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SUMMER 2015 MAGAZINE

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**SUMMER IS A TIME WE TEND** to remember as carefree, when family vacations include long afternoons and evenings lounging on the beach as the sun slowly sinks toward the Gulf of Mexico. It's the season for music and ice cream, rollercoasters and suntans, long days and warm, starry nights. Evenings at the beach might include hunting for shells, dinners out with friends or rinsing off the salt from a day on the water and just relaxing in pleasant exhaustion.

In this, our summer issue of Visit Panama City Beach Magazine, our writers explore how to plan the perfect summer vacation for you and your family; we take a look at what you might be fishing for and where you can find the beach that's just right for you. (With 27 miles of coastline to choose from, you'll have your pick!)

We'll tell you when and where to discover music in the air at Panama City Beach and even explore the perhaps surprising history linking Nashville's country music stars and our world-famous white sand beaches.

We went shopping for the summertime essentials and took a look at the many different ways to get out on the water (or under the water) while you're in Panama City Beach. And because we know that all this beach-time fun can create quite an appetite, we even made reservations with one of our area's best-known family owned restaurants — Captain Anderson's — which is truly the taste of summer for many of our visitors.

There's all that and more within these pages, and we hope that these stories will help remind you of your favorite summertime memories and spark your imagination as you plan your next trip to Panama City Beach.

Sunny regards,

**Dan Rowe, President and CEO**  
*Visit Panama City Beach*

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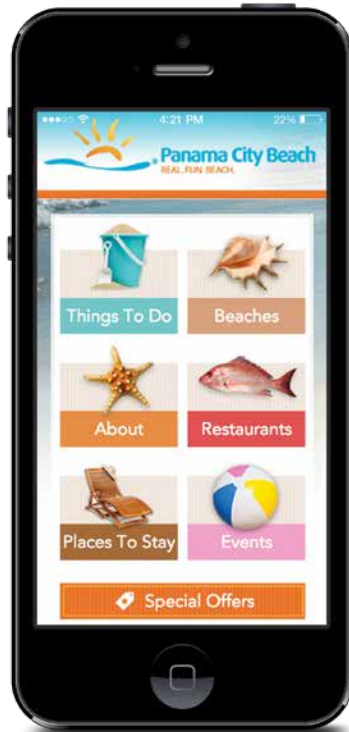


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## >> Get Inspired

While you're planning, check out the photos that other visitors have already posted. **#RealFunBeach**

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# Panama City Beach

## Talk Like a Local

- “Back Beach Road” ..... Panama City Beach Parkway
- “Middle Beach Road” ..... Hutchison Boulevard
- “City Pier” ..... Russell-Fields Pier
- “County Pier” ..... M.B. Miller Pier

\*\*NOT DRAWN TO SCALE

Major Road

Bike Path





## Distance Chart

Atlanta, GA	297 mi	470 km
Birmingham, AL	280 mi	440 km
Dallas, TX	751 mi	1,310 km
Houston, TX	639 mi	1,034 km
Montgomery, AL	186 mi	206 km
Nashville, TN	476 mi	744 km
New Orleans, LA	305 mi	513 km
Orlando, FL	340 mi	617 km
St. Louis, MO	745 mi	1,243 km
Tallahassee, FL	98 mi	171 km
Tampa, FL	339 mi	546 km

# Exciting Fishing Adventures Await!

**WHETHER YOU'RE** an experienced angler, a family ready for the “next big adventure” while on vacation or a father passing on his love of the sport to his children, fishing in Panama City Beach will not disappoint. From the sandy marshes and tidal flats of St. Andrew Bay to the depths of the Gulf of Mexico, our waters abound with a variety of marine life sure to entice the adventurer in you!

Today, pros and amateurs alike continue to catch an array of species, including amberjack, bluefish, cobia, flounder, grouper, king and Spanish mackerel, mahi mahi, marlin, pompano, redfish (or red drum), red snapper, trout, wahoo, sailfish and yellowfin tuna. Two of our premier locations to fish are the Russell-Fields Pier (or City Pier) and the M.B. Miller Pier (County Pier). An admission fee will include a license to fish from that pier for the whole day.

Summer is the most popular time of the year for fishing trips, though many locals say that spring and fall are their luckiest seasons. Knowledgeable anglers will find great rewards even in the winter.

In the summertime, family fishing rules. Anglers can choose from private charters, joining other anglers on a "party boat" or simply casting a line from shore. Snapper season is a highlight of summer, though red fish, gag grouper and red grouper are popular fish to target as well. Redfish and trout are more likely to bite in the bay during the early mornings or evenings of summer.

Offshore, deepwater fish like wahoo, yellowfin tuna, sailfish and marlin are favorites, while closer to shore red snapper are abundant and in season beginning the first of June.

In the fall, cooler temperatures stimulate fish to feed. That’s when redfish and trout most aggressively go after bait near the top of the water. With pompano and others schooling along the beach, fishing near the shore also improves.

As winter arrives, trout and redfish occupy the deep holes in the bay or seek refuge in creeks and rivers. Flounder, pompano and cobia, however, swim toward the shoreline for food. The warmer shores, in fact, lure larger fish throughout the cold weather.

At the onset of spring, Spanish mackerel, bluefish and cobia can be caught off the piers and in the bay, while trout and redfish populate the grass flats to feed.

For trolling and bottom-fishing offshore, deep-sea excursions range from private crew charters on luxury yachts to large group experiences on party boats. Small boat rentals are also available. For pier fishing, public sites include the Russell-Fields Pier, the M.B. Miller Pier and Tiller Pier in St. Andrews State Park.

Information and resources for fishing expeditions are available from the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau website at [visitpanamacitybeach.com](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com) under Ecotourism. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission publishes fishing regulations and license applications online at [myfwc.com](http://myfwc.com), and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council posts federal and state regulations on its website at [gulfcouncil.org](http://gulfcouncil.org). Find additional information on fishing and charters at [visitpanamacitybeach.com/things-to-do/fishing-charters](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com/things-to-do/fishing-charters).



**Pompano**



**Redfish**



**Flounder**



**Mahi Mahi**



**Grouper**



**Sea Trout**



**Cobia**



**Red Snapper**



**King Mackerel**

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# The Best Birding, Naturally

**NATURE ENTHUSIASTS** have much to explore in and around Panama City Beach. Birding is a hobby that is growing in popularity on the Gulf Coast, and with our diverse ecosystems of coastal dunes, salt marshes and freshwater wetlands, a wide variety of birds can be viewed in their natural habitat.

The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail (GFBWT) is a program of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission designed to conserve and enhance Florida's wildlife habitats by promoting birding and wildlife-viewing activities and conservation education. At its core is a network of nearly 500 sites throughout Florida selected for their excellent bird-watching, wildlife-viewing or educational opportunities. Miles of this self-guided trail run right through the Panama City Beach area.

St. Andrews State Park, aside from being named the No. 3 beach in the state by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, is also on the GFBWT. Lush nature trails wind through the park, providing an excellent opportunity for birding. Or, take

a kayak out and explore the coast for a more unique vantage point. Also, from St. Andrews State Park you can take a boat tour to Shell Island, a 700-acre island densely populated with a variety of wild birds, including pelicans, sandpipers, gulls, egrets and snowy plovers.

Camp Helen State Park, another site on the Trail, boasts a wide array of bird-watching opportunities. There is no end to what the attentive bird-watcher will see at Camp Helen since it is bordered on three sides by the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Powell — one of the largest coastal dune lakes in the world.

The Panama City Beach Conservation Park was born from a desire to protect and balance our natural resources while providing outdoor recreational opportunities. Twelve trails, ranging from just over half a mile to 11 miles, provide endless opportunities, so bring your binoculars and camera and enjoy a day in nature!

For more information on birding in the Panama City Beach area please visit: [BayCountyAudubon.org](http://BayCountyAudubon.org) and [FloridaBirdingTrail.com](http://FloridaBirdingTrail.com).



**Bald Eagle**



**Brown Pelican**



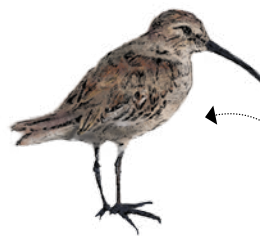
**Osprey**



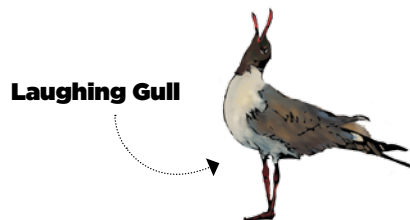
**Red-Shouldered Hawk**



**Sandpiper**



**Dunlin**



**Laughing Gull**



**Great Blue Heron**

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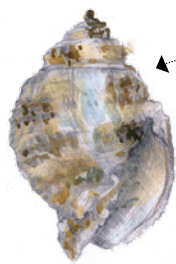
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# Grab a Pail and Take a Stroll

**NEVER HAS THERE BEEN** a more nostalgic image than a child carrying a pail, scouring the sandy beach along the water's edge, looking for a seashell that has been washed ashore. A discarded home from one of the water's inhabitants becomes a precious reminder of the awesome wonder of the sea. Take a stroll along our sugary sand, and discover what mysteries await as you recapture that feeling of innocence.

While shells can be found along any of the 27 miles of Panama City Beach, a preferred location is Shell Island, an uninhabited nature preserve, most of which is part of St. Andrews State Park. Collectors also spot some of their most spectacular shells while diving or snorkeling. Whether on shore or in the water, the species below represent a sampling of those that are indigenous to the area.



**Common  
Nutmeg**



**Angel Wing**



**Alphabet Cone**



**True Tulip**



**Lion's Paw**



**Atlantic  
Giant  
Cockle**

**Calico Scallop**



**Lightning  
Whelk**



**Florida  
Fighting  
Conch**





## BEACH SPOTLIGHT

### 27 Miles of Beautiful Beach Awaits

**WHEN YOU'RE** ready to feel the soft touch of the sparkling white sands of Panama City Beach beneath the soles of your bare feet, there are 27 miles of beautiful beach where you can choose to take your first step. One hundred public beach access points bring you to places where you can see and be seen, watch beach volleyball, grab a drink or a snack, go shelling or watch for dolphins frolicking in the waves. Or you can choose to lose yourself on an undeveloped island where you may be lucky enough to see the tracks of a sea turtle. Just wait until you catch that first glorious beach sunset. And the beach sunrises? They're pretty spectacular, too.



Splashing is more fun in the crystal clear waters of the Gulf of Mexico.



# The Sum of Its Parts

Sand plays host to people of all stripes

BY STEVE BORNHOFT

**TWO WHITETAIL DEER**, seemingly oblivious to the people around them, graze on the sparse ground cover that ekes out a living in the white sands of St. Andrews State Park. Visitors, some with phones, others with cameras fitted with outsized lenses, capture images of the does — the folks with whom they will share the photos need not know that the nearly tame deer were just a few yards off a paved road leading to the park’s Gator Lake.

Voices betray the fact that the deer’s audience is made up mainly of Midwesterners, folks inclined to comment that the St. Andrews deer are “just half the size” of the whitetails back home. For locals and out-of-staters alike, the park serves as an enclave separating them from busier beach venues along nearby Thomas Drive and Front Beach Road. With its dunes, marshes, lakes, beaches and jetty-sheltered “Kiddie Pool,” where generations have learned to swim, the park offers visitors varied environments that some say are consistent with the “Real Florida.”

## OTHERS PREFER ALTERNATIVE REALITIES

Along Panama City Beach’s 27-mile-long Gulf front, there are nearly 100 public access points that tend to attract crowds reflective of a particular stage of life. On PCB, the aging process generally advances from east to west. Consider three examples:

## A PLACE TO BE SEEN

Were a person to have a dollar for each of the bicep curls and sit-ups represented by the flat stomachs and bulging arms that gather each summer behind Schooners at the beach’s east end, he might comfortably retire ... early. Here gathers a crowd,



No matter who you are, Panama City Beach has a special beach just for you.



dominated by 20-somethings, for whom halcyon days can wait. Older folks, too, may frequent the place, but are likely to be equipped with mirror shades, metal detectors or both. Versus points west, the vibe here is active, young and more about “being seen.”

#### A PLACE TO BE SERENE

The atmosphere along the beach at the west end opposite Lahan’s Carousel Grocery — which offers both frozen fish bait and an extensive wine selection — feels like a Cheers bar. Expect here to find inveterate sun worshippers—people who are

no more fearful of melanoma than they are of meteor strikes. Most will have picked up their beach supplies — a magazine, perhaps, a bunch of green grapes, libations and a bag of ice — at the Carousel before hitting the sand. The vibe is as soft as the sugary shore itself, and the conversation relaxed. Nobody here is bent on impressing anybody else.

#### A PLACE THAT’S IN BETWEEN

The middle-beach beach at the County Pier is a family affair. Dads, some more mechanically inclined than others, all somehow manage to erect canopies that shade the fair-skinned family members. Many unselfconsciously display burnished bellies as if they were prized collectibles or the products of a lot of work. Boys with dreams of one day playing in Athens or Tuscaloosa toss around footballs, the sunscreen lotion on their hands serving as anti-stickum. Girls of a like age already feel a little too old to be seen hanging with their parents and sit slightly apart, returning to the group for a lunch time snack.

Indeed, Panama City Beach tourism promoters might well adopt the stance line, “Find Your Beach at Panama City Beach.” It’s here somewhere. ●

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Hombre Golf Club presents a challenge for golfers at all levels of expertise

BY JOHN MOOSHIE

## A Golfer's Paradise

**THE WEATHER IN PANAMA CITY BEACH, AS USUAL, IS PERFECT.** All you need is the golf course. With over 125 creatively designed holes built to fit any game, Panama City Beach has five distinctive courses that promise an experience of playability and a pleasing environment. Bay Point Resort boasts a Nicklaus Design course and a more subtle Willard Byrd layout. Holiday Golf Club's regulation 18-hole course and lighted par 3 course will impress all levels of players. Hombre's three separate and distinct courses promise varying degrees of difficulty, while Signal Hill delivers a short but challenging 18 holes. Exceptional golf abounds. So don't let all the beachside sand scare you; the grass is always greener on the fairways of Panama City Beach.

**IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR** a golf course with enough bite to challenge you, yet is approachable, fun and aesthetically pleasing, then Hombre is where you'll want to play. Designed by Wes Burnham in 1989, Hombre consists of three very different nine-hole courses giving players a different look on each of the nines. It's one of the most interesting golf courses in the Southeast. With names like The Good, The Bad and The Ugly, the nines can be played in differing 18-hole combinations. The original 18 holes (Bad and Ugly) annually host golfing professionals for the second-level stop of the PGA Qualifying School and was a tour venue for the Nike and Ben Hogan Tours.

Skillfully routed through the natural environment, Hombre offers a brilliant blend of holes, ranging from a reserve-like style to those with more of a walk-in-the-park feel. Water is a major component of the design, and there are plenty of hazards requiring accurate tee shots and exceptional shot-making approaches to thought-provoking greens.

Creatively designed and built through a collection of wetlands and marshland, Hombre is also home to an assortment of palm trees, majestic oaks, towering pines and an indigenous landscape that is scenic and challenging. In fact, the course will challenge every aspect of your game, and you better be willing to use nearly every club in the bag. Fear of water won't serve you well as it comes into play on most of the 27 holes. But the holes have been so deftly laid out that players have a number of options on how to play each one. Hit your ball in the wrong place and recovery will be difficult. So remember, "They never move the middle; it's always in the same place."

Hombre is a "must play" golf course but is not for the faint of heart. It's important to coordinate your playing ability with the correct set of tees. If you're going to play from the back tees, you should carry a single digit handicap because the course will serve up all you can handle. But if you're not an accomplished golfer and choose the proper teeing grounds, you'll love the challenges presented. Hombre has four sets of tees that allow golfers to choose the level of difficulty

that best fits their game and handicap. On the original 18 holes the course plays from 5,369 yards (senior tees) to 6,800 yards (championship tees) for the men while the ladies yardage is a stimulating 4,843. Depending on the combination of nines chosen, the rating/slope can vary from 74.4/144 to 67.5/123. Choose your tees and clubs wisely, and you'll know that you experienced a great golf course when finished.

A lot of imagination went into the design of the greens resulting in varying slopes, ridges and differing levels. Some can be difficult to putt, but they're all fair and well-maintained. Strategically placed bunkers are intended to catch errant tee or approach shots, while narrow tree-lined fairways and lots of water ensure that Hombre will never be boring. Often it's best to play the safer run-up shot rather than fire at the pin hoping to get it close. This isn't a course where you'll want to experiment with your driver. Favoring accuracy over distance will be the better option.

Adding to an already first-class facility is The Hombre Academy, one of the finest golf academies in the Southeast. Owned and operated by Adam Brack, the academy features private and group lessons, club evaluations and fittings, fitness and exercise programs, video analysis and special programs for kids and beginners. Anyone wishing to experience better golf or ensure their equipment is a proper fit will do well to visit the Academy at Hombre Golf club.

Hombre features excellent facilities, a challenging but fun golf course and a good practice facility all at a very reasonable price. ●





Hole No. 2 on The Bad course at Hombregolfclub.com.



Hombregolfclub.com Interior

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(850) 234-3218  
signalhillgolfcourse.com

# GEAR UP FOR SUMMER

**TAKE A BREAK FROM THE SUN** and enjoy a little retail therapy in Panama City Beach's wide selection of shopping venues, from beachside boutiques to retail giants to the mom-and-pop shops that dot Pier Park — an open-air shopping, dining and entertainment destination that delights with its Key West-inspired colors and Old Florida architecture. There are plenty of places to find that perfect souvenir, beachy knick-knack or surf-inspired gift. The Beach House Market alone houses more than 20 vendors under one roof. Specialty shops throughout the beach will help you find that perfect piece of jewelry or clothing that will remind you of your beach vacation long after you've shaken the last piece of sand out of your shoes.



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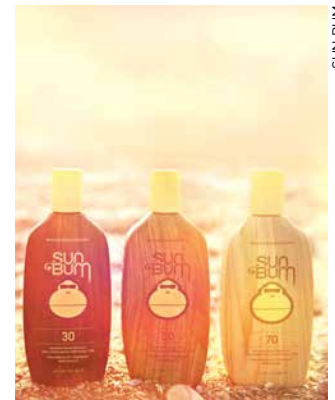
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# Fishing Equals Family Fun

Grab a pole and start making memories

BY CAPTAIN CHUCK SIMPSON

## Go Fish!

30.1767° N,  
85.8056° W.

**IF YOU DON'T** know where it is, it's the latitude and longitude for Panama City Beach, Florida: a world-class fishing destination with easy access to year-round fishing opportunities. Is your passion big billfish? What about reeling a large grouper or snapper up off a shipwreck resting on the Gulf floor? Would you rather troll for mackerel? What about redfish and tarpon on fly tackle? Do you just want the kids to have a good time? There are two public piers; take your pick. Panama City Beach has something to offer every angler. Remember, Panama City Beach is the destination where fishing season lasts all year long.

**IF YOU'VE TRAVELED** here with family, chances are you're on vacation and ready to make good memories. What better way to do that than a family fishing trip?

Nothing puts a smile on a face faster than a bend in a fishing pole and a tugging at the end of the line. Fishing trips create anticipation, adventure and excitement. Fishing sparks a child's creative thinking and peaks their imagination. It's educational and encourages interaction without distraction. Reeling in a fish can be much like opening a gift. You may have an idea what you're getting, but you're not sure until you finally put eyes on it. It is a great form of family entertainment and

can be one of the most exciting group activities in Panama City Beach. Fishing will create memories for years to come.

Have you ever looked out across the Gulf of Mexico, watched as sport fishing vessels pass or strolled along the docks at Capt. Anderson's as charter and head boats return to unload their customer's catches? Maybe you visited one of the public fishing piers and observed someone landing a fish. You're in town and want to go fishing. There is no reason you can't. Panama City Beach is the land of plenty — plenty of fishing for the whole family.

Due to its location, Panama City Beach is surrounded by diverse saltwater fisheries and







Fishing in the Gulf is always good — and fun for the whole family.

numerous recreational fishing opportunities. A number of professional charter boat operators and head boats are available for hire. Some captains dock at marinas, and some trailer their boats.

Capt. Anderson's Marina is a homeport to 20-plus private charter fishing operators. Generally, most privately owned fishing charters accommodate between one and six people, but a few do accommodate more. Some have their specialties. It's always wise to ask your captain about his services beforehand, to find out your best options and let him know your expectations. A little communication goes a long way.

Head boats can carry a number of people and are an affordable way to get one person or the whole family on the water fishing —possibly catching supper. Nancy Lee at Capt. Anderson's Marina explained the marina operates five head boats and now runs fishing trips of five, six, eight, 10 and 12 hours aboard their vessels. Bait, tackle and fishing licenses are covered in the cost of these trips.

Captain John Vann (owner of Last Local Guide Service) is a third generation Panama City Beach fisherman. He trailers his boat because of the versatility it allows him. Captain John fishes the bays, flats and offshore waters of Panama City Beach and the surrounding coastal areas. He can accommodate up to four anglers and prides himself in creating friendships with his clients.

There are other fishing charter services in the area, which can be found on [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com).

If you don't have sea legs, or prefer to keep your feet planted on land, the beaches, public fishing piers, bridges, sea walls and bays offer plenty of access for great fishing by foot. It's as simple as having a rod and reel, some bait and a desire to go fishing. Land-based fishing provides the perfect venue for introducing a child to the sport. Panama City Beach tackle shops like Sunjammers Watersports and Half Hitch Tackle are excellent sources for fishing tackle and information. Be sure you check the Florida Fishing Regulations to make sure you are in compliance with state laws.

The vast Gulf of Mexico, local surrounding bays and 27 miles of beach provide the perfect marine landscape for a myriad of fishing adventures. There's a fishing trip for any person and every family, so grab a pole and start making memories. ●

**FOR MORE FISHING INFORMATION, VISIT  
[VISITPANAMACITYBEACH.COM](http://VISITPANAMACITYBEACH.COM)**

## Enjoy the Gulf from a different perspective!



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We're located on Grand Lagoon at the Lighthouse Marina. Open March through October!



## Fun on the Water

WHAT'S YOUR WATER SPORT PLEASURE?

**IS IT A CRUISE** at sunset, a chance to observe dolphins or a fishing trip? Or are you enticed by underwater diving and snorkeling adventures? How about the fast-paced thrills of jet skiing, parasailing and skimboarding? Maybe you'd like the challenge of surfing and kiteboarding, or be happy with a peaceful paddle along the coast? In Panama City Beach, water sports are a way of life and you'll find all the equipment, guides and lessons here to experience them to the fullest.

And the fun doesn't stop at the beautiful white sand beaches. The area is loaded with bays, lakes, rivers, bayous, swamps, creeks and lagoons — all waiting for you to explore and enjoy.



Kayaking adventure can be found on the Gulf, the bay, lakes and rivers.



# Chart Your Course for **Fun in the Sun**

From adventure to relaxation, there are  
myriad water options

**BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM**

**WHETHER YOU ARE** looking for an action-packed adventure or a relaxing deep-sea excursion, charting your course to fun in the sun and on the water is easy in Panama City Beach.

For the leisure boater looking to dock for the day, you can moor at a half dozen marinas such as **Treasure Island, Bay Point, Bayside, Capt. Anderson's, Lighthouse Marina** and **Pirates Cove**. These one-stop water stops offer

snacks, supplies and a full roster of boating, fishing and sailing excursions — even banana boat rides — sure to suit all of the water lovers in your group.

If you did not come by your own vessel but want to spend time on the water, there are nearly as many options as there are fish in the sea. Choose from a 16-foot skiff to fish the shallows, a 35- to 45-foot mid-sized boat to go out into the Gulf with several friends or a



top-of-the-line, large sport fishing yacht to enjoy the lap of luxury while you watch the setting sun slip over the horizon. Decide whether you want to venture out for a half day or full day, and be sure to make reservations in advance to ensure the best selection.

If you like to be pampered and prefer someone else captain your ship while you try to spy dolphins, you have your pick. **Custom Yacht Charters** and **Island Time Sailing Cruises** are two of many outfits that have all the comforts and attentive crew necessary to spoil you and yours as you sail the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

It's easy to party on the water with **Paradise Adventures'** 52-foot Privateer. This 49-passenger catamaran features a spacious deck with plenty of seating, sunning nets, a slide off the back of the boat, a fully stocked bar and two onboard restrooms.

A cruise aboard the 73-foot **Sea Screamer** offers a smooth yet thrilling ride that allows you to take in breathtaking scenery while learning the area's history during a 10-mile ride alongside the world's most beautiful beaches and resorts. Don't forget your camera for a once-in-a-lifetime picture or video of playful dolphins as they splash and surf in the boat's wake.

A dinner cruise during sunset is memorable aboard the **Betsy Ann**, a beautiful old-fashioned style paddleboat that will have you expecting Mark Twain to step up at any moment. Kids especially love the tradition of the cannon blasting off and a chance to mug for the camera while steering the boat as an honorary captain.

Experience "real" Florida, like you've never imagined, with a tour of the backwaters of West Bay, rivers, creeks and marshlands in search of native Florida wildlife. On this tour by **Airboat Adventures** you just may spy American bald eagles, ospreys, heron, dolphins, alligators and more.

No matter what floats your fun boat, in Panama City Beach all you have to do for a day of fun is ... just add water.

*For a full roster of watersport rental and charter boat companies, go to [visitpanamacitybeach.com](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com).* ●

## WHERE TO GO TO RENT WHAT

### WEST END/PIER PARK

#### **Airboat Adventures**

6523 Hwy. 79  
(850) 230-3822  
[swampvette.com](http://swampvette.com)

#### **Agape Beach Service**

##### **WaveRunners**

11001 Front Beach Road  
(850) 866-2711

#### **Panama City Airboat Tours**

14856 Bayview Circle  
(850) 234-1532  
[panamacityairboat.com](http://panamacityairboat.com)

#### **Walkin' on Water Paddleboards**

##### **Paddleboards**

108 Carillon Market, Suite 1  
(850) 588-6230

### EAST END

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(850) 235-0009

#### **Aquatic Adventures**

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(850) 235-8051  
[pcbadvntures.com](http://pcbadvntures.com)

#### **Paradise Adventures**

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3901 Thomas Drive  
(850) 769-3866  
[paradiseadventurespcb.com](http://paradiseadventurespcb.com)

#### **Sunshine Water Sports**

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(850) 215-7046  
[sunshinewatersportspcb.com](http://sunshinewatersportspcb.com)

### SHELL ISLAND

**Shell Island shuttle, dolphin tours, pontoons, paddleboards, kayaks**

#### **St. Andrews State Park**

4607 State Park Circle  
(850) 233-0504, shuttle service  
(850) 630-1278, water sport rentals  
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#### **Shell Island Boat Rentals & Tours**

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[shellislandtours.com](http://shellislandtours.com)

*For a full roster of watersport rental and charter boat companies, go to [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com).*

## Fun for the ENTIRE family!



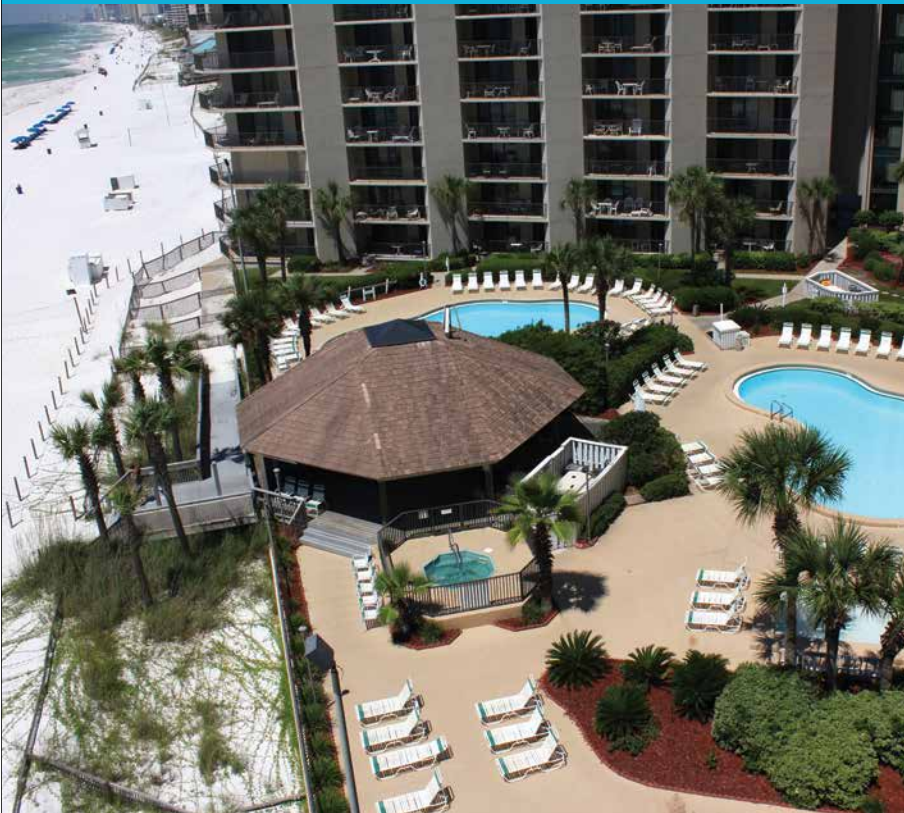
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## Natural Diversions

**OUT-OF-DOORS ADVENTURES** are a natural in Panama City Beach. Set out to explore “the last undiscovered Florida coast” and find out firsthand how diverse and rare animal species and plant life make Panama City Beach a nature lover’s wonderland. With 27 miles of beach, a multitude of parks and forests and a 700-acre natural barrier island, eco-tourists have their choice of wonderful adventures, from hiking and biking to kayaking and canoeing. Or stay put to enjoy a swim, look for shells or just log some great bird watching time.

# Sea Turtle Season ‘Eggcellent’ in Panama City Beach

The hatchling march to the sea is a sight to see — but don't touch!

**BY SANDI POREDA**

**SIX MONTHS OUT OF THE YEAR,** Nancy Evou spends every morning driving an ATV up and down about 18 miles of Panama City Beach, from St. Andrews State Park to Camp Helen State Park. She’s looking for turtle crawls, the distinctive tracks a sea turtle leaves behind when it comes up on the beach to lay its eggs.

Evou is the assistant director of Turtle Watch, a Panama City Beach-based program that works closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to protect sea turtles, their nests and eggs, and turtle hatchlings during the nesting and hatching season. The season lasts from April to September.

This area sees mostly loggerhead turtles, named for their large heads. After the sun sets, the female loggerhead turtle will come up onto the beach. Once she finds a spot she likes, she’ll dig her nest and lay about 110 eggs, each about the size of a golf ball. When she’s finished, she’ll camouflage the nest by flinging sand over it and then return to the ocean.

Last year, Turtle Watch found 37 nests, of which 36 hatched. That may sound like a lot of baby turtles, but only one of 1,000 hatchlings will survive until breeding age. Turtle Watch knows the odds, which is why its members stay vigilant.

When she’s out surveying the beaches, Evou is also looking for new nests so she can stake them off to protect them from vandalism or determine whether the eggs need to be moved because they’re in danger of washing away.

If a nest does need to be moved, teams of on-call volunteers carefully remove the eggs and find a new location where they can replicate the conditions of the original nest. Lynda Yates, a Turtle Watch volunteer, explained that these teams have to work fast — eggs have to be moved within 12 hours of being laid or the baby turtles could be harmed.

“Sometimes volunteers get called out at all hours of the night if someone sees a turtle laying her eggs,” said Yates. “We



KENNARD WATSON, TURTLE WATCH

BETSY STRALEY, TURTLE WATCH



Turtle eggs take about 60 days to hatch, then hatchlings head to the water.



have to be available 24/7 when we're on call. It's hard work, but it's immensely satisfying."

The eggs take about 60 days to hatch. Betsy Straley, another Turtle Watch volunteer, said she knows of people who see a turtle laying her eggs and come back two months later just to see that nest hatch.

"The hatchlings stick their little heads or flippers out of the nest," she said. "It's really cute."

When the eggs hatch, the hatchlings will go toward the brightest light, which should be the moon and the stars reflecting off the water. Other lights can disorient the hatchlings, which is why it's so important for homes and businesses along the coast to adhere to light restrictions during the season. That means no spotlights, headlights or other bright lights close to the sand.

Turtle Watch distributes flyers each year to the businesses, hotels and condominiums in the area so people know what the guidelines are and how to reach Turtle Watch if they see a turtle or hatchlings. ●



Female sea turtle depositing her eggs.

### WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A TURTLE LAYING EGGS OR FIND A NEST OR HATCHLINGS:

1. Call the 24-hour hotline: 1 (888) 404-3922
2. Don't touch the turtle or the hatchlings.
3. Do not use lights of any kind – no flash photography or flashlights, period.

### 2014 SEA TURTLE NEST STATS:

**Nest Count** — 37  
**Hatched Nests** — 36  
**Hatchlings** — 3,115

For more information, visit <http://turtlewatch.org/>.



TINA LEWIS AND DIANE WETHERBEE

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**Gulf-front kids playground**



## Diving Panama City Beach

### THE NUMBER

**ONE** destination for scuba diving in the Southeast is right here, or to be more precise, offshore in the calm waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

There are six dive shops in the area and a number of independent dive charters, a testament to the world-class diving that can be found here.

Artificial reefs, made from decommissioned ships, old bridge spans and other structures, give divers from all over the world a chance to see a wide variety of undersea wildlife.

An artificial reef off Panama City Beach is like an oasis in a desert, because this part of the Gulf sea floor is 98 percent sand and the wrecks help attract and support sea life. The wrecks themselves can be found at depths starting at 60 feet and as far down as 110 feet and provide opportunities for novices and experts alike.

DAVID BENZ

A popular dive spot, the 'Red Sea' is easily reached.





# **Smuggling Operation** Goes Straight ... to The Bottom

Vessel teems with fish and divers **BY STEVE BORNHOFT**



Above the Red Sea dive site and preparing to explore.

DAVID BENZ

### 'RED SEA' ARTIFICIAL REEF

- 125-foot steel-hull tugboat
- Sits upright in 75 feet of water
- 45 feet to top of the superstructure
- 6.6 miles from pass to St. Andrew Bay
- GPS coordinates: Latitude 3000.58, Longitude 8542.003

**SUNKEN SHIPS TELL** no tales. But Mike Gomez does.

Gomez's fellow Panama City Beach dive shop owners are well aware of the Red Sea, an ocean-going tugboat that was sunk in the Gulf of Mexico 6.6 miles outside the pass to St. Andrew Bay in June 2009. Ask them, however, about the history of the vessel and they'll confess that know nothing about its topside existence. "Gomez might know," they say.

Panama City Dive Center owner Gomez's network includes a South Florida friend with a knack for finding ships that appeal to wreck divers. When Gomez was told about it, the Red Sea was moored in the Miami River and sounded like an excellent candidate for artificial reefdom. It had a hull of steel and, at 125 feet in length, was a substantial vessel but still of a manageable size.

It was a perfect candidate for a new artificial reef.

"It's easily reached and in relatively shallow water, making it a popular dive for divers of all skill and experience levels," says Tony Snow, owner of the Dive Locker in Panama City Beach.

At the Red Sea, Snow's staff teaches people how to dive and leads them through their check-out dives.

So, too, does boat captain and divemaster Carlos Orozco of the Diver's Den.

"We teach classes underwater on the top of the bow," he says. "And the Navy conducts training in surface-supply diving in the vicinity of the wreck. They drop divers about 80 feet from the tug, and they make their way along the bottom to the wreck."

Once sunk, the Red Sea attracted reef fish almost instantly. Snow is not sure how fish detect the presence of a wreck so quickly. "Maybe they hear it sink," he theorizes.

Going on six years later, orange sponges and sea fans have encrusted the surfaces of the Red Sea, which hosts a food chain of fish and other creatures. Orozco offers a list: amberjack, spadefish, snappers, sharks, turtles, barracuda.

"And goliath groupers," adds Snow. "There are three or four that hang out on the Red Sea. They're the biggest members of the grouper family and can get to 500 pounds. They eat anything they want."

(Snow says they eat too much. He'd favor a one-day season to thin their ranks. Today, harvest of the strictly protected goliaths is prohibited.)

Visibility on the wreck, which sits upright on the bottom, averages 40-60 feet and may reach 100 at high tide. Divers easily and safely pass through window openings in the wheelhouse.

Now, about that topside history.

Gomez bought the Red Sea from the federal government for \$70,000 and, in turn, sold it to the Bay County Tourist Development Council and the Florida Aquatic and Marine Institute, which saw to its sinking.

What were the feds doing with an ocean-going tugboat? Seems the Red Sea couldn't outrun the Coast Guard. Especially when loaded with bales of marijuana from Belize. ●

# Last Local Beach Club



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# PIRATES AND TIGERS AND DOLPHINS, OH MY!

PANAMA CITY BEACH'S  
ATTRACTIONS OFFER LOTS  
OF SUMMER FUN **BY WENDY O. DIXON**

**S**urrounded by the Gulf of Mexico and St. Andrews and West bays, Panama City Beach has no shortage of summertime pursuits. The coastal community is home to six marinas and more than 40 charter fishing boats, as well as endless options for personal water crafting, kayaking, canoeing, diving and cruising.

Panama City Beach has a wealth of attractions, too, including summer classics like Gulf World Marine Park and Miracle Strip Amusement Park. And for an occasional rainy afternoon, indoor amusements like WonderWorks, Ripley's Believe It or Not museum and Rock'it Lanes keep the family entertained for hours.

## Gulf World Marine Park

**YOUR ADVENTURE AWAITS** at Gulf World Marine Park, where guests get an intimate look at the marine animals and enjoy daily live shows featuring dolphins, sea lions, reptiles and tropical birds. Explore fascinating exhibits showcasing penguins, flamingos, sharks, alligators, sea turtles, iguana and more. Spend the day at Dolphin Day Camp meeting the amazing animals and going behind the scenes in the park's animal departments. Learn more about marine life and discover fun facts about the animals' training while participating in interactive activities and experimental games. And Gulf World is proud to offer an up close and personal experience with California Sea lions, offering sessions with one of the sea lions during training.

15412 Front Beach Road, (850) 234-5271, [gulfworldmarinepark.com](http://gulfworldmarinepark.com)

## Goofy Golf

**OPEN SINCE 1959**, Goofy Golf is an old school favorite destination for the whole family. The park retains its kitsch charm with a sphinx, ghosts, dragons, fish and other creatures used as obstacles in its two 18-hole miniature golf courses. The evening lighting includes the glowing eyes of giant monkeys and dinosaurs. Climb one of the statues for a terrific view. It's mini golf with a bonus playland for a low-cost outing.

12206 Front Beach Road,  
(850) 234-6403, [Goofygolfpc.com](http://Goofygolfpc.com)



## Miracle Strip Amusement Park

**BRINGING SMILES TO NEW GENERATIONS** of families, Miracle Strip Amusement Park has held a special place in many people's hearts since it first opened in 1964. The park has since reopened in its new location, with restored historic rides and new rides and attractions, as well as gorgeous landscaping on 14 acres just east of Pier Park. Get the best view of the Gulf when you ride the 1975 Big Eli Ferris Wheel. Savor the cool breeze on a ride where everyone's a winner in the 1985 Zamperella Balloon Race. And take a journey that's out of this world in the 1966 Chance Trabant. New attractions include a zip line, batting cages and a rock wall climb.

284 Powell Adams Road, (850) 230-5200, [Miracle-strip.com](http://Miracle-strip.com)



MORGAN NEEKS

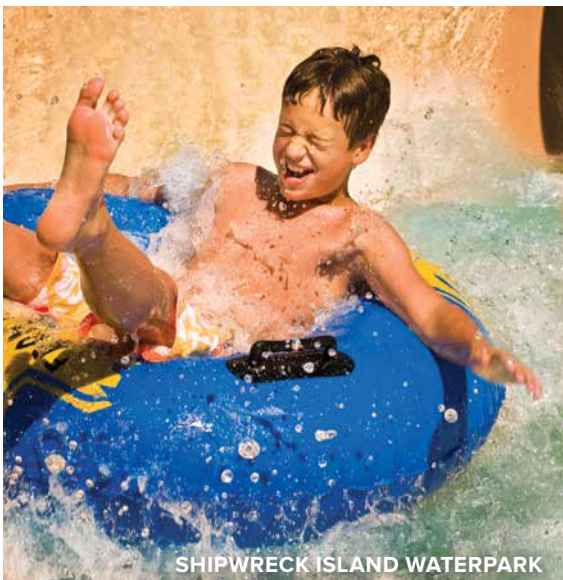




MAN IN THE SEA MUSEUM



WONDERWORKS



SHIPWRECK ISLAND WATERPARK

## Coconut Creek Family Fun Park

**WHEN IT COMES TO ADVENTURE**, Coconut Creek is king of the jungle. Experience the excitement of the African safari miniature golf courses. And challenge your navigation skills in the Gran Maze, a giant human maze with four checkpoints in an ever-changing route to keep you on your toes. Some people compete individually against each other; others work as a team to solve the maze puzzle in record time. Children under 6 play free.

9807 Front Beach Road, (850) 234-2625,  
CoconutCreekFun.com

## Man in the Sea Museum

**DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF DEEP SEA** exploration at Man in the Sea, with fascinating exhibits including a submarine you can climb through and an experimental dive system from 1968. Visit the display honoring the history of the U.S. Navy, contributed by Naval Support Activity Panama City, the area's Navy base. Examine an armored suit dating back to 1913, used to examine a wreck or study down to 400 feet. And check out the different diving helmets used throughout the years. Featuring a large collection of rare diving equipment, the museum highlights man's successes in underwater exploration.

17314 Panama City Beach Parkway, (850) 235-4101,  
ManInTheSea.org

## WonderWorks

**LET YOUR IMAGINATION RUN WILD** at WonderWorks, where scientific principles and fun come together to provide an unrivaled educational experience in Panama City Beach's only upside down attraction. The laws of nature and probability interact with human skills and perceptions to create some of the most mind boggling, head scratching virtual challenges. Lie on a bed of nails; experience natural disasters; test your mind's capabilities with bio-feedback; and create your own masterpiece with a gigantic version of Lite-Brite. Take the spacewalk challenge, a 36-foot tall glow-in-the-dark indoor ropes course with more than 20 different obstacles, crossing carefully over suspension bridges, swinging beams, lily pads and more. Strap on your laser-tag vests and battle against opponents in the laser tag arena's black-lit maze.

9910 Front Beach Road, (850) 249-7000,  
WonderWorksOnline.com/panama-city-beach

## Cobra Adventure Park

**FUN FOR ALL AGES**, Cobra Adventure Park includes something for everyone. Little ones can enjoy five kiddie rides and a kiddie track. And older racers can test their skills on a four-story go-cart track (double riding is available for kids). For extreme fun, check out the vertical accelerator, a sling-shot type ride that





## SHELL ISLAND

reaches heights of over 160 feet. The park also has an arcade with the latest in electronic games and an 18-hole pirate mini golf course.

9323 Front Beach Road; (850) 235-0321

## ZooWorld

**TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE** with a visit to ZooWorld Zoological & Botanical Conservatory, home to more than 275 exotic and endangered animals in a lush tropical landscape. See the exotic Bengal tigers of India and other big cats. Feed giraffes, goats and ducks at the feeding center, where you can get up close and have personal interaction with the animals. Meet tropical birds and primates from around the world, as well as giant snakes and other reptiles. The friendly zookeeper staff is always available and willing to share their knowledge of the animals. Under new management as a 501(c)3 educational facility, the zoo has evolved and grown, featuring new fun experiences, additional animals and exhibits and upgraded facilities.

9008 Front Beach Road, (850) 230-1243,  
[ZooWorldpcb.net](http://ZooWorldpcb.net)

## Shell Island Express Ferry

**SHELL ISLAND IS THE CROWN JEWEL** of St. Andrew's Bay and Panama City Beach. The 7.5-mile long, half-mile wide stretch of sand is a barrier island sitting at the mouth of the bay. Visitors and locals alike have made this pristine paradise a vacation must-do, and Capt. Anderson's Marina has the easiest and most convenient way to get there and spend an hour or the day. Part of St. Andrew's State Park, Shell Island is as close to nature as possible, with pristine white sand stretching as far as the eye can see. Sea oats cover the dunes and turtle nest sites are protected.

5550 N. Lagoon Dr., (850) 234-3435,  
[CaptAndersonsMarina.com](http://CaptAndersonsMarina.com)

## Shipwreck Island Waterpark

**SHIPWRECK HAS EVERYTHING** for the thrill seeker and the chill seeker. The 20-acre park features water attractions, thrill rides, a gigantic children's activity pool, lush landscaping and a professionally trained aquatics staff, making it one of the most hospitable attractions in all of North Florida. The Ocean Motion Wave Pool is a 500,000-gallon pool that generates three-foot waves every ten minutes. These waves contain cool clear water without any creatures that may live in the ocean. The Rapid River Ride is over 300 feet of white water inner tube rafting. "The Rapids," as they are affectionately known by so many guests, gives riders one of the best white water tubing slides you'll find anywhere. The 50-foot splash down is a breath-taking

finale. The Lazy River is over 2,000 feet of a slow moving meandering river that provides the park's most relaxing aquatic encounter. Tadpole Hole is its own little world of gigantic children's activity pools sporting a purple frog slide, a ship slide, an elephant slide, a pelican slide, a rope climb, a fort and a cute little yellow submarine known as "The Silly Sub." It's located next to the lazy river and the wave pool and is a perfect location for families with small children to spend the day. Shipwreck Island has been entertaining families in Panama City Beach since 1983 and has become a staple of Panama City Beach stays.

12201 Hutchison Blvd, (850) 234-3333,  
Shipwreckisland.com

### Ripley's Believe It or Not

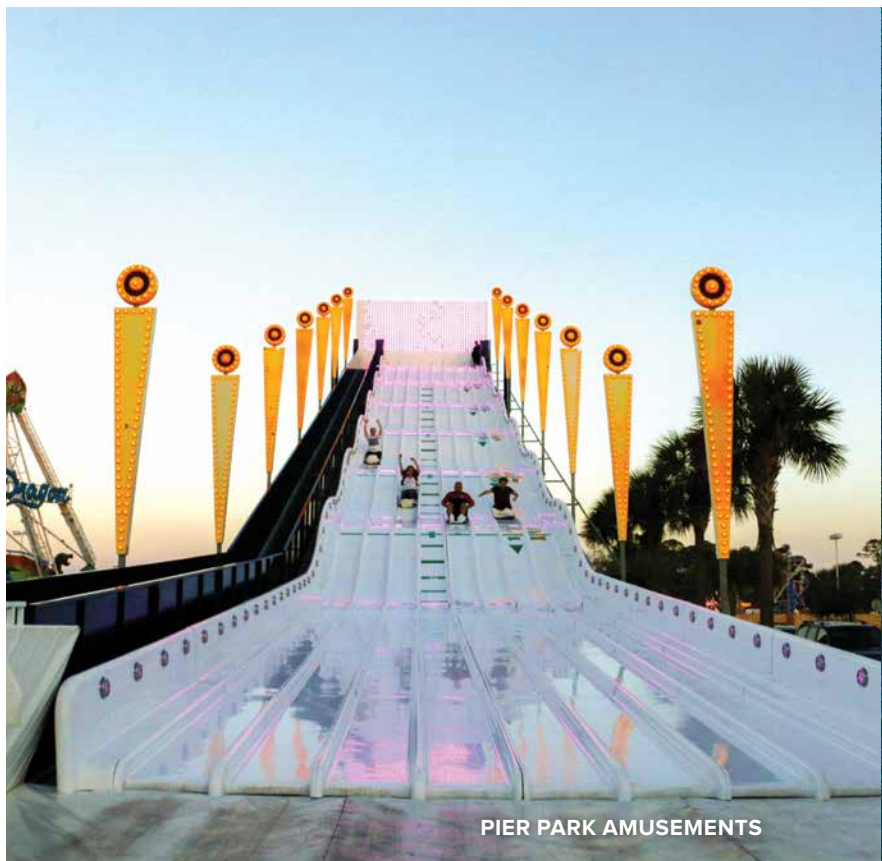
**FOR ALL THINGS BIZARRE**, stop into Ripley's Believe It or Not. Housed in a large, Titanic-like wrecked vessel, this eclectic museum will boggle your mind with its collection of unusual exhibits. Examine shrunken heads, an eight-foot tall Captain America sculpture made of scrap car parts, an authentic vampire killing kit, one-of-a-kind artwork, tons of hands-on interactive experiences and a wicked floating car. Strap on your seat belts for the seriously realistic 7D Moving Theatre experience. The state-of-the-art theater with digital effects and motion seats will have you feeling like you're starring in the movie. Bump, dip and shake your way through the kid-friendly Pirates interactive adventure. And for older kids and adults, the new Zombies interactive movie will have you shaking with fear.

9907 Front Beach Road, (850) 230-6113,  
Ripleys.com/panamacitybeach;

### Pier Park Amusements

**FOR THE ULTIMATE IN FAMILY FUN**, head to Pier Park Amusements, the latest addition to the beautiful Simon Mall at Pier Park on the west end of Panama City Beach. A great place to spend the day with the family, Pier Park's thrilling rides and cool Gulf breezes give you a break from hardcore shopping with fun that is safe and affordable. The Spinning Coaster is perfect for thrill seekers as you spin your way through a 190-foot figure eight. Experience the five-story tall Euro Super Slide, the actual slide on Super Bowl Boulevard at the 2014 Super Bowl. If you're still looking for excitement, check out the Sky Tower and reach to the sky before the bottom falls out in a 40-foot free fall. For the little ones, the 1952 Theel Merry-Go-Round, Horse & Buggy and Kite Flyer offer gentle fun.

15700 L C Hilton Jr. Drive, (850) 588-1680,  
PierParkRides.com



PIER PARK AMUSEMENT RIDES

PIER PARK AMUSEMENTS



RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT



SEA DRAGON PIRATE CRUISE

## Sunjammers Watersports Guided Eco Tours

**EXPLORE THE PRISTINE WATERS** of nearby lakes, salt marshes and tidal creeks with a guided kayak eco tour from Sunjammers Watersports. Included in the relaxing two-hour trip is basic paddling instruction and everything you need for an enjoyable kayak tour. The tours are every Tuesday from 6 to 8 p.m., weather permitting. If the weather isn't conducive the tour is rescheduled for Wednesday evening. The cost of the class is \$50 per person. Active duty military get the first tour for half price.

Sunjammers.com, (850) 235-2281 or email [brad@Sunjammers.com](mailto:brad@Sunjammers.com).

## Rock'it Lanes

**FOR SOME INDOOR FUN** in a wholesome atmosphere, shake things up at Rock'it Lanes for a day of bowling, billiards and skating. The bowling lanes and pool tables, along with a 5,000-square-foot arcade, 8,000-square-foot roller skating rink and the sports bar grille with big screen TVs are in a non-smoking environment all under one roof.

513 Richard Jackson Boulevard in the Shoppes at Edgewater, (850) 249-2695, [RockItLanes.com](http://RockItLanes.com)

## Sea Dragon Pirate Cruise

**HEAD OUT ON THE WATER** in grand buccaneer style aboard the Sea Dragon Pirate Cruise, one of Panama City Beach's premier vacation attractions. The cruise offers an exceptional sightseeing experience of the waters, shoreline and wildlife near the entrance to St. Andrews Bay. The captain will point out numerous species of birds and fish during the cruise and if you're lucky he'll scream out, "There she blows!" as you spot some of our playful bottled nosed dolphins. Have a swashbuckling good time on this two-hour cruise, in which young and old can get into the spirit with playful sword fights and the firing of cannons. Reservations are recommended.

5325 North Lagoon Drive, (850) 234-7400 or email [info@piratecruise.net](mailto:info@piratecruise.net), [PirateCruise.net](http://PirateCruise.net)



**SUMMER**  
Sound *of*  
**MUSIC**





FROM COUNTRY AND CONTEMPORARY TO OLDIES AND  
BEACH — THERE'S A WHOLE LOT OF MUSIC GOING ON

**BY JACKIE SHECKLER FINCH**

**D**azzling beaches glisten like diamonds in the sun. Soothing breezes fan the shores from the deep turquoise waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Sunsets flash golden rays before slipping out of sight. And music from world-renowned performers stirs the soul and makes hearts dance.

Summer in Panama City Beach is a time to sweep away the cares of the day and join in a celebration of life and great music. The magical “Summer Sounds of Music” include the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam, concerts at Aaron Bessant Park, Groovin’ on the Green and Chasin’ the Sun.

“In Panama City Beach, we pride ourselves on having fun,” said Dan Rowe, president and CEO of Visit Panama City Beach. “Last year was a record-breaking year for visitation, and we expect even more guests this year.”

No wonder, said Karen Miller of Nashville. The many concerts give her and her friends even more of a reason to visit Panama City Beach. “We came here to hear Toby Keith at the Gulf Coast Jam and had a ball,” she said. “Now we’re waiting to hear who the performers are next. We definitely plan on coming back.”

Wait no longer. Headliners for the 2015 Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam are Lady Antebellum on Sept. 4, Miranda Lambert on Sept. 5 and Keith Urban on Sept. 6. Also scheduled to appear at the Labor Day weekend festival are rising stars Hunter Hayes and Sam Hunt.

“This is the biggest talent lineup we have had so far,” said Executive Producer Rendy Lovelady. “We have been operating on a three-year plan, and we expect this third year to be the best yet. The first year we had around 10,000 people per day. The second year was 18,000 people per day. And this year we expect it to be about 25,000 people per day.”

Part of the success of the three-day festival is the free shuttle system and the local lodging packages, Lovelady said. A number of Panama City Beach resort hotels and condominium groups have teamed with the Gulf Coast Jam to offer lodging packages. The preferred lodging tickets provide access to a special viewing area in front of the Frank Brown Park main stage for the three days of the festival.

Gates open at 2 p.m. for each day of music with the show ramping up at 2:30. The lineup performs well into the late-night hours, wrapping up around midnight.

“The free shuttle is the thing that makes it work,” Lovelady said. “One of our biggest concerns was having that many people trying to go to one place at the same time. It could present a real traffic problem.”

To prevent traffic snafus, Lovelady said festival organizers met with experts in traffic control. “We consulted with Disney because Disney knows how to get people from one place to another without problems. Disney gave us the idea of a shuttle system.”

The continuous loop shuttle offers regular pick-up and drop-off stops at Pier Park shopping center, several resorts and nightlife

**“We came here to hear Toby Keith at the Gulf Coast Jam and had a ball. Now we’re waiting to hear who the performers are next. We definitely plan on coming back.”**

— Karen Miller of Nashville

venues. The free shuttle makes it easier to ride than to drive to the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam. “And people don’t have to worry about drinking and driving,” Lovelady said.

“The chief of police paid us one of the greatest compliments when he said it was the smoothest he has ever seen,” Lovelady said. “We had 18,000 people cleared from the park in just 40 minutes last year. No traffic jams. No problems.”



PCB ENTERTAINMENT

HUNTER HAYES, LADY ANTEBELLUM AND SAM HUNT



PCB ENTERTAINMENT



PEPSI GULF COAST JAM



KEITH URBAN

PCB ENTERTAINMENT



**"Our stretch of sand has inspired many songs and summertime anthems. And that's what Chasin' the Sun Music Festival is all about celebrating."**

— Dan Rowe,  
president and CEO  
of Visit Panama  
City Beach

MIRANDA LAMBERT

PCB ENTERTAINMENT



ALAN JACKSON

KRISTY BELCHER

## Aaron Bessant Park, Groovin' on the Green Concerts

Throughout the summer, visitors and locals gather at Aaron Bessant Park for a free summer concert series every Thursday from 7 to 9 p.m. The first concert this year is June 11, and the last one is Aug. 13. Live performances in the open-air amphitheater feature up-and-coming entertainers as well as popular local performers.

On Monday nights, Groovin' on the Green offers another open-air concert at the Carillon Beach neighborhood. The 2015 schedule of performers for both venues is still being finalized, said Jim Ponek, director of Panama City Beach Parks and Recreation.

"We've been doing the summer concert series for about 10 years now," Ponek said. "It's really relaxing, just a great atmosphere. People bring their lawn chairs, ice chests, food. We see a lot of families there. It's like the old days, as cool and fun as can be."

Music covers a wide range from country and contemporary to oldies but goodies and beach music with a dash of reggae mixed in.

"The amphitheatre is a beautiful multi-million dollar facility with plenty of room for everyone," Ponek said. "The Thursday night concerts are a good way to start the weekend early, and the Monday night ones are a good way to make the weekend last longer."

## Chasin' the Sun Music Festival

As a chance to enjoy a few bonus days of summer, the Second Annual Chasin' the Sun Music Festival on Sept. 25–26 is bringing in country music legend Alan Jackson to remind listeners that "It's five o'clock somewhere."

Performed by Jackson and Jimmy Buffett, the 2003 hit quickly became the theme song of people who want to shake off the stress of the workday and enjoy life. "Pour me somethin' tall an'

strong, make it a Hurricane before I go insane. It's only half-past twelve but I don't care. It's five o'clock somewhere."

The honorary resident of Margaritaville will perform Sept. 26 at Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater. More acts and information will be released at a later date. "Our stretch of sand has inspired many songs and summertime anthems," Rowe said. "And that's what Chasin' the Sun Music Festival is all about celebrating."

Panama City Beach resident Matt Pergolini said he is pleased at the "Summer Sounds of Music" offered in his hometown. The musical gatherings are a treat for locals and visitors alike, he said.

As sales manager for WonderWorks, Pergolini said he has noticed that visitors who come for the concerts also decide to enjoy other area attractions. An "amusement park for the mind," WonderWorks is a pleasant place for all ages to enjoy air-conditioned fun as a break from the beach and the music.

"They can come in here and play for a while, then leave to eat or let the kids take a nap and then come back," Pergolini said. "The tickets are good all day."

Although she also lives in the area and is the general manager of Gulf World Marine Park, Pam George said she and her friends book rooms at Edgewater Beach and Golf Resort, pay extra to sit in the VIP section near the stage and ride the free shuttle to the jam. "I haven't missed a Gulf Coast Jam since it started, and I'm really excited about the performers this year," George said.

"I've gone to the free concerts, too. They are very family friendly and relaxing," she added. "I think it's great that Panama City Beach has so much music going on. I enjoy the concerts myself and know that they bring in visitors who stay to see what else Panama City Beach has to offer." ●

# Food, Music and Fun for Everyone

## There's Music in the Air in Panama City Beach Summer

Throughout the summer, visitors and locals gather for the free summer concert series at Aaron Bessant Park amphitheater, where live performances in the open-air amphitheater set the tone for summer. The PCB Summer Concert Series takes place every Thursday night, and Groovin' on the Green offers a scaled down version of the open-air concert series on Monday nights at the Carillon Beach neighborhood.

## Star Spangled Spectacular, July 4

Panama City Beach celebrates the 4th of July with the largest fireworks display on the Gulf Coast at Pier Park. Families can enjoy a day filled with live entertainment, children's activities, tasty food and drinks, as well as breathtaking fireworks displays at multiple locations.

## Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam, Sept. 4-6

This Labor Day weekend, the Pepsi Gulf Coast Jam will bring the best of today's country music to the beach. Festivalgoers will get to see many of the biggest names in country music: Lady Antebellum on Sept. 4, Miranda Lambert on Sept. 5 and Keith Urban on Sept. 6. Also scheduled to appear are rising stars Hunter Hayes and Sam Hunt. When the sun begins to set, patrons can ride free shuttles to the headline stage at Frank Brown Park from participating lodging properties.

## Lobster Festival and Tournament, Sept. 14-20

Schooners sets the stage for the largest lobster festival in Florida, as the 26th Annual Lobster Festival & Tournament gives divers a chance to compete and attendees a chance to eat amazing lobster dishes. Tournament participants compete in a variety

of categories, including spiny lobster, shovelnose lobster and big 6. Weigh-ins begin Saturday and end Sunday with grand prizes and a Lobster Feast. The popular Sand Sculpting Contest is now in its 18th year and takes place on the beach behind Schooners.

## Alan Jackson Joins 2nd Annual Chasin' the Sun Music Festival, Sept. 25-26

Grammy award-winning singer and songwriter Alan Jackson will perform front and center at the 2015 Chasin' the Sun Music Festival on Saturday, Sept. 26. The area's newest concert tradition celebrates classic beach tunes for the perfect vacation soundtrack.

## Fall Fishing Challenge, Oct. 1-31

To showcase the world-class fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, Panama City Beach is luring avid anglers with weekend-long pier fishing tournaments this fall. Through the month of October, the City Pier vs. County Pier Challenge guarantees fun and prizes for participants. Extending more than 1,500 feet into the Gulf of Mexico, the M.B. Miller Pier (County Pier) and the Russell-Fields Pier (City Pier) are two of the longest on the Gulf Coast and are prime fishing spots for anglers of all ages. There is no fee to enter the contest — anyone fishing from the pier is automatically entered into the tournament.

## Pirates of the High Seas Fest, Oct. 8-10

Columbus Day weekend will bring a wave of fun-filled adventures to Panama City Beach with the Pirates of the High Seas Fest. Taking place throughout the coastal community, the festival will include an ensemble of parades and sword-swinging showdowns, culminating with



a dueling fireworks display reenacting The Battle of the Seven Seas.

## Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally, Oct. 21-25

Known as "The Most Biker Friendly FREE Rally in the United States," the Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally is held twice yearly in Panama City Beach during the first weekend in May and mid-October. Bikers from around the country enjoy scenic rides along the Emerald Coast, live entertainment and local cuisine.

## Ironman Florida, Nov. 7

What began as a challenge between groups of Navy SEALs has become one of the most recognized endurance events in the world. The Ironman consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run, with the Florida edition of the challenge serving as one of the most popular races on the circuit.





STAR SPANGLED SPECTACULAR



CHASIN' THE SUN MUSIC FESTIVAL



PEPSI GULF COAST JAM

PCB ENTERTAINMENT

**Emerald Coast Cruizin', Nov. 9–14**

The annual event at Aaron Bessant Park is perfect for families and attracts thousands of classic cars, hot rods, custom cars and trucks. Live music will also be featured at the event.

**Eighth Annual Beach Ball Drop, Dec. 31**

Celebrate New Year's Eve on the beach! A family-friendly countdown at 8 p.m. culminates with fireworks and 10,000 beach balls being dropped over the crowd. As the seconds tick down to midnight, thousands of revelers watch an 800-pound glowing beach ball descend to signify the start of a New Year with a second round of fireworks.

**2016 EVENTS**

**Winter Resident Senior Prom, Feb. 10**

Now in its fourth installment, the Senior Prom is a fun tradition for winter residents to get out their dancing shoes. Held at Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort, the 2015 theme was "Under the Starry Skies."

**Panama City Beach Mardi Gras & Music Festival, Feb. 12–13** The two-day festival and parade takes place in and around Pier Park and is one of the most

fun Mardi Gras events anywhere. The event is perfect for the whole family and includes a Mardi Gras Kidz Zone, float tours, street fair and live music, including a headlining performance by Aaron Neville of the Neville Brothers.

**Seabreeze Jazz Festival, April 22–26**

Named a "Top 10 Jazz Festival in the USA" by JazzIZ Magazine and recently nominated as "Best Jazz Festival" at the Oasis Smooth Jazz Awards, the Seabreeze Jazz Festival combines the top national smooth jazz artists with a full weekend of fun, sun, great beaches and good times — all on the west end of Panama City Beach. The event now attracts over 20,000 fans from the U.S., Canada and Europe for the ultimate performance-packed weekend of jazz.

*For more event information, visit [visitpanamacitybeach.com](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com).*



## Vacation Rentals & Long Terms



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At Joni's Beach Rentals, we provide vacation rentals throughout Panama City Beach. Whether you are looking for a secluded getaway or want to stay in the middle of the action, we can help you find your dream vacation home.

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# Nashville's Beach

Music city's stars find inspiration, relaxation in PCB

BY DAVID DEMAREST

**THERE'S A LONG-STANDING** connection between Nashville, Tennessee, and Panama City Beach. And I'm not talking about I-65 and the various highways and byways that bridge the eight-hour drive for so many visitors, or even the direct flights connecting the two cities' airports (ECP and BNA) with a one-hour flight.

No, there's a cultural connection between "Music City" and "The World's Most Beautiful Beaches" that goes deeper than the geography. It's a link that has led some in Tennessee to proclaim Panama City Beach as "Nashville's Beach."

For decades, Nashville's biggest stars and upstarts have made their way to Panama City Beach when they needed to kick back in the sand, find inspiration or trade writing songs about Nashville rain for songs that celebrate beach life.

So where to start? How about with Hank Williams Jr., who was ready to quit the music scene in 1974 when he met the

man who would become his long-time manager while on a fishing trip in Panama City Beach. Williams even opened Hank's Beach Club right on the beach near where Pier Park is today. The club was one of the largest in the region in the early 1980s, sitting on 18 acres of beachfront property with inside seating capacity for 1,000 concertgoers. Another country music legend, George Jones, also once owned a home in Panama City Beach.

More recently, Kenny Chesney's rise to super-stardom had strong ties to his appearances in Panama City Beach, and even after making it big he returned to put on a free beach concert two years in a row. In the second year, 2009, he pulled a newcomer onto stage with him – the following year now super-star Luke Bryan was named the "Top New Solo Vocalist" by the Academy of Country Music Awards and "New Artist of the Year" by the Country Music Association. The "Entertainer of the

Year" (2014) and "Male Vocalist of the Year" (2014) returned to perform for a crowd of thousands on the beach last March for the seventh consecutive year.

Panama City Beach has also turned up in a long list of Nashville hits, including songs performed by Jason Aldean, Alabama, Kenny Chesney and Travis Tritt. Luke Bryan's recent hit "Roller Coaster" is said to have been inspired by childhood trips to Miracle Strip Amusement Park and the music video accompanying the song was filmed in Panama City Beach. Rodney Atkins' song "Farmer's Daughter" may be set in farmland, but Atkins sings that the girl in the song had "just gotten back from Panama City / All tanned up and my kind of pretty." In short: Nashville's love of Panama City Beach is as engrained as country music's love of pretty girls!

Speaking of which, country music news and entertainment site The Boot recently featured emerging artist Justin Moore

and his wife, Kate, who reportedly met in Panama City Beach. Other artists have fallen in love with the area itself, resulting in some of the big names you'll see on the Gulf Coast Jam's marquee quietly buying homes along the beautiful white sand beaches that have long been Panama City Beach's No. 1 claim to fame.

Local businesses link Nashville and Panama City Beach as well — most famously (and literally) Tootsie's Orchid Lounge. The Nashville landmark country music hall opened a second location in Panama City Beach's Pier Park and originally featured a video link between the Nashville and beach locations that allowed patrons to wave or share a friendly "cheers" across the miles. The beach location features live entertainment from Nashville weekly and good times every day of the week. Asked why he chose Panama City Beach as the only Tootsie's location outside of Nashville, Tootsie's co-owner Steve Smith says, "I'd been visiting Panama City Beach

for years before deciding to open a second location there. It's just a great place and there are a lot of country music fans who visit there. We love it."

Of course, this isn't just a one-sided migration. Danny Rader (whose family owned and operated the Ocean Opry in Panama City Beach) left the sandy shores of his hometown to play guitar on the albums of a number of current country stars and since 2010 has been a guitarist in Keith Urban's touring band. Also, a former local TV news producer for WMBB (the call letters stand for "World's Most Beautiful Beaches") moved from our relatively small market to eventually become a senior vice president of Music Events and Talent for County Music Television (CMT) and serve on the Country Music Association's Board of Directors.



Tootsies Orchid Lounge at Pier Park

TOOTSIES ORCHID LOUNGE

With the world to explore, Nashvillians continue to choose Panama City Beach's powder soft and sparkling white sand as their favorite beach, and it's no wonder — whether they're like Blake Shelton looking for "Some beach, somewhere," or more like Jason Aldean looking for "My Kinda Party," there's something for everyone in PCB. And while Nashville's stars might not have discovered Panama City Beach, they've always known how to make themselves at home here. ●

## Pier Market Coastal Home & Garden



### PCB'S ONLY ORGANIC GARDENING CENTER AND MARKET

Farm Fresh Produce | Original Art

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artists — fresh soaps and  
bath salts, small batch culinary  
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BoardwalkBeachResort.com

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This Labor Day weekend, let Boardwalk Beach Resort be your Gulf Coast Jam lodging headquarters! Choose from a newly remodeled, affordable hotel room or indulge in one of our luxury condominiums and enjoy breathtaking views of our beach!

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# Finding Your Beach Home

From cozy cottages to lavish suites, PCB has it all **BY KIM FINLEY**

## THE ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

in Panama City Beach are as diverse as the families who make PCB their beach destination. From spectacular campsites to Gulf-side resort condominiums, families of all types will find just what they need for the perfect beach vacation.

Picture perfect views and easy access to the beach come standard in PCB, and the choices of where to stay are endless. Most accommodations have incredible views and are just steps from the Gulf. Stay near Pier Park for great shopping and dining options, at the East End for all access to the Gulf via Grand Lagoon or out on the West End for a secluded beach retreat.


### Family-Friendly Resorts

For families that want more activities close at hand, there are plenty of properties with loads of onsite fun. For children of all ages, Splash Resort is all about good wet fun.

A water park, splash pad, lazy river and multiple pools provide a watery wonderland for kids, while adult-only amenities such as a Jacuzzi and fitness center overlooking the play area provide parents a safe haven from which to enjoy watching their kids frolic with new friends. Holiday Inn Resort has plenty of high-octane family fun with a lagoon pool, pirates' cove and daily activities calendar that includes fun for adults as well as kids. For families with 'tweens, you're sure to have a happy family when booking one of the resort's Kids Suites — a unique room configuration with a partition that separates off one section with two twin beds. The kids' space features its own 26" flat screen TV and an Xbox gaming console.

### Laid-Back and Secluded Lodging

Looking for quiet seclusion? In Panama City Beach, you can pretty much dial up the degree of remoteness. Go a couple



miles west of Hwy. 79 to the “quiet end” of the beach and the landscape changes dramatically, though not the quality of the pristine beaches and their signature squeaky white sand. Laid back lodgings like Sugar Sands Inn and Suites or Beachside Resort make it easy to forget you are just minutes from one of the most energized and family fun destinations in the Southeast.

### All-Inclusive Resort Communities

Don't want to get back in the car until it's time to go home? Don't. Park your vehicle, unload the family and settle in to one of PCB's all-inclusive resort communities. Located at the west end of PCB, near Camp Helen State Park, Carillon Beach Resort is a quaint village that is perfect for



Wherever  
you stay, the  
beach is never  
far away.



families with young kids. There is lots of room to roam, little car traffic and plenty of fun activities on and off the beach to fill your days. Carillon Beach Resort Inn offers deluxe king suites with all the fixings, while Carillon Beach Rentals will set you up with a cottage of your own that includes all the amenities of home.

#### Activities Galore at Resorts

In the heart of Panama City Beach, Edgewater Beach Resort has it all — beach, golf, pools, splash pad, restaurants and, best of all, an activities director to help coordinate fun for the whole family. Spacious suites with fully equipped kitchens and washers and dryers make for a most civilized experience with kids; outstanding

restaurants and convenient shopping make for a fantastic vacation for all.

#### Classic Waterfront Properties

If your goal is to spend as much time as possible on the water, then the East End is the place for you. Panama City Beach's Grand Lagoon is the Gateway to the Gulf and offers visitors a myriad of ways to get out and enjoy it. Half the family wants to go fishing and the rest want to lie on the beach? Look no further than En Soleil, a new resort on Thomas Drive. Thomas Drive also features classic properties such as the Dunes of Panama, Summerhouse and Watercrest, which combine condominium style accommodations with affordable prices.



### Beach Cottages and Villas

For families seeking a home of their own while vacationing on the sparkling sands of PCB, choices range from cozy beach cottages just steps from the shore to lavish villas with ample room for multiple families to spread out. Private beach houses and townhomes are available for rent by owner or through several specialized property rental management companies and are the accommodation of choice for many families that book the same place year after year while visiting their “beach home.” Start your search at [visitpanamacitybeach.com](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com) where you can factor in location and specify important amenities to ensure you find exactly what your family needs for the perfect beach vacation.

### Family-Owned Motels

From modest family-owned motels and hotels to well-appointed high rise condominium complexes with an abundance of amenities, there are traditional lodging accommodations to

suit all types of families. Just need a clean, comfortable home base from which to explore? Various small properties like the Flamingo Motel and Driftwood Lodge are just steps away from many of Panama City Beach's key attractions, such as GulfWorld and Pier Park, and offer everything a family needs to enjoy its beach adventures.

### Waterfront RV And Tent Campsites

If campfires and communing with nature fill your family's vacation bucket, St. Andrews State Park offers a host of waterfront RV and tent campsites that provide the perfect backdrop for endless aquatic adventures and land-based expeditions. This award-winning park, located at the east end of Panama City Beach, offers the perfect family camping environment — it's easy to get around, the campsites are private and the bathrooms are clean. Just a couple hundred yards from the campground are literally some of the world's most beautiful beaches with great areas for swimmers and snorkelers

of all ages, hiking trails with abundant wildlife, a boat ramp with rental services and several small but well stocked stores that have pretty much anything a family needs for a stress-free vacation.

In addition to the state park, visitors will find a variety of private RV/Camp sites to choose from. Also at the east end of the beach is Panama City Beach RV Resort. For a more centrally located modern RV site, check out Emerald Coast Beach RV Resort. For wooded camping, Pineglen Motorcoach and RV Park features a private fishing pond stocked with bass, and Raccoon River and Campers Inn are both rustic retreats located in the heart of the action.

No matter how you define your family, and regardless of how you choose to spend your collective time during vacation, you can count on finding the perfect place to call home on the emerald waters and sparkling white sugar sands of Panama City Beach. ●



# Making Memories



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# Only in Florida

A park with fantastic natural scenery and an even more unbelievable backstory

BY LAURA BRADLEY



**TOWERING OAK TREES**, aquamarine beaches and eclectic, colorful wildlife are all Florida mainstays. But how many places let you see them all in one place? Camp Helen State Park certainly does. It's also home to Lake Powell, the state's largest coastal dune lake — a spectacle that can only be seen in five regions of the world.

“Camp Helen is a beautiful place,” says Park Manager Sasha Craft. “It's the perfect place to bring the family for a picnic, go hiking on our nature trail, cast a line, try your luck with fishing. The natural

beauty and the rich history of the park make it well worth the trip.”

The nature is what brings the hobbyists: Bird watchers, casual hikers and picnicking families come from far and wide year-round to unplug and connect with nature, taking in the storied scenery and abundant wildlife. Bird watchers are especially interested in Camp Helen, Craft said, because of the imperiled bird species, such as the snowy plover. Nesting sea turtles and other migratory bird species are also known to turn up. But before it became a state

park in 1997, Camp Helen had built up a backstory that lives up to Florida's colorful history.

Camp Helen's land was originally in Creek Indian territory, although Craft says other tribes might have also passed through; there are still a few mounds in the park. The first person to purchase the land was Robert E. Hicks, a man whose own personal history reads like an unsavory rags-to-riches story with a fairy-tale redemptive ending that would tickle Horatio Algiers. According to *The Bulletin of the Whitley County Historical*



The historic Rainbow Cottages were built in the 1930s as a recreation area for Avondale Mills employees who came from throughout the Southeast.

Society, Robert Hicks started out in the Midwest as an ambitious teenaged farm boy. He developed a knack for selling people bogus products like ineffective “birth control” pills. He traveled from town to town, eventually adding mail order schemes to his repertoire before the article says he was finally indicted in New York. That was 1903, and he would have been about 44.

Hicks was sentenced to 10 months in prison and fined \$1,000. But he fled to Montreal and then to Europe. A few months later he returned to the United

States, the article says, with the assumed name Robert E. Gammon. In 1915, the story goes that he was plucked from a New York dive in the middle of winter, drunk and freezing, and taken to the Helping Hand Mission. From there, he apparently became a changed man, owned up to his crimes and saw his sentence commuted by President Woodrow Wilson himself. Eventually, the article says Hicks started a magazine that provided advice to budding salesmen and espoused honesty in business. (For those of you counting, he was already well over the age of 50.) In the

midst of all this, Hicks had also met his third wife, Margaret — a Florida native from DeFuniak Springs. He bought the 185 acres of land we now call Camp Helen in 1928 to build a summer home for his family.

Although Hicks died when construction was completed, Margaret and their daughter, also named Margaret, did live on the land for years until they sold it to Avondale Mills, a textile company from Alabama. Avondale Mills used it as a summer camp for their employees from 1945 to 1987, offering the reward to select



**“They open up into the Gulf of Mexico and exchange water with the Gulf — the water comes in, fresh water goes out. That’s unusual. There are really no other lakes like that in the world.”** — Elam Stoltzfus, Documentary Filmmaker

lucky winners by lottery. The Comber family owned Avondale Mills, and Craft said one of the family members is thought to be the “Helen” for whom the park is named. In 1987, the property changed hands again and lay dormant until 1996, when the state of Florida purchased it.

In March of 1997, Camp Helen State Park opened to the public, attracting the attention of hobbyists and nature lovers from near and far. Elam Stoltzfus, a documentary filmmaker originally from Pennsylvania, was fascinated by dune lakes the first time he saw them decades ago. Like Robert Hicks, Stoltzfus also met his wife in Florida, and now calls the state his adopted home. The sights at Camp Helen in particular, he said, are phenomenal.

“I love going down that trail to the beach,” he said. “If you go off to the west side of the trail, you’ll see those large live oaks like a hammock.”

None of Florida’s other dune lake sites have such a lush hammock of live oaks so close to the beach, Stoltzfus notes: “It’s like two worlds.” The trees at Camp Helen, he adds, are especially beautiful because of how old and well preserved they are.

After years of turning the idea over in his head, Stoltzfus finally got the chance



Camp Helen State Park is bordered on three sides by the Gulf of Mexico and Lake Powell, a rare coastal dune lake. Hiking and biking trails lead visitors from the lake to the beach.

to work on his documentary about Florida’s coastal dune lakes toward the end of 2013. A little over a year later, the film is almost finished and set to air nationally in July. Stoltzfus and his team consulted several scientists, answering the big question that drew him to the project in the first place: “How can there be water in sand?” (The answer, in case you were wondering, appears to be humate-rich sand, which functions almost like a plastic liner.)

Coastal dune lakes can only be found in Florida, Oregon, Madagascar, Australia and New Zealand, according to Sasha Craft. Stoltzfus added that Florida’s coastal dune lakes are even rarer.

“They open up into the Gulf of Mexico and exchange water with the Gulf — the water comes in, fresh water goes out. That’s unusual,” Stoltzfus said. “There are really no other lakes like that in the world.”

Stoltzfus’s goal in making the documentary is to educate people about the dune lakes, how they work and how to interact with them. Hopefully, Stoltzfus says, viewers will finish watching the documentary and want to get involved in helping keep the area pristine for generations to come. Craft added that volunteers are what keep the park thriving and that anyone can drop by, fill out a quick application and help out — either by joining the citizens support organization, Friends of Camp Helen, or by volunteering one afternoon or even regularly.

Even if you don’t have time to volunteer or become a Friend of Camp Helen, you should still definitely take the time to meet her. Stroll through the forest, peek through the giant, curvaceous live oaks into the sparkling water and find out why so many people have already fallen in love with Camp Helen State Park. ●

# Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center



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Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center is a 218-bed acute-care hospital located in Panama City. The hospital was named a Top 100 Hospital by Truven Health Analytic. For three consecutive years, GCRMC earned the Top Performer on Key Quality Measures from the Joint Commission and was awarded an "A" rating by The Leapfrog Group. The hospital recently unveiled a 42-bed critical care wing, which includes a 20-bed adult-level Intensive Care Unit and the region's only four-bed Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and an 18-bed (six Level III) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.



Frank Brown has a broad spectrum, multi-generational appeal.

# Frank Brown Park

White sand beach adds to sports venue's appeal

BY STEVE BORNHOFT



Girls' fastpitch softball attracts 600 teams

**AT FRANK BROWN PARK**, more sports than some people can name have a season.

Baseball, softball and basketball.

Football, rugby and lacrosse.

Tennis, soccer, fishing.

Swimming, running and bicycling.

Pickleball.

Yes, pickleball, a game that combines elements of volleyball, tennis and badminton. It's played with wooden racquets and Wiffleballs on a court identical in size to that of a badminton court. Serves and returns of serves must be allowed to bounce after which players may take the ball in the air. Exchanges of volleys make for fast action, but because it is confined to a small space, especially seniors find the game dill-icious.

Pickleball has been a sensation at Central Florida retirement communities for decades but arrived in the Panhandle only within the past five years. Provision for it was made at Frank Brown Park after city officials began to receive complaints about pickleballers marking up tennis courts with chalk.

During Snowbird season, the city sets up three pickleball courts in the park's Philip Griffiths Building three days a week. That accommodation is part of park managers' efforts to ensure that Frank Brown has a broad spectrum, multi-generational appeal.

At this writing, pickleball season is winding down. Snowbirds have begun to head for their summer haunts along with loons and robins and white pelicans. As they recede, Frank Brown's softball/baseball fields come to life.

"Girls' fastpitch softball is the biggest revenue producer we have at the park," says Richard Sanders, vice president for sports and special events for the Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Youth baseball is the sport played the most on our fields and generates about 25,000 room nights a year."

Girls' fastpitch, however, accounts for more than 30,000 room nights annually. The vast majority of them are related to the United States Fastpitch Association (USFA) World Series, held at Frank Brown Park for two weeks each July. A total

of 600 teams participate with 98 percent of them coming from out of state. Each team, Sanders has found, will bring an average delegation of 46 people, including players, parents and coaches and typically will occupy nine condos or other rental units. Most will stay at the beach for seven days.

John Cain is the founder of the USFA, which is headquartered in Panama City Beach. He started the organization in 1998 after tiring of paying fees to other sanctioning bodies while doing almost all of the work associated with hosting tournaments himself.

“We’re the Little League of girls’ fastpitch with 10,000 teams participating nationwide,” Cain says. “We started out as an organization that primarily provided equipment to girls’ teams mandated by Title IX and have evolved from there.”

The presence of Frank Brown Park has a lot to do with the fact that the USFA, an organization that includes Olympic softball gold medalist Jenny Finch, remains in Panama City Beach.

Cain recalls the days when the park was home to just four softball/baseball diamonds prior to its expansion to nine fields in 1999.

“The quality of the facilities at Frank Brown is great, and the location is better than that,” Cain asserts. “When you take into account the three factors that Realtors always talk about — location,

**“People recognize that sports is in Panama City Beach’s DNA. We’re coming to be known as a sports capital and not just a Spring Break capital. With improvements in air service and more flights, we’re drawing teams from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and the Midwest in addition to the Southeast.”** — Richard Sanders, Vice President of Sports and Special Events, Panama City Beach CVB

location, location — it’s the very best. Sure, some facilities have better turf, better sand and more shade trees, but they don’t have a white sand beach and all that Panama City Beach has to offer a family that wants to turn a tournament into a vacation.”

Cain is excited by park expansion plans that include eight new diamonds. Those plans, Sanders points out, also include rectangular fields to be reserved for sports only and a multi-purpose center capable of handling basketball tournaments, gymnastics meets, cheerleading competitions, concerts and more.

“Eight new fields would pretty much guarantee that the USFA World Series would be in Panama City Beach forever,” Cain says. “The way things are now, we turn a lot of teams down and that is despite the fact that we also use fields at Harders Park (in north Bay County); Oakland Terrace Park (in Panama City); and in Lynn Haven.”

Southeastern softball/baseball hubs in addition to Panama City Beach include Orlando and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, but Sanders’ chief competitor may be Orange Beach/Gulf Shores, Alabama.

“They’ve got a beach, too,” Sanders point out, “and new fields in nearby Foley, but we’re so far ahead of them that we don’t have anything to worry about. Our issue is capacity and dealing with that will require more fields.”

The new fields, as envisioned, will complement existing fields but will represent a step up. Some will feature artificial surfaces thus requiring less maintenance and eliminating bad hops.

Like Sanders and Cain, Panama City Beach Parks and Recreation Director Jim Ponek hopes the expansion becomes a reality. His perfect picture includes one set of fields reserved exclusively for softball and another set for baseball.

Existing fields, he says, are showing signs of wear due to heavy usage and “there is only so much that you can cover up with a coat of paint.”

Umpires will thank Ponek for providing them with a place to relax and cool off between games. He acquired a surplus portable classroom from Bay District Schools and converted it to what will be known as the Blue Lounge, “blue” being synonymous with umps.

“People recognize that sports is in Panama City Beach’s DNA,” Sanders enthuses. “We’re coming to be known as a sports capital and not just a Spring Break capital. With improvements in air service and more flights, we’re drawing teams from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and the Midwest in addition to the Southeast.”

Sanders maintains a roster of 154 sports events that his operation either manages or otherwise touches. In total, those events, he says, account for more than 100,000 room nights and \$75 million annually in direct spending.

And, Sanders adds, “We shouldn’t forget about jobs generation. Every 85 visitors equates to a job.” ●







  
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# Grand Lagoon: Gateway to the Gulf

BY WENDY O. DIXON

**WITH ITS BREATHTAKING NATURAL BEAUTY** and practical access to the Gulf of Mexico for fishing, boating, stand-up paddle boarding and other watersports, the gateway known as The Pass provides a deepwater trail to the Gulf where fishermen venture to catch fresh seafood for the many dining establishments in the area. Grand Lagoon is a thriving gem of the Gulf Coast made up of people who share a vision for the ideal lagoon community.

**“We’ve got it all here — fishing, boating, sightseeing tours and dolphin tours. ... It’s a place you can bring your family and enjoy all or part of your vacation here.”**

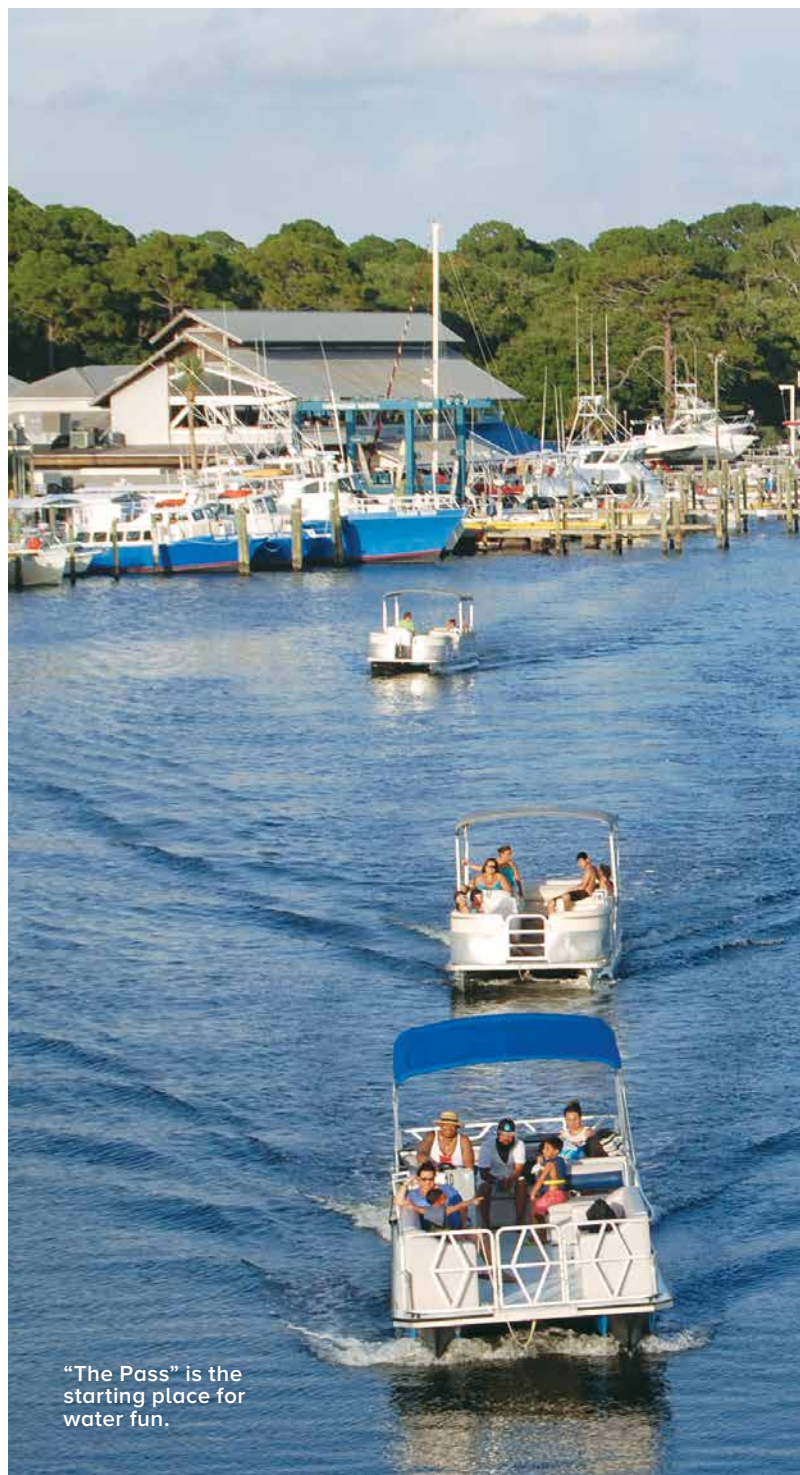
— Terry Nadeau, owner of Runaway Bay Caribbean Grill on Thomas Drive

sightseeing tours and dolphin tours. And an abundance of activities, one of the best state parks in the U.S. It’s a place you can bring your family and enjoy all or part of your vacation here.”

Steeped in history and pirate lore, Grand Lagoon was first settled by American Indians and later Spanish explorers. General Andrew Jackson was the first American to survey St. Andrews Bay, and his army spent considerable time there. Many

“It’s a destination within a destination,” says Terry Nadeau, owner of Runaway Bay Caribbean Grill on Thomas Drive. “This is a taste of the original real Florida. We’re not corporate on this end; most of the businesses here — the retail stores, restaurants and nightlife — are locally owned.”

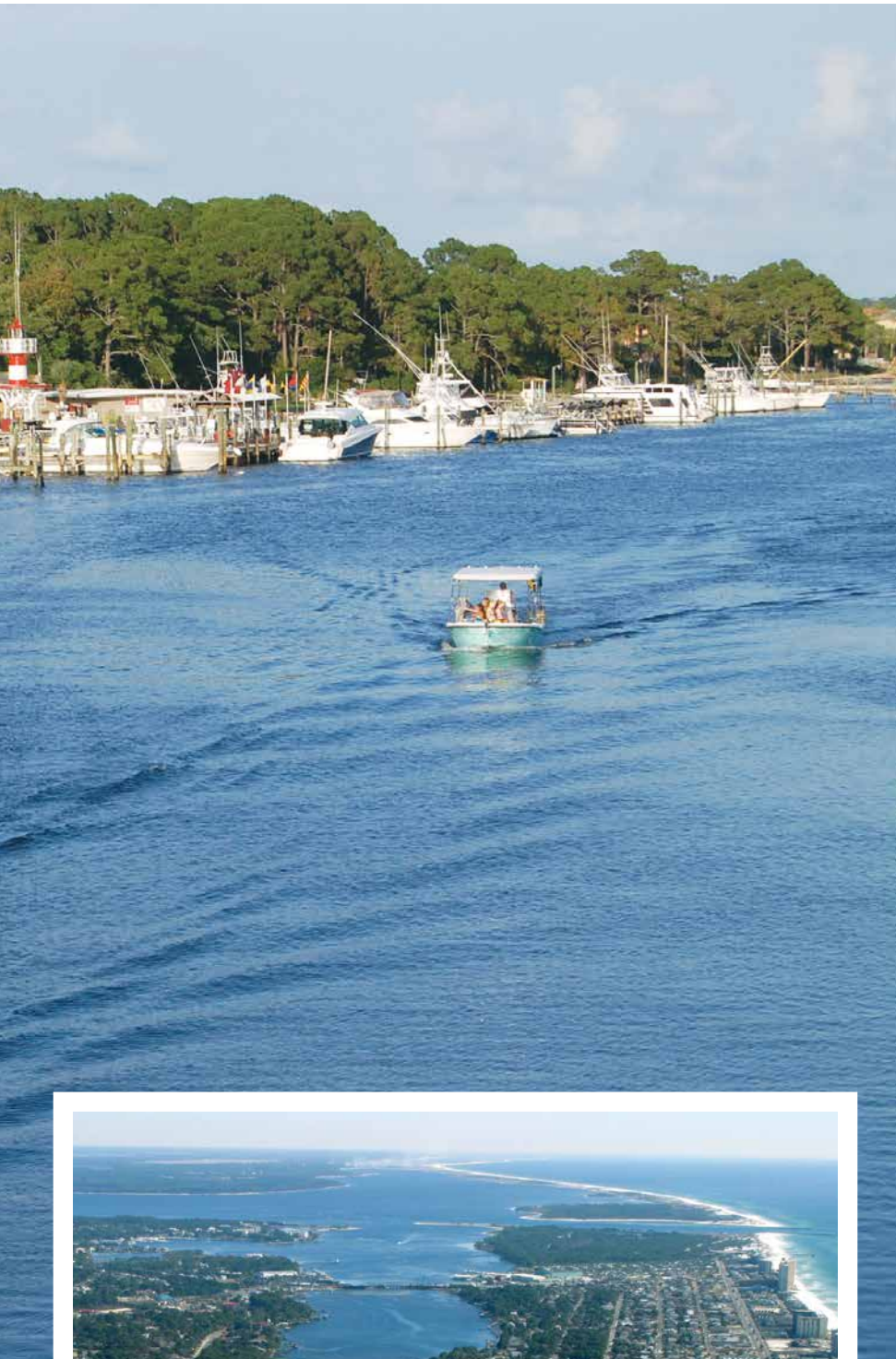
One of Grand Lagoon’s biggest assets is, expectedly, the lagoon. “Most boating activities have to come through the lagoon,” Nadeau adds. “We’ve got it all here — fishing, boating,



“The Pass” is the starting place for water fun.

of the soldiers returned there to live when the territory opened for settlement in 1821. The once deserted area now welcomes thousands of fishermen and water sports enthusiasts much of the year. And this historic community has all the amenities of a modern vacation destination.

In 1967, Capt. Anderson’s Restaurant & Waterfront Market was established. The restaurant’s location in the heart of Grand Lagoon makes it ideal for catching fresh fish that end up on a diner’s plate within just a few hours. “The logistics and what Mother Nature has been able to afford here is remarkable,” says Jimmy Patronis Jr., one of the owners of Capt. Anderson’s. “St. Andrews State Park is one of the most popular parks in the



# Something for Every Taste

## The Neighborhoods of Panama City Beach

With beachside neighborhoods dotted along the Gulf Coast, and a few tucked inland, Panama City Beach has a nice mix of subdivisions, each with its own unique personality. The incredible beaches, attractions, great weather and Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport are factors that make this a desirable destination.

The west end of Panama City Beach has been booming with new commercial construction over the past few years. Pier Park outdoor lifestyle center has expanded to the north, doubling its already massive size and attracting residential construction nearby.

Whisper Dunes, a condominium neighborhood with easy access to the beach, Pier Park and a community pool, is undergoing new construction. Nautilus Cove is a centrally located, affordable gated neighborhood with condominiums, apartments and townhouses.

Established neighborhoods include Bid-A-Wee, between Front Beach Road and U.S. Highway 98, which has access to a private beach. Another nice mix of homes is farther west, in Laguna Beach. And Summer Breeze, just east of Highway 79, is an easy walk to the beach.

Ideal for families, Palmetto Trace, Summerwood and Breakfast Pointe are near Pier Park and Frank Brown Park, a multi-sport park with a public swimming pool, kids pool and dogpark, as well as biking and walking trails. Tapestry Park, a new eclectic neighborhood off Hutchison Boulevard and Clara Avenue, is a planned community with an urban feel.

Emerald Pointe off Thomas Drive, a gated golf cart community made up of modular homes, is ideal for retirees, with a community center and a canal. And for golf lovers, Wild Heron, The Glades and Colony Club each have their own golf courses. The gated community of Bay Point Resort off Thomas Drive has private home sites, condominiums and villas with canal, golf course and waterfront properties.



## Grand Lagoon Highlights

### Buster's Beer & Bait

The coolest "Full Bar" in Panama City Beach, Buster's has a full liquor store with the best selection and prices on the beach, as well as 20 craft drafts, free jalapeño popcorn and live music. In the back, the bait shop includes a tackle shop with the luckiest live and frozen bait in the world. Come in to grab cold drinks, bait and ice and hit the water. [Bustersbeerandbait.com](http://Bustersbeerandbait.com); (850) 234-9250



### Shell Island Excursion

Take the Shell Island Shuttle from St. Andrews State Park in Panama City Beach to this natural, undeveloped island, just a 10-minute boat ride away. Get an up-close-and-personal look at the wonders of the reefs and marine life that abound in the Gulf of Mexico. Snorkel packages and kayak rentals are available. (850) 235-4004



### Sea Dragon Pirate

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### Signal Hill Golf Course

Signal Hill Golf Course is set on a well-maintained wonderland of wide-open fairways and dazzling greens. The 18-hole course is relatively flat, with some simple confidence-boosting holes and some tantalizing tricky ones. This makes Signal Hill the ideal golf course for families, beginners and pros seeking a relaxed round in Panama City Beach. [Signalhillgolfcourse.com](http://Signalhillgolfcourse.com); (850) 234-5051



**Schooners** Known as the "last local beach club," at Schooners you can enjoy the breathtaking view of the sunset and sound of live entertainment as you dine on wings, fresh seafood, sandwiches and salads. Schooners and the locals love visitors, too.



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### Capt. Anderson's

**Marina** Hook and cook your fish after you get it to the dock. Some area restaurants let you bring your freshly caught and filleted fish, which they will cook and serve to you with all the fixings. Marina Cantina and J. Michaels will cook your fish — fried, grilled or blackened. (850) 234-3435



The Grand Lagoon offers beautiful scenery and plenty to do.

state. It's second to none with its beauty and so many amenities. Taking a ferry boat or pleasure boat is a fantastic way to spend an afternoon enjoying the natural beauty of those protected resources."

From seafood to Mexican to Thai, a variety of restaurants have popped up in recent years. Restaurants include J. Michaels, Jasmine Thai Cuisine, Marina Cantina and Patches Pub & Grill. Visitors wanting to check out the nightlife in Grand Lagoon can visit Miss Newby's Liquors and Schooners.

Adjacent to Capt. Anderson's Restaurant is Capt. Anderson's Marina. Known for more than 55 years as the top destination for deep sea fishing, Shell Island cruises and dolphin tours, the marina is still run by the Anderson family, offering five-, six-, 10- and 12-hour trips on large stable boats, which accommodate multiple fishing spots. For a more private excursion, choose from Northwest Florida's Top 25 private charter boats offering sport fishing, trolling, inshore and bottom fishing, as well as dive and snorkel trips. The captain will tailor a trip specifically for your large or small group.

Grand Lagoon boasts some of the best golf in the nation, thanks in large part to the Bay Point Resort. Bay Point is home to the only Nicklaus Design golf course in Northwest Florida. A few holes on this beautiful course even offer panoramic views of Grand Lagoon and St. Andrews Bay.

The latest change to Grand Lagoon came in 2011 when a new, more environmentally friendly bridge over the lagoon was completed. The new bridge includes four car lanes, two bicycle lanes and a pedestrian walkway. At 18 feet tall at its center, up from 10 feet with the previous bridge, the new bridge allows larger boats to pass under it. ●

**"The logistics and what Mother Nature has been able to afford here is remarkable..."**

— Jimmy Patronis Jr., one of the owners of Capt. Anderson's

# Where Family Memories are Made



GrandLagoon.org  
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## THE PLACE FOR FAMILY FUN

Panama City Beach's renowned Grand Lagoon is home to dining, shopping and easy access to the Gulf. Enjoy a round of golf, a day at St. Andrews State Park or many other outdoor adventures. From boat rentals and romantic cruises to waterfront dining and live entertainment — you'll find it all at Grand Lagoon, your gateway to the Gulf!

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Your #1 resource for family fun!



Capt. Anderson's Restaurant started out as a 90-seat breakfast house but after a series of expansions now serves up its fresh-caught seafood to about 2,000 people a night.

# A Family Tradition

Capt. Anderson's Restaurant has been serving up fresh seafood for decades

BY WENDY O. DIXON

**FOR NEARLY A HALF CENTURY,** Capt. Anderson's Restaurant & Waterfront Market in Panama City Beach has been well known for its fresh local seafood and warm, family atmosphere. When vacationers ask a local where to dine, the first place recommended is usually Capt. Anderson's.

Owned by two generations of the Patronis family since 1967, Capt. Anderson's has won the loyalty of millions of customers and friends. It is a local tradition to dine early and watch freshly caught fish tumble from the nets as the fishermen unload their catch at the marina. As guests take in the salt air, they can see the connection between what they're eating and from where it comes.

Over the years, the restaurant has grown slowly and steadily. "When Jimmy and Johnny bought it, it was a 90-seat breakfast



house that served breakfast, lunch and dinner 365 days a year," says Jimmy Patronis Jr., one of the owners. "Every time they were able to save money they expanded a little." Since opening it has grown to 725 seats, serving around 2,000 people per night during the peak season and more than 250,000 guests during its nearly 10-month season.

Capt. Anderson's Restaurant is one of those rare family restaurants that not only survives but also strengthens and improves through the years. While the landmark waterfront eatery has witnessed remarkable growth, it has not lost the quality of service its guests return to year after year. Jimmy Patronis Jr. attributes the continued success of the restaurant to two things — a loyal staff and unparalleled quality of food.

A working marina, run by the Anderson family, ensures some of the freshest seafood makes it to the table at Capt. Anderson's.



“The average length of employment is more than 20 years,” he says of his nearly 200 employees. “Many have worked here since it first opened and have a sense of ownership of the place, so we’ve been able to maintain consistency. It may not be a smart business decision, but we are closed on Sundays, so every employee knows they have that day off. It’s important for quality of life, and it’s worth it.” The restaurant is also closed for two-and-a-half months during the winter, but as this market develops that window may change, Patronis adds.

For an operation that serves thousands of guests each night, perfecting the menu with the freshest ingredients is what helps Capt. Anderson’s stand out as a restaurant leader. “We only buy whole fish and break it down ourselves,” Patronis says. “We hand cut our own steaks and bake bread and desserts from scratch every day. What we do is not standard operating procedure. No one does it on the scale we do.”

Named among America’s Top 50 restaurants, recipient of the “Best Seafood Restaurant” award from Southern Living and Wine Spectator’s “Award of Excellence,” Capt. Anderson’s won the Florida Trend Golden Spoon Award for 15 years before being inducted into the Restaurant Hall of Fame in 2005. The Hall of Fame is the highest honor Florida Trend can bestow upon a Florida restaurant. The classic restaurant has always featured quality and simplicity in its menu; no heavy sauces are used. Instead, the

mouth-watering taste of fine seafood is allowed to speak for itself in dishes like whole broiled lobster tail and Scampi Imperial. Charcoal-broiled certified Angus beef steaks are a specialty as well.

The most popular menu items include Capt. Anderson’s classics — Johnny’s Special Greek Salad with crab meat and Gulf shrimp, oven broiled whole stuffed flounder and shrimp scampi — all from local fishermen and cooked on the Greek-style open hearth charcoal broiler. The hardwood coals — first used on this coast by Capt. Anderson’s, according to Johnny Patronis — sizzle with the juices of fresh seafood filets. “On the coast of Greece where my family grew up, it has been a tradition for hundreds, maybe thousands of years,” Johnny Patronis explains.

The freshly baked bread blends delightfully with the tangy fresh olive oil. The wine, beer and specialty drinks selection is extensive. Order a souvenir drink and keep the glass. After dinner, enjoy a decadent dessert paired with an after dinner drink — espresso, café latte, dessert wine or a delicious cognac.

The restaurant owners still have an active working marina, run by the Anderson family. The family has made its mark on the coastal community and has worked to preserve the Gulf Coast and its precious resources. The Patronis family has a good working relationship with fishermen, oystermen and others who make their living harvesting the Gulf and bay waters and work with them to preserve the natural oyster beds of Apalachicola Bay,

to build artificial reefs and protect the fragile coastal ecology. Preserving and replenishing the rich natural bounty of the Gulf Coast is part of the Capt. Anderson's legacy, one of the most important reasons this landmark restaurant is known for serving more fresh local seafood than any other restaurant in Florida.

The Patronis family appreciates that their customers continue coming back and recommend Capt. Anderson's to others who want a good local place to dine when they come to Panama City Beach. "With our employees, you have folks that know the restaurant," Jimmy Patronis says. "They know the product, the culture and are long time stake holders in the business. We know exactly what we're doing and don't allow someone else to micromanage what we do. We've evolved through the collaboration of great employees and family ownership."

Capt. Anderson's recipes are the same ones learned from family patriarch Theo Patronis, passed down the generations in a family dedicated to preserving the quality of food and service. Theo's philosophy was simple: Serve people fresh seafood, well-prepared food in a clean and wholesome environment, and they will come back again and again. Capt. Anderson's is generous about sharing the Patronis family recipes, so you can cook for yourself after your vacation in Panama City Beach ends. Purchase one of the restaurant's cookbooks, join the mailing list to receive the recipe newsletter and like them on Facebook.

The restaurant is located in the heart of Grand Lagoon off Thomas Drive on the east end of Panama City Beach. "There is no other place like it in the Panhandle, with an active working waterfront marina community this close to the Gulf," Jimmy Patronis Jr. says. "You can get in and out in 15 minutes, and it's the greatest fishing in the state of the Florida." ●



**"We only buy whole fish and break it down ourselves. We hand cut our own steaks and bake bread and desserts from scratch every day. What we do is not standard operating procedure. No one does it on the scale we do." — Jimmy Patronis, Jr.**

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# Making your trip to **The Beach a Breeze**

A mother of three shares her Beach-Life lessons

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM



Keep it simple:  
A bucket and  
shovel are all you  
really need to  
enjoy the sand.

**AS HER NICKNAME SUGGESTS,** Sonora “Sonnie” Spivey, likes to look on the bright side. And living in what she calls “a perfect paradise,” it’s pretty easy to do, especially when spending a day at the beach has become a snap.

Since relocating from Cypress Inn, Tennessee, to Panama City Beach seven years ago, a day at the beach is still an exciting adventure this family of five looks forward to. But as this 39 year-old mother of three tells, it didn’t start out that way ...

“Initially we carried so much stuff — tons of toys — and it was tiring to trek it all out there. But since then we’ve learned less is more,” Spivey says. “Let the beach do the work for you. One mat, a bucket and shovel and you’re set.”

Though her husband, Will, grew up in Panama City Beach and this Bay Point clan frequently hits the beach as many as three or four days a week, Spivey’s sugar-sand savvy took some trial and error. Now this mom has it down to a science

and is happy to share her helpful hints with anyone looking to make their trip to the beach a breeze.

“Raising my kids here has been so much fun. There’s always something to do. The Gulf is endless fun. There is so much to explore. You never know what you’ll see. The landscape constantly changes, so it brings you back for more,” she says. And if you venture to the stretch of beach in front of the Panama City Beach Pier or the serene beach scene in





St. Andrews State Park, you might just run into the Spiveys. Now that baby Hawk has turned one, (Vivian is 14 and Betty is 5) this fun-loving local family plans to visit their favorite beaches even more this summer.

“I sometimes drive down Front Beach Road and remind myself of how lucky I am to live here,” Spivey says.

Unlike her streamlined beach bag, we’d say Sonnie Spivey’s glass is definitely more than half full. ●



## Sonnie Says...

- » Apply sunscreen before you leave the house. Avoid wasteful sprays. Consider a brand that is skin sensitive for babies.
- » An SPF of 40 is fine as long as you reapply it often.
- » Instead of bulky blankets and chairs, bring a synthetic roll-up mat. These are inexpensive, lightweight, easy to wash and carry.
- » The only toys you need are a bucket and shovel.
- » Munch on disposable snacks like fruits and veggies; instead of bottles, cans and cartons of sodas and juice, bring a jug or thermos of water.
- » Bring towels, but don’t use them until the end of the day.
- » Tuck in a change of clothes for the little ones so they aren’t wearing a wet suit in the car ride home.
- » A small inflatable baby pool placed under the shade of an umbrella and filled with a couple of toys will occupy wee ones for a long time.
- » Carry along a zip-lock plastic bag to keep your phone/camera and keys dry and sand free.
- » Keep cooler by heading to the beach before 1 p.m. or after 3 p.m.
- » Keep a beach bag in the car stocked with sunscreen, mat, bucket and shovel so all you have to do is just add fresh towels.
- » Rinse and repeat often!

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# Safety First

## FLORIDA'S BEACH WARNING

**FLAG** program uses flags in four colors accompanied by interpretive signs along the beach to explain the meaning of each color. Flags are located approximately one mile apart along the beach. Absence of flags does not assure safe waters. Current beach flag conditions can be found on [VisitPanamaCityBeach.com](http://VisitPanamaCityBeach.com). Sign up to receive text alerts for flag changes.



**RED OVER RED**  
Water closed to public



**RED - HIGH HAZARD**  
High surf and/or strong currents



**YELLOW - MEDIUM HAZARD**  
Moderate surf and/or currents



**GREEN - LOW HAZARD**  
Calm conditions, exercise caution



**PURPLE**  
Dangerous Marine Life



YEAH. I'M PRETTY SURE THEY'RE LOVING THIS.

WHEN I CALL THEIR NAMES AT HOME, THEY WALK.

WHEN THIS BEACH CALLS THEIR NAME, THEY RUN.

BUT I GET THE FEELING: ALL FUN. NO HOMEWORK. NO SOCKS. NO WORRIES.

WHO WOULDN'T RUN TOWARD THIS?

I THINK I'LL RUN TOO.



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# Leave No Trace

Take only pictures, leave only footprints

**PANAMA CITY BEACH** is known for having the “World’s Most Beautiful Beaches,” and we would like to keep it that way for the enjoyment of locals and tourists alike! For this reason, the “Leave No Trace” ordinance was adopted in 2012. Our goal is to protect our pristine beaches and the natural wildlife, such as nesting sea turtles, by leaving no trace of personal items on the beaches overnight. Please do your part in maintaining our beautiful beaches!

The Leave No Trace ordinance states that all personal items will be removed and disposed of if left on the beach between the hours of 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. These items include, but are

not limited to, tents, chairs, toys, umbrellas and coolers. On public beaches or with the upland landowner’s permission, beachgoers may store personal belongings overnight at the toe of the dune. The toe of the dune is the area of the beach immediately seaward of the dune and beach vegetation. To be specific, it is the area of the beach that is furthest from the water that is not in a sand dune or beach access point.

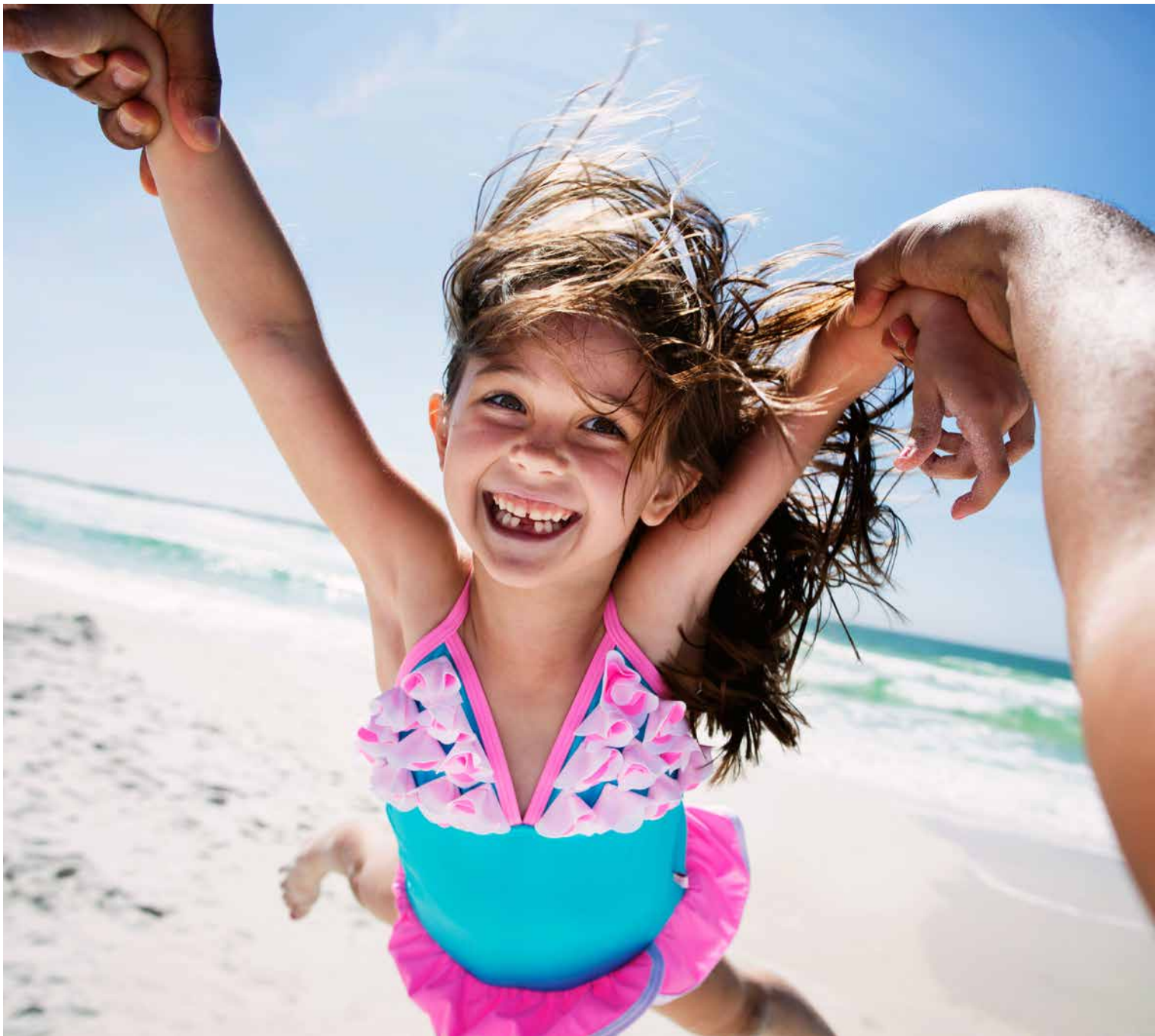
Those who store their personal items overnight do so at their own risk. The county, the city, the Tourist Development Council and the beach maintenance contractor do not assume any liability for any items left on the beach.



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