

TRAVEL & CULTURE

YOUR GUIDE TO THE SOUTH NOW

LONG WEEKEND

You Really Need a Florida Getaway

Escape the chill at these coastal destinations, all close to major airports yet worlds apart

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HAIR: MAKEUP & WARDROBE STYLING: CENNIE RUSSELL; ZENOBIA; PROP STYLING: RAJINA KATTELSON/BIG LEO

Winter, begone!
Head for sand
and sun at Bean
Point Beach in
Anna Maria.

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**GETTING THERE****Airports of choice:** Tampa International Airport (TPA) and Sarasota Bradenton International Airport (SRQ)**Average February high:** 74°F**THE THROWBACK**
ANNA MARIA ISLAND

“What a Florida postcard!” developer Will Bean must have thought over 100 years ago, seeing this seahorse-shaped, 7-mile-long barrier island with white sand washed by the sparkling waves of the Gulf of Mexico on the west and lapped by the deep blue bay waters to the east. It would be an irresistible escape for winter-weary Northerners, for folks fleeing yellow fever in Tampa just up the coast, and for anyone else who sought a ticket to paradise.

Inheriting the land from his father (Anna Maria Island’s first homesteader) in 1892, Bean worked with fellow promoter and developer Charles Roser to make the island into an escape ready for investment.

With a knack for publicity, he even purchased exotic seashells to secretly scatter along the beaches every night so tourists would find them—and write home of this shell-seeker’s dream.

That meant a boom in the early 20th century: a cottage-lined main street leading to a long pier that welcomed steamship-borne travelers, and later

tidy plats of cinder block-and-concrete houses for snowbirds and beach motels scattered like Monopoly properties along that gorgeous shore. And then that was it, really. While beaches to the north and south surged with high-rises in the seventies and later, Anna Maria Island tapped the brakes. So now, to arrive here in

Clockwise from right: Anna Maria Island’s vintage Bungalow Beach Resort; Pink & Navy Boutique; the popular Sandbar, where the seafood and cocktails are matched only by the sunsets



Clockwise from top: On Anna Maria Island, rent toys from Beach Bums, meet locals at Bean Point, and try the treats at The Donut Experiment.

the 21st century is to greet that older landscape. It’s no wonder that folks who’ve caught on to the island’s quiet delights cling tightly to them.

Spend a few nights at Bamboo Apartments (which owner Alice Sutton’s grandparents built in 1971) or the 1916 beachfront cottage on the property, and you instantly hear the whisper of Old Florida. “My grandmother had one phone for the whole place,” Sutton says. “She’d run out to the beach to see if her guests wanted to take a call when it came in. They usually didn’t!” It’s easy to see why:

With a small knoll of sand and sea oats breaking to a wide beach infused with western breezes and rolling waves, it still feels like Sutton has the only phone on the island. And there’s no need to take any calls, thank you.

Three towns dot Anna Maria Island’s length. Each requires slow driving (25 mph in most cases) and displays its wares with ready ease. At the north end sits the city of Anna Maria anchored by Pine Avenue, Bean’s original then-sand-and-seashell main street that bisects the island. Here, brightly painted restored homes and

mercantile buildings from the original boom now hold charming markets, galleries, bakeries, museums, bike shops, restaurants, and (naturally) vacation-rental offices. At first glance so beautifully old-fashioned, this place offers some of the most decidedly on-trend spots: Poppo’s Taqueria, where they make tortillas by hand and have local kombucha and beer on draft; The Donut Experiment with wildly original combinations of toppings; and boutiques with of-the-moment clothing. In Anna Maria’s Historic Green Village is a group of old buildings retrofitted with solar panels and rainwater cisterns to become a net-zero community. It’s proof that you can live the Florida life—and even stay cool—without wasting resources.

While Pine Avenue hums with the old and the new simultaneously, just up the road, the island’s iconic circa-1950 Rod & Reel Pier holds onto a timeless now with its narrow, weathered dock leading to a double-decker building (with seafood above and a bar below), all of it surrounded by a coterie of fishermen along with like-minded egrets, herons, gulls, and pelicans.

And the wonders roll on. In Anna Maria’s slender midsection, the town of Holmes Beach is ground zero for



GETTING THERE

Airports of choice: Orlando Melbourne International Airport (MLB), Orlando International Airport (MCO), and Palm Beach International Airport (PBI)

Average February high: 74°F



At Sandbar:
Tampa Bay Clams
& Head-On Shrimp

ogling mid-century Florida homes and plying old-school souvenir shops and beach bars. Farther south, Bradenton Beach holds at its heart the short, fun-loving Bridge Street—a salty complement to Pine Avenue—with a tiny miniature golf course, seafood joints, waterfront bars with thatched tiki perches, and its own pier that culminates in a fine oyster house with views up and down the bay.

With dozens of short public pathways to get to the Anna Maria beaches, the choices seem almost dizzying—and they're all fantastic. Pick the access closest to you, take an umbrella for shade, and occupy your slice of Gulf Coast paradise. Or spend a day at Anna Maria's southern tip at Coquina Beach, famed for its wide stretches of sand and flanks of palms. Or make a pilgrimage at dusk to Bean Point at the north tip of the island to watch the sun drop into the Gulf while its waters play with the wavelets from Tampa Bay. See legions of terns hunker down, facing into the breeze in such a way that they look as if they've come to take in the sunset. Watch as a great blue heron arrives to stalk a shore fisherman who has left his bait unattended while he takes a dip in the peach-tinted waters. "What a Florida postcard!" you might think. And you wouldn't be wrong.

ANNA MARIA ISLAND

The Beach Report

WHERE TO EAT

There's no better breakfast on the island than at **Ginny's & Jane E's**, an eye-popping, warmhearted restaurant and marketplace in Anna Maria. Everything is cooked from scratch, the outsize cinnamon rolls are legend, and the shopping is irresistible. (Florida ornament for next Christmas? Check.) Also on the sweet side, Pine Avenue's **The Donut Experiment** will layer your cakey confection with a variety of frostings and wild toppings (including Fruity Pebbles), and **The Waffle Press** plates smallish takeaway waffles with toppings like Key lime. Nearby, **Poppo's Taqueria** does incredibly fresh tacos, quesadillas, bowls, and burritos. Then at happy hour, **The Waterfront Restaurant** near City Pier mixes the island's best cocktails. For beach-bar-style fun, head straight for the **Bridge Tender Inn** in Bradenton Beach or **The Ugly Grouper** in Holmes Beach. Dinner-time at the **Sandbar** restaurant is a revelation: a toes-in-the-sand spot with a stunning sunset view of the Gulf along with topflight locally sourced seafood and more. (Its sister location, **Beach House Restaurant** in Bradenton Beach, offers similar pleasures.)

WHERE TO STAY

In Holmes Beach, the **Bamboo Apartments** are an Old Florida treasure right on the sand and steps away from the island's free trolley stop. Done up with vintage-style rattan and wicker, all five units are delights; the original 1916 duplex cottage lined in heart pine (including the ceiling and floors) is nostalgic perfection. Other motels bursting with charm include **Cedar**

Cove Resort & Cottages, Haley's Motel, Bungalow Beach Resort, and SeaSide Beach Resort.

WHERE TO SHOP

You can spend at least a day mining the goods in and around Pine Avenue. Look for Spartina 449 tunics and caftans at **The Egret's Nest**, fun Draper James looks at **Pink & Navy Boutique**, and Lilly Pulitzer resort wear at **The Island Cabana**. **The Studio at Gulf and Pine** features local artists and has beautiful and affordable options. **The Anna Maria General Store** is an ideal spot to scout for treats from this area.

WHERE TO PLAY

Morning yoga is offered year-round on Saturdays and Sundays at the Pine Avenue public beach access (voluntary contribution) and is a wonderful way to greet the day. Rent bikes and more gear for the week in Anna Maria at **Beach Bums Island Attitude** and **Lazy Turtle Beach Rentals**. They'll set you up to get outside.



On Two Wheels:
Anna Maria is a biker's dream.

Clockwise from top:
Seagrape Trail Beach
Access; Kimpton Vero
Beach Hotel & Spa;
calamari and vegan
flatbread from Cobalt

THE HIDEAWAY
VERO BEACH

It's a low-key tropical escape for millionaires (and billionaires) who want to relax out of the spotlight of Palm Beach and Miami to the south. This is where celebs can stroll the public boardwalk and no one makes a fuss. It's been called the Hamptons of Florida, home to upmarket boutiques, wine bars, and spas.

It's also home to Bibble Irvin. You can find the sixty-something surfer and artist at **Waldo's Restaurant & Bar**, a beloved establishment constructed of driftwood smack-dab in the center of Vero. He'll be offering handwoven palm-frond hats for sale while talking



over news of the day with local citrus farmers and real estate developers alike. Quirky, outspoken, and utterly Floridian, Irvin is as much Vero Beach as the latest tycoon to get hooked on its unique blend of sophistication and authentic, flip-flop fun. That's what makes this delightful discovery feel like home to all manner of travelers—



everyone here ends up at the funky heart of Vero Beach.

And everything feels so close and interrelated. Base your days at the indulgence-worthy digs of the **Kimpton Vero Beach Hotel & Spa**—



Clockwise from above: The Twig swim and sportswear shop, housed in an Old Florida gem; McKee Botanical Garden; El Sid Taqueria's citrus slushy



complete with an intimate pool (and beach bar), a serene spa, and lounge-dotted pale sands with polite attendants ready to get you all set with sporty toys to play in the sea. But then you can slip on your sandals and stroll south into shopping-centric Vero, mining fresh shift dresses from Lilly Pulitzer or bright board shorts from Australian brand Tom & Teddy. You can feel very right now, capping off your hunting and gathering with a trip to the Vero Beach Museum of Art and dipping into Cuban food and upscale cocktails at Gloria Estefan's chic Costa d'Este Beach Resort & Spa. That would all be divine, but just as easily, you can swing onto the mainland side of Vero Beach and visit a fourth-generation citrus

farm such as Schacht Groves, where they're harvesting and squeezing juices before your eyes. As you stroll among the trees and taste just how much better Indian River County citrus tastes than any other, you'll appreciate how this agricultural juggernaut rose to prominence in the mid-1900s and never looked back. Then, keeping with the botanical mood, dive into what feels like the verdant heart of Vero Beach, the resplendent McKee Botanical Garden. Built in 1932 by Arthur G. McKee and visionary pioneer Waldo E. Sexton on acres of tropical hammock as the McKee

Jungle Gardens (once home to exotic animals such as chimpanzees), this place maintains the labyrinthine magic of the original conceit and feels like a true Florida wonderland.

From there, it's a no-brainer: Go back to the barrier island part of town, to the beachfront, where Sexton built his family a home out of driftwood and other found objects. Now, that house forms part of The Driftwood Resort, a masterpiece of whimsy and quirk. Waldo's Restaurant & Bar, named for Sexton, sits on the property. You could hang out there and see if Irvin is making hats today or head down the



Dockside fun:
Find water access on the Historic Jungle Trail.

road to the Ocean Grill—yet another Sexton-constructed palace of reused boards, found art, and layers of decor. Sit at the restaurant’s bar, which perches right over the Atlantic’s restless water, and enjoy some of the best crab cakes you’ve ever tasted. Caught in the Indian River Lagoon, the crab is sweet, buttery, and fresh. Across the bar, you might spy a jet-setting couple who look like the world’s happiest escapees from Palm Beach. Nod and salute them with your Pusser’s Painkiller cocktail, because everyone in Vero is part of the hide-away gang—here for the surf, for the citrus, and simply for the wonderful time of it all.



VERO BEACH

The Beach Report

WHERE TO EAT

Have breakfast at the **Lemon Tree**, an old-fashioned cafe with delicious lemon-blueberry pancakes. For lunch or dinner, **El Sid Taqueria** is a great new outgrowth of **Countryside**

Citrus, one of the powerhouse growers and markets in Vero Beach. For dinner, **Cobalt** at Kimpton Vero Beach Hotel & Spa applies a gentle Venezuelan influence to fresh seafood, and at **The Wave Kitchen & Bar** at Costa d’Este resort, co-owner Gloria Estefan’s Cuban roots shine on the menu. Save time for tasty pours at **Orchid Island Brewery** and for **Grind + Grape**, a coffeehouse by day and sophisticated little bar by night.

local coordinator to responsibly participate in sea turtle watches during nesting season (generally March 1 through October 31). Outside lights are lowered after sunset to help hatchlings navigate to the sea.

WHERE TO SHOP

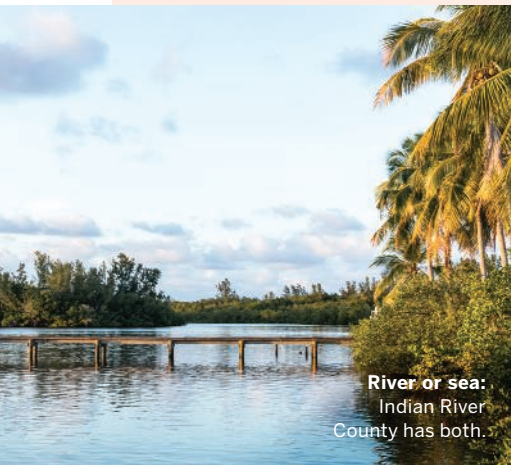
Don’t miss **The Lazy Daisy**, **The Twig**, **The Beach Shop**, **Schacht Groves**, and **Countryside Citrus**.

WHERE TO PLAY

Explore the Indian River Lagoon and its dolphins, birdlife, and mangrove tunnels with the splendid folks at **Vero Tackle & Watersports**, who’ll take you out on guided kayak or paddleboard tours or rent you the equipment for DIY journeys.

WHERE TO STAY

At the northern end of downtown Vero Beach, the **Kimpton Vero Beach Hotel & Spa** wraps all the ideals of an exotic getaway in its stylish embrace—pool, spa, outfitter, bar, and excellent restaurants. The resort partners with a



River or sea:
Indian River County has both.



GETTING THERE

Airports of choice: Tallahassee International Airport (TLH) and Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) **Average February high:** 66°F



THE RIVER TOWN APALACHICOLA

There are discoveries, and then there are *discoveries*. You know you're onto something as U.S. 98 slides southeast down the coast from Panama City. After heading inland briefly past flanks of longleaf and slash pines, you find yourself rolling more slowly past stately antebellum homes until you arrive at a pristine 19th-century downtown. Just beyond is a sky blue waterway dotted with shrimp boats.

You meander downtown, amazed by what you see: a craft brewpub; a Charleston, South Carolina-worthy boutique with beautiful clothing; an

upscale outfitter with fishing rods and fashionable outdoor wear; antiques stores; and art galleries. On a corner is a deep-porched inn that feels like the coolest spot to stay on the Panhandle.

Welcome to Apalachicola, Florida's stunning surprise, the little up-and-comer. Here lies a tiny city that has endured booms and busts. First a thriving cotton and lumber port, then a center of the Gulf's oyster fishery (which crashed precipitously in 2012), it has, in the last decade, quietly built itself up. Inventive entrepreneurship has turned it into a sweet and stylish getaway that blends those downtown delights with proximity to some of the coast's most remarkable wild beaches.

Make no mistake: Apalachicola is

having a moment. You can feel it in the vibe of The Gibson Inn. Built in 1907, this historic property was bought in 2018 by a pair of thirty-something siblings—Steven Etchen and Katharine Couillard—who grew up coming here with their parents and enjoying Shirley Temples on these very porches. “We have loved this place forever,” says Couillard, “so when it looked like we could buy it and enhance its potential while maintaining its authenticity, we leaped at the chance.”

With the design-savvy vision of the pair, the interiors now vibrate with a modern sensibility that nods to nostalgia—deep leather sofas in the lobby, the occasional taxidermy, plus nautical and Florida motifs in the wallpapers. A revitalized bar offers craft cocktails along with longneck beers, and the house restaurant—The Franklin—takes a fun and updated culinary approach that emphasizes



Clockwise from above: Apalachicola's famous bivalves, served at The Franklin; the view from Up the Creek Raw Bar; chef Ken Lumpkin of The Franklin



APALACHICOLA

The Beach Report

WHERE TO EAT

After the oyster crash of 2012, a new wave of farmers is bringing the beloved delicacy back. Get local varieties consistently at **The Franklin** and **Up the Creek Raw Bar**. This is also shrimp country, and the catch is done up right at **Apalachicola Seafood Grill**, a historic corner-store-style lunchroom with just enough kitsch to keep it real (don't miss the mustardy potato salad). Nearby, the **Oyster City Brewing Company** has excellent craft beers.

WHERE TO STAY

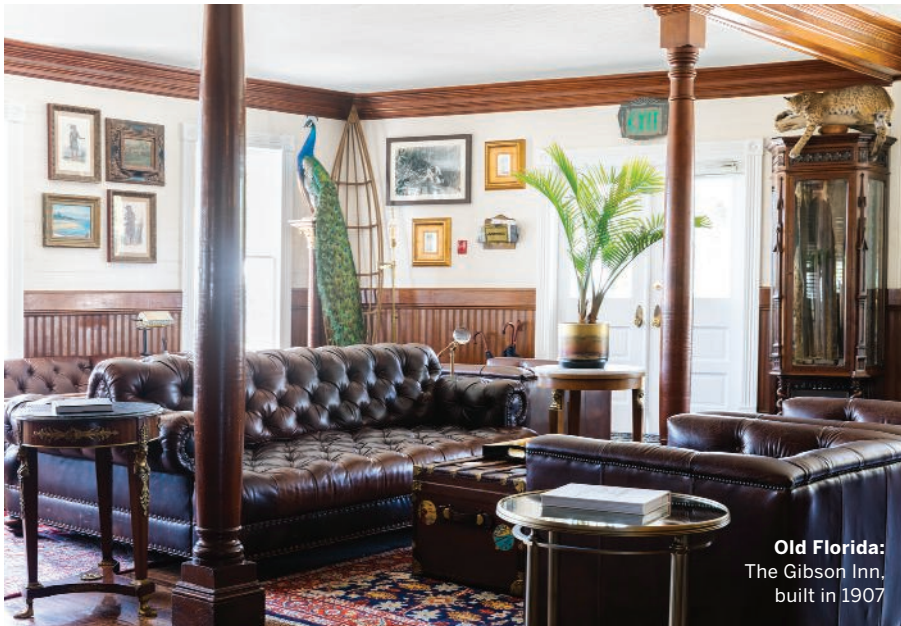
Recently restored and updated, **The Gibson Inn** is a modern historic gem. Spend happy hour with locals at the Parlor Bar (try a Gibson Breeze, their signature cocktail).

WHERE TO SHOP

From the vintage maritime riot at **The Tin Shed Nautical & Antiques** to the fashionable but approachable boutiques **Becasa** (featuring owner and designer Emily Raffield's timeless and trend-forward pieces) and **S&G Threads**, downtown has every retail niche covered. Your shopping list: **Apalach Outfitters**, **The Grady Market**, and **Downtown Books & Purl**. Keep your eyes peeled for the local variety of Florida tupelo honey, rare and highly valued for its silky texture and rich flavor.

WHERE TO PLAY

Explore the Apalachicola River estuary aboard the **Half Shell**, a refashioned classic Apalachicola oyster boat, with renowned guide and captain Gibby Conrad.



Old Florida:
The Gibson Inn,
built in 1907

locally sourced oysters and fresh-caught seafood. Evenings downstairs at The Gibson Inn are themselves a marvelous blend of everything that is Apalachicola—old-timers parked at the bar and longtime visitors and families settling in for dinner, all mixing with happy travelers who know they're onto something really special.

While the abundant charms of Apalachicola could keep anyone occupied for a long weekend (you

could spend days just rambling The Tin Shed Nautical & Antiques), what lies nearby also lures.

There's perhaps no wilder place than Cape San Blas and the St. Joseph Peninsula, a delicate spit of sand that arcs out from the mainland just west of Apalachicola and parallels the coast for about 20 windswept miles of high dunes and untrammelled beaches. Partway out the peninsula, in fact, is where 2018's Hurricane Michael came ashore with such ferocity that it carved a navigable channel across the spit before it savaged Mexico Beach. Already, though, the slash is filling back up with sand as nature resets itself, and now the place feels wilder than ever.

Similarly, the waters reaching inland from Apalachicola—the river that shares its name—are potent places to experience that aching wildness that defines the ancient Panhandle of Florida. It's an Audubon escapist fantasy to go upriver here, even for a few hours, and to feel yourself the lucky explorer, the discoverer of a small and beautiful world. **SL**



Local goods:
Emily Raffield's
Becasa boutique