydin Island – known as KeeIsland, to those in the know – are complemented by surrounding greenery, offering a sense of seclusion that travellers often long for on vacation. There are no cars, roads or bridges due to its designation as a nature preserve island, so you can really take it back to basics (but be sure to pack everything you might need for the day, including snacks). Go shelling or watch for dolphins, swim or wade in the surf.

Getting there is easy with the Hemingway Water Shuttle from Marco Island, or experienced boaters may opt to rent their own watercraft. marcoislandbeachgetaway.com

CRANDON PARK BEACH

While most tourists visit South Beach or Cape Florida, Miami locals know that Crandon Park Beach is really the place to be. The pristine sand and calm water are reason enough to spend a day here, and beach cabanas for rent make it that much more enjoyable. An especially notable feature is the beach's offshore sandbar, which protects it from ocean surf creating ideal swimming conditions.

Come for a morning, an afternoon or an entire day; beyond the beach there is plenty to keep visitors entertained. A winding promenade, concession stands and multiple picnic areas (with tables and grills!) are found in immediate proximity to the beach, though Crandon's Family Amusement Center, Crandon Gardens, a nature centre, marina, golf course and tennis centre are not far off to satisfy varying interests. miamiandbeaches.com. ●



Santa Rosa Beach

FLORIDA: YOURS TO DISCOVER





Central Florida

.....

KISSIMMEE

OCALA MARION
COUNTY

ORLANDO

.....

BY CANDICE WALSH

Visit Florida



Universal Orlando's Volcano Bay



DID YOU KNOW...

Kissimmee boasts more than 25,000 home rental properties, ranging from four to 12 bedrooms. Maybe that's why it's called the Vacation Home Capital of the World. As one to consider, try [Orange Lake Resort](#), next door to Walt Disney World Resort and nearby Orlando attractions. If you're interested in affordable accommodation but prefer a more traditional option, [Knights Inn Maingate](#) is also nearby most major parks.

FOR ACTIVITY & ATTRACTION SEEKERS

Volcano Bay is Universal Orlando's newest theme park, and it's making quite a splash (pun intended!). Whether you're seeking some lounge time in a chair on the sandy shores of Watari Beach or looking for the ultimate thrill plunging from Mount Krakatau, this water park is a must-do for the whole family.

Slow things down at **Kissimmee Lakefront Park**, where you'll find plenty of lush green space around Lake Tohopekaliga. Use the park's grills to barbecue up hot dogs and burgers before hitting the hiking and biking trails. Take advantage of the basketball courts or volleyball courts, or let the kiddos hang out at the playground for a few hours.

For something entirely different, join **Ocala Ghost Walks and Historical Tours** and dive into a mysterious, paranormal world. Owner Catherine Wendell has been tuned into the Ocala Historic spiritual world her whole life, and she has quite a few stories to tell. Ask her about her time at the Seven Sisters Inn – a place made famous by paranormal television shows like TAPS Ghost Hunters.

Slow things
down at Kissimmee
Lakefront Park, where
you'll find plenty of
lush green space around
Lake Tohopekaliga.



Ocala, Marion County

FOR OUTDOOR & ADVENTURE ENTHUSIASTS

Walk among the treetops at the **Orlando Tree Trek Adventure Park**, where you'll climb and soar through the forest with Tarzan swings, nets, ropes and more. The park is built across a six-hectare pine tree forest canopy, with 97 games and challenges for people of all skills. Climb 15 metres to the top of the canopy, and then plunge nearly 130 metres by zip line. This place is great for the whole family.

Ocala, Marion County is well known for being an equestrian escape, with plenty of fun activities for horse lovers. Hit the trails on horseback and explore the Ocala National Forest, the Florida Greenway, or the Florida Horse Park. If you're not a rider, a leisurely horse-drawn carriage ride around the rolling farmland of **Horse Country Carriage Co. and Tours** is a great way to spend an afternoon.

Wake up bright and early in Kissimmee for a hot air balloon ride with **Orlando Balloon Rides**, drifting across Central Florida as the sun's rays touch every part of the countryside. As you soar gently alongside other balloons over wilderness and sprawling theme parks, your captain will point out special landmarks. Top it all off with a champagne breakfast toast – a tradition for balloonists!



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FOR CITY EXPERIENCES

Celebration might just be the quaintest town in America, founded by Disney in the mid-1990s and adorned with tree-lined streets, boutique shops and small restaurants, and plenty of park space. The entire town's architectural design draws influence from historical American cities, making it a modern destination with old-time vibes. Plus, the downtown core is easy to explore on foot.

The **Ocala Downtown Market** is a great place to get to know the city, where a wide range of farmers, artists, craftspeople and foodies gather together to sell their wares every Friday and Saturday. The market is located close to the Ocala Downtown Square, in a comfortable open-air market pavilion. Grab some local grub and shop for artisan soaps, woodworking and other handcrafted goods to take back home.

Want to see Orlando's twinkling lights all sprawled out at night? Head out on International Drive and hop in a capsule at the 120-metre **Coca-Cola Orlando Eye** for an incredible bird's-eye view of the entire city. International Drive itself is worth exploring for its myriad of shops, restaurants, bars and galleries.



Celebration

FOR THE BIG SPENDERS

If you're visiting Orlando for vacation, treat yourself to a few blissful nights at one of the city's most glamorous resorts. You have your pick of sprawling luxury complexes, like the [Four Seasons Resort Orlando](#) or the [JW Marriott Orlando](#). Pools, splash parks, nightlife entertainment and excellent service all promise your best vacation yet.

Not a resort person? No problem. Kissimmee and the Orlando area are home to some ultra lavish vacation homes, complete with private pools, separate bedrooms, full kitchens, and access to resort amenities like spas and tiki bars. If you're travelling with a group, rent a fabulous place from [Elite Vacation Homes](#), and enjoy your home away from home. Bonus: when you want a quiet evening in, hire a personal chef to cook you up a five-star meal.

For the fashionistas and thrifty spenders: shop 'til you drop at [Ocala's Historic Downtown Square](#), where you can take your pick from boutiques, gift shops, flea markets and a surprising number of antique shops. You never know what you might find with a little digging.



Antique shopping



The Coca-Cola Orlando Eye

INSIDER TIP

"It'll take some pre-planning and a little sleuthing, but there are definitely ways to make your Canadian dollars stretch in Orlando while still feeling like you've had a five-star vacation. Look for bundle deals, such as the one offered at the Orlando Eye, which saves you a ton of cash when you bundle tickets to The Coca-Cola Orlando Eye, Madame Tussauds, SEA LIFE Orlando Aquarium and Legoland Florida. Check out the deals and discounts offered to Canadian citizens, such as those compiled by Visit Orlando. Spend a few days exploring the area's free or very inexpensive options such as state parks, botanical gardens, museums or nearby beaches."

- Kristen Manieri, founder of Orlando Date Night Guide, @GoOrlandoTravel

FOR CULTURE, ART & HISTORY BUFFS

Orlando isn't just theme parks and family resorts – there's an exciting arts scene here, too. During your visit, see what's on at the **Dr. Phillips Center**, home to the 300-seat Pugh Theater, the acoustic Steinmetz Hall, and the Walt Disney Theater. Symphonies, theatrical plays, pop concerts, and even comedians regularly take the stage; you never know who might be in town!

Cinema fans: enjoy a blast from the past at the **Ocala Drive-In**. Movies screen here seven nights a week, and admission is just \$6 for adults, \$3 for children (6-12 years old), and free for children under five. There's also a concession stand where you can pick up pizza and popcorn to enjoy with the show.

Step back in time at the **Pioneer Village** at Shingle Creek, where guests get a fascinating glimpse in how pioneers once lived. Explore a general store, a blacksmith shop, a sugar cane mill, and even some restored homes. Learn about the period's architecture at the "Cracker House," built by the Lanier family in 1889, characterized by a centre breezeway allowing for natural air conditioning. There's also a washhouse, smokehouse, and a lovingly tended garden.



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THE EVOLVING EXPERIENCES OF Florida theme parks

New places to stay, play and dine in 2018 BY MICHAEL BAGINSKI

Many a first family vacation has taken place on the grounds of Walt Disney World, the memories captured with a photo of mom and dad in Mickey Mouse ears, perhaps a kid in a princess gown and the Magic Kingdom castle towering in the background. The nostalgia attached to Florida's theme parks will never change, though the experiences within might be ever-evolving.

From Disney to Universal, SeaWorld to Busch Gardens, LEGOLAND to Gatorland, the traditional reasons for visiting these must-see parks remain, though each continue to offer new and exciting experiences for guests.

Here's the scoop:

WALT DISNEY WORLD

A virtual city unto itself adjacent to Orlando, Walt Disney World is comprised of four separate parks (Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios), two water parks (Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach), 28 resort hotels (with 30,000 rooms), and the Disney Springs entertainment district (formerly Downtown Disney). In May 2017, **Pandora – The World of AVATAR** opened to guests, offering a different kind of magical experience based on the hit film, AVATAR. Located at Animal Kingdom, this attraction represents the largest expansion in Disney World history.

And the growth continues; Hollywood Studios is undergoing significant development, which will include the opening of **Toy Story Land** this summer and Disney's "next big thing" – **Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge** – in 2019. Speaking of the galaxy – Epcot is set to be home to a new attraction based on the popular **Guardians of the Galaxy** films (though no launch date has been set at this point), plus an all-new **Tron**-themed attraction in Magic Kingdom will be introduced sometime in the not-so-distant future.

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter-Hogsmeade and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter-Diagon Alley are pillars to Universal Orlando Resort (UOR), which is also comprised of

Universal Studios Florida and the adjacent Islands of Adventure. The new South Pacific-themed **Volcano Bay** water park opened in May 2017 as UOR's third standalone theme park, adding to the broad roster of options.

Coming this spring is a new **Fast & Furious** attraction, based on the film franchise of the same name, at Universal Studios Florida. Thrill-seekers can join film's stars on a high-octane simulated adventure into the world of underground racing.

Where to stay during your next stop at Universal Orlando? There are currently five on-site hotels (with a total of 5,600 rooms) and a new one on the way in the very near future. Universal's **Aventura Hotel** will have 600 guest rooms and the first-ever rooftop bar and grill at Universal when it opens in August. Two more properties are set to start welcoming guests in 2019.

SEAWORLD

From adrenaline-boosting rides at SeaWorld to the daring water slides of Aquatica, or the thrill of swimming with dolphins, rays and tropical fish at Discovery Cove, SeaWorld theme parks never fail to delight.

SeaWorld's signature Kraken ride was updated this past summer with virtual reality technology; the ground-breaking



Infinity Falls



Fast & Furious



Volcano Bay

Kraken Unleashed takes guests on a “fantastical voyage” under the sea to encounter gigantic sea monsters, including the legendary Kraken. An equally thrilling ride will be opening in summer 2018, whereby guests will have the chance to take a boat ride through roaring Class IV rapids. Called **Infinity Falls**, the adventure culminates in a plunge over the world’s tallest river drop. This is the centrepiece of a new rainforest-themed area at SeaWorld that will offer interactive experiences designed to create a positive impact on freshwater ecosystems.

Still looking for more waterpark fun? With wild water jets, a colossal water sphere and swoops into giant manta wings, the **Ray Rush** raft ride will provide three new ways to slide, splash and soar at Aquatica come springtime.

BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY

Inspired by the point on a wave where water and gravity form a “perfect partnership,” Adventure Island in Tampa Bay will unleash the **Vanish Point** drop slide on guests starting in March. Two wave paths offer contrasting experiences. Be sure to schedule a day at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay while you’re in the area, which offers a unique blend of thrill rides, a zoo with more than 12,000 animals, and live shows.

LEGOLAND FLORIDA RESORT

Located just 45 minutes from both Orlando and Tampa and on the former grounds of Cypress Gardens, LEGOLAND Florida Resort in Winter Garden continues to add to its interactive theme park offerings, which already includes more than 50 rides, shows and attractions. The entire park is geared to families with children aged two to 12, and this spring, the first virtual reality roller coaster designed for children will be added to its line-up of attractions. The **Great Lego Race VR Coaster** will open in place of the Project X roller coaster, re-imagined with a new story and special effects.

2017 saw the opening of **LEGOLAND Beach Retreat**, a village-style vacation resort with 83 bungalows and 166 rooms located one kilometre from the theme park on Lake Dexter. The 152-room LEGOLAND Hotel is located next door.

GATORLAND

Dubbed “Alligator Capital of the World,” the 40-hectare family theme park in Kissimmee has been an Orlando mainstay since 1949, providing an element of Old Florida charm to its adventure activities, rides, entertainment, educational wildlife programs and, of course, thousands of crocs and gators.

The new **Stompin’ Gator Off-Road Adventure** and **Gator Joe’s Adventure Outpost** opened last fall as part of a US\$2.5-million park expansion, the largest since its opening.

NONA ADVENTURE PARK

Brand new and set for a summer opening, the Nona Adventure Park in Orlando will feature an inflatable, floating obstacle course, wakeboarders pulled along by cables and an 18-metre climbing tower with a ropes course. ●

FLORIDA: YOURS TO DISCOVER



Daytona Beach



East Coast

.....
DAYTONA BEACH
NEW SMYRNA
ST. LUCIE COUNTY
SPACE COAST
.....

BY CANDICE WALSH

Daytona Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau



Kennedy Space Center

FOR ACTIVITY & ATTRACTION SEEKERS

No trip to the Space Coast is complete without a visit to the Titusville area, where the **American Space Museum and Walk of Fame** provides endless entertainment for both space lovers and casual visitors. At the Walk of Fame, see the bronze handprints of the Mercury 7 Astronauts, and listen to stories from volunteers about the earliest days of America's space explorations. Then visit the **Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex** to see where astronauts first launched their 383,000-kilometre journey to the moon.

For car enthusiasts, visiting the **Daytona International Speedway** is a must-do while you're on the East Coast. Likely the most famous racetrack in the world and home to the Daytona 500 (NASCAR's most prestigious race), you'll want to set aside plenty of time for your visit. Hop on a 30- or 90-minute Speedway Track Tour for a comprehensive insider look at what makes this speedway so special.

At the **Epic Flight Academy** in New Smyrna Beach, take a discovery flight lesson with a certified flight instructor, and soar the skies as you fly your very own airplane! If you've ever dreamed of being a pilot, this experience will help make it happen.

FOR CITY EXPERIENCES

Daytona Beach's nightlife is legendary, and despite being such a small city, debauchery is practically guaranteed during your visit. Whether you feel like dancing, pubbing, or listening to live music, you'll find plenty to do when the sun goes down. Take in live blues and rock bands at the **Banks and Blues Club**, or enjoy a more relaxed setting at the **Daytona Beach Brewing Co.** For something different, tone it down at **Cinematique Theater**, the only full-time art-house cinema in the county.

Palm Bay on the Space Coast is reputedly the fastest growing city in the United States, with a large, active outdoors community chock-full of nature lovers (and fishermen). For family fun, spend an afternoon at **Hurricane Paintball Park**, or splash around the waterslides at **Palm Bay's Aquatic Center**.

Fort Pierce is the largest city in St. Lucie County, with a busy waterfront and plenty of old Florida charm. Peruse the **Farmers' Market** and the **Jazz Market**, where you can shop for hand-painted glassware and other artsy wares. For something entirely unique, participate in **Bike Night** – a monthly live music outdoor event where more than 500 bikers park their motorcycles and enjoy the balmy Florida evening air.



Daytona International Speedway

Daytona Beach



Along Daytona Beach's Ale Trail

FOR THE FOODIES

Craft beer lovers will appreciate Daytona Beach's growing **Ale Trail**, where each location has something unique to offer. Swing by **Beachside Brew Pub** on Ocean Shore Boulevard to sample one of their 10 beers on tap. If spirits are more your style, check out **Copper Bottom Craft Distillery** for a complimentary tour and tasting. Wherever you end up, your glass won't stay empty for long!

Seafood is king on the Space Coast, especially when it comes to locally caught rock shrimp. Try a few seafood dishes at **Dixie Crossroads** in Titusville, or plop down at a table in any of the restaurants at **The Cove** in Port Canaveral for the freshest seafood eats in the region.

Local eats are on the menu in St. Lucie, and you'll want to show up early for weekend breakfast at **Berry Fresh Café**. Try the blueberry fritters or the decadent Nutella-stuffed French toast, to start. For dinner, order the classic clam chowder or fish 'n chips at **The Cottage Grill**, a St. Lucie favourite run by two local restaurateurs.

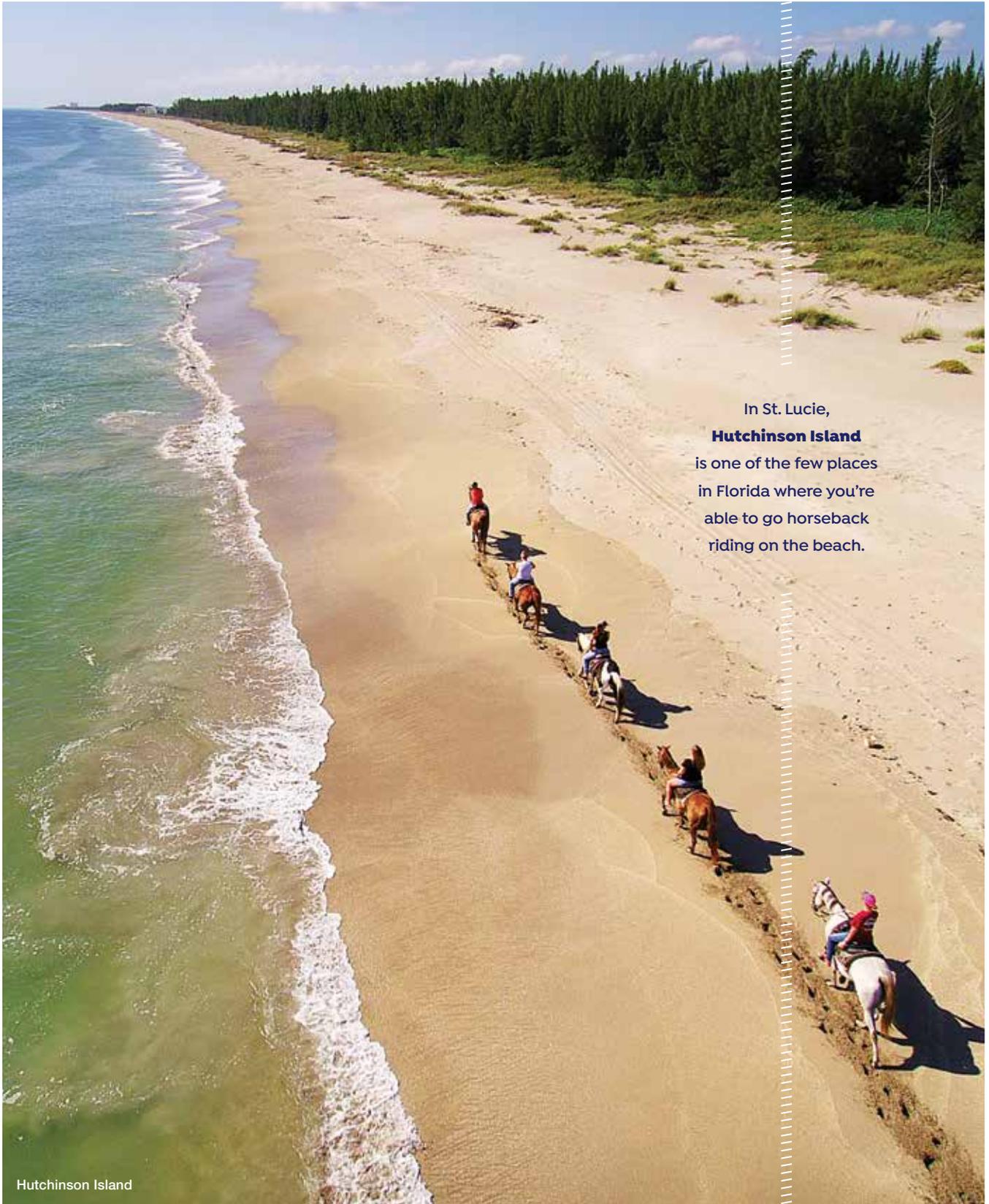
DID YOU KNOW...

The new **Hard Rock Hotel Daytona Beach** is scheduled to officially open its doors in early 2018. The four-star property, located at 918 North Atlantic Ave., will feature 200 guest rooms, oceanfront dining and a full-service Rock Spa.



STAY HERE

Located on Atlantic Avenue in Daytona Beach, **Sun Viking Lodge** promises to be a great choice for family travellers to the area. Kids and adults alike will enjoy the 18-metre waterslide, ocean-side playground, and other indoor and outdoor activities. Budget-savvy travellers should opt for a room with a fully equipped kitchen to save money on meals.



In St. Lucie,
Hutchinson Island
is one of the few places
in Florida where you're
able to go horseback
riding on the beach.

Hutchinson Island

FOR OUTDOOR & ADVENTURE ENTHUSIASTS

Did you know that some of Florida's best surfing opportunities are on Florida's Space Coast? Epic surf and year-round warm temperatures make the East Coast ideal for both experienced and novice surfers, and **Cocoa Beach** is the perfect place to do it. If you're a beginner: sign up for private surf lessons at **Ron Jon Surf Shop** or the **Cocoa Beach Surf Company**.

Rent a kayak and hit the **Spruce Creek Paddling Trail** in New Smyrna, where once a large Indigenous population inhabited the area around the Spruce Creek basin. As you paddle northward, the creek narrows into a marshy waterway crowded with trees and wildlife. The feeling of ancient history is palpable in the salty air; take note of the **Spruce Creek Mound**, a prehistoric earthen structure located on a bluff near Port Orange.

Galloping on horseback over soft, sparkling sand with the turquoise Atlantic waters lapping at your feet (or rather, your horse's hooves) – sounds dreamy, doesn't it? In St. Lucie, **Hutchinson Island** is one of the few places in Florida where you're able to go horseback riding on the beach. Book with **Tours on Horseback**, and head out for a fun tropical ride.



Cocoa Beach



INSIDER TIP

"There is so much more to Daytona Beach than one of the most popular sporting events in the world. There is a good food scene, a craft beer Ale Trail, lots of history including the landing place of Ponce de Leon, and two museums/art galleries within walking distance of each other. I think it may be one of Florida's most overlooked cities."

- Marc Smith,
Canadian influencer
@themarcsmith,
30DayAdventures.ca

Daytona Beach

FOR BEACH BUMS

On St. Lucie's **Treasure Coast**, the Vero Beach area is the best place for some fun in the sun. **Wabasso Beach Park** has wide, quiet beaches with calm waters for swimming, while **Golden Sands Beach Park** is equipped with grills and picnic tables for mid-afternoon barbecuing. **Jaycee Park** is always a crowd pleaser, with three hectares of oceanfront parkland, a buoyed swimming area and a lovely boardwalk.

If you'd prefer a beach town with a little more hustle and bustle, **New Smyrna Beach** is the classic experience. Surfers and beach bums come together in this chilled-out community full of local boutiques, eateries and artistic charm. And, of course, there's the quintessential Florida beach scene here, with more than 20 kilometres of pure coastline.

You can't overlook **Daytona Beach**, either. The city certainly doesn't take its 37 kilometres of accessible beaches for granted, which are open to the public 24/7! Several stretches of beachfront are also wheelchair-friendly. Rent a beach chair and umbrella, load up on sunscreen, and spend a day soaking in the Vitamin D.

Daytona Beach

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Time for a (day) trip

There's plenty to keep travellers entertained in Florida's main hubs, but when you look beyond city centres and theme parks, there's a whole other world of experiences to be enjoyed. BY TERRILYN KUNOPASKI



Kennedy Space Center, C. Grant/Visit Citrus

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

(56 mins, 84 km from Orlando)

Between one theme park visit and another, plan to spend a day at Kennedy Space Center, less than an hour's drive from Orlando. There's a world of things to learn and explore here, many of which are unique to this one-of-a-kind Florida attraction. See rockets from NASA's Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs; get a close-up view of Atlantis; meet an astronaut during a live presentation at the Astronaut Encounter; see the Mars Rover Concept Vehicle; learn about the successes, setbacks and spinoffs of the Hubble Space Telescope; and the list goes on. To make navigating the 28-hectare facility easier, it is arranged into "Mission Zones," whereby attractions and experiences are grouped by specific periods of time and achievements. Think you or your kid has what it takes to make it to space? An Astronaut Training Experience is coming in early 2018 for ages 10 and up. kennedyspacecenter.com

CRYSTAL RIVER

(1 hr 33 mins, 128 km from Tampa Bay)

Golf and fine dining are two major reasons to visit Crystal River, but the real draw is no doubt the opportunity to swim with the manatees. A world of natural springs, which flow at a constant 22 degrees Celsius during the winter months, it's the perfect climate for these gentle giants to call home (though they are here year-round); in fact, this is where you'll find the largest manatee population in Florida. Get up close and personal via guided tours, whether swimming, kayaking or paddle boarding. Outdoor enthusiasts can further enjoy the mangroves, open bays and freshwater lakes of Crystal River; it's no wonder it's called Central Florida's "Nature Coast." discovercrystalriverfl.com





ISLAMORADA

(90 mins, 130 km from Miami)

An affluent resort area along a 132-kilometre stretch of the Overseas Highway, a visit to Islamorada is well-worth the two-hour drive from Miami, whether for a day or a few nights. It's known as one of the world's top fishing destinations but angler or not, there is plenty to enjoy in this corner of the Florida Keys. Art galleries and boutiques offer plenty of ways for you to do your part in stimulating the U.S. economy, though the dining scene is often recognized as one of the best in the State – and not just because of the seaside restaurant views. One of the world's largest collections of historic dive equipment can be found at the Florida Keys History of Diving Museum, or view the remains of a shipwreck salvage community from the 1830s at Indian Key Historic State Park. Locals recommend packing a picnic and enjoying some sun and swimming at Anne's Beach. But for something more active, water enthusiasts may be well-served to book a snorkelling or diving charter. fla-keys.com



SOUTH WALTON

(1 hr 9 mins, 65 km from Pensacola)

If ever there was a spot more charming than South Walton, we've yet to find it. This little piece of Northwest Florida boasts 42 kilometres of white sand beach and signature turquoise water, not to mention a wealth of other ecoadventures thanks to the four state parks, a state forest, 15 coastal dune lakes and the Gulf of Mexico within close proximity. But you'd be remiss to not explore the 16 neighbourhoods of South Walton, such as Grayton Beach, Seaside and Rosemary Beach. Art lovers rejoice, as the works of painters, sculptors and craftspeople are on frequent display at markets and festivals, while live music will be a constant soundtrack of your visit.

visitsouthwalton.com



AMELIA ISLAND

(41 mins, 50 km from Jacksonville)

Beautiful beaches, rich history and lush landscapes are only a few of the many reasons Amelia Island is a must-see in Florida. Arts and culture are integral to the fabric here, where live theatre shows, open-air art walks and festivals are part of everyday life. This weaves through to the shopping scene, which offers one-of-a-kind artisan boutiques in which you'll be sure to find a unique souvenir (or two) to remember your visit. Even the accommodation in the area have their own sense of style (should you decide to extend your visit beyond a day trip), with cozy beachfront condos or campsites to choose from. Amelia Island is known as Florida's first luxury tourist destination, which dates back to the Gilded Age; explore the historic downtown district, where this history still lives on in unique architecture and design. For more active travellers, the options are endless; stroll the 20 kilometres of pristine beach, hike or cycle through the preserved areas surrounding the island, or golf any of the area's 99 holes.

ameliaisland.com

FLORIDA: YOURS TO DISCOVER



A night out in Jacksonville



Northeast Florida

.....

AMELIA ISLAND
JACKSONVILLE
PALM COAST
ST. AUGUSTINE

.....

BY CANDICE WALSH

Ryan Ketterman



Pirate & Treasure Museum

FOR CULTURE, ART & HISTORY BUFFS

St. Augustine's history is a long and fascinating one, beginning in the 1500s with the arrival of Spanish colonizers. One of the best ways to uncover the city's past is with a visit to the fascinating **St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum**, home to the world's largest collection of authentic pirate artefacts. You'll find everything here from 17th-century swords to real treasure chests.

For history buffs, learn all about Palm Coast's agricultural past at the **Florida Agricultural Museum**, where you can step back in time by visiting an 1890s pioneer homestead. Exhibits on-site include a Dry Goods Store, several restored Depression-Era buildings from a citrus operation and a dairy barn. Check ahead of time to see if a historical enactment is taking place, for the opportunity to watch history come to life.

Bibliophiles and book lovers flock to Amelia Island, where reading is serious business. An annual book festival takes place every February, but the **Fernandina Book Library** is a gathering point for readers and art lovers alike year-round. Peruse the shelves at **Books Plus** or **The Book Loft** (set in a quaint Victorian building) to find your next book to accompany you to the beach.

FOR THE FOODIES

St. Augustine is a multicultural hub, where restaurateurs draw their inspiration from Spain, France, Italy, Mexico, Asia and the Caribbean. Fusion food is a popular theme throughout the city, so book a table at the **Raintree Restaurant** or the **Gypsy Cab Company** and try something new.

In Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches, a mellow beach eatery is the place to be. Start the day off with scrumptious breakfast biscuits at **Crab Island Flagler**. Later, grab a heaping plate of fish tacos from **A1A Burrito Works Taco Shop**, or a classic Flagler Beach sandwich (blackened fish, veggies, and cheese in a tomato basil wrap) at **Beach Belly Bob's Sandwich Shop**.

Amelia Island loves its al fresco dining, so savour the warm air and the best BBQ on the island at **Happy Tomato's** small courtyard space. Enjoy real Americana on the patio at **Bar Zin** bistro, or share a pitcher of sangria amongst friends in the lush garden setting of **España Restaurant & Tapas** (or keep the pitcher to yourself – we won't judge).



Fish Tacos served at the beach

DID YOU KNOW...

Jacksonville is the largest city in the continental U.S., spanning 2,175 square kilometres. The Mayport Ferry is Florida's only public auto ferry and connects Jacksonville's beaches to the Fernandina Beach and Amelia Island areas.



Aviles Street carriage ride

FOR THE BIG SPENDERS

Jacksonville is big on boutique shopping, and trendy neighbourhoods like **San Marco** provide endless hours of retail fun. Grab some chocolate-covered popcorn from the Peterbrooke Chocolatier and then peruse the new fashion trends at shops like Olive or Rosie True. **Avondale** is another upscale shopping area, where you'll find everything from antiques to fine arts to fashion.

If there's a place that does luxury right, it's the Five Diamond-rated **Ponte Verda Inn & Club** resort in St. Augustine. Not only can you golf seaside, but you'll also have access to tennis courts, flawless beaches, a luxurious spa, fine dining at the Seafoam Dining Room, and world-class service. Did we mention each room has a fully stocked wet bar?

Unplug and find complete peace and solitude at **White Orchid Inn & Spa** in Flagler Beach, where you can spend your days lounging on the beach with a good book, being pampered at the on-site spa, or enjoying the heated mineral pool. The resort will even pack you a picnic basket to carry to the beach, complete with fresh fruit, salads and other goodies.





Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park

FOR OUTDOOR & ADVENTURE ENTHUSIASTS

In Palm Coast, you can cycle or hike your way through the city on the **Lehigh Trail**. Following 13 kilometres of abandoned railroad, the route follows the Lehigh Canal through the centre of town, along Graham Swamp, and ending at Colbert Lane. It’s the perfect way to experience Palm Coast while getting some fresh air and exercise!

In Jacksonville, lace-up your hiking boots and explore nearly 25 kilometres of wooded paths inside **Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park**. The trail meanders along the ocean, where hard-packed sand makes an ideal route for running. The **Theodore Roosevelt Area** also offers tranquil hiking trails, allowing nature lovers a chance to enjoy Northeast Florida’s grasslands and forests.

Amelia Island has some of the best bicycling options in Florida, where traffic is minimal and the scenery is always spectacular. We recommend the **Amelia Island Trail**, running from Peters Point to Amelia Island State Park and then onwards to Fernandina Beach. The route is tree-lined and paved, and follows a scenic byway. Make sure you stop at legendary **Terry’s Produce Stand** for boiled peanuts.



Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens

FOR CITY EXPERIENCES

Palm Coast knows how to “wow” visitors with its city parks, including the **Bird of Paradise** nature preserve, the **Waterfront Park’s** tree-lined walkway following the Matanzas River, and all 23 hectares of **Linear Park**. Linear Park is particularly impressive for its snug location between Palm Coast Parkway’s eastbound and westbound lanes, providing hiking and biking trails, shuffleboard, and even a playground amongst all the traffic chaos.

In St. Augustine, get acquainted with the **Uptown** area, known for the stunning Nombre de Dios Catholic mission and the giant cross towering over the city. If you’re lucky enough to be in the area for the last Saturday of the month, take part in “Uptown Saturday Night” – an event where shoppers come out to enjoy live music and endless libations.

For some family fun in Jacksonville, head to the **Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens**. More than 2,000 animals and 1,000 exotic plants call this place home, including apes, giraffes, and tigers. You can even roll up your shirtsleeves and play “Zookeeper for a Day,” working alongside keepers to get close to reptiles, birds and friendly mammals.



St. Augustine Amphitheater

INSIDER TIP

“St. Augustine has long been known for its colourful history and European-influenced architecture. What most people don’t know is that over the past decade, our city has become a world-class music destination with the St. Augustine Amphitheatre at the forefront. We also have a progressive craft cocktail scene with Ice Plant Bar and St. Augustine Distillery at the helm, around a half-dozen craft breweries, and a rich agricultural and fishing heritage that’s helped produce dozens of eclectic restaurants focused on sustainable ingredients and unique flavours.”

– Kara Pound, freelance writer & long-time resident of St. Augustine, @oldcitypr, oldcitypr.com



OUR HISTORY IS NOT
THE SAME OLD

Story

More than 42 miles of unspoiled shoreline have attracted visitors to St. Augustine | Ponte Vedra for over 500 years, and you can see why. Our timeless dunes are topped with swaying sea oats instead of condos and high-rises. And with quaint B&Bs and spacious resorts as nearby fortifications, Florida's Historic Coast® is yours to conquer.

Explore FloridasHistoricCoast.com or call 888-313-3076.



**ST. AUGUSTINE
PONTE VEDRA**
FLORIDA'S HISTORIC COAST®



Ripley's Believe It or Not Odditorium has three floors of odd and unusual exhibits that are fun for all ages! There are new exhibits and interactives to make this an unforgettable experience during your trip to St. Augustine. Ripley's Red Train Tours have been the best way to see St. Augustine since 1953!

**Ripley's
Believe It
or Not!**

Ripley's Entertainment
19 San Marco Avenue
904-824-1606
Ripleys.com/StAugustine



It's the newest aquarium in Northeast Florida. See seahorses and touch starfish, urchins and horseshoe crabs. Be amazed by over 300 Florida reef fish in the Florida Reef habitat or better yet, snorkel with them! Feed sharks in Shark & Ray Cove or visit Shark Tooth Dig to find shark teeth. You can even take your favorite one home!



St. Augustine Aquarium
2045 State Road 16
904-429-9777
SAAquarium.com



Guy Harvey Outpost Resort is a newly renovated oceanfront resort located directly on St. Augustine Beach! Features include shuttles to America's oldest city, kids' splash pad, poolside tiki bar, entertainment and many activities. The hotel boasts a new restaurant and lounge.



Guy Harvey Outpost Resort
860 A1A Beach Boulevard
800-626-7263
GuyHarveyOutpostStAugustineBeach.com



Relax in a thoughtfully appointed one-bedroom suite. Unwind by our oceanfront heated pool. Enjoy all St. Augustine has to offer and the oceanside beauty of charming Crescent Beach.



Beacher's Lodge Oceanfront Suites
6970 A1A South
904-471-8849
BeachersLodge.com



The World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum celebrates the history of the game and the legacies of its 155 members through artifacts, personal memorabilia, photography, videography and interactive exhibits. Join us as we celebrate golf's greatest legends.



World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum
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Sit back as our talented conductors share the history and sights of America's oldest city. The 80-minute tour features 23 stops where guests can get on and off to shop, dine or sightsee. Your ticket is good for all day on and off re-boarding. Our expert guides are licensed by the city and extensively trained. Voted Best Guided Tour 2017!



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904-531-3249
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Florida for real outdoor enthusiasts

Five reasons Florida should be your next escape BY DAVID WEBB

For Canadians, summer is too short; we pack a year’s worth of paddling trips, camp-outs, hiking and cycle tours into just a few months. It’s part of the fun, I suppose, but it’s also a shame to see those balmy summer nights come to a close, leading to long stretches of rain or snow.

Of course, they needn’t end. Beyond shopping, nightlife and theme parks, Florida offers expansive wilderness and unique outdoor experiences to keep enthusiasts satiated year-round. In fact, winter is often the best time to go – temperatures are conducive to outdoor activity and there are fewer bugs. But Florida is the land of endless summer – so no matter what season you choose to visit the Sunshine State, outdoor adventures await. Here are some of the best:

EVERGLADES CANOE & KAYAK TRAILS

Spanning more than 600,000 hectares and three counties in Southern Florida, Everglades National Park harbours wild water-based adventures, typified by its legendary canoe and kayak trails. These routes meander through mangroves, marshes, cattails and saltwater bays offering both day trips and committing multi-day adventures. For the former, try **Nine Mile Pond**. Accessed off Main Park Road (Highway 9336) about 60 kilometres southwest of Homestead, this four-hour paddle leads through marshes and mangroves, treating adventurers to sightings of wading birds, turtles, fish and alligators. It’s easily marked and best paddled in winter when water levels are high and bugs are low. Or, head into **Hell’s Bay**. This challenging trail requires advanced route-finding skills, as things can get convoluted while you paddle through mangrove forests and a maze of small bays. The route can be paddled in about eight hours, or

snag a backcountry permit and set-up camp on one of the “Chickees,” floating elevated tent platforms offering an overnight in the Everglades. [nps.gov/ever](https://www.nps.gov/ever)

SEBASTIAN INLET SURF CAMP

Follow State Road A1A – a National Scenic Byway – into the heart of Florida’s beach culture as it leads north-south along the Atlantic Coast. Midway, Sebastian Inlet State Park awaits. With five kilometres of beach facing the open sea, Sebastian Inlet is one of the East Coast’s most renowned spots to shred a wave. Surfers: head to **First Peak** or **Monster Hole**, both consistent waves renowned for long rides. You’ll need a few days here to fully get in the groove, so pack your camping gear. The park has a full-service campground with 51 sites for tents and RVs, as well as a recently-added primitive campground for walk-in tenting and serene nights under the Florida stars. Shore fishing, kayaking and historic sites – including a 1700-era Spanish treasure fleet – complement the world-class waves. [floridastateparks.org](https://www.floridastateparks.org)

FLORIDA’S MEGA-TRAIL

Extending a whopping 2,000 kilometres from near the Alabama border on the Florida Panhandle to the wildlife-rich Everglades, the Florida National Scenic Trail is a hiker’s paradise. This subtropical route is within an hour’s drive of most major cities in the State, and provides adventures ranging from a simple walk in the forest to an extreme multi-day backpacking adventure. And every year, some brave souls set off on a two- to three-month-long through hike. But you don’t have to get too hardcore; pick a leg and tackle it with gusto! In the Panhandle, trek the silver sand beaches of **Gulf Islands National Seashore** – the trail’s only designated beach hike. In Central Florida, the trail passes through **Ocala National** >

Visit Florida





Everglades National Park

Forest, dubbed “the heart of the Florida Trail.” Expect wildflowers, dense forest canopy and the sparkling waters of Alexander Springs. Or embark on a real adventure in South Florida’s **Big Cypress National Preserve**. On the wildest section of the trail, your hike will likely see you hip-deep in water as you trudge through cypress groves, home to elusive ghost orchids and maybe even the Florida panther.
fs.usda.gov/fnst

CYCLE OVER THE SEA

Once completed, the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail will be an international draw for the world’s cycle-tourists. Get there before it’s famous! Currently a 145-kilometre linear route, with an additional 25 kilometres under construction, the FKOHT travels from Key Largo to Key West, incorporating some 23 historic Flagler Railroad Bridges as it treats cyclists to seaside scenery, 17 parks, quaint towns and historical monuments. If the full 145 kilometres is too daunting, pick a leg and ride. **Long Key**, from Mile Marker 71 to 62, is renowned for expansive ocean vistas as well as the second-longest railroad bridge on the trail. And **Lower Keys to Key West**, a roughly 30-kilometre (or more) stretch, hugs the water as it connects laidback towns and breathtaking Florida Keys scenery.
floridastateparks.org/trail/Florida-Keys

KAYAK THE KEYS

As a collection of some 1,700 islands dividing the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean at the southernmost tip of the continental U.S., it’s no surprise the Florida Keys is a prime paddling zone. The concern is narrowing your focus enough to pick just a few spots to launch a kayak – travellers can push-off from multiple locales right along the Overseas Highway. In the Upper Keys, **John**



Ocala National Forest

Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park offers a four-kilometre-long mangrove forest paddling trail. It’s also a colourful snorkel spot. Visit on a weekday to avoid the crowds. In the Middle Keys, **Curry Hammock State Park** is a gem. Much of the area is motorboat-free, so paddlers can enjoy serenity and fewer crowds in this less-populated region. In fact, Curry Hammock is the largest chunk of uninhabited land from Key Largo to **Big Pine Key**, a 109-kilometre stretch. Rentals are available in both parks. While visiting Big Pine Key in the Lower Keys, connect with kayak legend Bill Keogh, owner of Big Pine Kayak Adventures and author of Florida Keys kayak guidebooks. Join his group tour and explore Great White Heron and Key Deer National Wildlife Refuges (three hours for \$50) or rent a boat and paddle at your own pace.
floridastateparks.org; keyskayaktours.com

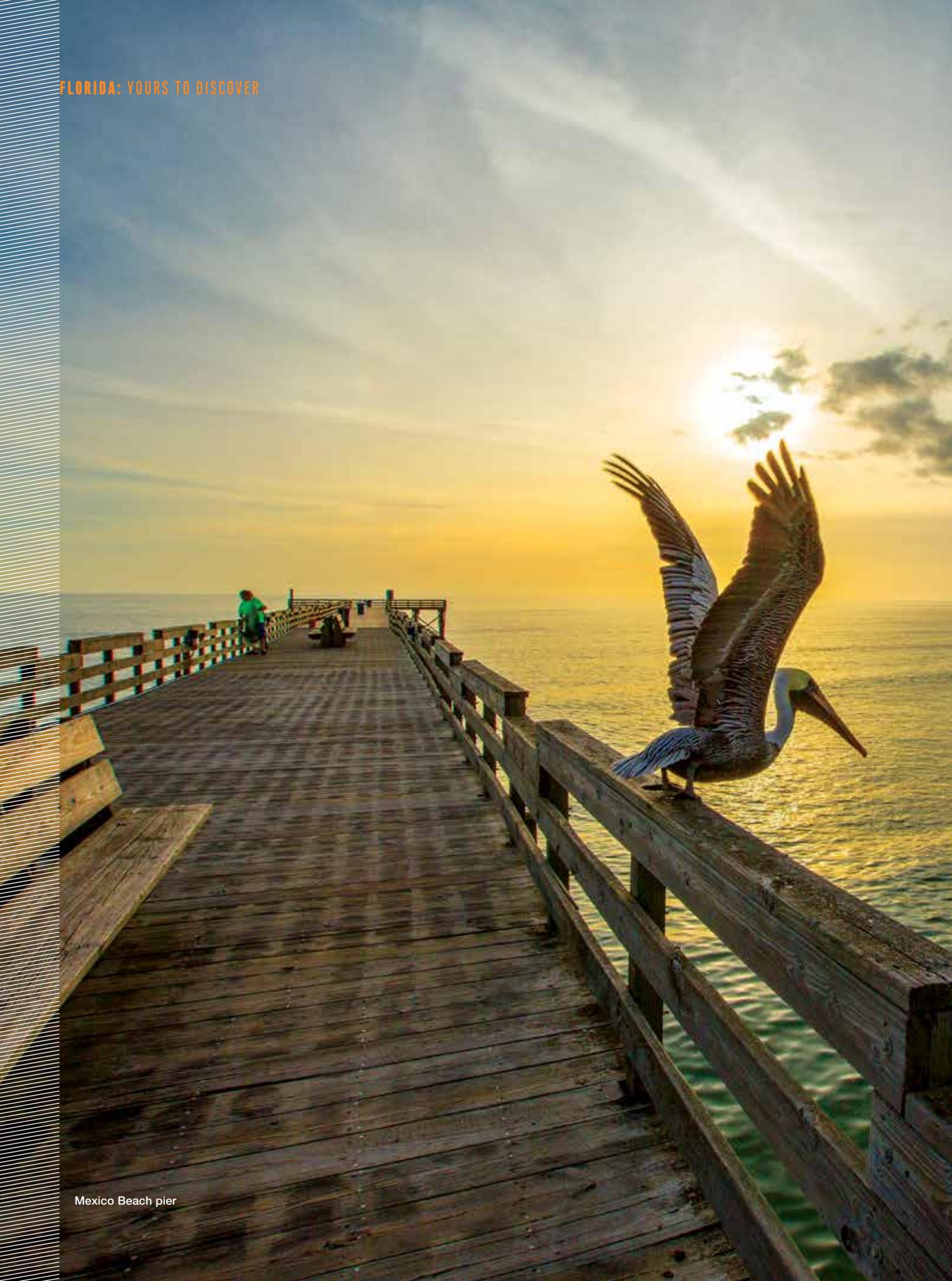


Old Seven Mile Bridge



Everglades National Park

FLORIDA: YOURS TO DISCOVER



Mexico Beach pier



Northwest Florida

.....
EMERALD COAST
MEXICO BEACH
PANAMA CITY BEACH
PENSACOLA
.....

BY CANDICE WALSH

Mexico Beach CDC



Panama City Beach



Panama City Beach diving

FOR BEACH BUMS

With 43 kilometres of sandy white beaches along the Gulf of Mexico, **Panama City Beach** might just be the most underrated beach destination in Northwest Florida. The city is home to two state parks, tons of public beach access points, and dozens of artificial reefs created for divers and snorkellers alike. Do yourself a favour and stay for the sunsets over the Gulf.

If you're like us, maybe you're just discovering the charms of **Mexico Beach**, too. Mexico Beach is a particularly rare gem: its sugar sand beaches are made up of quartz crystals, originating millions of years ago in the Appalachian Mountains. The

quartz crystals make the sand ultra-reflective, meaning the beaches here are cool, even during the hottest summer temperatures (refer back to pg. 26 for more).

We can't pass up an opportunity to rave about the Emerald Coast, and this time, we're focusing on **Henderson Beach State Park** in Destin. The shoreline here is dotted with dune rosemary and sand pines, and there's a lovely boardwalk for you to stroll at leisure. Otherwise, relax on the sand and enjoy the warm sand's embrace. This beach is pet-friendly.

Mexico Beach
is a particularly
rare gem: its sugar
sand beaches are
made up of quartz
crystals, originating
millions of years ago
in the Appalachian
Mountains.



Mexico Beach

Jamie Kingham, Romona Robbins/ Mexico Beach CDC



Pensacola Lighthouse and Museum



Alys Beach

FOR BIG SPENDERS

Spend a day getting pampered at the **Escape Wellness Spa**, voted the best spa in Pensacola. Here, you can splurge on everything from facials to body wraps, and of course, massages are always a good idea. If you're on a romantic vacation, spring for the couples' massage and sink into blissful relaxation.

In Fort Walton, book a vacation home at **Alys Beach** – a carefully crafted community where every single building, street and park space is designed to reflect the world's most beloved seaside towns. It's all about the details here. All streets orient to the beach, with views of the Gulf and Northwest Florida. The white stucco architecture draws influence from Bermuda, while the courtyards are characteristic of Antigua, Guatemala. Go to Caliza – dubbed one of the most elegant pools in the world.

If you'd rather spend your hard-earned money on shopping, head to **Pier Park** in Panama City Beach. This shopping centre is the absolute mecca when it comes to dining, speciality shops, boutiques, and other attractions. Take advantage of 124 shops, catch a movie at the Grand IMAX Theater, or maybe round it all off with some live music at Tootsies.



FOR ACTIVITY & ATTRACTION SEEKERS

In Pensacola, visit the **Pensacola Lighthouse and Museum**, one of the oldest lighthouses in Florida dating from 1859. You can climb to the top of the tower, or visit the restored keeper's quarters and the Richard C. Callaway Museum. Fun fact: The lighthouse is known to be haunted. Ask one of the guides for details!

Take the fam to **WonderWorks** at Panama City Beach, where education and entertainment are combined for a fun-filled and engaging experience. There are more than 100 interactive exhibits here, including a hurricane shack and virtual sports. Play a game of Mindball, or design your own rollercoaster. This place makes for a great way to spend a rainy afternoon.

Ever wonder how people make those epic multi-layered sandcastles? On the Emerald Coast, you can actually sign up for sandcastle lessons! **Beach Sand Sculptures** will bring all the sculpting tools to you for a two-hour hands-on session, and although this activity might sound like it's for the kids, adults will have a blast, too. Plus, the next time you're at the beach with friends, you can "wow" them with your artistic talent.



INSIDER TIP

"The Grand Marlin at Pensacola Beach and the Fish House or the Oar House near Downtown Pensacola are a few of our favourite open-air dining spots. On Perdido Key, you might try the Crab Trap, Flora-Bama Yacht Club, or Sunset Grille."

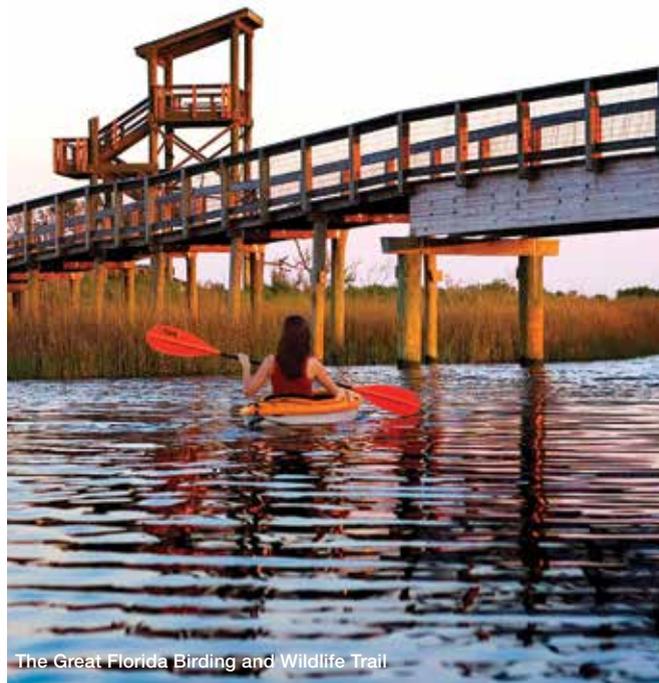
– Amy Minchin, travel writer,
@sandinmyminivan,
sandinmyminivan.com

FOR OUTDOOR & ADVENTURE ENTHUSIASTS

Pensacola is for the birds...literally. Bird watchers love this part of Northwest Florida, particularly for the opportunity to take photos of nesting osprey and migrating warblers. **The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail** is a network of 510 sites for viewing native and migrating birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.

In Mexico Beach, strap on your scuba gear and dive the area's natural and artificial reefs, as well as historical shipwreck sites. When it comes to shipwreck diving, check out the **Empire Mica** – a British steam tanker that was attacked and sunk by a German U-boat in 1942. The artificial reefs just offshore from the beach offer more than a few diving opportunities to keep you busy.

Are you a geocaching junkie? On the Emerald Coast, hit the **Okaloosa County Geocache Trail** for a fun day of exploration. At each cache, you'll find containers with a logbook inside, or little trinkets to take with you. Refer to the Okaloosa County website to print out an official passport to start tracking down all the geocaches on the trail. Track down 20 of them, and you might just earn a special Okaloosa County Geocache Trail coin.



The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail



Eat like a local in Pensacola, where staples like **Jerry's Drive-In** have been serving up good 'ol Americana grub since 1939. It became known for its carhop-style bacon cheeseburgers, and although it's no longer a real drive-in, the burgers, fries, onion rings, and milkshakes are famous. For some (slightly) lighter fare, try the barbecued goods at **City Grocery** – you can't miss the enormous iron smoker outside. Try the rib platter. If you're in the Perdido Key area, grab some wings and

sandwiches at **Hub Stacey's**. People often pull up by boat at **Galvez Landing** and enjoy live music and drinks here.

Waterfront dining is king in Panama City Beach, especially for the fresh seafood options at **Barefoot Hideaway Grill**, including giant shrimp tacos and blackened mahi mahi sandwiches. **Harpoon Harry's** is another favourite, especially for its casual dining area right on the beach. Grab a beach chair and a tropical frozen drink, and relax Northwest Florida-style.

FOR THE FOODIES

For a perfect introduction to South Walton's foodie scene, start your evening on the town with appetizers and cocktails. Grab some local seafood and meats at **723 Whiskey Bravo**, along with a wine from their extensive list. For Latin flavours, check out **Abrazo** for tequila cocktails and try their small plates of wood grilled octopus, or pork tacos.

DID YOU KNOW...

It might be no surprise to learn that it's the surrounding vibrant emerald green waters that gives the Emerald Coast its name. Travellers interested in a perfect beach vacation should look no further than the beachside cities of Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island. Accommodation options include budget to luxury, hotel rooms to condominiums and of course, quintessential beach houses.



Barefoot Hideaway Grill



Love
the Beach

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THINGS TO DO

Looking for a unique reason to plan a Florida vacation? Here are a few one-of-a-kind events taking place throughout the year

LEESBURG MARDI GRAS

Downtown Leesburg
Feb. 3, 2018

No need for New Orleans when you can enjoy the sounds, colours – and dare we say smells – of Mardi Gras from the Sunshine State.

leesburgmardigras.com

ART WYNWOOD

Art Miami Pavilion, Miami
Feb. 15 – 19, 2018

More than 70 top international galleries showcase their art while showcasing the Wynwood district of Miami as world-class for culture enthusiasts.

art-wynwood.com

BIKE WEEK

Daytona Beach
Mar. 9 – 18, 2018

A Daytona Beach tradition for nearly 80 years, this is a 10-day party for motorcycle enthusiasts and spring breakers.

officialbikeweek.com

FUNK FEST

Central Florida
Fairgrounds, Orlando
Dates TBD

Look forward to top acts at this all-evening outdoor show, where you'll see a line-up that combines old and new school rhythm and blues.

funkfesttour.com

FLEET WEEK

Port Everglades, Fort Lauderdale
April 30 – May 6, 2018

Be part of the welcoming party in Fort Lauderdale for active Navy and Coast Guard vessels and get to see ships, or simply enjoy the city with service men and women.

browardnavydaysinc.org



COUNTRY 500

Daytona International
Speedway, Daytona Beach
May 25 – 27, 2018

Join top country music artists for this Memorial Day weekend party, which takes place over three days and nights.

country500.com

BILLY BOWLEGS PIRATE FESTIVAL

Fort Walton Beach
June 1 – 2, 2018

Having roots dating back to the 1950s, the Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival is not only a Fort Walton favourite but also fun for the whole family, with different events, including a Pirate Pub Crawl, Fireworks and Torchlight Parade.

billybowlegsfestival.com



ST. PETE PRIDE

St. Petersburg
June 20 – 24, 2018

It's one of the largest LGBT pride celebrations in the southeast U.S., featuring artists, musicians, fashion designers, community leaders, business owners and activists.

stpetepride.com

THE KEY LIME FESTIVAL



Various locations
in Key West
June 30 – July 4, 2018

Celebrating Florida's official state pie, you'll be sure to find your fair share of pie eating and pie making contests...though samplings of Keys-distilled rum (served with lime) are just as easy to come by.

keylimefestival.com

TAMPA BAY COMIC CON

Tampa Convention Center,
Downtown Tampa
Aug. 3 – 5, 2018



Get your geek on at the Tampa Bay area's most well-known and long-running "cons" where comic book junkies will find cosplay, celebrity guests, toys and graphic novels, an electronic gaming arena and a "game cave."

tampabaycomiccon.com

EPCOT INTERNATIONAL FOOD & WINE FESTIVAL

Walt Disney World Epcot
Dates TBD

"Dine around the world" with tasting events and big-name entertainment at this annual Epcot event, where you can also opt to take part in culinary demonstrations and seminars on mixology, beverages and cheeses.

disneyworld.disney.go.com

ANNUAL DING DARLING DAYS

J. N. Ding Darling National Wildlife
Refuge, Sanibel Island
Oct. 12 – 14, 2018

Eco-activities are of course the focus during the 30th annual Ding Darling Days in this national wildlife refuge. Tour on foot, via kayak or paddle boards, with options for birding and kids crafting.

dingdarlingsociety.org

NASCAR'S FORD CHAMPIONSHIP WEEKEND

Homestead Miami
Speedway, Homestead
Nov. 16, 2018



Be part of the fun as all three of NASCAR's premier racing series crowns (Sprint Cup, Nationwide and Camping World Trucks) will be decided in one weekend. Upgrade your experience with the Pre-Race Pit Pass.

homesteadmiamispeedway.com

FOO FOO FESTIVAL

Various venues, Pensacola
Dates TBD

At this 12-day celebration of arts and culture, you'll be sure to find one-of-a-kind events like Science on the Street, Pop-Up Hot Shop: Glass Blowing on the Move, the Great Gulf Coast Arts Festival and the Clean Energy Fest.

foofoofest.com

BeallsFlorida.com

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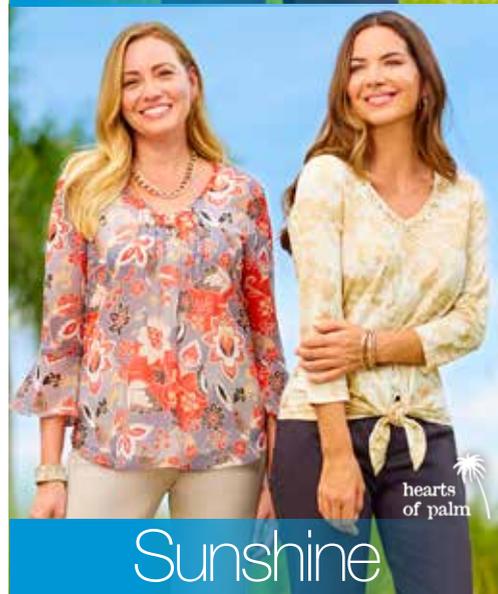
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IZOD
GOLF

Tee Time



hearts
of palm

Sunshine



Coastal Home

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Middle of Everywhere
STARTS HERE



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