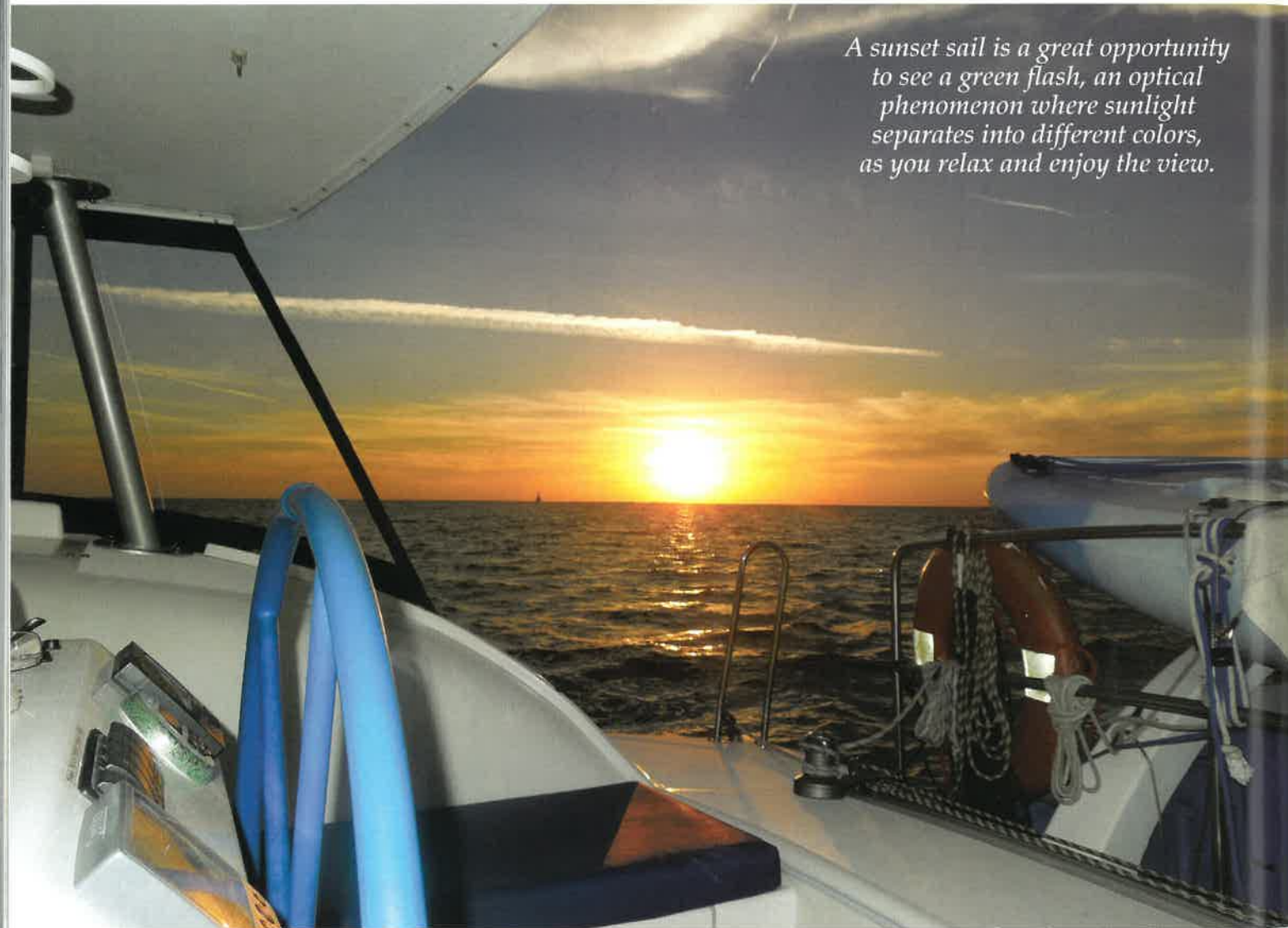


A SOUTHERN STAYCATION

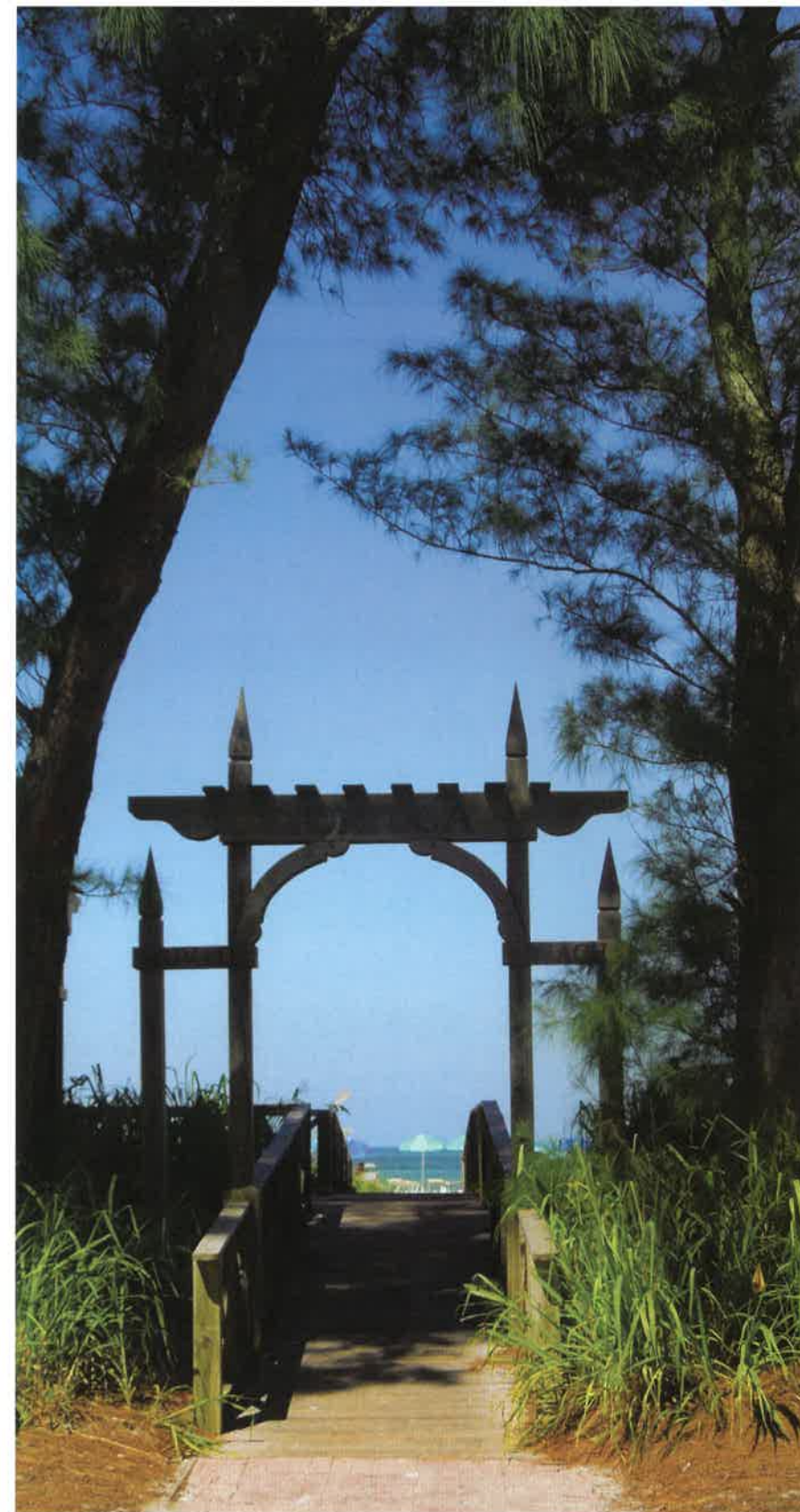
Bradenton and Anna Maria Island

By Margaret Word Burnside and Aaron R. Fodiman
Photography by Gram and Noraa



A sunset sail is a great opportunity to see a green flash, an optical phenomenon where sunlight separates into different colors, as you relax and enjoy the view.

Anna Maria Island is a great place for a local getaway. So we hopped in the car, put the top down and headed over the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. In a little over an hour, we were relaxing in a two-bedroom, luxury suite at the Tortuga Inn Beach Resort. We immediately felt at home, as it was decorated and equipped exactly as we would have done it ourselves. This cozy resort offered us the Old Florida privacy we were hoping to enjoy.



The entrance to the beach at the Tortuga Resort is built in the style of the resort's large pergola.

Anna Maria Island, a little over an hour from Tampa Bay, is a relaxing spot for a quick getaway.

For our first venture, we headed to Pine Avenue, a heritage area that features shops, 1920s era cottages and the historic Anna Maria Island Jail. Our stroll also took us to the Anna Maria City Pier, which was built in 1911 to accommodate steamships and 776-foot-long paddle wheelers. At the nearby Waterfront Restaurant (its real name), we enjoyed a tasty Old Florida-style lunch, while looking out at the calm water from this charming converted home.

We stopped at the Olive Oil Outpost to pick up some nibbles for the sunset cruise we had booked to Egmont Key and the south side of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. The store's owner Kelly Kary selected some marvelous cheeses and other goodies and introduced us to Tim Norwood of Sea Salt Florida, who is harvesting sea salt from the local waters. We then took our artisanal snacks and some wine and headed to the marina in Holmes Beach for a sail aboard a catamaran. At sunset, we watched for the elusive green flash, which failed to appear. Perhaps we had not had enough wine, either that or the atmospheric conditions were not right. Either way, we docked ready to dine at the Beach Bistro's sister restaurant Eat Here, where we delighted in the innovative cuisine we knew we would find there.



The Tortuga Beach Resort has the relaxed charm that made Old Florida so popular. The property also has a private white sand beach on the Gulf of Mexico and three heated swimming pools.

The next day, after a blissful night at our lodging, we had breakfast at Ginny's and Jane E's, a local eclectic mix of the old and creative, along with a bakery and café. The Crème Brûlée French Toast was divine. After returning to our suite, we walked across the street and had a couples massage under a tiki hut on the beach from Sea-
renity, a beach spa and eco-boutique that

is located on Bridge Street. At this point, we were so relaxed, we felt as though we had been on vacation for a week. For lunch, we chose the newly renovated Beach House Waterfront Restaurant, where you can literally eat with your toes in the sand. The location's mesmerizing view was the perfect setting for a meal that featured fine local cuisine in a glamorous setting. We

then left the beach to visit the South Florida Museum with its Bishop Planetarium and Parker Manatee Aquarium, which had been the home to Snooty the Manatee for 68 years and still has other manatees. There is always something new at the museum that will appeal to you, whatever your age. We were fascinated by two back-to-back presentations in the planetarium. ▶

Dioramas such as this one at the South Florida Museum and astronomy programs in the museum's planetarium make this one of our favorite attractions in this area.



This Florida creature reminds us to keep a safe distance.

Our Recommendations

Lodging

Tortuga Beach Resort
1325 Gulf Drive N.
Bradenton, Beach, FL
(941) 778-6611

Dining

Beach Bistro
6600 Gulf Drive
Holmes Beach, FL
(941) 778-6444

Eat Here
5315 Gulf Drive
Holmes Beach, FL
(941) 778-0411

The Doctor's Office
5312 Holmes Blvd. #B
Holmes Beach, FL
(941) 213-9926

Arte Caffé
930 12th St. W.
West Bradenton, FL
(941) 750-9309

Beach House
200 Gulf Drive N.
Bradenton Beach, FL
(941) 779-2222

The Waterfront Restaurant & Craft Bar
111 S. Bay Blvd.
Anna Maria Island, FL
(941) 778-1515



At the Beach House Restaurant, you can dine with your toes in the sand, as you enjoy tide-to-table items, along with local produce.



Far left: Colorado lamb chops are among the favorites of those who dine at the Beach Bistro.

At left: Lobster Tacos at the Eat Here restaurant are as good as they look.

Attractions and other Things to Do

Ginny's and Jane E's
9807 Gulf Drive
Anna Maria Island, FL
(941) 778-3170

Village of the Arts
(941) 747-8056

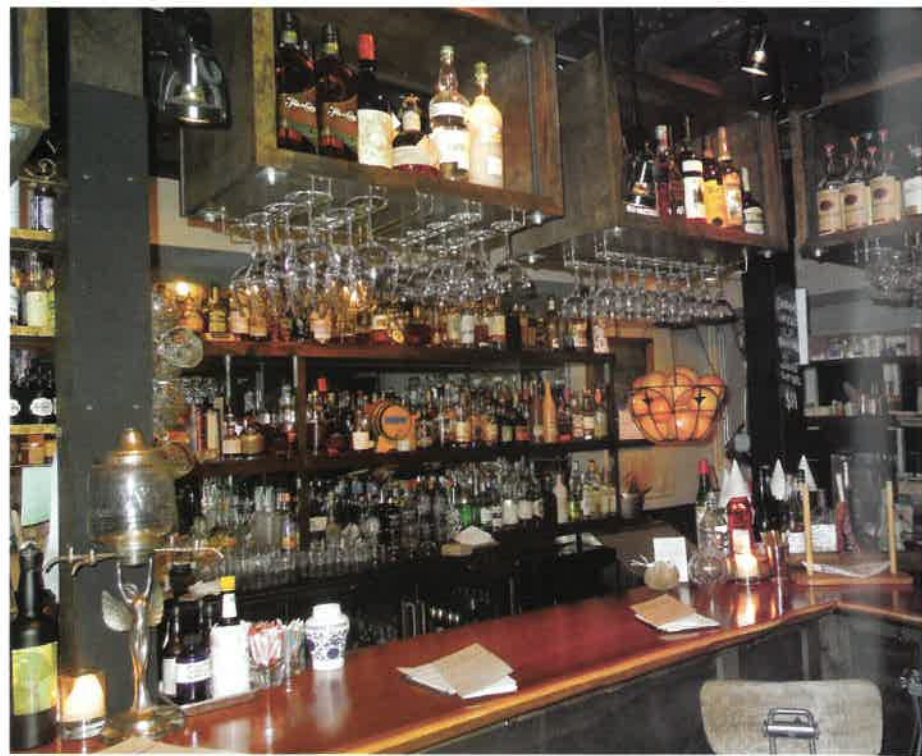
Sunset Sail
Kathleen D Sailing
Catamarans
(941) 896-6400

Sea-renity Beach Spa
(941) 779-6836

South Florida Museum
201 10th St. West
Bradenton, FL
(941) 740-4131

Olive Oil Outpost
401 Pine Ave.
Anna Maria Island, FL
(941) 896-3132

The absolute highlight of our visit was dinner at the Beach Bistro.



The Doctor's Office bar specializes in "prescriptions" based on gin, vodka, tequila, rum, whiskey and other mood adjusters.

The exhibits in the museum captivated us, as we viewed a vast array of Florida history.

The absolute highlight of our visit was dinner at the Beach Bistro, which is one of the best restaurants in Florida according to both of us and Zagat, which says it is one of the best in America. We often drive here for dinner and return home, thinking that we should do this more often. However, since we were staying on the island, we went for a nightcap at the Doctor's Office, so named because it was once the office of the island's doctor. It is another creation of Sean Murphy, who owns the Beach Bistro and Eat Here restaurants with his wife Susan. The classic crafted cocktails and exceptional bar fare have made the Doctor's Office the most popular watering hole in the area. You can't really say you have been to the island if you haven't had a drink there.

After that full evening, we slept late the next day, ready to return home. But before we did so, we wanted to see Bradenton's Village of the Arts that is located just south of downtown. It is a community of galleries, studios, specialty shops, restaurants and other ventures, which are housed in colorful 1920s cottages. Our first stop there was at the wonderful Arte Caffé where Chef Remo Mambelli and his wife Meridith serve exquisite Italian fare and baked goods. After lunch, we visited many artists who were selling their own creations or operating galleries that featured a wide variety of works by other artists. We vowed to return to the Village of the Arts on a First Friday or Saturday of the month, when their vibrant art walks draw thousands of visitors. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information on lodging and events, contact BradentonGulfIslands.com.



The Arte Caffé in Bradenton's Village of the Arts is one of the many businesses that make this vibrant community of artists so appealing.

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