

# VISIT PANAMA CITY BEACH

SPRING 2015 MAGAZINE

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flavors of the  
Gulf coast**

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# The WonderWorks Experience



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# Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center

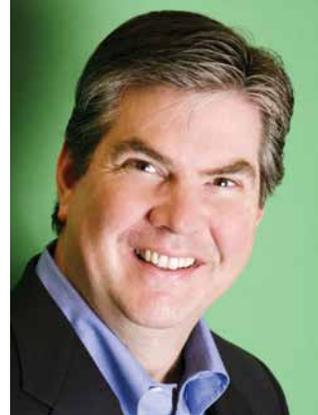


## *Choose Quality and Safety*

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 and was awarded an "A" rating by The Leapfrog Group for three consecutive years. For the third consecutive year, Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center earned the Top Performer on Key Quality Measures from the Joint Commission. 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.



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**ON BEHALF OF THE STAFF** at Visit Panama City Beach, I'm excited to introduce you to the brand new Visit Panama City Beach Magazine, the official visitor's guide of Panama City Beach. With so many events going on and places to explore in our destination, we decided that one issue couldn't contain a whole year, so from now on we'll be dedicating an issue to each season.

A recent survey showed that over 90 percent of the visitors who come to Panama City Beach plan to return again in the future. We couldn't be more proud of that statistic, and we want to make sure that everyone knows a visit in the summertime isn't the same as a visit in the fall — or the spring or winter for that matter. There's a ton of fun going on no matter what the time of year.

The new magazine format allows us to share a few of our favorite out-of-the-way spots, too. Panama City Beach is blessed to have 27 miles of beautiful beaches, as well as inland parks, lakes and more, with great restaurants and attractions found throughout the destination . . . if you just know where to look! That's why we'll be featuring new shops, restaurants, parks and events in each season's issue, along with tips from locals and great photos taken by visitors like you.

In this spring issue, you'll meet a former New Yorker who now serves up smiles and terrific food here at the beach. You'll discover the history behind one of our favorite parks. We'll tell you what's happening this spring and what we're looking forward to in the summer. There's all that and much more in these pages. What you'll discover is how to get the most out of your time in Panama City Beach along with what you might want to come back and experience next time, too.

Thank you for visiting Panama City Beach. I'm proud to call this area home and even more proud that so many of you consider it your home away from home.

Warm regards,

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

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At ResortQuest, our goal is to make your beach getaway, family reunion or wedding weekend a fun, enjoyable and memorable experience. We are dedicated to making your vacation in Panama City Beach an unforgettable trip. Stay with us and experience the award-winning difference!

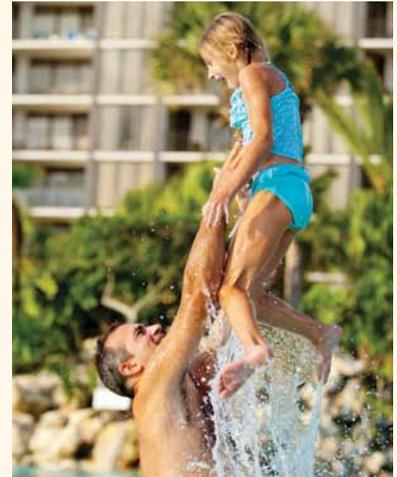


# visitpanamacitybeach.com

## >> MOBILE WEBSITE

Take us with you while you're in Panama City Beach. Our mobile website will help you:

- Find where to eat, play and stay based on your current location
- Easily access driving directions to attractions, restaurants and more
- Stay updated on current beach conditions
- View events and special offers from local businesses
- Find the nearest beach access points
- Connect with us through social media



## >> PLAN THE PERFECT VACATION

Visit our website to plan your vacation. You'll find all the information you need, from accommodations to restaurants, events and attractions.

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



**Visit our website to find out about current beach conditions!**

[visitpanamacitybeach.com/beaches/beach-warning-flags](http://visitpanamacitybeach.com/beaches/beach-warning-flags)

## >> SOCIAL CABANA

Check out what's happening in Panama City Beach through our range of social media: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube and our Blog.



[visitpanamacitybeach](http://visitpanamacitybeach)



@visit\_pcb



## >> Get Inspired

While you're planning, check out the photos that other visitors have already posted on our bucket list site or our Social Cabana pages. #RealFunBeach

# Where family memories are made



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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 the waters of Panama City Beach will not disappoint. From the sandy marshes and tidal flats of St. Andrew Bay to the depths where the continental shelf plunges to the ocean floor, 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.

Many locals say that spring and fall are their luckiest seasons, but a knowledgeable angler will be rewarded any day of the year. The cool fall temperatures, for instance, stimulate fish to feed. That’s when redfish and trout 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. By summer, deepwater fishing rebounds with wahoo, yellowfin tuna, sailfish and marlin. The season for red snapper, abundant and prized in the Gulf, begins at the first of June. Redfish and trout are more likely to bite in the bay during the early mornings or evenings of summer.

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 (City Pier), the M.B. Miller Pier (County 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 their 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**



**Cobia**



**Red Snapper**



**King Mackerel**



**Sea Trout**

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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 number three beach in the state by 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**



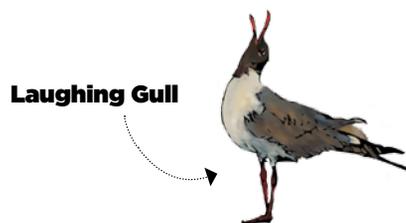
**Red-Shouldered Hawk**



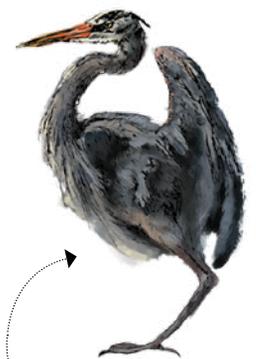
**Sandpiper**



**Dunlin**



**Laughing Gull**



**Great Blue Heron**

# Get in touch with fun!



15412 Front Beach Road, Panama City Beach  
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GulfWorldMarinePark.com

## ***You gotta go to Gulf World!***

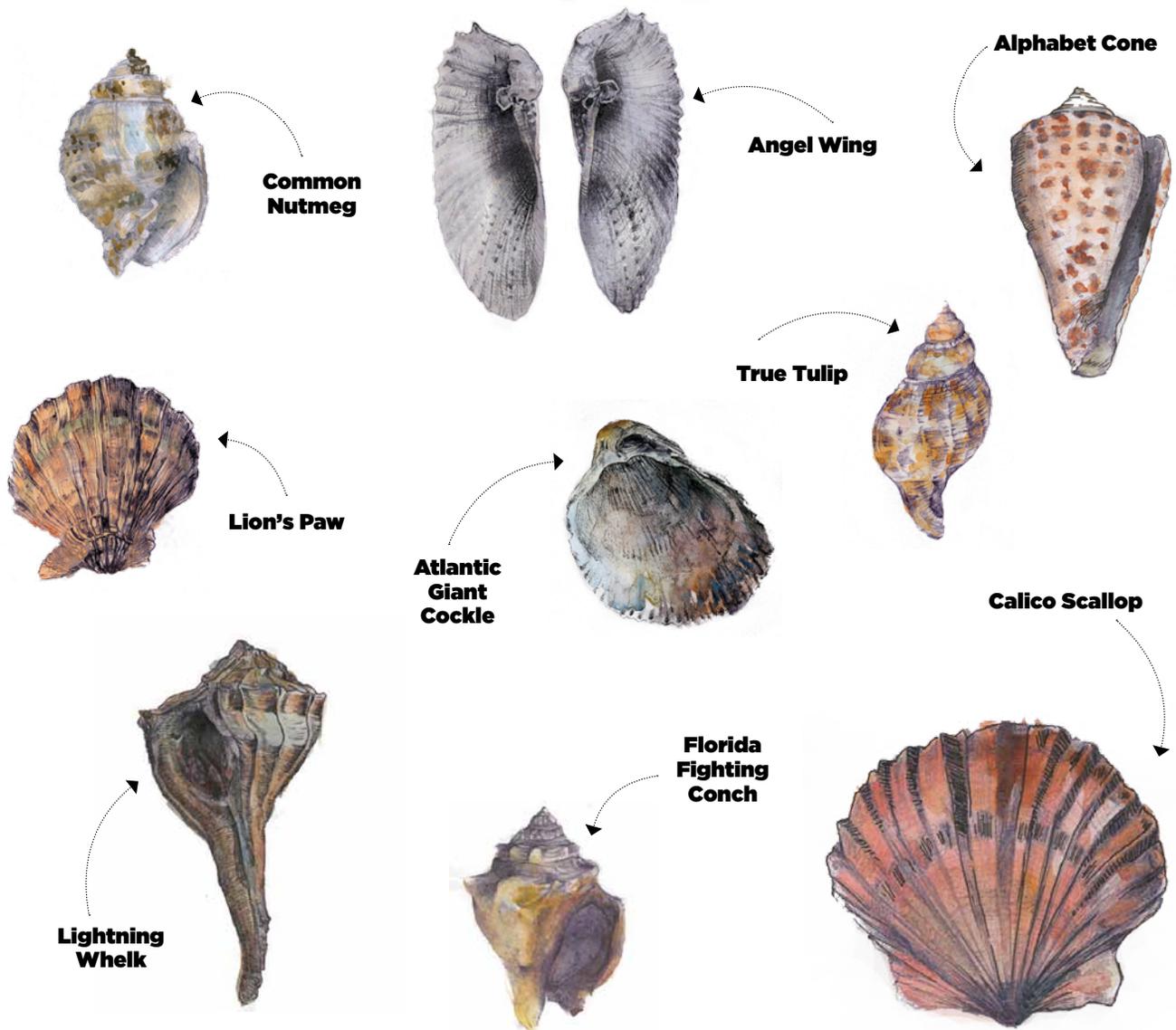
Visit Gulf World Marine Park and pay one daily price to see entertaining presentations featuring dolphins, sea lions, tropical birds and their furry friends. Explore indoor and outdoor gardens showcasing sea turtles, penguins, alligators and much more!

Make a reservation for one of our interactive programs: Swim & Play with a Dolphin, become a Trainer for a Day, attend Dolphin Day Camp. New in 2015, Sting Ray Bay interactive program. Open daily 9:30 a.m. rain or shine.

# 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.



# Secret of Our White Sand

The story begins thousands of years ago and hundreds of miles away

BY LINDA KLEINDIENST

**OF ONE THING** there is no doubt. It is the powdery pure white sand that makes the beach at Panama City Beach.

Feel its fine softness as you brush your foot across the fluffy surface, or scoop some up with your hand and watch it drift slowly downward between your fingers.

It was long believed that the sun had bleached the sand of all color, but scientists came up with the real answer.

Those tiny crystalline specs that form

the perfectly white sand of Panama City Beach began their journey thousands of years ago — and hundreds of miles away — in the Appalachian Mountains. Pieces of quartz were carried south by the Apalachicola River into the Gulf of Mexico at the end of the last Ice Age — close to 20,000 years ago — and were polished by eons of water action.

The beaches have been weathered by wind and water long enough that other minerals which would have added a

yellowish color have either dissolved or been broken down into tiny pieces and washed away.

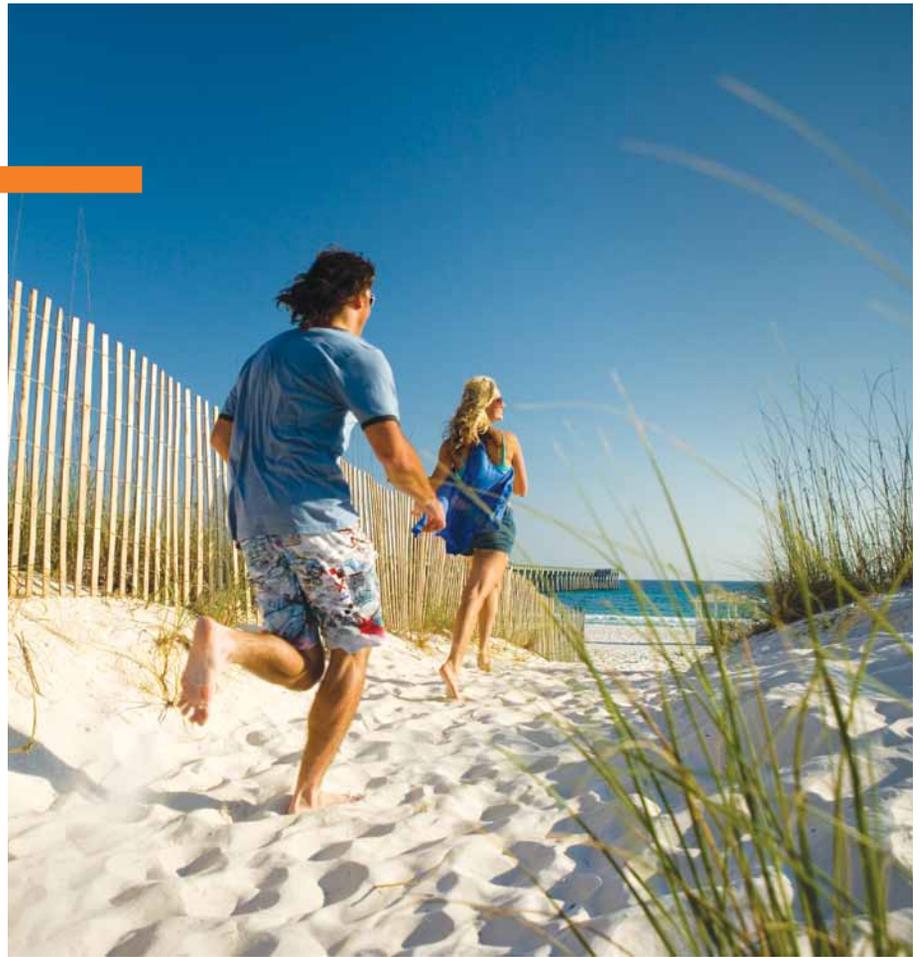
So dazzlingly white, the beach can temporarily blind you — but the crystals that look more like sugar than sand particles always stay cool, even on the sunniest summer day. And the way in which they refract the sunlight contributes to the unique emerald green color of the Gulf waters that lap against the world famous shores of Panama City Beach. ●



It was long believed that the sun had bleached the sand of all color, but scientists came up with the real answer.

## 27 Miles of Beautiful Beach Awaits

**WHEN YOU'RE READY** to feel the crunch 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 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 dolphin 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.



## A gift gallery for all your senses

**When ordinary just won't do...**

Shop the most unique collection of North American artisans on the beach, with works from over 90 local, regional and national artists. Find the perfect treasure from our exquisitely handcrafted jewelry, pottery, blown glass, exotic culinary items and much more!



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# A Million Reasons to Play Holiday Golf Club

## New greens bring new life to this classic course

BY JOHN MOOSHIE

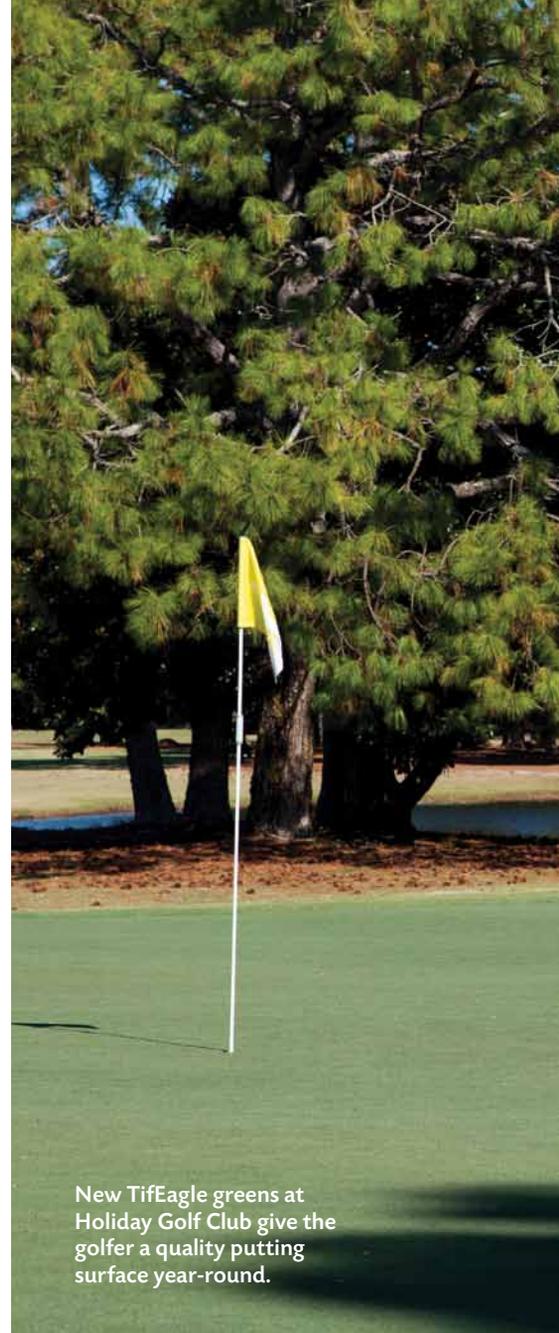
**THERE IS NO QUESTION** that most golf courses accepting public play are measured by the quality of their green complexes. Holiday Golf Club in Panama City Beach advertises the “Best Greens on the Beach,” and Trip Advisor has validated that claim by naming it as one of the very best attractions in Panama City Beach.

It was July 2014 when Holiday Golf Club’s million-dollar rejuvenation was unveiled, showcasing select tee boxes and its 19 brand new state-of-the-art TifEagle greens — a Bermuda grass variety developed exclusively for golf course greens and universally recognized to be a superior Bermuda putting surface. TifEagle greens give the golfer a quality putting surface year-round but especially during the winter season with or without overseeding. Compared to other Bermuda grass varieties, TifEagle recovers faster from mechanical injuries, retains its green color much longer and is extremely cold-hardy, drought-tolerant and disease-resistant.

“The main advantage of TifEagle,” according to PGA professional and Director of Golf Jim Carlisle, “is that it is a heartier grass that can be maintained at lower heights year-round, which will improve putting speeds and deliver a more consistent roll. It is unlikely that you will ever putt on perfectly true greens, so the best a golfer can hope for are greens that run at a consistent speed. That’s what we offer at Holiday Golf Club.”

Holiday Golf Club’s features, inherently characteristic in course design, present a challenge for golfers of varying ability.

Forgiving fairways are extremely wide and open, affording players the opportunity to score well. Yet, water adjoins 11 of the 18 holes so whichever of the five tees you opt to confront can add to or detract from your playing proficiency. The par 72 course plays anywhere from roughly 5,100 to 6,900 yards and is maintained in splendid condition. The course record is only 69, so it plays a lot harder than it looks. Heaven forbid that your ball will find a bunker along the way but if it does, it will be resting in the finest and most consistent sand anywhere in the area. Ladies, considered an after-thought on so many courses, have their own separate handicapped holes and are able to negotiate the layout design commensurate with their skill level. ●



New TifEagle greens at Holiday Golf Club give the golfer a quality putting surface year-round.

### HOLIDAY GOLF CLUB ALSO FEATURES

**Pro Shop** Featuring an excellent selection of golf clubs, golf apparel and related merchandise to complement your game. Their friendly staff will help you with start times, golf cart rentals and golf lessons when requested.

**Practice facilities** Including a lighted nine-hole par



three 1,000 yard course, the only such facility in the entire Northwest Florida area and perfect for beginning and junior golfers. With an extensive short game practice area, large putting green and illuminated driving range, Holiday Golf Club is your “go-to” golfing destination.

**Holiday Golf Club** 100 Fairway Blvd., Panama City Beach, is

centrally located in the heart of Panama City Beach, 2.5 miles east of Pier Park. (850) 234-1800

**From Panama City** take Highway 98 West (Panama City Beach Parkway) for five miles. Holiday Golf Club is located on the right. (Look for the large range net.)

**From the west** take Highway 98 East. After you pass Pier Park, drive two more miles. Holiday Golf Club is on the left. (Look for the large range net.)



**Bay Point Golf Resort and Spa**

The Nicklaus Course &  
The Meadows Course  
(850) 235-6950  
baypointgolf.com

**Hombre Golf Club**

(850) 234-3673  
hombregolfclub.com

**Holiday Golf Club**

(850) 234-1800  
holidaygolfclub.com

**Signal Hill Golf Course**

(850) 234-3218  
signalhillgolfcourse.com



**A Golfer's Paradise**

**YOU'RE A GOLFER!** 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.



# GEAR UP FOR SPRING

**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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The VTX Wrist Computer uses the highest technology available, including OLED color display, Bluetooth capabilities and a 3-Axis digital compass to aid you in any dive.  
**Dive Locker, 106 Thomas Dr.  
DiveLocker.net**



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These hand-painted buoys by artist Clynton R. Davis will look picture perfect on the porch of a beach house getaway. Transform any home into a vacation with marine-themed art from The Beach House Market.  
**The Beach House Market, 17900  
Panama City Beach Pkwy.  
facebook.com/  
thebeachhousemarket**



## GULF COAST SALTWORKS

Local Panama City Beach chef Paul Ashman is the creator of these artisan salts. Water from the Gulf of Mexico is collected, boiled and dried to create cooking salts with bursts of flavor such as lime, pecan and ghost pepper.  
**Blue Heron Fine Gifts, 11260  
Panama City Beach Pkwy.  
BlueHeronFineGifts.com**



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The bright and cheery print on this cooler tote, matching tumbler and pink wine opener make the perfect accessories for a springtime picnic or a summer day on the beach.  
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HysToggery.com**



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Cobia is a hard fighting game fish that is great table fare.



# Cobia's Annual Pilgrimage

The popular game fish arrives every spring for a multi-month stay

**BY CAPTAIN SIMPSON**

**IT WAS AN EARLY** April morning. I was spending boat time with a good friend cruising just south of the last sandbar paralleling a Florida Panhandle beach. The sun was at our backs and the bow was pointed west. In my right hand I held a sturdy 7½ foot spinning rod, sporting an equally stout reel with ample line for the game at hand. Tied to the end of the line's leader was a feather jig with a soft plastic eel trailer. We were in search of a visitor that Florida's Panhandle beaches are famous for each spring,

especially Panama City Beach. From our elevated perch, we had a good view of the emerald-colored waters. In a calm, but urgent tone, I heard the words, "Look, 10 o'clock," uttered by my buddy. He had spotted several dark torpedo shapes cruising just below the water's surface. They were at a distance of about 30 yards. Continuing our same course, we pulled slightly ahead of the fish, placing them at a five o'clock position where I could present my offering in front of the oncoming school. A short cast, a solid eat and hookset, a

15-minute fight; my first cobia of the year was on deck.

Panama City Beach has been a traditional springtime destination for many travelers. Most come by land, but many other interesting ones show up by sea. One such visitor is a fish: *rachycentron canadum*, most commonly referred to as the cobia. It's a pelagic species, which prefers tropical, subtropical and warmer temperate waters. A cobia is a hard fighting fish that is valued as great table fare. They grow in excess of 100 pounds. The current

All Tackle World Record recognized by the International Game Fish Association is 135 lbs. 9 ounces, and was landed July 9, 1985, in Shark Bay, W.A., Australia. And, for now in the present day, the stocks of cobia are in good condition. This annual, migratory Panhandle visitor also travels under these aliases: ling, lemon fish, crab cruncher and man in the dark suit.

Florida's Panhandle cobia is a prized gamefish. Sight fishing for them is a spring tradition among Panama City Beach anglers. Every spring a number of cobia migrate to the northern waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The spring cobia beach migration from east to west usually lasts from early April into early May. Later in the spring, cobia take residence offshore, where they can be caught while fishing over artificial reefs and around other various structures. Cobia visit until cooler fall water temperatures send them migrating back south to warmer waters for the winter. They are present in the Northern Gulf along the Florida Panhandle for several months out of the year, depending on the Gulf water temperatures — roughly late March to early May.

Sight fishing (the practice of seeing a fish, then casting to it) is how most cobia are hooked and landed in the spring. Fishing vessels outfitted with an elevated platform — bridge or tower — are most commonly used. An elevated position provides anglers a better vantage point and increased line of sight. Since these fish swim just under the water's surface, elevation is a major advantage. Once a fish or school of fish is spotted, an offering/bait is presented with a well-placed cast. This is an extremely exciting type of fishing that includes the visual effect of getting to watch the fish take the bait.

Fishing vessels with towers aren't the only way to sight fish. Landlocked? Don't worry, the three Gulfside fishing piers located along Panama City Beach reach far enough out into the Gulf, offering pier anglers more than a reasonable chance of hooking and landing a cobia.

Don't be left on the beach. Contact a local charter captain, bring your own boat or walk out on the pier. Panama City Beach offers up some of the best cobia fishing along the Florida Panhandle coast. ●

## 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? 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.

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



In the Space Discovery section, visitors get to explore a life-size replica of an EVA suit that astronauts wear when they need to work outside their spacecraft.

# WonderWorks: 'Edu-tainment' for Everyone

Mixing learning and fun for all ages

BY CHAY D. BAXLEY

**OFFICIALLY WOWING** Panama City Beach inhabitants and visitors since opening its doors back in late June 2010, WonderWorks is a local favorite for family-friendly fun. This 35,000-square-foot, four-story facility claims to have something for absolutely everyone.

And the adventures begin as soon as guests cross the unique, upside-down threshold.

"A lot of people come through the door and say, 'What is this place?'" laughed

Mike Walsingham, a Panama City Beach native and WonderWorks' owner. "The only thing we've really come up with is that it's an indoor amusement park mixed with an educational center."

At WonderWorks, the good times are broken down into several interactive "zones," which take guests through more than 100 hands-on challenges and experiments. Patrons explore topics ranging from natural disasters to light and sound research to space discovery. Admission is

good for the entire day, so once you've tried them all, revisiting your favorites is a breeze.

"Everything in here is interactive," explained Walsingham. "You've got to touch it, you've got to throw it, you've got to play with it, you've got to ride it."

While the inquisitive learn about the deepest, darkest secrets of the Bermuda Triangle, the daredevils of the group can test their nerve with an assortment of "physical challenges," like lying on a bed





## Instant Attractions

FOR THOSE LOOKING FOR ATTRACTIONS GALORE, PANAMA CITY BEACH IS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

**“FUN IN THE SUN”** may be one of Panama City Beach’s unofficial mantras, but this booming beach town has a lot more to offer than simply world-class natural amenities. Sure, the miles of pristine coastline are what draw people in. But once visitors arrive in this vacationers’ wonderland, there’re a million reasons to stay.

Sightseers in need of a reprieve from the beautiful sunshine of the Emerald Coast will have an array of adventures to choose from in Panama City Beach.

On the agenda? Well, for starters how about partaking in a round of mini-golf, exploring an imitation-shipwreck, getting into a laser tag shoot out with loved ones or making friends with a stingray? As a true, all-American seaside retreat, this beach is chock-full of fun attractions.

of 3,500 nails or taking an XTREME 360 bike ride. Also included in the admission price? None other than a high ropes challenge course. Guests willing to upgrade their passes can also participate in a bout of “Lazer-Tag.”

“When you look at it,” emphasized Walsingham, “everything in here can have some sort of educational element — even the (simulated) rollercoasters.”

With other locations sprinkled across the country, the WonderWorks franchise has made quite a name for itself in recent years. Geared toward kids of all ages, it’s the quintessential example of family-friendly fun. ●

### WONDERWORKS

9910 Front Beach Road  
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SPOTLIGHT**



Paddleboarding is great  
for exercising, sightseeing  
or just plain fun.

# What's SUP?

All ages can jump on a paddleboard

BY ROSANNE DUNKELBERGER

**THE INITIALS STAND** for Stand Up Paddleboard, and with miles and miles of coastline, Panama City Beach is the perfect place to give this hot new recreational activity a try.

A 2013 report by the Outdoor Foundation said a whopping 56 percent of those participating in the sport were trying it for the first time.

Part of the attraction might be the sport's near-universal appeal. While standing, balancing and paddling is a

physical workout, it doesn't require the training and practice required by activities like surfing or kiteboarding — making it the perfect vacation pursuit.

"That's one of the good things; anybody can do it," says Gabriel Gray, owner of Walkin' on Water. "I've taken 3-year-olds all the way up to 88-year-old women, and I've taken the skinniest of people all the way up to 300 pounds."

Even those who have never paddled before are able to get up and around with

as little as 30 minutes of instruction, say local outfitter/instructors.

"On a paddleboard you can do anything. You can be on a lake, you can be on a river, the ocean, or the Gulf, the bay ... it's really anytime, anywhere," says "Mermaid Heather" Wiles.

Paddleboards are usually made of molded plastic or a foam core coated with epoxy and come in a variety of widths and lengths. While SUPs resemble surfboards, they're definitely different, says Wiles.



“A surfboard, you can’t just get out in the middle of the water and stand on it — you’ll sink. You have to actually be on a wave to stand on a surfboard.”

Gray, Wiles and other area outfitters offer short, introductory lessons, board rentals and group excursions. While many visitors paddle along the white sandy Gulf shores, some of the most enjoyable paddling for beginners can be found in calm and protected areas like St. Andrews Bay and Lake Powell.

Gray, who has been paddling for seven years, specializes in ecotours. One of his half-day excursions takes his guests to a river and natural spring inland near the town of Vernon. “There’s a lot more to see in Panama City Beach than just the Gulf. You have rivers and natural springs ... there’s a lot of beauty around,” he explains. And on a hot, sunny day, “it’s going to definitely be a lot shadier.”

Wiles, 32, has been surfing for nearly 20 years and teaches it at her GulfLife Surf Shop. But the sport needs waves, which

**“What’s cool is it’s so fun. You’re seeing the water, you’re seeing the sea life and you can see the crabs and the fish that swim under you (and) an occasional dolphin or manatee that will cruise by, you’re so focused on that you don’t realize you’re working out.”** — “Mermaid Heather” Wiles

can be hit-or-miss depending on the weather. So, she started teaching paddleboarding and renting equipment for days when there wasn’t much surf.

Two years ago she added a new twist to the popular new sport when she began offering classes in paddleboard yoga. Basically, her students perform simple yoga poses atop a board anchored in shallow water.

“What’s cool is it’s so fun. You’re seeing the water, you’re seeing the sea life and you can see the crabs and the fish that swim under you (and) an occasional dolphin or manatee that will cruise by,” she says. “You’re so focused on that you don’t realize you’re working out.”

While Wiles can do headstands on her SUP, each class is designed for the comfort level of the students.

“If you feel better doing baby steps, we can do seated yoga on the board ... and modify everything,” she says. But everyone seems to enjoy the final Savasana pose, where one lies on the board at the end of a session. “It’s really peaceful because when we lie down you’re focusing on listening to the water bounce off the board. It’s so relaxing.”

And there’s no shame in falling off the SUP into the water. “I always say it’s kind of nice to fall off because when it’s hot out, it’s going to cool you off,” Wiles quips. ●

## 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.



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# Give PCB Conservation Park a Go

12 TRAILS PAVE THE WAY FOR FITNESS AND FUN FOR NATURE-LOVING HIKERS AND BIKERS

**BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM**

**DO YOU KNOW WHERE** to go to get your “green” on at the beach? Head to the beautiful Panama City Beach Conservation Park located just west of Griffin Road off Highway 98. This innovative public green space protects and balances the area’s natural resources while providing 2,912 acres of outdoor recreational fun.

And that’s just the start. As eco-systems are restored and habitats are

improved over time, more native species will be reintroduced to the park. The park is part of a network of trails and connects to Frank Brown Park and Aaron Bessant Park. It’s a long-term environmental project that’s off to a great start.

The park is open daily from dawn to dusk. Hikers can trek 24 miles on 12 different trails (ranging from .6 miles to 11 miles) not to mention over a mile

of boardwalks that meander thru scenic Cypress domes. A great place to start is the 1.8-mile hike on the Green Trail; it hits the high points closest to the trail-head, is a comfortable walk for children and is wheelchair friendly.

This is a fantastic place to exercise furry four-legged friends. Up to two dogs per person are welcome as long as they are leashed.



Bring a mountain bike and enjoy an easy ride through the restored pine forests by bicycle on any of the trails.

For your convenience, parking and public restrooms are located at the Trail Head building. Here, you can pick up a brochure with a map and size up the various trails. Make a day of it and picnic at the covered pavilion (which is available for rent for family gatherings and special occasions). Ask about the guided Audubon bird walks, and the volunteer and recreational programs offered in the Trail Head classroom seasonally. To fully enjoy all the nature around you, be sure to bring your binoculars for bird and wildlife watching. And don't forget your camera to capture the beauty of the moment. ●

## GETTING THERE

From the intersection of US 98 and SR 79, drive west to Griffin Road. You'll find it on the right immediately past a La Quinta Inn. It's the main road through "Beach Commerce Park," a St. Joe-owned industrial and office park. Follow Griffin Road until it ends. It jogs left into the Panama City Beach Conservation Park through a main gate at the southern boundary of the preserve and continues north, paralleling the paved bike trail to a loop through the trailhead area.

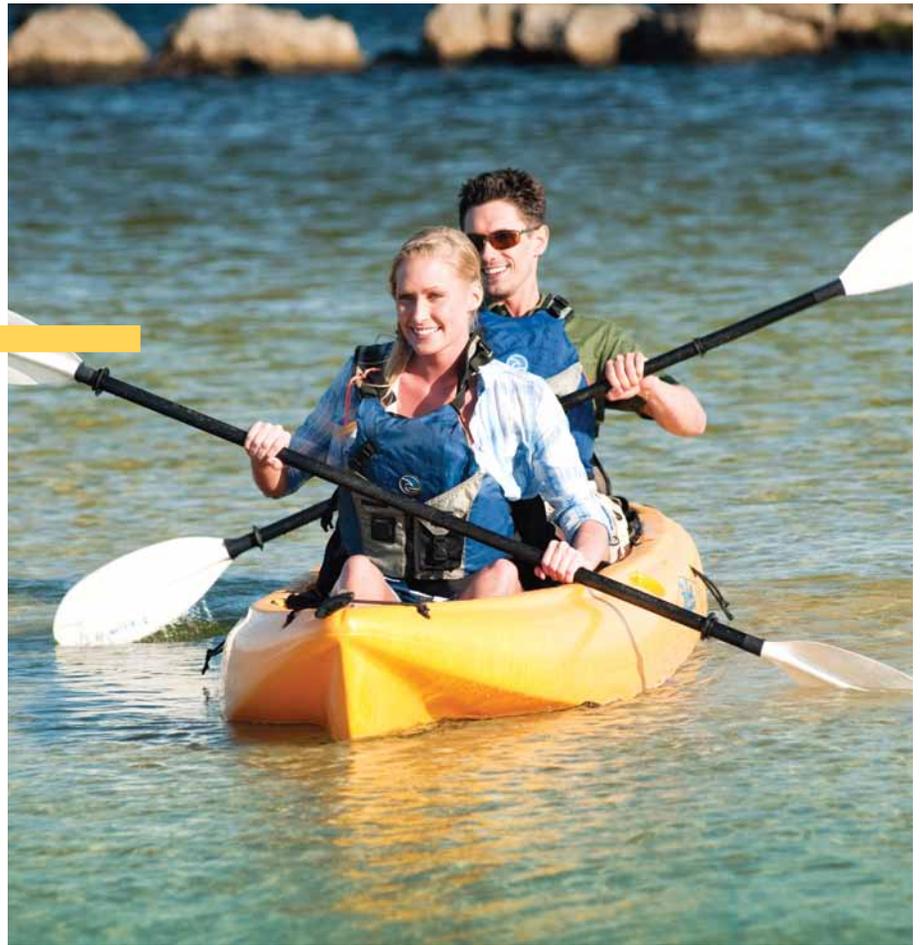
### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- » Open daily from dawn to dusk
- » Bicycles are permitted on all trails
- » Bring binoculars for bird watching
- » Only two dogs permitted per person



## 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.



## Enjoy the Gulf from a different perspective!



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# Diving the Black Bart

Exploring Florida's Panhandle Shipwreck Trail

BY JASON DEHART

**ORIGINALLY CHRISTENED** as the Vulcano del Golfo in the '70s, the Black Bart was an offshore oilfield supply ship that on July 27, 1993 became one of the first vessels to be sunk as part of the local artificial reef program. It is now part of the Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail and was renamed the Black Bart in honor of Charles "Black Bart" Bartholomew, a Navy salvage captain and sport diver

who championed the cause of artificial reefs in these parts. The ship is 185 feet long and rests upright in about 80 feet of water. The top of the ship is in about 45 feet of water, which makes it a prime location for open water certification of student divers.

"They don't go inside the wreck, but we let them swim around the outside of it," said Capt. Pat Green of Panama City

Diving, noting that divers should not enter wrecks unless they have proper training.

The biggest highlight for divers on the Black Bart is seeing a goliath grouper, which can grow up to eight feet in length and weigh as much as 800 pounds. Even though they're quite docile, it's still a thrill to suddenly bump into one.

"It's like, you're swimming along, watching the little fish, enjoying your



CAROL COX, MEXICO BEACH ARTIFICIAL REEF ASSOCIATION

## 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 de-commissioned ships, old bridge spans and other structures, give divers from all over the world a chance to see a tremendous amount and 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.

dominance, and you look around the corner and there’s something way bigger than you staring back at you,” Green said. “Their mouth is so big you could fit your shoulders in there.”

Aside from goliath grouper, divers will also see all the game fish popular with fishermen — including flounder, snapper and amberjack — along with manta rays and an occasional turtle, and in the summer there are dense shoals of bait-fish all over every dive wreck. “When you put these wrecks down there everything

flocks to them, so there’s a dense amount of marine life,” Green said.

Qualified divers who venture inside the Black Bart can expect to not only encounter sea life, but can tour the ship’s wheelhouse, cargo holds, galley and the ship’s head. Just carry a light and be careful stirring up silt. Like cave diving, it’s very easy to lose visibility inside a ship. Another possible hazard to watch out for are fishing lines, and divers are encouraged to always carry a knife just in case of trouble. ●

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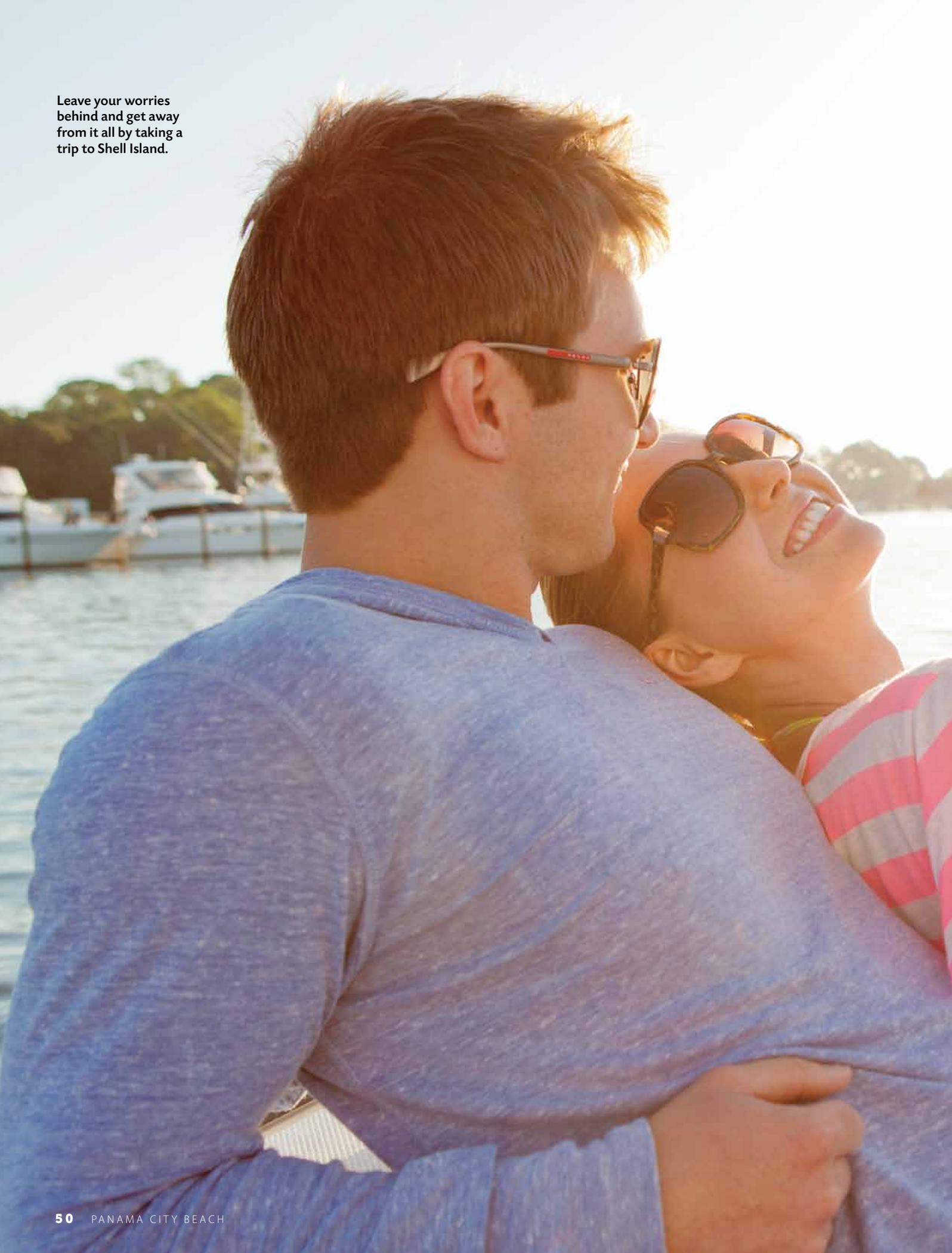
At Joni’s Beach Rentals, we provide vacation rentals throughout Panama City Beach. Whether you are looking for a secluded getaway or want to stay in the middle of the action, we can help you find your dream vacation home.

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Leave your worries behind and get away from it all by taking a trip to Shell Island.



# SHELL ISLAND

THE BEST WAY TO  
FIND FUN IS TO LOSE  
TRACK OF TIME

BY ZANDRA WOLFGRAM

**S**o, you are stranded on a deserted island. What three things do you take? If you are lucky enough to spend the day on Shell Island in Panama City Beach, the three most important things to bring are your family, a camera and ... your sense of adventure!

There is still an amazingly pristine, uninhabited island just waiting to be explored. Shell Island is a barrier island, a 7-mile stretch of undeveloped land nestled between the Gulf of Mexico and St. Andrews Bay. If you are seeking a beach experience that will help you reconnect with Mother Nature, this is the place for you. Here the Sunshine State is at its best — and most natural.

Shell Island has something to offer everyone in the family. When my family of four ventured out for our first visit, it definitely offered something for all of us.

I was in heaven doing my best impression of a sun-seeking, lounge-chair lizard and communing with nature. I tuned my “radio” in to the call of the seagulls and the crash of the waves, while my husband, son and daughter found their own personal adventures.

“Fantastic fishing” was all that my husband had needed to hear to clear his schedule for the trip. He spent the day wading in and out of the surf trying to lure the likes of red fish and whiting to his line. Though he dug up quite a few plump “sand fleas” to use as bait, his fish dinner still managed to elude him ... this time.



My son didn't spend much time on land. He grabbed his snorkel gear, jumped in the surf and headed for the jetties. He bobbed along just below the surface, pausing only long enough to take a deep breath before diving back down to explore the sandy depths. He spotted rockfish, hogfish hiding under rocks, hermit crabs scuttling on the sandy floor, and found nestled in a weed line a very special first-time discovery — a baby seahorse.

As for my daughter, she was content with a day of shelling and returned with sandy pockets loaded with free tokens from the sea and a sun-kissed nose. The highlight of her day? The impromptu “dolphin show” just offshore.

In this fast-paced world, it's nice to know there is a place where time does seem to stand still ... if you let it. We loved being “stranded” on Shell Island. In losing ourselves to the day, we found lasting memories that are much like the coastal keepsakes Shell Island is named for — true treasures.

#### **WHAT YOU'LL FIND**

Shell Island lives up to its name. Sand dollars, moon snails, conch shells, pin shells, periwinkles, whelk and olive shells are just a few of the indigenous seashells found here. And, as long



Water, sun and sand – and perhaps a deer – might be your only companion some days on this barrier island off Panama City Beach.

Shell Island is appropriately named — so on your walks, don't forget to look for some of the treasures deposited by the waves.



as there are no creatures living in them, there is no limit to how many of these one-of-a-kind keepsake souvenirs you can take home with you.

This unassuming island is only about three-quarters of a mile at its widest point and stretches seven miles from east to west. The western end is part of St. Andrews State Park and the eastern portion is the property of Tyndall Air Force Base.

In its history, the island has been home to Native American settlements, seen the arrival of Spanish explorers and, very likely, hosted a few pirates! It even had a cameo appearance on the Silver Screen. Tim McCanlies' 2003 coming-of-age film "Secondhand Lions," starring Michael Cane and Robert Duvall, features a scene with two horses racing along the Shell Island beach, although in the film the beach is supposed to represent the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

From shore, the island can look like a mirage, but Shell Island's abundant natural bounty is very real. Here, miles of undulating sugar-white sand dunes dotted with swaying sea

### What to Know Before You Go

- » You must be 21 to rent a pontoon boat
- » No facilities available on the island
- » You can bring a paddleboard to paddle around the island, but it's not recommended to try to paddle board to the island
- » Anglers, a Florida fishing license is required
- » Please plan to leave the island the way you found it, pristine

oats, scrappy scrubs, towering pine hammocks and a serene coastal lake are a haven for hundreds of species of plants and wildlife. All kinds of critters — from docile deer, nesting shorebirds and elusive ghost crabs to a host of endangered coastal creatures such as Choctawhatchee beach mice — call Shell Island home.



Sea turtles, however, are probably the most special inhabitants. There are two kinds, both endangered. The majestic loggerhead can grow up to 1,000 pounds. The gracious green turtle is not named for its shell, which is normally brown or olive, but for the greenish color of its skin.

Turtle nesting season is May to October, but it's important to be mindful of markers noting nesting sites throughout the year. During nesting season, these magnificent animals emerge from the surf at night to lay their eggs in nests dug into the dry sand, then return to the sea. The hatchlings are on their own to scuttle their way to the safety of the surf.

### HOW TO GET THERE

Getting to Shell Island is part of the adventure, and there are several fun options to choose from.

The Shell Island Shuttle, operated out of St. Andrews State Park, is the most convenient and affordable way to go. In season (spring and summer) the shuttle runs daily on the half hour

## SHELL ISLAND TREASURES



**CONCH** The horse conch, also known as the giant band shell, has been Florida's official state shell since 1969.

**MOON SNAILS** Moon Snails can bore a hole in the shell of their prey in as little as three minutes, using their teeth, which are attached to tissue that most resembles a cat's tongue.



**PERIWINKLE** This species can breed year-round depending on the local climate. It reaches maturity at 10 millimeters and lives five to 10 years.

**SAND DOLLARS** Also known as a sea cookie or sea biscuit, the term "sand dollar" refers to species of extremely flattened, burrowing sea urchins belonging to the order Clypeasteroidea.



**OLIVE SHELLS** Olive snail shells are popular with shell collectors, and are also often made into jewelry and other decorative items.

**WHELK** A common name that is applied to various kinds of sea snail, many of which have historically been used, or are still used, by humans for food.



**PEN SHELLS** One of the largest bivalves in the world, this shell has two thin-walled, fan-shaped shells that can reach lengths up to 10 inches. In Florida, they are common in shallow waters near seagrass beds and are usually found buried in the sand with only the upper portion of the shell exposed.





## Fun in the Sun Forget Me Nots

- Towels
- Cooler or picnic basket
- Snorkel gear
- Fishing gear
- Camera
- Sunscreen
- Beach chairs and umbrella

from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on the hour in the off-season (fall). There is no shuttle in the late fall and winter. Adults are \$16.95, children 12 and under are \$8.95 and infants ride free of charge. Though you should plan on bringing what you need with you, if you visit between Memorial Day and Labor Day and need some basic beach accessories, the shuttle has these items available for purchase along with sundries and snacks when you buy your tickets.

If you want to make a party of it, you can pile up to 10 members of your family and friends into a pontoon boat and enjoy the island at your leisure. Just be sure the boat driver is 21 years old. There are several excursion outfits that offer rentals, but the most convenient is in St. Andrews State Park. If you want to amp up your adventure by snorkeling or kayaking around the island, sign up for a tour package, which can take out the hassle by including all the equipment you need, not to mention convenient round-trip ferry service.

If you do decide to captain your own “ship” you can sail, swim, dive, snorkel and fish. And as luck will have it, Panama City Beach has some of the best fishing along the entire Gulf Coast. You can cast a line from the shore

or right from the back of your charter or pontoon boat.

Getting a fishing license is easy. You can purchase it from sporting goods stores or online ([myfwc.com/license](http://myfwc.com/license)) and by phone (888-FISH-FLORIDA). An annual saltwater fishing license will only put you back \$17. Of course, if you reserve a fishing charter, the license fee is typically included in the price.

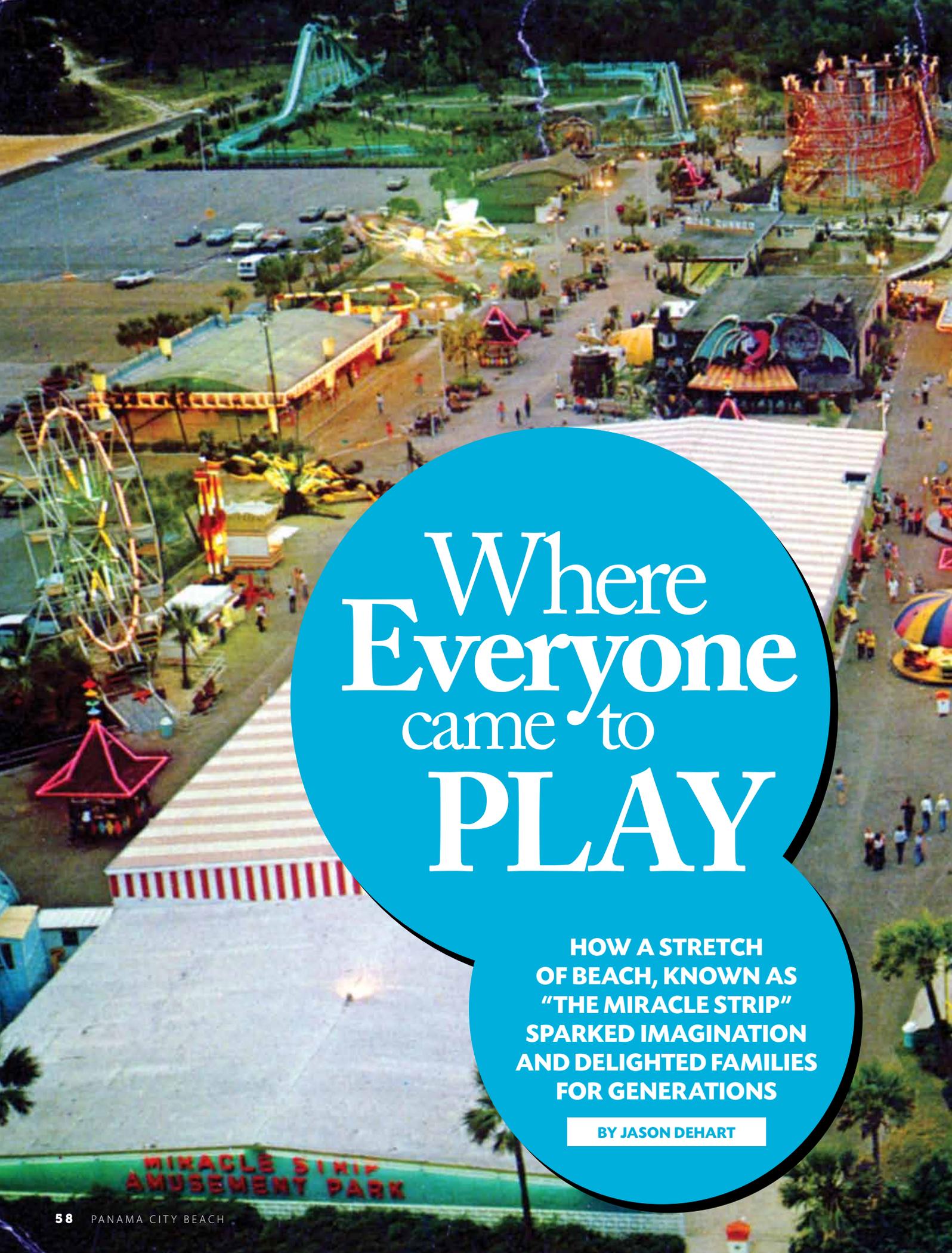
Fishing is for the patient, but it rewards the prepared. Selecting the appropriate equipment for the type of fish you are trying to catch, as well as the best flies, lures and bait could mean the difference between catching dinner and telling a story over dinner about the one that got away. So, bone up on bait.

If you have your own boat or you have rented a boat during your vacation stay, you can simply motor over, drop anchor just offshore, and come and go to the island as you please.

Shell Island is big on nature and low on commercial trappings — you won’t find concession stands, restroom facilities, picnic pavilions or trash receptacles. So, when you come, be prepared and plan to bring containers or bags so that you can take out everything you brought in. ●

The only way to get here  
is by boat, but once you  
are here the view and the  
serenity are sublime.



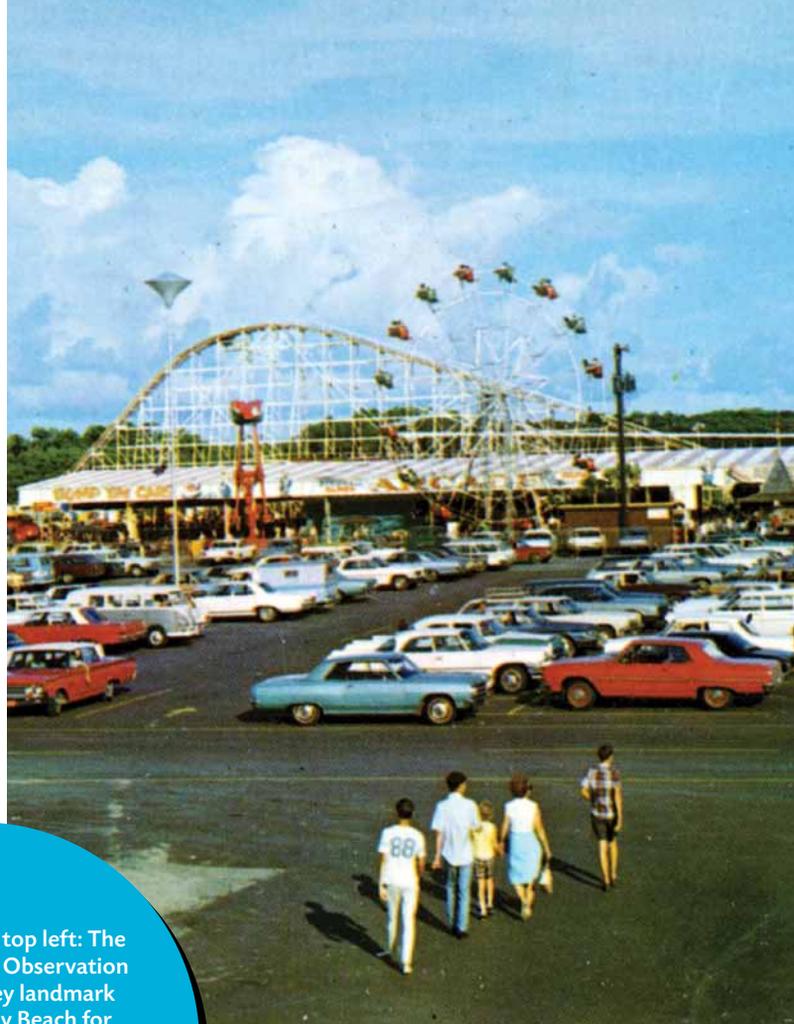


# Where Everyone came to PLAY

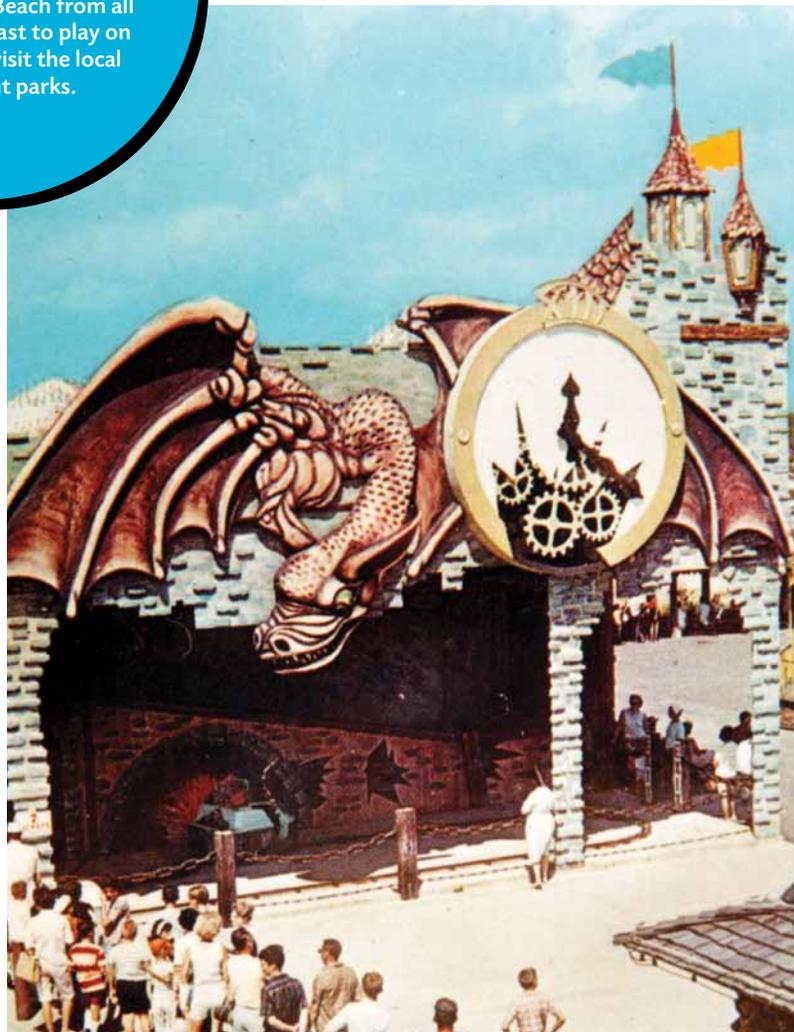
HOW A STRETCH  
OF BEACH, KNOWN AS  
"THE MIRACLE STRIP"  
SPARKED IMAGINATION  
AND DELIGHTED FAMILIES  
FOR GENERATIONS

BY JASON DEHART





Clockwise from top left: The Top O' the Strip Observation Tower was a key landmark on Panama City Beach for many years; visitors flocked to Panama City Beach from all over the Southeast to play on the beach and visit the local amusement parks.





**B**eloved by many as a family-oriented beach getaway, the Miracle Strip Amusement District was a colorful world of Goofy Golf, haunted houses, dinosaurs, sea monsters, fanciful jungle attractions, roller coasters, carousels, and even cowboys and Indians. Those iconic themes dominated the landscape of Front Beach Road during the mid-1960s and created some cherished memories.

“It was magnificent family fun for years,” said Melody May, who at 18 was well-known as a model for many of the businesses and promotion agencies operating along the Miracle Strip. “Nobody acted silly, and there was no smoking or drinking.”

May said she probably started the modeling gig around 1965. She got the job, she said, because the photographer at the audition said he liked her smile and her long legs. Like most of the other girls, she had no agent, but her image appeared worldwide.

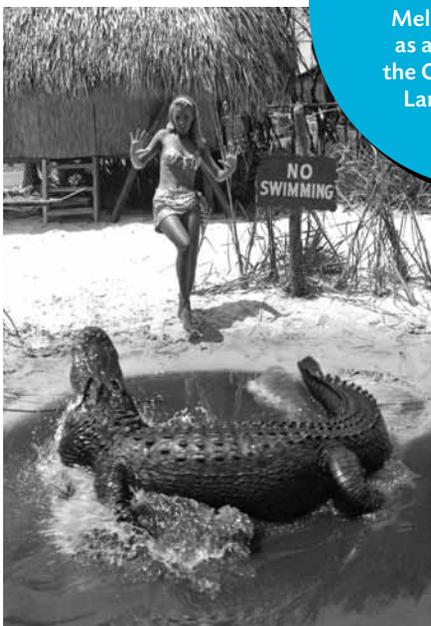
“It was a blast. It was so much fun,” she recalls.

Many photos from that place and time were saved over the years and now reside

in the Florida Photographic Collection. To celebrate National Archives Month, the State Archives in Tallahassee recently held a one-night exhibition of Miracle Strip photos from not only the state’s collection, but also from the private collection of tourism historian Tim Hollis.

“For decades, Panama City Beach was a mainstay of tourism in the Florida Panhandle. It was our own version of Coney Island in the Sunshine State. From wild west shows to mini golf to roller coasters and the sparkling waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Panama City Beach and the Miracle Strip Amusement District were a veritable playground for the entire family,” said Joshua Goodman,





Opposite page: Jungle Land was one of the major Miracle Strip attractions. This page: The scenic tower; Melody May starred as a ghost in ads for the Old House; Jungle Land featured live attractions.

archives historian at the Bureau of Archives and Records Management, Florida Department of State. “Panama City Beach is still a favorite for thousands of visitors each year, but a lot has changed. (This exhibition) highlights a time when themed attractions like those found on the Miracle Strip were scattered up and down the highways of Florida, when attractions with whimsical names like Goofy Golf and Tombstone Territory and Jungle Land were the epitome of Florida’s vibrant tourist trade.”

Interestingly enough, tourism arrived late in this area compared to other parts of the Sunshine State. According to Hollis, the Miracle Strip area and the Panhandle in general were all but ignored by the rest of the state.

“Everything about it — the climate, the clientele, the fact that it was a summer resort and everything closed up after Labor Day — made it totally unlike St. Augustine or Fort Lauderdale or Miami, or anywhere else in Florida. Those towns probably barely considered it a part of the same state,” Hollis said.

In fact, this part of the state was about the last to be developed for tourists, unless you count converting the swamps west of Orlando into theme parks, he said.

“Panama City Beach officially opened in 1936, and most of the attractions people remember so nostalgically were built in the late 1950s and early 1960s, so by no means was it ‘early’ in the story of Florida tourism,” he said.

This stretch of highway was christened “The Miracle Strip” by newspaper writer Claude Jenkins in 1952, Hollis wrote in his book, “Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising.”

“At first the term referred only to the area around the still-developing Fort Walton Beach, where Jenkins was inspired by the snow-white sand and the deep blue-green of the Gulf waters,” he wrote. “By the early 1960s, the entire stretch from Pensacola to Panama City was considered the Miracle Strip, and many businesses and attractions were anxious to capitalize on the name.”

Attractions like Tombstone Territory, Fun-Land, L.L. Sowell’s Zoo-Land Golf, Lee Koplin’s Goofy Golf, the

**“Panama City Beach officially opened in 1936, and most of the attractions people remember so nostalgically were built in the late 1950s and early 1960s.”**

— Tim Hollis, Tourism Historian

Opposite page: Local teenager Melody May became a prominent feature in a lot of the early Miracle Strip advertisements attracting people to Panama City Beach. This page: The Abominable Snowman was one of the featured rides at Miracle Strip Amusement Park.

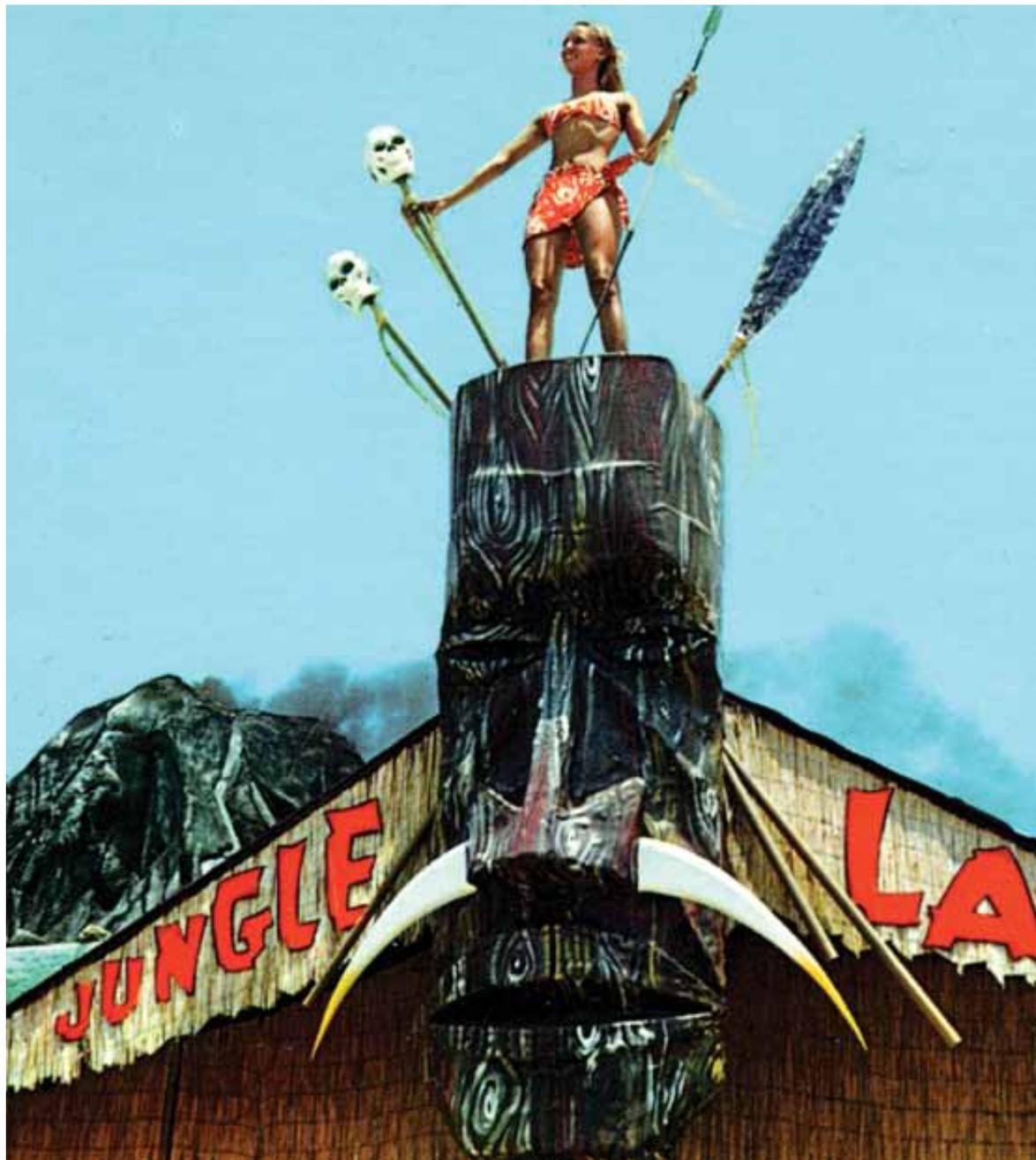


Miracle Strip Amusement Park, Jungle Land, Long Beach Resort, the landmark Top O' The Strip observation tower and many others appealed to a different audience than those who frequented the attractions of Central and South Florida.

"The folks who went to Panama City Beach — and, to a lesser extent, Fort Walton Beach and Pensacola ... were primarily from Alabama and Georgia, and many of them I have spoken with never went anywhere else in Florida," Hollis said. "As far as they were concerned, places like Silver Springs or Cypress Gardens could have just as well been on the moon. The Miracle Strip is important because it's important to people's memories."

**Attractions like Tombstone Territory, Fun-Land L. L. Sowell's Zoo-Land Golf, Lee Koplin's Goofy Golf, the Miracle Strip Amusement Park, Jungle Land, Long Beach Resort, the landmark Top O' The Strip observation tower and many others appealed to a different audience than those who frequented the attractions of Central and South Florida.**

Hollis said that if there ever was an unsung figure in the history of the Miracle Strip, it was Val Valentine, a former animator for Max Fleischer Studio who did a lot of artwork for Ocala's Silver Springs before eventually moving north and settling in Panama City.



“He was responsible for most of the artwork around the Miracle Strip park, and Jungle Land was his own attraction,” Hollis said. “He actually bought an existing wildlife attraction and once Val got ahold of it, Melody (May) became the primary model.”

May also played a ghost in ads for the “Old House,” a haunted house attraction. And she went on to appear in several Christmas-themed ads wearing a Santa mini-skirt that her mom made.

“Christmas shoots were cool because the sand was so white, it looked like snow,” she said.

The original Miracle Strip Amusement District may have changed since the '60s, but today one family is working to help families and visitors build new memories. Ted and Jenny Meeks have managed to create a new “Miracle Strip Amusement Park” in Panama City Beach, and are working miracles to restore the magic.

“We have 16 rides, and then we also have (modern attractions such as) bungee jumping, rock climbing, zip line and we have bathing cages. But all of our rides are vintage 1938-1985,” said Jenny Meeks. “If it’s not the same ride (that was at the original park), it’s the same make and model. We worked very hard so that when you walk on our property you feel like you stepped back in time to a park from yesteryear.”

One of their ambitions is to recreate the classic “Starliner” rollercoaster, which was perhaps the most symbolic ride at the original amusement park. The family hopes to have “Starliner 2.0” ready for the 2015 season.

“We know we can never be as wonderful as the old Miracle Strip Amusement Park, but we hope that we can make it be loved and cherished for another 40 years to come,” Meeks said. ●

# Time for Jazz

Seabreeze Jazz Festival set for April 22–26

BY JASON DEHART PHOTOS BY SHELLY SWANGER





### **IT'S SNAZZY, JAZZY,**

breezy and coming to a beachfront park near you. The 17th annual Seabreeze Jazz Festival, an “ultimate weekend of smooth jazz,” is expected this year to draw yet another record-setting crowd of mellow music lovers to the Aaron Bessant Park Amphitheater in Panama City Beach.

One of Northwest Florida’s most inspired musical events, the festival is scheduled for April 22–26 and will feature jazz legends George Benson, Al Jarreau and David Sanborn. Brian Culbertson, keyboardist Jeff Lorber and Mindi Abair will return to the festival this year and Norman Brown, BWB, Althea Rene, Kirk Whalum, Down to the Bone, The Boneshakers, Kim Waters, Euge Groove, The Rippingtons (featuring Russ Freeman), Everette Harp, Chris Standring, Acoustic Alchemy and other talented musicians will round out the list.

Before you go, be sure to pack a hat and some sunscreen. After all, we’re talking about an outdoor concert near the beach. It’s usually pleasantly sunny along this part of the Emerald Coast in the spring. It may be so downright pleasant that you may want to pad your visit with a few extra days in Panama City Beach. There are a lot of things to see and do while you’re here. Aside from the beaches, there

are some great golf courses nearby, and St. Andrews State Park appeals to the nature lover in all of us. Plus, there are plenty of charter boats ready to take on your fishing party, and undersea adventure awaits you with world-class wreck-reef diving. Back on dry land you’ll find fun stops like the Gulf World Marine Park, Coconut Creek Family Fun Park and Ripley’s Believe it Not! Odditorium. Afterwards, chill out with some shopping and dining at any of the 150 fine shops and restaurants at Pier Park, Northwest Florida’s premiere shopping center. More family fun can be found at the Grand Theatre, a 16-screen IMAX experience.

Of course, you have to feed the troops, and the Seabreeze Jazz Festival will feature Southern coastal cuisine like barbecue, coleslaw, fried shrimp and grilled fish fresh from the Gulf of Mexico — along with some savory Cajun fare that ought to put a perfect coda on your musical trip. But that’s still not everything there is to see and do. Artists from all over will flock to the festival, and there’s a good chance you might go home with some upscale piece perfect for the den or music room. Plus, there are “after concert” parties and cruises on the schedule. So if you’re after jazz, food, and art, you’ve come to the right place. ●

**Big name acts like Brian Culbertson (top) are set to appear at this year’s festival. Past years have brought in Boney James (left), Roman Street (this page) and Euge Groove (page 68).**





PANAMA CITY BEACH MARDI GRAS & MUSIC FESTIVAL

## 15 Events in 2015

### Winter Resident Senior Prom, Feb. 10

Now in its fourth installation, 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 is "Under the Starry Skies."

### Panama City Beach Mardi Gras & Music Festival, Feb. 13-14

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.

### Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally, April 29-May 3 / Oct. 21-25

Known as "The Most Biker Friendly FREE Rally in the United States," the Thunder

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

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STAR SPANGLED SPECTACULAR



PIRATES OF THE HIGH SEAS FEST

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.

#### **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. As the sun begins to set, patrons can ride free shuttles to the headline stage at Frank Brown Park from participating lodging properties.

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

#### **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 tropical rock and classic beach tunes for the perfect vacation soundtrack.

#### **Fall Fishing Challenge, Oct. 2015**

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.

#### **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.

#### **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.

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# Can You 'Dig' It?

Beach volleyball makes its debut in Panama City Beach

BY WENDY O. DIXON

**WHILE THERE ARE** many beaches in the world, the 27 miles of unspoiled sand of Panama City Beach are special. A beach lover's dream, the sand is sugar-white with a fine, powdery texture, cool to the touch and a pleasure to sink your toes into.

There are endless possibilities to how you could spend your time along this brilliant stretch of beach, which provides plenty of room for those who love to sand sculpt, stroll and sunbathe. Now a recent addition to the beaches is luring volleyball athletes, as well as anyone who wants to add a little sporty fun to the beach party.

Kevin Jones, director of the Panama City Beach Volleyball Club, grew up playing beach volleyball in Southern California, where the sport is hugely popular. He thought it could be equally as popular in Panama City Beach and collaborated with Christine McLaughlin, owner of Hook'd Pier Bar & Grill at Pier Park, to put four courts on the beach near the restaurant. Since then, the city of Panama City Beach has leveled the sand and put up 10 of its own courts, maintaining them for all to enjoy. "The courts are always in use," McLaughlin says. "We (at Hook'd) have several volleyballs free for use, and Gulf Coast State College holds tournaments and practices here, so even the people who dine here get much enjoyment seeing people play volleyball."

Depending on the time of year, Jones coaches up to 30 young athletes, holding after-school volleyball clinics on the beach behind Sharky's Restaurant and Tiki Bar. "It gives the kids another avenue and a new sport to play," Jones says. "When I first moved here there was no one playing beach volleyball. We're trying to

grow the sport in Panama City Beach and we welcome anyone who wants to come join us."

Indeed, beach volleyball is practically a different sport than indoor volleyball, with several rule differences. "The court dimensions are smaller on the beach so you lose a foot-and-a-half on each side and three feet on back line; doubles are a lot tighter," Jones explains. But the perks of playing on the beach include more contact with the ball, since it takes only two people to make a team. "It's better for the kids, so when they go indoors they'll be more well-rounded athletes."

Two of Jones' athletes have garnered national press. Casey Justice and Eden Hawes were named Princesses of the Beach by Volleyball Magazine. Best friends and beach volleyball partners, Justice and Hawes were the only freshmen on the varsity squad for Panama City Beach's J.R. Arnold High School's Lady Marlins. The girls have enjoyed a successful record — winning seven straight tournaments, including first place at the U14 World Series of Beach Volleyball in Long Beach, California. "To have a dynamic team like that is incredible," Jones says. With the addition of Gabrielle Crowley, also a Lady Marlin, the trio seems unstoppable. Hawes and Justice won three tournaments last summer, Justice and Crowley won two and finished third at Nationals. All three were selected for a High Performance Camp at the Olympic Training Center, making their summer a success.

But it's not only athletes who can enjoy the beach volleyball courts. For visitors to Panama City Beach, the PCB Beach Volleyball Club connects local players with out-of-towners who want to set up a casual competitive mixer. "Anyone can go to [pcbbeachvolleyball.com](http://pcbbeachvolleyball.com)





Beach volleyball is a popular sport – and out-of-towners can find friendly locals for a casual mixer.

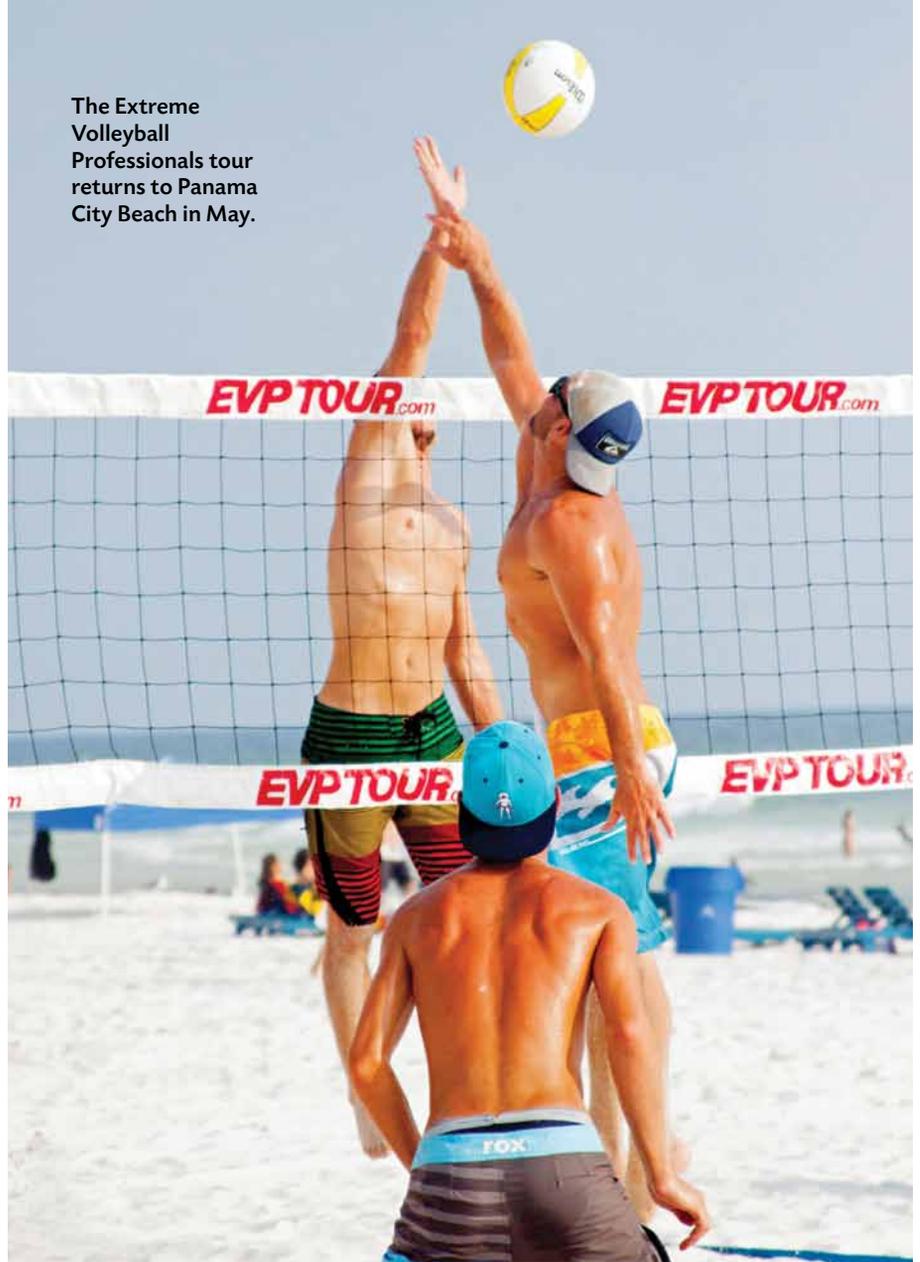


to see where the courts are, make plans to attend a volleyball camp or play with locals,” Jones says. “Even adults are doing it. We’ve just had a guy from Hawaii and group from Canada who played in December. Local players are on a text list ready to play.”

In the collegiate sports arena, the Gulf Coast State College Lady Commodores won conferences for the last two years. “We’ve built up the program to be competitive, and we’re trying to keep it there,” says Kyle Peck, in his fifth year as head volleyball coach. “We’re working to expand from regional to national success.” As a way to keep the team sharp, Peck holds beach volleyball practice in the spring to get out of the gym. “Sand volleyball is a collegiate sport in NCAA Division I,” Peck adds. “This gives them an opportunity to broaden their skills.”

For extreme volley professionals and enthusiastic amateurs, the EVP (Extreme Volleyball Professionals) Pro-Am Beach Volleyball Tour Southeast Conference will be in Panama City Beach on May 23–24. This event is now in its eighth year in Panama City Beach. After 20 stops that span the country, teams of 300 athletes from Miami Beach, Chicago, Virginia Beach and everywhere in between make their way to compete in a thriller of a tournament on the beach at the Boardwalk Beach Resort. “Panama City Beach has the best sand for our sport of beach volleyball. The beaches are pure white sand that is soft when you dive for an extreme play. That is why our players come back year after year,” says Ross Balling, EVP Tour commissioner. “The resorts are perfect for a long weekend vacation, and the service is outstanding. I cannot wait ‘til May.” ●

The Extreme Volleyball Professionals tour returns to Panama City Beach in May.



## Sports Tournament Schedule

**Feb. 13–15**  
Edgewater  
Gymnastics Classic

**Feb. 27–28**  
Florida vs. USA  
High School  
Fastpitch Classic

**March 6–8**  
ISSA Senior  
Softball Gulf Coast  
Championship

**April 10–11**  
Mr. Surf’s Zap Pro/  
Am Skim Jam

**May 9**  
Gulf Coast  
Triathlon

**May 9–10**  
Super Cup of  
Watercross

**May 23–24**  
EVP Tour Pro/Am

**June 6**  
USA Jr. Beach  
Volleyball Classic

**June 12–14**  
Minor League  
Paintball Classic

**June 16–21**  
Grand Slam World  
Series of Baseball I

**June 22–28**  
Grand Slam World  
Series of Baseball II

**June 29–July 5**  
Grand Slam  
World Series of  
Baseball III

**July 6–11**  
USFA Fastpitch  
World Series I

**July 13–18**  
USFA Fastpitch  
World Series II

**July 20–25**  
USFA Fastpitch  
World Series III

**July 20-25**  
Grand Slam  
World Series of  
Baseball IV

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# Museum Traces Man's Steps Under the Sea

How we explore mysteries of the deep

BY STEVE BORNHOFT PHOTOS BY MATT BURKE

**THE SURVIVING BEATLES** would be amused. The Man in the Sea Museum is home to not just one, but three yellow submarines. Smallish vessels, mind you. None equipped with bunks. Strictly for day trippers.

“It may be that these subs were painted yellow to increase their visibility in the water,” said nine-year museum employee Mike Degroote, whose knowledge of the underwater world is rock solid. “Or maybe the song had something to do with it.”

The largest among the three, a battery-powered Beaver Mark IV, is mounted on I-beams on the museum floor. Two headlights, in combination with a circular hatch, lend the sub a certain Mr. Bill-like facial expression. It is big enough to have accommodated five aquanauts. Even so, it pales in comparison to the most significant artifact at the museum.



Sealab 1

The Louvre has its Mona Lisa. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has its Washington Crossing the Delaware.

The Man in the Sea Museum has Sealab 1.

Sealab 1 was built at the Navy lab in Panama City Beach in 1964. The project was spearheaded by Capt. George Bond, the Sealab program's medical director. Bond was committed to studying the effects of living and working undersea for extended periods of time.

Sealab 1, a steel, watertight capsule, was towed to Bermuda, where it was deployed in 193 feet of water for a scheduled 21 days. Bob Barth, for whom an aquatic training facility at Naval Support Activity Panama City is named, was the lead diver on board. An approaching storm cut the mission to 11 days, but Bond had proved the feasibility of “saturation diving” — remaining at depth when nitrogen in a diver's body reaches saturation levels.

The success of Sealab 1 proved to be of great interest to the offshore oil industry, which proceeded to undertake saturation diving projects of its own.

Sealab 1 is located outdoors at the museum and is visible to passersby on Panama City Beach Parkway. It is flanked by a decompression chamber and a personnel transfer capsule that was used by divers to move from the lab into the chamber. The museum hopes to restore Sealab 1 to its original condition in time for its 50th birthday in 2015.





This battery-powered sub is large enough to accommodate five aquanauts.

The Man in the Sea Museum is operated by the non-profit Institute of Diving, which was founded by Sealab 1 personnel who wished to preserve the history of the project. While Sealab 1 is central to the museum, various exhibits combine to trace the history of man's continuing efforts to "explore the mysteries of the deep sea." Other displays, including a collection of mines, relate to maritime warfare.

A contraption resembling a giant king crab generates more questions than any other artifact kept outdoors. Called a "minesweeping hydrofoil," it was towed behind a helicopter and generated a magnetic field that detonated mines. It was built in 1985; later editions of hydrofoils remain in use today.

Inside the museum, visitors encounter a collection of diving helmets dating to 1916 and human-powered compressors that were used to deliver air via hoses to divers at depth. It is the stuff of Jules Verne.

Detailed dioramas depict the rescue of crew members from a Navy submarine, the USS Squalus, which sank in 1939, and the discovery in bridge-building workers of Caisson disease, today known as decompression sickness or "the bends." An exhibit contributed by the National Association of Cave Diving recalls a research project conducted to explore the world's largest cave at Wakulla Springs, south of Tallahassee.

Early aqualungs, patented by George Bond's friend, Jacques Cousteau, in 1945, are on display. Cousteau used retired fire extinguishers as air tanks and developed a regulator that enabled

One of many dive helmets on display.

divers to breathe air at depth without damaging their lungs.

An outlandish pressure-resistant diver's outfit called a gym suit and resembling a giant Pillsbury Doughboy stands at one corner of the museum. Elsewhere stand MARK V dive outfits of a sort familiar to anyone who has seen the movie "Men of Honor."

Displays of rebreathers and Swimmer Delivery Vehicles will interest people who share in the current fascination with Navy SEALs. Rebreathers recirculate unused oxygen in a closed system that doesn't give away a diver's position because it emits no bubbles. SDVs are used by SEALs to stealthily move underwater from submarines to shallow water.

The Man in the Sea Museum, located one mile west of Pier Park, invites everyone to stop by and learn about the history of diving while exploring the mysteries of the underwater world. It is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. ●



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# Fresh Start

A look at the man behind one of Panama City Beach's most successful eateries

BY WENDY O. DIXON



BECK GRABEN



MATT BURKE

**ANDY'S FLOUR POWER** Café & Bakery, with its lively staffers, cozy corners and quirky art-filled walls, is a standout among the great locally owned restaurants in Panama City Beach. The sight and scent of freshly baked muffins, pastries and desserts lures you in, inviting you to sit awhile at the uniquely cheerful café. Then you taste the food — a ham and cheddar omelet with fresh fruit and a buttery biscuit for breakfast, or a classic Cuban sandwich or fresh Greek salad with blackened chicken for lunch, and you immediately become a returning customer. The philosophy at Andy's Flour Power Café & Bakery is: "We don't do fancy. We do fresh, and you can't fake fresh."

Third-generation chef John Certo practically grew up in the kitchen. Since the age of nine, the New Yorker spent his days helping his father in the gourmet food and catering business. "When my dad started the business, from the first day he said, 'You're going to work with me,'" he recalls. "And there I stood on a milk crate washing dishes or chopping vegetables, my apron literally went from the bottom of my chin down to the floor."

Certo's two grandmothers were masters in the family kitchen "One was an off-the-boat Italian who taught me authentic Italian style," he says. "The other was fifth-generation from Bay County, and she taught me about

John Certo learned Southern recipes from his grandmother, a fifth-generation resident of Bay County.



SCOTT HOLSTEIN

Southern recipes.” He was destined to run his own restaurant someday.

Every Sunday after church, Certo’s family would get together for a great meal. “I thought that was normal everyday life,” he says. “I didn’t know I was so lucky. That’s when I noticed food brought people together.”

Certo has since grown into his apron and made a name for himself in the Northwest Florida culinary business. Interested in opening his own café, while visiting Panama City Beach, Certo fell in love with the area and decided the town was just the right locale. “I saw the development, the new airport coming in. I saw so much growth and potential,” he says. “You get a sense of real beauty here. This is true Southern hospitality.” But the real treat of the trip was meeting the woman who would

**Every Sunday after church, Certo’s family would get together for a great meal. “I thought that was normal everyday life. I didn’t know I was so lucky. That’s when I noticed food brought people together.”**

– John Certo

become his wife, and after a two-day trip turned into a two-week trip, he knew that this is where he wanted to be.

He discovered Andy’s Flour Power Café & Bakery, which had been open for about nine months, and fell in love with the place. Certo convinced original owner Andy Faoutas to sell it to him and, with his wife and a dedicated staff, has made the restaurant into one of Panama City Beach’s best cafés. “My wife has been a huge inspiration for me,” he says. “And the crew does their part. It’s a team effort. And because there are so many tourists here who want a good local place, they end up asking the desk clerk at their hotel where to get good local food, and then end up here. The locals are loyal; we have some who come in every day for breakfast.”



BECK GRABEN

Located on Grand Lagoon just north of Capt. Anderson's restaurant on Thomas Drive, Andy's Flour Power Café & Bakery was named one of the Top 25 Great Breakfasts in the U.S. by Urban Spoon and received the Trip Advisor Award of Excellence for the last four years in a row. Certo was featured as one of 850 Business Magazine's 40 Under 40 in 2012 and has served as a celebrity

chef at various charity events. His restaurant has been featured in Southern Living and several travel magazines.

The success of the café is all in the experience, according to Certo. Andy's is famous for its Flour Power French Toast, made from thick country French bread dipped in cinnamon and brown sugar batter, grilled until golden perfection and topped with toasted nuts, fresh strawberries and powdered sugar — ideal for a special Sunday brunch. Tasting the Cuban, with baked ham, pork loin and genoa salami with Swiss cheese, sliced kosher dill pickle and mustard, grill-pressed on Cuban bread, you'd think you were in Ybor City, home of the authentic Cuban sandwich. For those who like lighter fare, the salads — blackened chicken Caesar,

spinach salad and strawberry fields — are all made from the freshest vegetables and fruit. From the bakery, pick up some fresh dinner rolls, a French baguette, assorted muffins, Danish, pastries, cakes, pies and cookies, all made on site daily. "I've always said food is only 50 percent; 25 percent is ambiance and 25 percent is service," he says. "If you do all that, you've created an experience and they want to come back and have that experience again."

It would be difficult to find another original café that takes fresh food as seriously as Andy's Flour Power Café & Bakery. Certo and his staff get a thrill out of seeing patrons visiting the café, catching up with friends, enjoying a delicious meal and returning again. But even when he's not working in his restaurant, you can still find Certo in his happy place — the kitchen—even if he's a guest in a friend's home. "Putting on a little Sinatra, cracking open a great bottle of wine and cooking; it's the best way to just enjoy family." ●

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Snorkeling in crystal-clear water is just one of the many fun activities this popular historic state park offers visitors.



# A Little History

St. Andrews Park sparkles with sand and memories

BY JASON DEHART

**ST. ANDREWS STATE PARK** is justly famous for its white sugar-sand beaches, emerald-green waters, marshes and pine scrub. But as with most any place you go in Florida, there's always a story beneath the surface.

There are all kinds of fun tales to imagine here. It's only natural that a visitor would think this peninsula would hold secrets from the past. It's not difficult to imagine pirates lurking behind the palmettos and jealously guarding some buried treasure, or some ancient shipwreck just offshore, patrolled by sharks and rays, its hull and masts all but lost to time. Some ancient Spaniard may have planted a Burgundy cross here at one time and claimed the land for his king. Or perhaps some prehistoric people lived here in peace and quiet, fished the blue-green waters with spears and hunted the scrub pine with atlatls.

Maybe all of this happened. Maybe, only part of it did. As it turns out, the real history is just as compelling as any work of fiction. Here's what we know, beginning with some vital stats.

St. Andrews State Park is a 1,200-acre Florida State Park that features more than a mile-and-a-half of beach between the Gulf of Mexico and Grand Lagoon and was named America's Best Beach by "Dr. Beach" in 1995. The state of Florida started buying the land for the park in the mid-1940s, and when

it opened in 1951 the entry fee was a quarter, according Melissa Shoemaker, park services specialist.

The man most responsible for the development of the park was Claude J. Willoughby, known affectionately as the "Father of St. Andrews State Park," Shoemaker said. He quite literally scratch-built a park from the wilderness.

"The first campsites at St. Andrews didn't have water or bath houses — just outdoor toilets," Willoughby recalled in a newspaper account published in the Panama City News-Herald in 1981, the year he retired. During his tenure, St. Andrews State Park grew from an almost inaccessible stretch of shore and woodlands into one of the most popular parks in the state.

"He was responsible for building a lot of the infrastructure out here," Shoemaker said.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA, FLORIDA MEMORY

## CONSTRUCTING THE PASS

Today the park consists of a mainland portion and a bit of neighboring Shell Island. The two peninsulas (the east end of Shell Island is Tyndall Air Force Base property) are separated by a jetty-lined channel cut by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in the mid-1930s.

“There was nothing here so they worked off barges at first, but in 1937 they put in a railroad on the west end all the way to the jetties,” Shoemaker said. The railroad helped speed up the construction process and helped the engineers stay ahead of the constantly shifting sand and sediment. The original rock that was used to form the jetties was white marble shipped in from Alabama, and you can still see some of that rock on the Shell Island side. The new cut essentially replaced an older cut to the east that proved treacherous to shipping because of sand and shallow water.

## EARLY HISTORY

People have been coming to this area for at least a thousand years or more, thanks to the abundance of fish and wildlife. Shell middens, or trash mounds, associated with the presence of Weeden Island culture and Fort Walton culture people have been located on the St. Andrews peninsula. The middens in the park aren't all that visible anymore, but some are still visible on Shell Island, which is accessible only by boat.

Not only did Native Americans flock here, but Europeans also found the sheltered bays and coves useful for the same reasons.

“There are stories about the Spanish passing through, and there is a little cove called Spanish Ante where they would park their boats,” Shoemaker said. Interestingly, the stories didn't end there, as tall tales passed down through generations tell of buried treasure marked by spikes in nearby trees — but there's no archaeological evidence of said treasure, she said.

## TEDDY TOLLOFSEN

One of the more colorful figures to emerge from the history of St. Andrews State Park is a fellow by the name of Theodore

“Teddy” Tollofsen, a Norwegian fisherman who became a permanent resident here before the park began.

“We built an interpretive program around Teddy and there are lots of interesting stories about him,” Shoemaker said. For example, he was shanghaied three or four times and was struck by lightning two or three times. He eventually wound up in Mobile working as part of a fishing crew, came over to Pensacola and liked it so well that he got his own fishing boat and started working for himself. In 1929, he was in the St. Andrews area when a vicious hurricane struck. For Teddy, this was the beginning of his life here.

“Some stories say his boat was being repaired, and while he was working on it the hurricane came up and tossed his boat into the park on the lagoon side where the present campground is,” she said. His boat lost, Teddy sunk roots and made the best of things. He built a shack, had some chickens and a feral hog that he saved from drowning, and continued fishing. Since there was no electricity, he salted his fish and kept eggs cool by burying them in the sand. Teddy passed away in 1954, about the time that Claude Willoughby was establishing the park. Shoemaker said

Willoughby buried Teddy using ballast rock from his old fishing boat at a cemetery in Panama City.

## RECENT HISTORY

Later visitors were drawn here by fat merchant ships, oilers and tankers. During World War II, German U-boats prowled the Gulf waters, and picturesque barrier islands throughout parts of Northwest Florida became armored pillboxes for coastal artillery. St. Andrews was no exception.

As part of the St. Andrews Military Reservation, Battery 155–St. Andrews Sound consisted of two M1918 155-mm gun emplacements and pre-fabricated Army barracks. Work on the battery was completed in 1943, and 50 soldiers from the 13th Coast Artillery unit were stationed here. The battery was located on the west side of the newly-constructed shipping channel, and today one of the circular “Panama”-style gun mounts serves as the foundation for a covered beach pavilion. The other gun mount is mostly lost under the shifting white sands, although erosion this past year has revealed part of it. In 1944, as the U-boat threat diminished, the men and guns were transferred to Fort Pickens in Pensacola and the station was essentially deactivated. ●



Throw out a line and see what you can catch — just like longtime park resident Teddy Tollofsen.

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# Find the Fun!

## WANT THE "INSIDERS' TIPS" THAT LOCALS SHARE WITH THEIR GUESTS?

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**1↑** **LOCAL FISHING GUIDES** can teach you how to fish from a kayak or stand up paddleboard ... they promise that fish look bigger caught this way! Pier fishing offers easy and affordable fun, and a good captain on a chartered trip can "put you on the bite" no matter the season!

**2→** **WHEN RENTING A BOAT**, ask how to recognize shallow water, and get a few pointers on the rules of the road to avoid running aground. Consider docking your boat at a waterfront restaurant and enjoying a great meal on your way to Shell Island!



**3↑** **PADDLEBOARD** lessons are fun for the whole family, and some Panama City Beach outfitters deliver equipment to you, or take you on a guided tour! Snorkeling is best along the jetties in St. Andrews State Park, where a protected area known as the "kiddie pool" is home to many brightly colored fish.

**4↗** **WHEN THE WAVES** get too big or currents are strong, you don't have to put your swimsuit away. Shipwreck Island Water Park has thrills to spare and offers the Lazy River for a relaxing float (open seasonally). The Frank Brown Park Aquatic



4

Center is a world-class facility where you can swim laps in the Olympic-sized pool, leap off regulation springboards or let the kids play in a 5,000-square-foot splash park complete with slides, water guns and other amusements. Even your hotel or condo accommodations might have an excellent pool or children’s splash pad.

5↓

**LOOKING FOR** some FREE entertainment? Panama City Beach’s Frank Brown Park hosts all kinds of sporting events, including softball, baseball and soccer. The talent is top-notch, and admission is free. During the summer, locals love the free Summer Concert Series held every Thursday night at the impressive outdoor amphitheater at Aaron Bessant Park, and on Monday nights Carillon Beach hosts musicians in a more intimate outdoor venue.



5



6

6↑

**SOME LOCAL AMUSEMENT PARKS** and putt-putt golf courses offer all day passes. This can be a great deal that allows you to play in the morning, take a break and come back for more fun later that night!



**7** **ST. ANDREWS STATE PARK** is a great family value. Entry is only \$8 per carload or \$2 each for pedestrians or bicyclists.

**8** **RICK SELTZER PARK** off South Thomas Drive offers free parking and changing rooms at this public beach access.

**9** **IF YOU LIKE TO COOK**, you can save money by paying a little more for a condo with a kitchen. Local seafood markets sell fresh local seafood to complement your perfect beach vacation.

**10** **WHEN YOU CHECK IN** at your hotel or condo in Panama City Beach, ask the front desk or the owner of your unit about coupons for attractions – there are many great deals available!





## 11 ←

**GULF WORLD MARINE PARK** is an amazing way to get up-close views of locally rescued rough-toothed dolphins, Atlantic bottlenose dolphins and sea turtles, and you can also view sea lions, sharks and even penguins! For the opportunity of a lifetime, take part in one of the many interactive programs, including “Trainer for a Day” or “Swim with a Dolphin.”

## 12

**LOCALS LOVE** a good sunset sail, because nothing beats letting someone else take the helm while you relax with a cold drink and enjoy the amazing view. For the more adventurous, a helicopter tour of the beach offers a whole new perspective.

## 13

**A DAY OF SCUBA DIVING** will open up seemingly new worlds as you explore the area’s many shipwrecks and artificial reefs. Local dive shops can arrange multi-day certification classes or a Discover

SCUBA program that will have you in the water with an instructor that day!

## 14 ←

**POPULAR PIER PARK** offers an unforgettable outdoor shopping and dining experience. From your favorite retail stores and unique boutiques to great restaurants, sweet shops and amusement rides, there’s something for everyone here!

## 15

**LOCALS KNOW** the “in and outs” of getting around and enjoying each experience in PCB. If you have questions, just ask!

## 16

**THOUGH PANAMA CITY BEACH** sees the biggest crowds in the spring and summer, many locals say April and early May have the best weather. Other locals recommend September through early November, when the water is still nice and warm but the air is not as hot.

## 17

**LOCALS DON'T SPEND** a lot of time driving on Front Beach Road. To get where you’re going faster, take Middle Beach (Hutchinson Blvd) or Back Beach Road (Panama City Beach Parkway) to

get close to your destination, then take a connecting road down to the beach!

## 18

**IF YOU'RE BOOKING** a sailing tour or a day-cruise with your family, consider one of the early morning boat trips to beat the heat and the crowds!

## 19

**CALL AHEAD** to skip the lines at popular Panama City Beach restaurants, or arrive before 6 p.m. or after 8 p.m., when crowds are smaller.

## 20 ↓

**LAKE POWELL AND CAMP HELEN STATE PARK** are hidden gems that have somehow stayed off the radar of most tourists, and offer breathtakingly beautiful beaches, wonderful picnic opportunities and trails that wind through rare ecosystems.

## 21

**THERE IS MORE** to Panama City Beach than just the beach! Take time to explore, or hire a guide who can show you the other natural beauties the area offers, such as conservation areas, lakes, rivers and bayous.



20

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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**. 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

# Fun for the ENTIRE family!



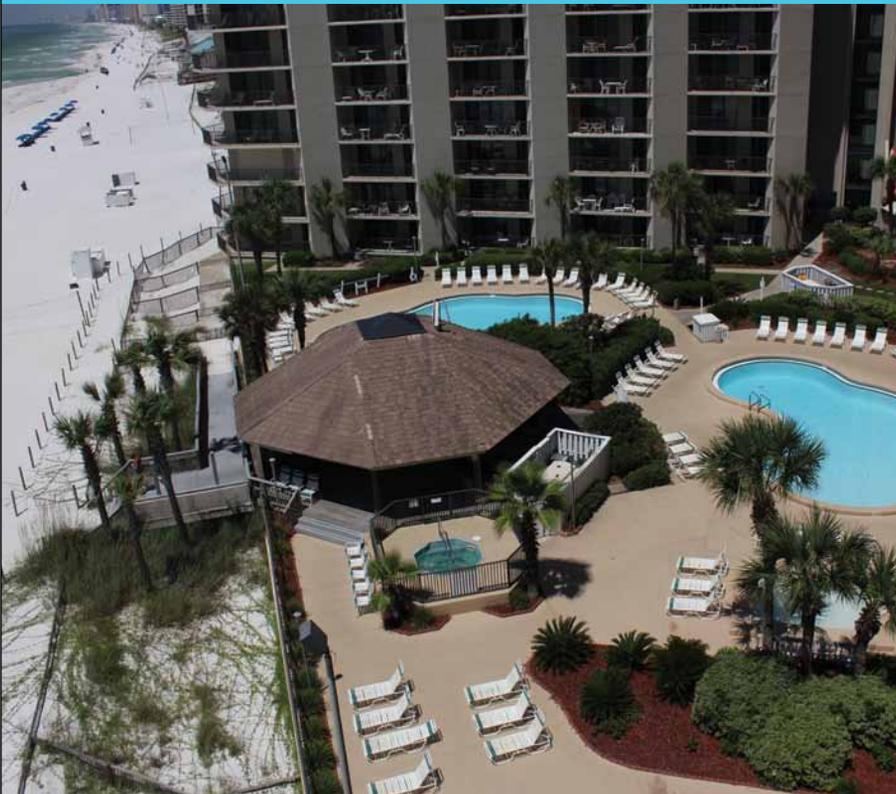
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# Leave No Trace

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 issued in the area beginning 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. ●



**Let the Bucket List Fun Begin!** There are so many great things to do in Panama City Beach, you can create your own Bucket List of must-do experiences. Go to **PCBeachBucketList.com**, select from the activities listed and when you've added all the fun you can handle, save your list and create your profile. The list includes activities like "Build the Ultimate Sand Castle," "Experience Scuba in PCB" and "Master Your Frisbee Toss." Submit your photos and you'll earn great prizes!



SEE THE BEACH FROM THE AIR



BIKE THE CONSERVATION PARK



TAKE A SUNSET CRUISE

KRISTIN LUNA

# Re-discovering the Beach

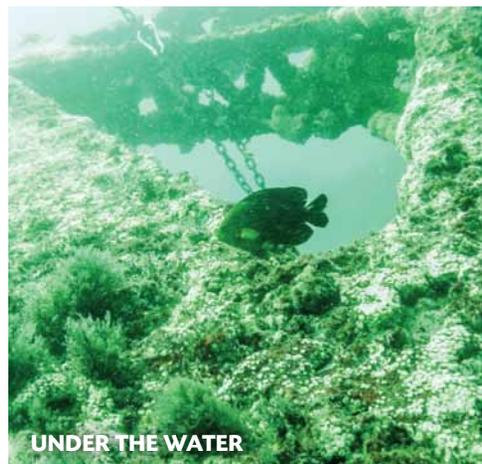
My Panama City Beach bucket list **BY KRISTIN LUNA**

**GROWING UP SOUTHERN**, I spent my spring breaks, summer holidays and other special occasions on the sugar sands of the Florida Panhandle, building castles with my cousins and boogie boarding in the surf. But as the years passed, vacation habits evolved, and these days as a 30-something my needs are more varied. I still like being outside from sunup till sundown, but I gravitate toward more active pursuits. Thus, this most recent trip down south to tackle my ultimate bucket list had me looking at Panama City Beach through a different lens — that of someone who knows the turf but is looking for new activities to try in an already familiar destination.

One thing I never did as a kid, for example, was explore all PCB had to offer below the ocean's surface. Now, as an avid diver, I was eager to check "wreck diving in the Gulf" off of my bucket list, so I nabbed a spot on the boat with Diver's Den and started my day by exploring the Black Bart wreck, where my dive master Carlos and I unearthed a number of stealthy marine life, including the camouflaged toadfish. After a brief surface interval, we descended to explore Bridge Span 14, where I spotted a number of behemoth Goliath groupers, the biggest one topping out at 600 pounds, lurking among the steel girders.

The next day, I took the opposite approach and chose to glimpse PCB from above, via a 20-minute flight with Panhandle Helicopter, watching the 27 miles of pristine coastline spread out before me. From the window, I spied pods of dolphins, handfuls of nurse sharks, isolated manta rays and a sea turtle traveling the turquoise waters below. Our four-seat aircraft rose over high-rise condos and hotels and flew alongside the Strip before reaching St. Andrews State Park and Shell Island, then turned around and made the trip back. It was, no doubt, the highlight of my time in Florida.

On my final day at the beach, I took it a bit easier. No high-adrenaline activity — or so I thought — just an hour of relaxation, getting my "on" on atop a paddleboard. Having done SUP frequently over the past few years, I wanted an added challenge. When I saw via Facebook that Mermaid Heather offered SUP Yoga, I knew that's how I'd spend my last morning. (Note: She also gives standard paddleboard tours and lessons.) It was much harder than it looked, requiring a healthy amount of balance and core strength I didn't know I had, and I was tired after my hour-long solo session of yoga asanas. Good thing St. Andrews State Park was nearby, so I had time for an oceanfront nap before my flight home to Nashville! ●



UNDER THE WATER



PANHANDLE HELICOPTER



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Kristin Luna is a magazine writer who contributes to a number of publications and also shares her misadventures via her blog, [CamelsAndChocolate.com](http://CamelsAndChocolate.com). Follow her on social media @LunaticAtLarge.

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