

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

Discover the beauty of Pensacola Beach
The first and last beach in Florida

the secret beach

BY SALLY A. STANFIELD PHOTOS BY DIANE BRADFORD



nature trails sculpt this landscape. If camping is on your radar, you will find water, grills, bathrooms and cold showers available on Loop "A" of Fort Pickens on Pensacola Beach. Due to hurricane damage, it is accessible only to cyclists, boaters and hikers. Road repairs are soon to be completed.

The warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Pensacola Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway make vacationing in Pensacola Beach a water wonderland. It is the ideal playground for sport fishing, sailing, diving, sunset cruises and dolphin watching.

The **Pensacola Beach Marina** is the first stop as you come onto the beach. With the largest single fleet of charter fishing boats in northwest Florida, there is something for everyone. Big-game fishermen can take full-day and overnight trips in search of wahoo, tuna, dolphin and marlin. Each of the captains has more than 20 years of experience in these waters, and their ability is exhibited with regular tournament wins. The *Miss Marisa* won the 2007 Women's International Billfish Tournament with a 647-pound blue marlin, while the captain of *The Playful Seas* pulled in a record 932-pound tournament-winning shark.

For a more leisurely fishing experience, take a half-day trip out on the *Hog Wild*, *Lively One II*, *Bone Collector* or the *Entertainer*, and fill up your cooler with grouper, triggerfish, amberjack and red snapper. After your trip, you can relax at the boater's bar, where weary anglers and friends gather for a cold one while the boats weigh, measure, fillet and pack the catches.

If cooking after a fun day in the sun is not on your agenda, the marina is also home to the island's only full-service deli and grocery store, where they will prepare your fish for an afternoon meal. The deli provides breakfast and lunch, featuring a wide assortment of recipes to make sure you have a unique experience. Locals say this is the best place in town for steaks, and they carry a diverse wine selection to suit every taste. As an added service, **Cici's Deli & Grocery** will stock your condominium or rental house with food before and after you arrive. Boasting panoramic views of the island, the third-floor restaurant is used for private parties, corporate events and weddings. You can't miss enjoying the sunsets over Little Sabine Bay from the upstairs balcony with a bottle of wine and a special friend.

The Pensacola Beach Marina also offers dolphin and sunset cruises, as well as sailing tours, to explore the island with your friends and family. For those who want to experience Pensacola Beach from above and below the water, the marina has diving charters, like the *Daisy D*, that can take you out to the U.S.S. *Oriskany*. Sunk in 2006, the *Oriskany* is now the world's largest artificial reef, a must-see for all diving enthusiasts. You'll also find dozens of other great local dive sites that are perfect for observing marine life, photography, spearfishing and beginning wreck dives. The temperate waters, 80 degrees in the summer and upper 60s in the winter, allow for year-round enjoyment.

The marina is a great overnight stop for boaters, with several transient slips, fuel, the deli and grocery. It wouldn't be a trip to Pensacola Beach without a stop at the Pensacola Beach Marina.

Getting around the island is only limited by your sense of adventure and where you want to go. The beach trolley service begins May 16 and runs through Labor Day. The free trolleys leave every 30 minutes from designated areas. Open-air Funny Cars, scooters and bicycles can be rented hourly or daily for island excursion on your time. The fun and adventure is not limited to land; you can also zoom atop the waves on a WaveRunner or catamaran at Key Sailing and Bonifay Water Sports.



This page, clockwise from top: Heron on the beach, 647-lb blue marlin caught aboard *Miss Marisa*, proud fishermen with wahoo, catches from the *Entertainer*. Right page: vacationers enjoying a beach sunset above, Grand Marlin Restaurant below

If blue skies, sugar-sand beaches and emerald-green waters sound like paradise to you, then Pensacola Beach, Florida, is your ideal vacation destination. This unique stretch of white sand peppered with swaying palms has miraculously survived the commercialism and overgrowth that has taken its toll on other vacation venues. It could be coined "Florida's Secret Beach"!

With travel prices to foreign destinations soaring, take comfort in the pristine natural beauty of Florida's Gulf coast. Affordability, easy access, intoxicating beauty and world-class luxury lure travelers from around the world to Pensacola Beach.

The forts of Gulf Islands National Seashore date back almost 150 years, from the Spanish-colonial Bateria De San Antonio (1797) to the World War II-era Battery 234. Take a step back in history and visit Fort Pickens and Fort McRae (accessible only by water); both are located on and off the west end of Pensacola Beach. Despite the destruction of the Civil War and numerous bouts with tropical storms, a large portion of the fort and grounds still remain standing.

The parks of the Gulf Islands National Seashore are rich in natural resources. Sparkling blue waters, snowy-white beaches, fertile coastal marshes and beautiful winding



Dining on the island offers a variety of flavors and atmosphere. There are restaurants both Gulf-side and Sound-side that feature tropical surroundings and island influences. Don't miss the local favorites: Peg Leg Pete's, Flounder's Chowder House, Crabs and Hemingway's Island Grill. These all feature locally caught fresh seafood and oysters. You can root for your sports team while enjoying your favorite snacks and burgers at Sidelines or Surf Burger. Breakfast that is "as good as grandma's" can be found at DJ's Beach Café and the Native Café. Grab a beach chair from Lazy Daze rentals and enjoy a burger and fries from Tiffany's or a fish sandwich from The Pier Sandwich Shop. Distinctive southwestern flavors are on the menu at Cabo Grill. On the lighter side, sushi and tapas make the list at Charlie Banana's. At the end of the day, wind down waterside with your toes in the sand and enjoy the best view of the sunset and your favorite cocktail at Pensacola Beach's destination for live music, **Paradise Bar & Grill**. If the kids have their heart set on pizza, try Florida Pizza Kitchen or Papa's Pizza, both of which deliver to your door. For fine dining coastal-style, the Hilton offers H2O, a Cajun-Asian fusion restaurant, and the Bonsai Sushi Bar.

In the summer of 2009 the **Grand Marlin Restaurant** will open its doors and offer an atmosphere of tranquil waterfront dining. The restaurant will be a classic gulf coast restaurant serving 100% fresh seafood and prime steak with all dishes being a feast for the eyes as well as the taste buds. For casual dining or a cocktail outside under the stars, the menu can match the caliber of the ambience.

The marina will offer a number of long-term and transient slips that will accommodate vessels up to 75 feet. The signature features and benefits that will be unmatched include 24-hour security, cable television, dry cleaning service,

telephone access, washers and dryers, a fish cleaning facility for your latest catch, diesel and gas fuel pumps as well as delivery service from The Grand Marlin restaurant to the bow of your boat. The marine store, located just inside the entrance of the restaurant, will provide boating and fishing necessities as well as beach souvenirs and monogrammed clothing.

The first floor of the Grand Marlin's facilities will feature a separate area for private parties and functions of all kinds. From any of the dining and entertainment areas in this facility you will experience the fabulous panoramic views of the Santa Rosa Sound. The top floor will contain retail and professional offices, with views so magnificent it may be difficult to keep your mind on your work!

Abundant island-style shopping can be found on the beach. For a unique array of gifts, art, wine and home décor featuring local and national artists, stroll down to a marketplace called Geronimo's Outpost. L.A.-style clothing and jewelry have become the signature motif for Venus in Paradise, located in the Outpost. Gift items for all occasions (including free gift wrap) make this a great stop.

The Pensacola Beach Pier is a great way to watch fishermen bring in their catch, as well as observe dolphins and other sea life. The Bait Shop at the foot of the pier will set





elegance. A staff trained to anticipate guests' needs amplifies the attention to detail. Whether dining on the veranda, taking a cooking class with your kids, cooling off in the pool or rejuvenating in the spa, guests of The Island Empress will enjoy the comforts and personal touches associated with the world's most exclusive resorts. Fractional-ownership opportunities as exceptional as this are as rare as the white-sand beach so make your dream come true!

Portofino Island Resort & Spa is located on a pristine stretch of preserved land bordering both the Gulf of Mexico and the tranquil waters of Santa Rosa Sound.

It offers some of the most extensive beach-resort facilities on Florida's Gulf coast. Meticulously designed and magnificently appointed two- and three-bedroom sky home suites within five Mediterranean-inspired tower residences provide every modern luxury for today's savvy traveler. A full-service, year-round resort, Portofino offers guests the attentive service reminiscent of a boutique hotel with the exclusivity of a private resort retreat. Guests enjoy a spectacular fitness center with state-of-the-art equipment, and professionally trained staff will customize classes and programs. Portofino Island Resort's spa, located in the 40,000-square-foot Lifestyle Center, will help relieve stress and revitalize your spirit. Each day of your stay, enjoy a complimentary beach chair set up for two, DVD movie rentals and a round of golf on any of the four Emerald Coast Golf Trail courses. The complimentary resort water taxi offered Memorial Day through Labor Day offers a peaceful bay cruise to Pensacola Beach's finest dining, shopping and entertainment.

Pensacola Beach offers all types of lodging to fit every lifestyle and budget. From a modest 1950s-style motor-court motel to luxury high-rise hotels and condominiums, your choice is only as limited as your budget. **Paradise Inn** is pet-friendly and offers casual accommodations with the amenities of larger hotels, but with parking directly in front of your room. The family-style ambience that makes you feel like you're staying with friends is only surpassed by the sound of wind-swept palms and the lapping waters of Santa Rosa Sound.

you up with fishing gear and bait for a relaxing afternoon of inshore fishing.

In 1959, the Knights of Columbus erected the 10-foot concrete cross that's located on the south side of Fort Pickens Road. They placed it on the island as part of the Quadra centennial celebration of Don Tristan de Luna's landing in Pensacola and establishing America's first European settlement. It commemorates the first Christian mass held in the United States and has stood firmly through the years despite many storms and beach erosion.

The Island Empress will combine unparalleled ocean-front vistas with the rare opportunity to own a lifetime of them. Soon to emerge on Santa Rosa Island's 40-mile stretch of paradise, The Island Empress, a magnificently appointed full-service five-star retreat, will also introduce a coveted fractional-ownership experience enriched by The LaTour Signature Group. Inspired by Tom LaTour, former chairman and CEO of Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, The LaTour Signature Group distinguishes The Island Empress by offering the ultimate hospitality experience. Upon arrival, guests discover a place where Southern hospitality — with its relaxed charm and kick-off-your-shoes comfort — meets Mediterranean-style



Clockwise from top: spa at The Island Empress, La Tour Signature Wine, historic beach cross, the Island Empress, opening 2009. Right page: Pensacola Beach at its finest, cycling by the dunes, Portofino Resort & Spa





Whether you want a romantic weekend for two or a gathering of friends and family for a week at the beach, **Paradise Beach Homes** offers rentals that accommodate groups of up to 22 guests. Beautiful properties located directly on the Gulf of Mexico with verandas and sun decks add to the enjoyment of your stay on Pensacola Beach. For a more secluded venue, the rentals located on Santa Rosa Sound have less public access and offer a sense of privacy. Some Sound-front homes have piers and boat moorings.

Paradise Beach Homes has an inventory of fabulous town homes, condominiums and sky homes with opulent appointments. Many are located in the heart of Pensacola Beach and are within walking distance of dining and shopping. Other fabulous choices are situated in gated communities, all-inclusive destination resorts and gracious Gulf-side towers with pools, spas and gyms.

Traditional cottages and beach bungalows are still in demand for a vacation that is reminiscent of earlier times. The comfort level is high, and the price level is competitive with hotels. Enjoy the privacy of a home while cooking for family and friends island-style in paradise. Family pets are welcome in most of the houses and cottages with a deposit. Paradise Beach Homes has the largest inventory of vacation homes and cottages on Pensacola Beach.

Pensacola Beach is also home to many nationally recognized hotel chains that have a loyal following. Highpointe Hotel Corporation, a local hotel development and management company, is proud to offer the SpringHill Suites by Marriott and the Days Inn Pensacola Beach. Whether your trip is for business or pleasure, they have the perfect place for you.

The only Gulf-front Marriott from Texas to Central Florida, **SpringHill Suites by Marriott** offers spacious studio suites with separate living and sleeping areas, as well as private balconies overlooking beautiful Pensacola Beach. All suites are equipped with a microwave, mini refrigerator, coffeemaker, iron and ironing board, and hairdryer. Start your day off with a deluxe complimentary breakfast buffet, get a workout in the fitness room and relax beside one of the three outdoor swimming pools or whirlpool. The kids can enjoy hours of fun in the children's pool. After a day at the beach, relax with a beverage and a meal at Sunray's Poolside Tiki Bar and Sandwich Shop. Business travelers can keep up with the office in the business center, enjoy the convenience of wireless high-speed Internet access throughout the property and plan their next meeting or event in the well-appointed conference and banquet facilities.

Also located directly on the Gulf of Mexico, the **Days Inn Pensacola Beach** offers a lower-cost alternative for families traveling on a limited budget. The hotel offers complimentary continental breakfast each morning, laundry facilities, two outdoor pools and wireless Internet access. Rooms are equipped with microwave, refrigerator, coffeemaker, iron and ironing board, and hairdryer for guests' convenience. The hotel features two outdoor pools and is within easy walking distance to several of the island's restaurants, attractions and nightspots. Wyndham frequent travelers can earn Trip Rewards points with every stay!

While the family is busy at the beach, the golfers can explore the new **Emerald Coast Golf Trail**. The Emerald



This page, clockwise from top: a Paradise Beach Home, Paradise Bar & Grill, three sparkling pools at SpringHill Suites, Days Inn Pensacola Beach, Peg Leg Pete's Restaurant. Left page: Beach house architecture above, pristine Pensacola Beach below.



Coast Golf Trail consists of four great courses all less than an hour's drive from each other. They include the Scenic Hills Country Club, Tiger Point Golf Club, The Club at Hidden Creek in Navarre and Shalimar Pointe Golf Club in Fort Walton.

Entertainment is never in short supply on Pensacola Beach. The kids will love the island's two mini golf courses, go-cart rides, a game arcade, and bicycle and kayak rentals. Many of the restaurants feature impressive playgrounds, so parents can relax and dine while children are entertained. For adults, when the sun goes down, the nightlife powers up. Let the rhythm of the music draw you into one of the nightclubs or island bars for an evening of fun and dancing. Longtime local favorites are The Islander, The Sandshaker and The Dock. Surfers catch the latest surfing videos and cold beers at The Break. Lillo's is setting a new trend with an upscale cocktail lounge with signature tapas. For some Irish hospitality, stop in at Paddy O'Leary's. There is always something to do and some place to be on Pensacola Beach.

On Pensacola Beach, you can walk barefoot on the sand, relax in the sun, dine at the water's edge or dance under the moonlight. This is truly paradise and Florida's "secret" beach.

Pensacola Beach Partners

Pensacola Beach Marina & Cici's Deli & Grocery

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