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2023 | Issue Seventeen







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from the publisher LOVE, TRAVEL, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

In the face of all the challenges of recent years, this difficult time has had its upsides. For many of us, it has been epiphany-rich—especially in terms of what makes us happy. Here are two takeaways I'd like to share and, if possible, connect. Both are conclusions of recent studies on happiness.

The findings of the first are from of the landmark 2017 Harvard Study of Adult Development which reveals that, above all else, happiness is related to the number and depth of our relationships. The more people we have in our lives who care deeply for us, the happier we are. Also true: The more people we deeply care for, the happier we are. And this dynamic is only enhanced as we grow older.

The findings of the second study, published in 2021 by the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, are actually based on several separate consumer surveys. The results mark a 76% increase over the course of a decade in Americans who say experience-related purchases are more valuable than material purchases.

Both insights, I would suggest, support the recent surge in travel among Americans. We want to share the experience of travel with those we deeply care for because this is what makes us happy. We know this in our bones.

Happiness, of course, is defined as a sensation—and it's fleeting. But it's surely more than that. It's central to who we are as human beings, and especially as Americans. The pursuit of it, we believe, is an inalienable right, just as fundamental as life and liberty.

And at its core, the pursuit of happiness is what BeachLife is all about.

We begin this issue with **the dream of owning a vacation home rental**. What does it take to make the dream a reality? From here, we head off with **Captain Andy Coleman of Backwater Tours** to explore the **Choctawhatchee River**—an untouched realm few ever see. We then head east for the charming bay town of **Port St. Joe**. Next, **Sandcastle Coach Rick Mungeam** shares his expert tips for creating your own work of art. Then we're off to Choctawhatchee Bay, where we investigate its **mysterious pilings and their little-known Cold War history**.

Next, we're on a mission of discovery, in search of our favorite **local restaurants with water views**. Our water-themed journey continues with an introduction to the local **bottlenose dolphin** population, as well as Florida's largest reptile, **the alligator**. From here, we learn all about **sun safety** with the nonprofit **Helm's Hope**. Of course, a vacation on the Emerald Coast wouldn't be complete without a stop at Bud and Alley's rooftop bar, where we're introduced to everyone's favorite bartender, **Mo Mosley**. Finally, we take a moment to learn more about **Sandcastle Kids** and its healing mission.

With that, I'll sign off with a toast to our everlasting commitment to love, happiness—and, of course, vacation. So cheers! Travel inspired. Travel well. Travel on.



Nathan Henris PUBLISHER

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From Beach Home to VACATION RENTAL what it takes to make it happen

by Alex Curry

he first three years of the 2020s have been like no other time for the travel industry especially within the sphere of lodging. Within this space, the vacation home rental has proven, by far, to be the most surprising. A couple of things have happened. First, millions of Americans were introduced to the vacation home rental concept. And they fell in love with the experience.

Something else has happened within this space something equally profound. The experience introduced vacation rental guests to the dream of becoming vacation rental owners.

What exactly is the dream?

To own a vacation home in your favorite destination and rent it out while you're away. Two good things happen in every version of the dream: The home is looked after by a trusted property management company, and it generates considerable revenue through bookings.

But is it really that easy? And what do prospective vacation rental owners need to consider before making the move? Are there costs involved in onboarding a vacation home rental? What kind of revenue can an owner reasonably expect? How many weeks of the year will the vacation rental likely be booked?

If you've ever been curious, read on.

A Few Words About My Team

In the interest of full disclosure, I am Alex Curry, the Director of Business Development for 360 Blue. Every day my team and I work with prospective vacation rental homeowners who want to know what they can expect in terms of home care and, of course, the anticipated occupancy and Gross Annual Revenue (GAR).

We happen to know the local and regional markets here on the Florida Panhandle better than anyone. How can I say this? We have access to real-time booking data not only for our company but for the market in Destin, Miramar Beach, along 30A, Panama City Beach, and Cape San Blas markets. In short, we have an incredibly accurate picture of where the market currently is, and a fairly solid idea of where it's heading. Naturally, the further out we look, the cloudier the picture becomes.

We also know what guests want in a vacation home rental—from location to design to amenities. Our people talk to guests all the time, literally every day. This constant contact gives us incredible insight into what they're looking for. And we pass this information along to our clients.

One of the most important tools we offer prospective owners is a rental revenue projection for their particular home. Finally, we know the benefits to vacation rental ownership. And we know the drawbacks. And I'm going to share much of it with you here.

Overlooked Benefits

One of the most overlooked perks of vacation rental ownership is the fact that your home isn't sitting empty for months on end. Periodic use of a home makes it less vulnerable to the elements—especially here in our salty, maritime environment.

It may sound a little counter-intuitive, but if a home is occupied, its longevity as an asset actually increases. Housekeepers, the property manager, and maintenance people check on the home after each departure.

Does it need a pressure wash? Does a door gasket need replacing? Do the HVAC filters need to be swapped out? These issues are consistently addressed. A home can quickly become a liability as its integrity fades when allowed to sit empty.

Another largely overlooked benefit: If you're trying to sell your property and it has existing future reservations on the books, it will likely be more attractive to potential buyers. Existing bookings place your home in the special category of "an income-earning asset"—something prospective buyers love. There's a difference between existing bookings and projected rental revenue. While my team is remarkably accurate with our rental projections—and has a proven track record that sets us apart—there's no substitute for existing bookings in the eyes of potential buyers.

Finally, our company has built relationships with the most trusted maintenance professionals in the area over the years. Once on our program, our homeowners gain access to them.



What are the drawbacks of owning a vacation rental?

You have to divorce yourself from the notion of it being your personal home year-round. Once the home is booked by a guest, it is dedicated to their use for that period of time. They have paid to have exclusive use, and we are committed to providing them with a luxury experience.

On a related note: If you are looking to maximize returns on your property, there will be long stretches of time when the home is unavailable to you—especially during high season. On the Emerald Coast and Forgotten Coast, high season is June, July, and much of August. Spring Break is also incredibly busy. If you want use of the home during this time period, it's best to block it off well in advance. By doing so, however, you'll forfeit that potential income.

You must also reinvest in this income-earning asset. Why? To avoid diminishing future returns. Improvements need to be made to keep up with trends and the ever-shifting tastes of the traveling public.



What does it take to get a vacation home on a rental program?

You need to find the management company that's right for you and your home. Vacation rental companies tend to specialize in a specific caliber of property, and you want to find a company that's all about yours. We have three brands: Callista, which focuses on mid-size luxury homes and condos; 360 Blue, which is for larger luxury homes; and our Alaya Collection, which is made up of the finest luxury homes on the entire Emerald Coast.

Once you've found the right company, you need to keep in mind that there are start-up costs for things like a KABA lock for access control, new linens, and housewares. You will also need property photos for marketing purposes. Typically, these costs can be a negotiating point when considering which company to go with.

What portion of the year will a vacation home rental be booked?

Most owners can expect their home to book anywhere from 24 to 30 weeks per year—or right around half. This of course is dependent on the home's pricing and its amenities. Does it have a private pool? What's its proximity to the beach?

What about décor?

Bear in mind that you are looking to appeal to an audience whose preferences and tastes you may not share. When it comes to décor, you may need to strike a balance between what potential guests want and what you want in a vacation home.

It's also important to stay current with the latest design trends. Coastal contemporary is the prevailing aesthetic here on the Emerald Coast, but like all trends, it continually evolves.

What's the one investment I can make to maximize my return?

This one is easy: A private pool. They are expensive, but guests love them.

How often can owners use their own rental property?

There really are no homeowner restrictions on homeowner use. That said, there are high-demand periods during which you will be leaving significant revenue on the table if you choose to use it at these times.



The effect of the national economy on the local market

The state of the local market and the national economy will also play a huge role in the GAR a vacation home can generate. So let's take a quick contemporaneous look—but with the understanding that this information will feel a bit stale as time goes by.

Over the past few months, there has been steady talk of a looming recession. Current predictions run the entire spectrum—from a deep and prolonged recession to a short and shallow slowdown to no recession at all.

So far, this ongoing speculation, as diverse as it is, has had a minimal effect on the Emerald Coast and Forgotten Coast markets.

Current numbers with regard to Occupancy for Summer 2023 are slightly behind those for Summer 2022. The GAR for our homes is expected to come in slightly lower as well. Last year we noted an increase in last-minute bookings and saw smaller booking windows. We expect the same for this year.

Bookings for 2023 are pacing nicely throughout our brands, and we are seeing an increase in reservations for early 2023 in particular. The takeaway: Based on our overall pacing data for the Emerald Coast market at this point in time, we anticipate rates and occupancy for 2023 to be remarkably similar to last year.

Have Questions?

If you're looking to invest in a vacation home rental here on the Emerald Coast or Cape San Blas, drop us a line. We can put together a rental revenue projection and offer insight that may help you along in the process. It's an extraordinary time to be in the vacation rental space. And the feeling among many in the industry is that this is only the beginning.

> – Alex Curry Director of Business and Development 360 Blue



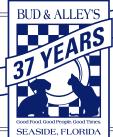






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Welcome to Port St. Joe a small town with a big heart

by Samantha Felix





estled along the western shore of St. Joseph Bay on Florida's Forgotten Coast lies the small but vibrant town of Port St. Joe. What makes it so vibrant? Foremost, its people—but also its history.

This deep-water port town has a history stretching back some 180-plus years. Most recently, in October of 2018, it was hit by Hurricane Michael. The community, however, has come back stronger than ever, with a Songwriters Festival, incredible restaurants, outfitters, and locals who are the most welcoming you'll ever find. Simply put, Port St. Joe is a hidden gem waiting to be rediscovered.

Today, this town of 3,700 souls is a vacation destination unto itself. For guests staying on **Cape San Blas**, it's the perfect day excursion. Just 12 miles or so from the Cape, it's a scenic drive along the southern arm of the St. Joe Peninsula and the western shores of the Bay, making it an excellent getaway.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

St. Joseph's Bay ranks as one of the best snorkeling venues on the Gulf Coast. What makes it so great? The shallow, clear, and protected waters

of the Bay—along with the fantastic and abundant beds of scallops that populate the seafloor. The shallow waters allow you to anchor your vessel as you and your party don your snorkeling gear and indulge in some scalloping—which is similar to an underwater Easter egg hunt for adults. Of course, the kids will love it too.

Don't forget to look out for all the sea turtles and octopuses that call the Bay home. You'll encounter a wide variety of sea life everything from dolphins to seahorses. On calm days, the cloudless waters make for some luminous underwater photography.

Back on land and just to the west of downtown, you'll find the **Forgotten Coast Sea Turtle Center** (FCSTC). This remarkable local organization

promotes educational and conservational efforts to benefit the regional sea turtle population, highlighting the importance of the beach habitat Travel

they require. The uninhabited portion of St. Joe Peninsula, with its long arm of pristine white sand, serves as a home to thousands of amazing seafaring creatures and their nests.

If you haven't quite gotten your sea legs yet, you may want to drop in for **Blast on the Bay Songwriters Festival**, a must-see event for all music lovers. This intimate event attracts some of the biggest names in the Nashville music industry for live music and storytelling. In the past, the festival has headlined Grammy-nominated Clint Daniels, Earl Bud, and many more.

With its continued growth, the festival now features over 30 iconic artists performing at multiple venues. The event is deliberately kept small to showcase the local charm and hospitality of the community. Proceeds benefit several nonprofits, civic groups, and local grade schoolers who can take advantage of the musical workshops throughout the year.

Restaurants

One of the most memorable seafood restaurants is the **Krazy Fish Grille** in downtown Port St. Joe. Stepping into the Krazy Fish is an unforgettable experience in and of itself, with its weathered interior and tropical fishing village vibe.

This colorful local restaurant uses locally sourced ingredients, including fresh snapper, shrimp, and oysters. They have a sushi bar and a full-service wet bar, serving up the classics, including Blue Hawaiians, Key West Mojitos, and Bahama Mamas. Seafood isn't your thing? The Grille also serves up some of the finest tacos on the Forgotten Coast.

Looking for pizza? **Joe Mama's Wood Fired Kitchen** offers the best Tuscaninspired pie in the area. From sandwiches, to fresh salads, to delicious pasta dishes, Joe Mama's is your go-to establishment. Looking for a breakfast spot? Just down











Beach Life







the street is the **Sand Dollar Café**, where you'll find the finest breakfast and lunch Southern fare.

A HISTORY THAT IS ALIVE TODAY

Founded in 1835, Port St. Joe (originally known as St. Joseph) quickly emerged as the largest city in Florida, with a flourishing population of 11,000. In time, it would play host to 56 delegates at a convention to draft Florida's first constitution.

But old St. Joseph's brief period of prosperity would be followed by a series of devastating natural disasters. And they ran the gamut: from the yellow fever pandemic to a great fire to a catastrophic hurricane. The yellow fever outbreak alone reduced the city's population to fewer than 500. It was effectively abandoned after a fire, followed by a hurricane, destroyed much of the infrastructure. At one point, only 19 people called Port St. Joe home.

But with every challenge—especially the recent landfall of Hurricane Michael—the town has come back ever stronger. Perhaps the best example of this is the shipyard operated by the **Eastern Shipbuilding Group**.

The facility is situated on the Gulf County Canal and is one of only three along the Gulf Coast. Here they build military and commercial vessels, including ferries, tugboats, fireboats, and Coast Guard cutters. The shipyard is outfitted with a marine railway and a 57,000-foot fabrication building, and is one of the largest employers in the area.

Over time, this boundless resilience has become central to Port St. Joe's identity. And the locals are as warm as they are proud of it—which makes Port St. Joe such an inspirational destination to visit.





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DOLPHINS FROM THE NORTHERN GULF OF MEXICO

The Life + Times of Our Favorite Sea Mammal by Dwight Williams

hey roam every ocean of the world, from the high latitudes of the Arctic and Southern Ocean to the warmest equatorial waters. Eversocial, they live and travel in pods and hunt in teams. As cetaceans, they are related to the most ethereal and majestic creatures of the sea-the orca, the baleen, and toothed whales. All breathe through blowholes. All are related to terrestrial mammals that have adapted to life in the ocean over the vast sweep of time, sharing an ancestry with deer and cattle.

Dolphins have fascinated humans for millennia. Ancient mariners interpreted their presence during extended voyages as a sign of a safe passage to come. Upon the final approach to a distant harbor, their accompanying presence was interpreted as a sign of welcome. In other words, you could say that dolphins provided a false sense of security for these sailors throughout the journey, from beginning to end.

For centuries dolphins have played in the bow wakes of ocean-going vessels. They swam alongside the

fleets of Magellan, Cook, and the ancient Polynesian seafarers throughout the Pacific-just as they do today with twenty-first-century container ships transiting the Pacific Ocean from Shanghai to the Panama Canal.

Even the simplest facts about dolphins are extraordinary. Consider that they sleep by resting one hemisphere of their brains at a time, floating nearly motionless at the surface, never fully losing consciousness. Some have been known to dive as deep as 1,000 feet, where they feed on squid in the utter darkness of the abyss.

There are countless verified accounts of dolphins seeking out the assistance of humans-often after having become entangled in fishing lines or nets. They seem to grasp that the source of their life-threatening problem is also the key to its solution: human beings. They seek us out for assistance, coming alongside boats or approaching SCUBA divers for relief, to be cut free. These incidents are so numerous that many have been captured on video.



The extraordinary social nature of dolphins makes their behavior all the more seemingly comprehensible and relatable to humans. There is growing evidence that they, along with whales, communicate in a language of "song," complete with their own dialects. They even can be said to have their own routines and culture unique to the larger family.

And then there's the dolphin "smile."

Perma-smiles present these enigmatic creatures as friends to humans, which is not necessarily the case. That said, there are countless unverified stories of dolphins "saving" human swimmers from sharks. Whether or not these stories are authentic—whether or not there is any truth to them *at all*—humans seek out opportunities to bring themselves within close proximity to them.

Many expectant human moms who have swam with dolphins claim the creatures transmit a vibe of compassion, love, and well-being that's more felt than understood in any conventional sense. The experience has been described as somehow mystical, beyond what can be explained away by mere science or the clumsiness of language.

And so, through this metaphysical connection, the dolphin's fame and allure among humans has gone extra-dimensional.

It is thought that dolphins may be able to "perceive" or at least sense the fetus when swimming with a pregnant human. The idea may sound wildly far-fetched. But consider that dolphins possess a sense called echolocation—a kind of sonar that allows them to fix the location of objects and creatures in their immediate vicinity, even in the murkiest of waters. And it is this remarkable faculty that may also serve as something not unlike an ultrasound in an obstetrician's practice as the senor passes over the belly of the mother.

So you might think that we could answer the simplest of questions about dolphins. For instance: Is it "safe" to swim with them? The answer: Always respect these extraordinary wayward creatures by giving them their space.

Visitors to the Emerald Coast are not only drawn to the sugar-white sand and turquoise Gulf waters. They are drawn to the sea life—and none command their attention more than the dolphin. A remote encounter is a moment to be cherished. Whether the circumstance is little more than a glimpse from shore of one breaching the surface, or an experience at close range while paddleboarding—the moment is unforgettable. Afterward, you want only to learn more about them.

This is all to say that dolphins have a friend in humans. Or so we would like to believe. However, nothing about our relationship with them is straightforward. We think we understand them. We think we get their intelligence, their sense of fun, their playfulness, even their smile. We are their greatest fans and yet we are also their greatest threat—all at the same time.

Want to learn more? Keep reading for a deeper dive. We'll introduce you to the best resource on the bottlenose dolphins you're most likely to see here on the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico—the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.

A Deep Dive with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Marine scientists reveal the secret lives of dolphins of the Northern Gulf Coast

The story begins in 1971 when seven Alabama universities and colleges came together to develop a marine science lab for students on Dauphin Island on Alabama's Gulf Coast. The overarching idea was to consolidate the disparate marine research and educational resources and channel them into a single world-class entity. Today, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) is the centerpiece of marine research in Alabama, serving as a resource for 22 public and private universities. In 2022, the lab welcomed a record 110,000 visitors.

To get a fuller picture of the lives of the dolphin population here in the Northern Gulf, we reached out to DISL marine scientist Dr. Ruth Carmichael and research technician, MacKenzie Russell.

Are bottlenose dolphins of the Northern Gulf of Mexico migratory? Or do they live out their lives within the local waters?

Bottlenose dolphins primarily can be divided into two groups: coastal and offshore. Coastal bottlenose dolphins are often bay, sound and estuary residents who live close to shore and have small home ranges. On the other hand, offshore bottlenose dolphins, or "transients," may travel along the coast, with some in the Atlantic known to seasonally migrate.

However, the animals in our area are not yet known to be migratory in this way (best documented for higherlatitude beasts). Our work in the Northern Gulf is



trying to answer these types of question about local populations, including the extent to which they may be resident or transient, their home ranges, and their movements in Alabama and adjacent waters.

What is the greatest threat to the dolphin population in the Northern Gulf?

Our research here in Alabama has found about half of dolphin deaths in our area are linked to human interactions. In fact, this is the most common single known cause of death in the stranded dolphins we recover. Typical human interactions that may cause death include vessel trauma, drowning due to entanglement, and sharp or blunt force trauma.

Another common threat to dolphins in the northern Gulf of Mexico is low salinity due to freshwater discharge. When dolphins experience prolonged freshwater exposure it can cause skin lesions, physiological imbalances, and ultimately death either directly or via secondary illnesses.

Can you characterize the intelligence of dolphins? Is it similar to that of any other species in the animal kingdom?

This is a difficult question because measuring intelligence is inherently biased (the testing is done by



humans on a human scale of judgment). Dolphins are known to have complex communication. They are also able to teach and learn skills, such as surgically depredating fish from lines, and to use of 'tools' to forage for food. They've been documented using sponges as face protection while foraging among corals in Australia.

Can you characterize the dolphin's faculty of echolocation?

In short, dolphins echolocate by producing short clicks using two air pockets located near their blowhole that are tuned and directed through their bulbous forehead, which is really a large fat deposit called a melon. When the click bounces off something and comes back to the dolphin, it is received into another fat pad in the lower jaw next to the ear where it then travels to and is interpreted by the brain.

What is a little-known but extraordinary fact about dolphins?

We'll give you three!

1. Dolphins can be aged using their teeth. They have only one set of teeth throughout their lives (unlike humans who have two), and deposit new layers of dentin annually. When an animal dies and strands, we can save some teeth, slice them in half and count the internal growth layer groups—just like counting the rings of a tree.

These layers of organic and inorganic material also record information about the external environment so that we know the conditions in which the animal was living. The really cool aspect of this research—which our lab carries out—is that it allows us to relate the environmental data to specific years of the animal's life. Also, when we know the time of death, we can relate the layers to specific years in time. This approach allows us to do things like trace exposure to freshwater that might periodically cause stress throughout the animal's life.

- **2.** All of a dolphin's skin sloughs every 2 hours—12 times a day!
- **3.** Dolphins have special adaptations to live in saltwater. Their kidneys are "reniculated," which means that they have many small kidneys clustered together to form one large kidney like a bunch of grapes. This allows them to be extremely efficient in recovering freshwater from their food. Because of this adaptation, dolphins do not need to directly drink freshwater.

Extra bone fact! Dolphins have ossified sternal ribs. In humans, we have cartilage that connects the tips of our ribs to our sternum. In dolphins, these connections are ossified with bone and provide additional hinges in the dolphin ribcage to allow contracting for deep diving.

A note on reporting marine mammals in distress:

For marine mammals in the Southeastern United States: Please report manatees, whales, and dolphins in distress or stranded at 1-877-WHALE-help (1-877-942-5343). Callers can select the specific state for their report. Specifically for manatees: In Florida, please report to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) at 1-888-404-3922. In Mississippi and Alabama: Please report to Dauphin Island Sea Lab's Manatee Sighting Network at 1-866-493-5803.

For more information on the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, visit: DISL.edu.





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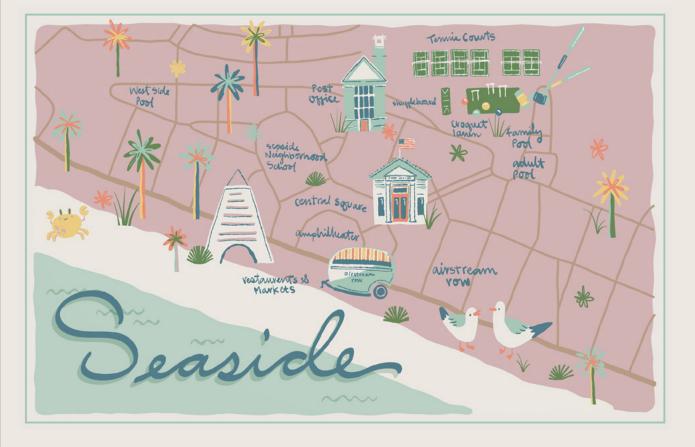
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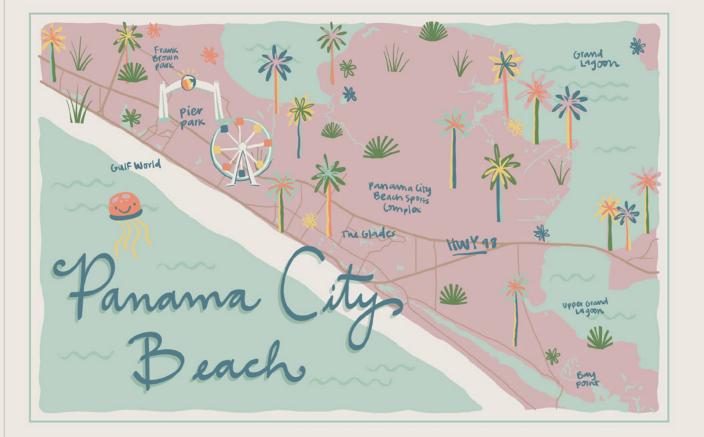




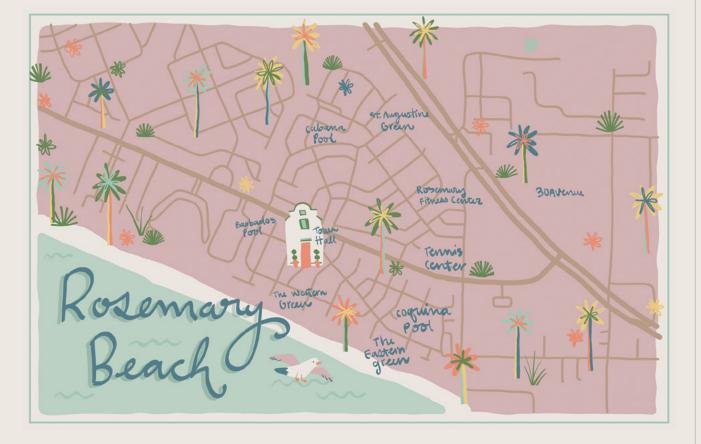


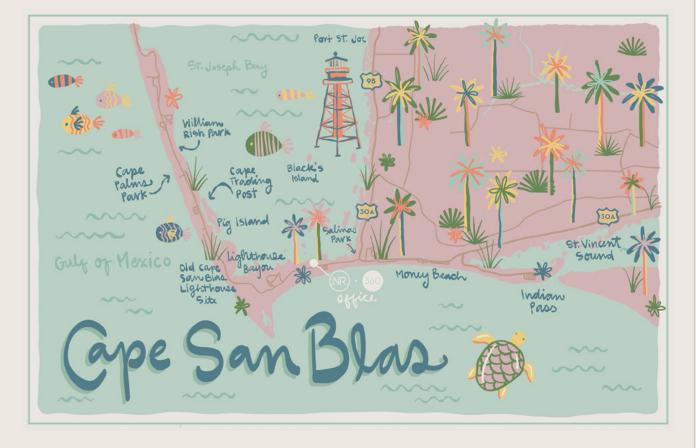
















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Vacation Guide

Where To Shop + Dine On The Emerald & Forgotten Coasts

Beach Li

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You've arrived at a one-of-a-kind destination with so much to see and do, and 360 Blue is here to show you the way. We've highlighted a number of amazing Experiences for you to take in, and a run-down of some of our favorite local shops and restaurants. From standup paddleboards to beach chairs to surfboards, we have the rental gear you're looking for. Explore local trails on bike, order a custom charcuterie board with champagne, or host a s'mores beach party with loved ones. Have your own ideas for an adventure? Reach out and we'll help make it happen

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Vacation Guide

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Vacation Guide

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A NATURE LOVER'S DELIGHT, AN ANGLER'S DREAM

The River Reveals its Jewels

by Susan Vallee

ingfishers dive and swoop, skimming the surface of the water, encircling each other in a dance before alighting on a lowhanging branch. Osprey nests top bare, skinny trees, framing the horizon like a child's drawing—the nests far too wide and heavy to rest safely among the treetops. Two bald eagles sound a cry above us, perhaps startled by the sound of the engine amid these tranquil backwaters of the Choctawhatchee Bay.

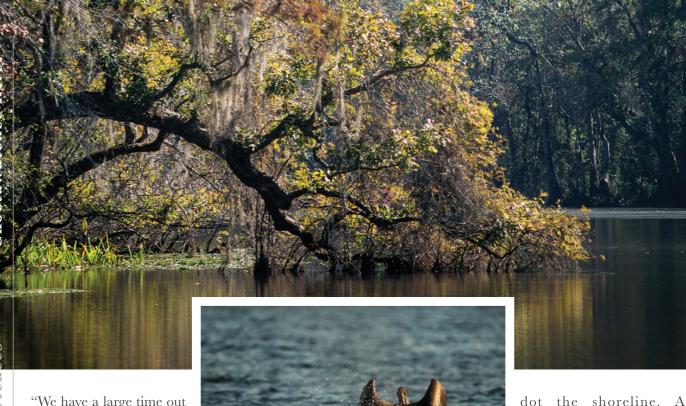
We're entering the Choctawhatchee River on Backwater Tours' small boat, weaving through a snake-shaped waterway bordered by high marsh grass. It's a dizzying approach to a river that winds its way all the way up into Alabama. A river steeped in history, lore, and natural wonders.

After a thrilling toggle back and forth among the winding mouth of the river, we enter a wide, calm channel that feels a million miles away from the white-sand beach and emerald-green and azure waters of the Gulf.

The boat slows, and a wide, natural grin spreads across the face of Captain Andy Coleman, our guide for the day. The stiff formalities of earlier are gone, and as the boat rests in the river's swift-moving waters, it's easy to see why he's passionate about sharing this still-relatively unknown place with people—he loves it. He loves every inch of it.







Experiences

"We have a large time out here on the river," he says as his boat begins to work its way upriver. He points out a sunning turtle, a bald eagle's nest, and a heron taking flight ahead.



"There were no bald eagles here. Absolutely none. I started seeing them in the 1980s. Now, I know of 16 bald eagle nests. We have a much healthier ecosystem. The ospreys are plentiful, and we have otters now, which are a great indicator of clean water."

Capt. Andy began giving these tours in 2014 and is now joined by alternate Capt. Jimmy Parris, which works well because Capt. Andy can now point out sights and curiosities while Capt. Jimmy navigates. Most tours wind their way up to a captivatingly quiet cut-through that runs deep into the swamp, past old cypress stands. Capt. Andy explains these perfectly straight waterways are remnants from the 1800s when men with oxen-pulled carts would travel deep into the swamp to cut cypress and timber, which would then be floated downriver.

Instead of the usual 3-hour tour, we're in for something a bit more special—an all-day adventure that works its way up into Bay County and to a small spring that feels like a local secret.

Along the way, the river widens, and riverfront fish camps, bed and breakfasts, and ramshackle houseboats

dot the shoreline. A kingfisher swoops by a rope swing, and we strain our necks looking for giant sturgeons beneath the water.

"How do you like my river?" he yells over the roar of the

motor. "Can you believe how few people are on it?"

As we get closer to the spring, the riverbank begins to change, and we notice pale pink and white wildflowers lining the ancient limestone shores. These shores give way to unbelievably wide cypress; we glide silently past one that is as wide as a refrigerator is tall. Within the new cypress growth and lumpy, bumpy landscape of the swamp, tiny white wildflowers bloom. It feels as though we've somehow slipped from an angler's paradise into a quiet fairyland.

Capt. Jimmy skillfully guides our boat through a shallow, narrow waterway lined with these mammoth cypress that leads to the spring. Once at the spring, we dock on a small sand beach and stare, amazed, at the bubbling, crystal-clear water in front of us.

"We love to show off our favorite places," Capt. Jimmy says as he hands out the paddles for the SUP boards. Capt. Andy never wastes an opportunity at the springs and gamely jumps into the 68-degree water.

"I like to stay in one spot with a mask," he explains. "You'd be amazed at what goes by you!"

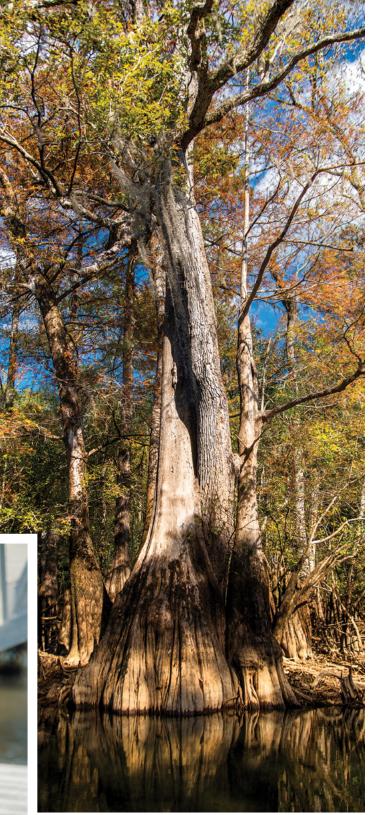
Beach Life

With the SUP boards unmoored from the top of the boat, it's now time to experience the force of the spring for ourselves. The experience does not disappoint. The bubbling spring is forceful but gentle as it pushes our boards back and away. Beneath us, schools of fish dart and river grass sway.

Capt. Andy surfaces from watching the fish and points to the sand beach. "This is the best place in the whole world to eat a watermelon," he says. "You sit in the shallow water there and eat it."

Once we've grown tired of paddling the spring, it's time to reboard and begin the long ride back to the dock at Point Washington. It's a bit sad to say goodbye to these woods and this crystal-clear spring. It feels as though, just for a little while, we were granted special passage into a watery and forgotten world.





"We love to show off our favorite places." Captain Jimmy







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building sandcastles

WITH THE SANDCASTLE COACH

by Susan Vallee

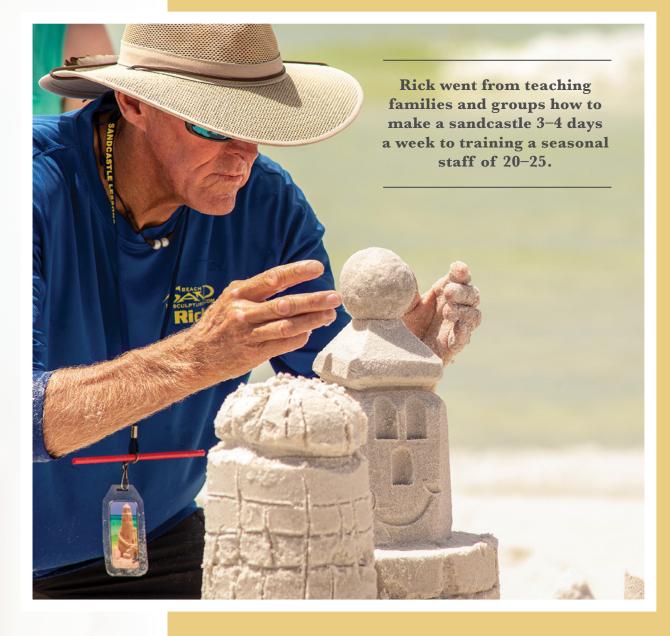
A ve you ever walked past an intricately carved sandcastle on the beach and thought, wish I could do that? Well, you're not alone. Rick Mungeam was volunteering at Topsail State Park and building sandcastles on the beach for fun when people began to take notice of his creations. It turned out the retired architect had a knack for crafting buildings from sand.

"One of the rangers saw a few of my castles and asked if I'd teach a class on building sandcastles for the park," he said.

The classes filled quickly, and one evening, during a particularly gorgeous sunset, he noticed a bride and groom posing for photographs next to one of his castles that featured a big heart.

"I realized I might have a business opportunity when I saw that," he said.

Experiences



So Rick and his wife, Capri, thought up a business name (SandCastle Lessons), built a website, and with every booking, word spread. Rick went from teaching families and groups how to make a sandcastle 3–4 days a week to training a seasonal staff of 20–25 sand sculptors to meet the demand. And now, people from all around the world can learn from Rick, thanks to a recent licensing deal SandCastle Lessons made with Princess Cruise lines.

Always fill buckets halfway with water first! Add sand second. Top with additional water if needed.

Rick uses a straight-edge ruler to cut steps into his castle.

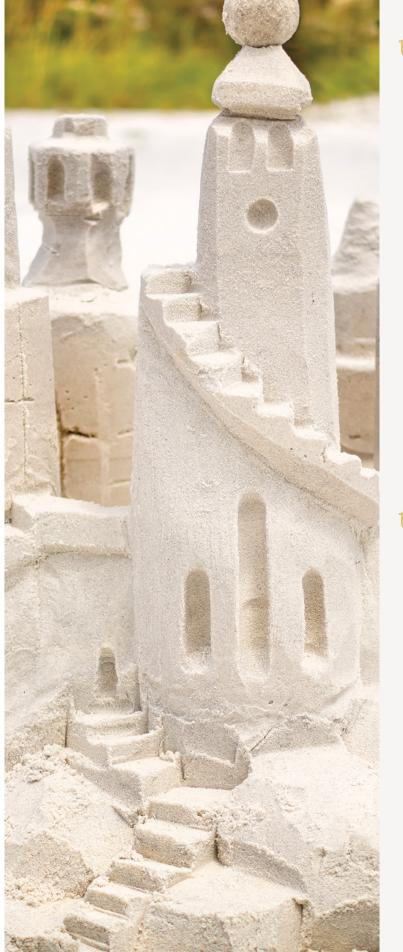
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His process is pretty straightforward and involves an assortment of tools.

"I always do a demo first for families, so people can see how each tool is used," he explained. "Then they can create their masterpieces. Sometimes people will start carving, and all of a sudden, they'll say their castle looks like a frog, and they'll go with it. I think we've made everything by now. Toilets are a surprisingly common request. I suppose every castle needs a throne!" With the Spillman family watching, Rick built a delightful sandcastle. The essential ingredient for success other than sand? Water. Once he was done, the family grabbed buckets and tools and got busy creating castles of their own.

As he walked around, nodding his head and encouraging their progress, he offered this sage advice:

"When you think you have enough water, add more water."



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Local Spotlight

THE PILINGS

The Secret History of Eastern Choctawhatchee Bay





here's an odd cluster of pilings on the eastern edge of the Choctawhatchee Bay. Ever noticed them when driving north across the bridge? These aren't the remains of an ill-fated attempt at a bridge, but are part of a system capable of detecting low-flying aircraft during the early years of the Cold War when computer technology was in its infancy.

Let's back up a bit: After WWII, the United States learned that the Soviet Union had successfully developed a nuclear bomb and aircraft capable of carrying out a nuclear attack against the United States. A strong national air defense system did not exist—so the race to create one began.

A critical weakness in our air defense was the ability to detect low-flying aircraft in real time. And in 1950, a computer capable of interpreting data in real time did not exist—which is where the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) enters the conversation.

Professor Jay Forrester was already working with a group at MIT to develop the world's first computer capable of interpreting data in real time. After a successful demonstration, Project Lincoln and the Lincoln Laboratory were created to study air defense systems for the Army, Navy, and Air Force. But since Forrester's computer used storage tubes for internal memory, the data was unreliable. A better memory system was critical. So, Forrester and his team successfully developed the magnetic-core memory system—which spawned modern computing as we know it.

Now that computers could properly analyze and interpret this data , air-to-ground radar testing began. In 1959, Eglin Air Force installed 2,040 pilings topped with omnidirectional radar corner reflectors in the eastern corner of the Choctawhatchee Bay. Dubbed "Test Area D-55," the Air Force would send and receive radar to these pilings (arranged in 25 different sections) to test the accuracy of the real time data analysis.

It Must Have Been An Odd Sight

Years passed, and the Air Force seemed to have abandoned the area. Locals began pilfering the aluminum "bowls" from atop the pilings to sell for scrap (or use as odd garden ornaments). Two Walton County locals, Andy Coleman and Freddy Bishop, even got in a bit of trouble over the reflectors.

"Now, I had called Eglin before to get permission to remove them," Coleman explained. "I was never able to speak to anyone, so we just decided we'd go out there to get them. Turned out the Air Force didn't like that."

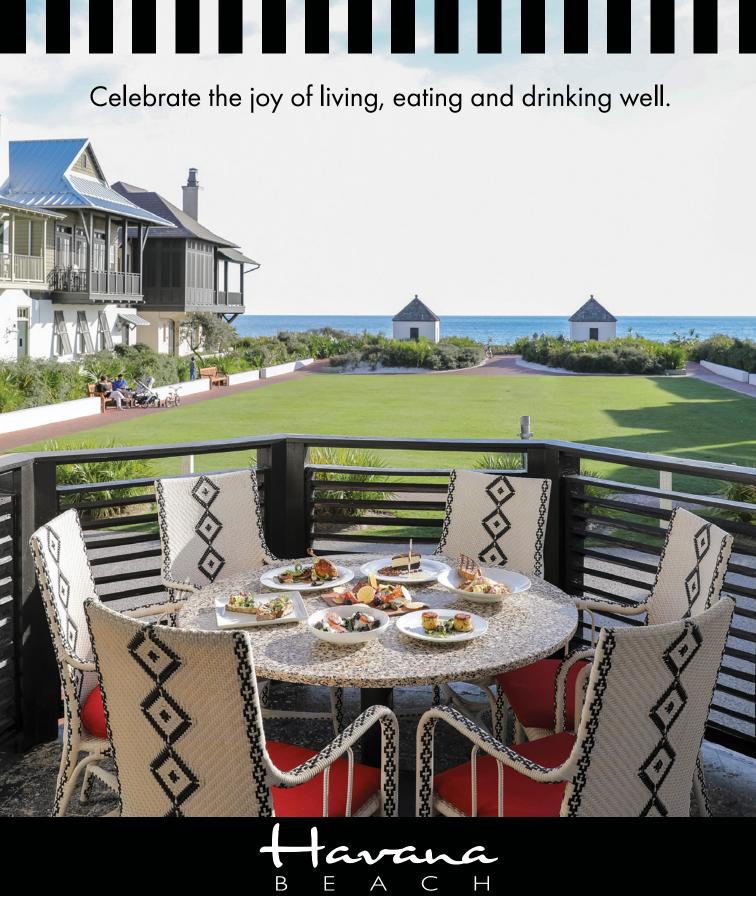
After being questioned by authorities, Coleman said he was released because he could prove he had contacted the Air Force in advance. His friend, however, was not as fortunate and faced charges.

In 1993, Eglin confirmed the site was inactive: "Most of the reflectors are reported missing, with the pilings remaining on-site. The pilings are clearly marked on navigation charts. The pilings have not been removed due to the potential environmental impact on water quality from the creosote."

Nowadays, the only thing those skinny, creosotetreated pilings support is the occasional double-crested cormorant, pelican, or seagull in need of a perch.

As you drive across the 331 bridge, probably assisted by the GPS on your smartphone, take a moment to appreciate the technology race that led to those decaying old pilings, and let that echo of the past be an inspiration for what's possible.





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Dining With A Water View

Best Views from 30A to Destin

by Susan Vallee

Havana Beach Rooftop

Boats sailing past, waves crashing against the shore, a brilliant orange and purple sunset reflecting in deep blue water—and delicious food. Almost nothing pairs better with a beach vacation than dinner with a view.

Of all the questions locals hear, "Where's a good place to eat with a view of the water?" is the most common. So, we did our best to round up waterfront and water-view restaurants that are beloved from 30A to Destin.

30A WATER VIEWS

Pescado Rooftop Bar and Seafood Grill

With its cobblestone streets and gas streetlamps, Rosemary Beach offers romantic charm like no other 30A beach community. And now, you can add even more romance by dining at Pescado's Rooftop Bar and Seafood Grill. Enjoy views of the Gulf and the roofscapes of this unforgettable New Urbanist community while enjoying fresh seafood and daily specials.

You must be 18 years or older to enter, but all ages are welcome for lunch and Sunday brunch.

Havana Beach Rooftop

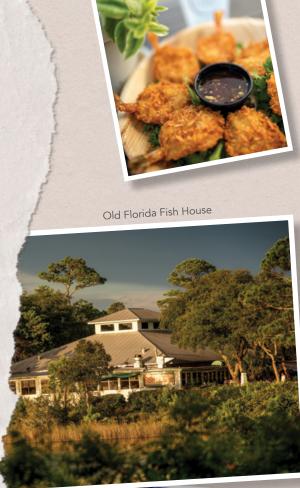
Across the way from Pescado is The Pearl's rooftop restaurant—Havana Beach Rooftop. Enjoy communal tables with a menu centered around shared-plate dining and stunning views of the Gulf. When the stars come out, two firepits help keep guests warm.

Crabby Steve's Gulfside Bar & Grill

Shhh... Crabby Steves is a bit of a local secret for a good reason: you can only reach it on foot (unless you're staying at High Pointe Resort). Located at the top of a dune walkover, it doesn't get much more scenic than Crabby Steve's Gulfside Grill. After walking along the beach to reach it, reward yourself with a cocktail, a delicious fish sandwich, and some spicy tuna dip.

Old Florida Fish House

What can you expect at Old Florida Fish House? How about oysters, fresh fish, a sushi bar, and gorgeous views across Eastern Lake to the Gulf? Head outside to toast the sunset from a deck overlooking the lake, enjoy live music, or relax with a cocktail in an Adirondack chair while the kids play along the lake's shore.







The Shrimp Shack

It doesn't get much "beachier" than feasting on a pound of steamed Gulf shrimp while staring at cresting waves with white sand between your toes. Order at The Shrimp Shack window and enjoy your food along the Seaside Boardwalk. See if you can spot a dolphin between bites!

Bud & Alley's Rooftop Deck Bar

This Seaside classic is beloved by both locals and tourists. Founded by two surf buddies, Bud & Alley's has incredible views of Seaside and the Gulf. Enjoy smoked tuna dip, a po'boy, or the grilled fish of the day, before celebrating sunset with the ringing of a vintage bell.

Fish Out of Water

This relaxed, family-style restaurant overlooks the Gulf from inside the award-winning WaterColor Inn. Flip flops and hair damp from the beach are welcome because FOOW focuses on the experience, not a dress code. Offering daily brunch and dinner, FOOW serves classic Gulf fare with an extensive and fun drink menu—like the mocktail "Georgia Peach at the Beach" or a fully-loaded "Swim to the Second Sandbar" cocktail. Dine inside or out, or order food to go!

Shunk Gulley Oyster Bar

What's not to love about a bar with panoramic beach views, live music, and local seafood? Popular with tourists and locals, Shunk Gulley enjoys views of the Gulf and the beach access at Ed Walline Park from upstairs. And the best part? You can cross 30A after your meal to dip your toes in the Gulf.

Stinky's Fish Camp

Don't let the name fool you. There's nothing stinky about this beautiful Dune Allen Beach restaurant! Stinky's is serious about serving local Gulf seafood and is built along the shores of Lake Allen, one of the rare coastal dune lakes found along 30A. This family-friendly restaurant even sells turtle food so restless kids can head to the dock to feed the turtles while the grown-ups relax.

O CHOCTAWHATCHEE BAY VIEWS

The Bay Restaurant

Dine on the covered porch to best enjoy striking views of the Choctawhatchee Bay at the aptly named The Bay Restaurant. Known for its Southern coastal cuisine and sushi, The Bay is a great place to meet up with friends and enjoy live music while the kids play on the white sand beach.

Stinky's Fish Camp

North Beach Social/Farm & Fire

Across the road from The Bay Restaurant is a two-story building that houses two distinctly different restaurants. North Beach Social is located on the first floor, and Farm & Fire is on the second floor. North Beach Social embraces its Bay-front location as a mostly outdoor bar and restaurant. Tables and a large deck extend alongside a large sandy beach with a dedicated kids' play area. The firepits blaze when the sun goes down, and local musicians take the stage.

Upstairs, at Farm & Fire, diners will enjoy bird's eye views of the Bay and a varied menu that includes sushi, brick-oven pizzas, steak, and local seafood.

WIRAMAR BEACH & DESTIN WATER VIEWS

Boshamps Seafood and Oyster House

Waterfront dining on the Destin Harbor is an incomparable experience. There's nothing like enjoying fresh, local seafood while the charter boats sail by. Dine on the back deck for the best water views, and enjoy a peek at Lucky Dog Seafood's wholesale market upon entering the restaurant. Boshamps is dedicated to providing the freshest Gulf seafood—and Lucky Dog Seafood Company does that by sourcing, procuring, and providing fresh Gulf seafood exclusively to Boshamp diners.

Pompano Joe's

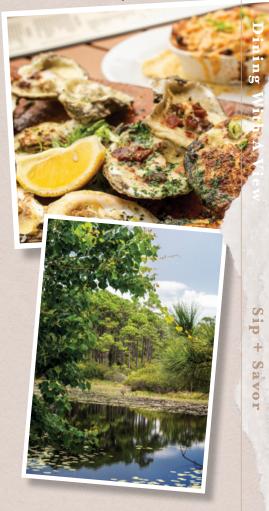
Pompano Joe's is a quirky, colorful restaurant located next to the Miramar Beach Regional Access, making it easy to get to and guaranteeing uninterrupted beach views. Indulge in a varied menu featuring Caribbean spices and flavors (they also offer a gluten-free menu) and discover why Pompano Joe's is a destination unto itself.

Lulu's

Lulu's in Destin invites guests to arrive by car, boat, jet ski, or paddle boat! Lucy Buffett's lively restaurant sits on the shores of the Choctawhatchee Bay, near the base of the Mid-Bay Bridge. Kids will love the large outdoor play area and gift shop, and parents will appreciate the live music and varied food and drink menu. Lulu's even offers a dedicated allergy-free menu for guests with different food allergies!

Crab Trap Destin

Built right on the beach in Miramar Beach, Crap Trap Destin serves delicious Gulf seafood in a classic Florida setting. Toast the day with a drink at the beachside bar, or let the kids play on the beach playground. Large open-air windows let in unforgettable beach views and warm, salt-air breezes.



North Beach Social







AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



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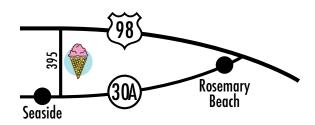
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Nature

ALL ABOUT ALLIGATORS

8 Seemingly Unknown Facts About Florida's Largest Reptile

by Samantha Felix

Natur

merican alligators (Alligator mississippiensis) are one of the most iconic animals in Florida. These massive reptiles can be found in all 67 counties of the state and are a common sight in many freshwater environments, including lakes, rivers, swamps, and brackish waters. While alligators may seem intimidating at first glance, these apex predators are actually quite shy and avoid humans if possible—we're not their natural prey. And with that, here are eight facts about alligators that will surprise you!

Alligators Are Remarkable Survivors

Alligators are native to Florida. and fossil evidence shows that they have remained relatively unchanged for the past 8 million years and are closely related to dinosaurs.

2 Alligators Are Florida's Official State Reptile

The American alligator was designated as Florida's official state reptile in 1987 as a symbol of the state's untamed wilderness.

3 The Alligator's Courtship Is Sophisticated

During mating season, from late April to early June, the male's infrasonic bellows cause the surface of the water around the male to ripple and dance, which attracts the female.

4 Alligators Have Super Senses

With an excellent sense of hearing and smell from extra sensory organs covering their face, alligators can hear hatchlings squeak from inside the eggs and smell a single drop of blood in 10 gallons of water.

5 Alligators Are Reptiles (Sort Of!)

Scientifically speaking, alligators are reptiles but they're also archosaurs, which includes alligators, crocodiles, AND birds. So technically speaking, birds are closer relatives to alligators than snakes or lizards.



6 Alligators Create Habitats For Smaller Animals

Gators make nests for themselves in soft mud that eventually fills with water. These "alligator puddles" protect and house all sorts of small reptiles and fish while also serving as a drinking hole.

7 An Alligator's Gender Is Determined By Temperature

Laboratory studies have found that eggs exposed to temperatures above 93°F are likely to become males, while those at 86°F usually become females—and intermediate temperatures produce both sexes.

8 Alligator Attacks Are Extremely Rare

Despite their reputation as fearsome predators, you're actually more likely to be struck by lightning than attacked by an alligator!

As you can see, there's much to learn about American alligators. Next time you're in Florida, check out one of the many wildlife sanctuaries or nature parks to see them up close—just don't feed them in the wild. Travel on.



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BLOCK THE SUN, NOT THE FUN 360 Blue partners with Helms Hope for Sun Safety

by Susan Vallee

elms Hope and 360 Blue want guests to be sun-safe when soaking up that wonderful Florida sunshine. So we've partnered to provide complimentary sunscreen and sun-care products in all 360 Blue vacation rentals.

Helms Hope is a non-profit dedicated to advancing skin cancer prevention, awareness, and early detection. Inspired by the life and lasting legacy of 21-year-old Shawn Helms Jr, Helms Hope encourages everyone to:

- Wear sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher and reapply every 2 hours or after going in the water.
- $ightarrow \, Wear \, a \ hat \ to \ shield \ your \ face, \ neck, \ and \ ears.$
- Avoid peak exposure. The sun's rays are strongest from 10 am-4 pm.
- ☆ Wear sunglasses! They block harmful UVA and UVB rays.

"Seeing a dermatologist annually and checking your skin could absolutely save your life or the life of a loved one."

- Shawn Helms, Founder of Helms Hope

"One in five people will develop skin cancer in their lifetime," Shawn Helms said. "Melanoma is one the deadliest cancers in the world. Seeing a dermatologist annually and checking your skin could absolutely save your life or the life of a loved one."

Please enjoy the Helms Hope sunscreen, aloe, and sun-safe information provided in your vacation rental. For additional resources, or to learn more about the Helms Hope organization, go to helmshope.org.

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BARTENDING IN SEASIDE FOR 23 YEARS AND COUNTING

BUD & ALLEY'S

Great Drinks, Better Memories by Susan Vallee

ud and Alley's rooftop bar is a go-to spot for locals looking to unwind and tourists with unfilled time spooling out before them. And for more than 23 years, bartender Mo Mosely has been welcoming familiar faces and remembering favorite cocktails.

He scribbles names and times on a chalkboard as tables begin to fill in anticipation of sunset. These "best guesses" are a fun, daily tradition. When the sun dips into the watery horizon, Mo, or another bartender, rings a cast-iron bell from an 1888 steam train. Guess when the bell rings, win a free drink; guess wrong, and enjoy the spectacular sunset. There are no losers.

Back before Scenic 30A was the bustling, year-round destination that it is today, Bud and Alley's was the only bar on 30A open late into the night. At midnight, tired staff from The Red Bar would climb the steps to the bar, unraveling the day's craziness to anyone who dared listen. On those busy summer nights, hidden behind folks standing three deep in front of the bar was Mo-weaving and pouring, eyebrows raised, a slight nod to let you know he saw you, knows what you want, and it's in his mental queue.

"Bartending feels like being on a stage," he said. "Behind the bar, I'm extroverted, but in front of the bar, I'm quiet and will just sit there." Around 2001, customers began calling his popular margaritas "Mo-garitas," and the moniker stuck.

"Everyone thinks it's special when I make it," he said. "I don't know why. It's a really simple drink," he said, shrugging his shoulders from behind the bar. "But people swear it tastes different when other bartenders make it."

Nowadays, the Tarpon Club is larger, with new porches and expanded bar space. It looks fancier and feels less like a surf bar. But among the changes, a few things remain constant-Mo behind the bar, the sunset bell (although now with an electric ringer), attentive service, good food, gorgeous Gulf views, and cold drinks with a kick.

After 23 years and all those faces, you'd think it might be difficult for Mo to pick a favorite memory, but it's not. His eyes light up as he recalls two of his favorite moments-and both involve sports greats.

"I got to watch the Braves win the World Series with Ron Grant! He was sitting at the bar, and we had it on the TV. That was pretty incredible. And Jerry Jones. I'm a big Cowboys fan, but I never try to engage him. I remember one time he was up here, and he got to talking to this guy about the guy's son, who is autistic. They were talking about the type of physical therapy the son was getting. So Jerry goes and gets a piece of paper and writes out this full-page thing so the kid can go and use the Cowboy's training facility for whatever he needs. I mean, it's incredible to me that I get to see people do extraordinary things like that."

When asked if he ever thinks about retiring, Mo frowned and shook his head. "Everyone always wants to know when I'm going to retire. I'm not! Why would I give this up?" he asked, gesturing out to the brilliant blue Gulf waters in front of him.

1/2 oz. Grand Marnier 1/2 oz. Rose's lime juice 2 oz. sour mix (or lemon/lime juice)

DIRECTIONS:

wedge around the rim of the glass and then dip





HIBISCUS MOJITO

FOR THE MOJITO:

- 5-10 mint leaves
- 1-2 tsp. agave syrup or natural sugar
- 2 tbsp. lime juice (about 1 small lime)
- 1 1/2-2 oz. hibiscus Simple Syrup
- 1-2 oz. rum (light or dark)
- 5–6 oz. club soda
- Cubed or crushed ice

Lime wedge and mint sprig for garnish

FOR THE HIBISCUS SYRUP:

- 1/2 cup dried hibiscus flowers
- 1 quart Simple Syrup

DIRECTIONS:

Gently muddle the mint leaves in the bottom of a tall glass using a gentle, twisting motion.

Add agave syrup or sugar and continue to muddle. Next, add the lime juice, rum, and hibiscus syrup and stir to combine. Fill the glass with ice. Slowly pour in club soda to fill the glass. Give it a gentle stir to mix. Serve with a garnish of lime and mint, if desired.

To prepare the hibiscus syrup: Add the dried hibiscus flowers to a dry saucepan and stir until aromatic, about 30 seconds. Pour the simple syrup into the saucepan and allow the syrup to simmer for 20 minutes—the color should change to deep purplish pink. Remove the hibiscus syrup from the heat and allow it to rest for an hour. Strain the solids. The hibiscus syrup may be refrigerated for up to 2 weeks.

CUCUMBER TOM COLLINS MOCKTAIL

FOR THE MOCKTAIL:

1 cucumber Juice of 1 lemon Soda water

DIRECTIONS:

Peel and chop the cucumber. Add chopped pieces to a blender (for a lighter cucumber taste, add thinly sliced cucumber to the glass instead). Blend. Squeeze in the juice of 1 lemon. Add ice to a highball glass and pour the blended cucumber into the glass. Top with soda water. Garnish with a cucumber slice, and enjoy this refreshing, healthy drink.

HAWAIIAN BONFIRE TROPICAL WHISKEY

FOR THE WHISKY COCKTAIL:

1 1/2 oz. rye whiskey
1/2 oz. yellow Chartreuse
1/4 oz. Simple Syrup
3/4 oz. pineapple juice
1/4 oz. lime juice
Dash of cinnamon
2 dashes of bitters
Pineapple wedge for garnish, optional

DIRECTIONS:

Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake and strain into a glass with ice. Garnish with a wedge of grilled pineapple.

COCONUT MARGARITA

FOR THE MARGARITA:

2 oz. cream of coconut2 oz. tequila1 oz. pineapple juice1 oz. freshly squeezed limeIce

TOASTED GARNISH FOR RIM:

Honey (optional) Toasted coconut (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

For a garnished rim: Spread honey on a small plate and toasted coconut on a second small plate. Dip the serving glass in honey and swirl it in the toasted coconut to create the garnished rim. Set aside.

Pour the cream of coconut, tequila, orange liqueur, and lime juice into a cocktail shaker. Add a handful of ice. Shake well and strain into the garnished glass. Mo Mosley







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Sandcastle Kids: Healing Hearts

One Vacation at a Time





Ve, a resilient little 4-year-old, endured hundreds of chemotherapy and steroid doses, invasive biopsies, multiple scans, and hospital stays during her 832 days of treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia. It was a long and heart-wrenching journey for her parents, Meredith and Scott Gvozdas, to navigate and for her two sisters, Margaret and Mary Scott, to witness. And then came a ray of light—a pediatric oncology social worker told them they had been selected to receive a free vacation to South Walton, courtesy of Sandcastle Kids.

Sandcastle Kids, a South Walton 501c3 nonprofit, carries out its healing mission by providing all-expenses-paid vacations to families experiencing a diagnosis of childhood cancer. As you can imagine,

these families undergo tremendous mental, emotional, and financial stress daily. Sandcastle Kids looks to ease that burden.

Eve was diagnosed in 2019, and her parents spent the next two and a half years managing her exhaustive healthcare needs while also loving

and supporting their two other children. The global COVID epidemic complicated matters and required extra sacrifices.

"We had to say no a lot during that time," Meredith said. "And now, all of a sudden, I was able to say yes to something!"

The Yes Week

"I called it the yes week," she said.

Vacations can be costly for a family of six, but every treat and whim was possible thanks to this program. From providing gorgeous beach house accommodations to exciting day excursions like dolphin tours, Sandcastle Kids' families are free to soak it all in and make magical memories. Sandcastle Kids also provides gift cards for expenses, restaurant vouchers, and photography sessions that local photographers donate.

Power of Community

Sandcastle Kids is entirely volunteer-based. Because of generous homeowners, donors, and businesses, Sandcastle Kids' families leave their worries at home for a week.

"My husband and I were floored by the level of generosity we encountered in South Walton," she said.

Once all the families scheduled for 2022 complete their trips, Sandcastle Kids will have helped 110 families since its inception in 2015.

Believe in Eve

While the Gvozdases' Fall 2021 trip was planned months in advance—it just so happened that Eve was able to take her last chemo pills while on her beach trip. It was a night the family will never forget.

"My husband and I were floored by the level of generosity we encountered in South Walton."

- Meredith

The morning after Eve's last treatment, Meredith went for a walk on the beach. The sky was gray and ominous, but she was determined to walk out all her complicated thoughts and feelings. Her phone battery died unexpectedly, so when a huge rainbow appeared, she was disheartened to realize she could not capture it.

Noticing her frustration, a stranger offered her his phone, saying, "I've taken some already. Please text them to yourself or take some of your own."

Only later did the Gvozdases notice Meredith herself was in the stranger's photos. There she was: the mom of a warrior, reflecting upon their storm, walking right beneath the promise of a Gulf Coast rainbow.

A year later, Eve is doing great. She is 5 now and loving life as a kindergartener. The Sandcastle Kids trip demarcated a new beginning for their entire family—a fresh start to believe in.

360 Blue is proud of our ongoing partnership with Sandcastle Kids. To learn how to help other families, please reach out to your 360 Blue Property Manager, or visit TheSandcastleKids.com. **Beach Life**







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