

Tasty ways to honor tradition in Tucson

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Name the states that border Lake Erie.
GeoQuiz answer, Page 4



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There are no hotels on Honeymoon Island, one of the northernmost barrier islands on Florida's Gulf Coast. It was named after a 1940s Life magazine contest for newlyweds.

SPRING BREAK ISSUE

Find your Florida beach

Anchored by St. Pete on Gulf Coast, Pinellas County offers stretch of sand for every mood

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Chicago Tribune

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — As winter drags on, thoughts turn to a spring escape, a trip south for warmer weather and the beach. But which one?

A beach is just a beach, you say, a place for kids to build sandcastles, adults to spread a towel to take in a few rays and older folks to relax in a lawn chair with a good book. But beaches are more than strips of sand. Some might be virtual wildernesses with only the basic amenities, while others buzz with hotels, condos, shops and restaurants. Some are so quiet you can snooze to the sound of the surf. Others feel like party central.

Florida's Pinellas County covers the full range. More than two dozen communities populate the Gulf Coast peninsula anchored by St. Petersburg. Most are divided between what's locally known as "The Burg," meaning the city and adjacent suburbs, and "The Beach," a string of barrier islands near Tarpon Springs on the north to the Tampa Bay inlet on the south.

Low-key day

You won't find hotels on Honeymoon Island, and that's just fine with day-trippers who cross a causeway to spend a few hours in Florida's most-visited state park. Occupying one of the most northern barrier islands on the state's Gulf Coast, Honeymoon Island State Park takes its name from a Life magazine contest in the 1940s that awarded newlyweds a two-week stay in the island's thatched bungalows.

Those overnight lodgings are long gone, replaced by two modern pavilions with concession stands and bathhouses with showers for washing off the sand before the park closes at sunset. Beachcombers keen on shelling know to arrive



KATHERINE RODEGHIER/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Excursion boats pass Clearwater Beach on sunset cruises. It's a busy resort area.

when the park opens at 8 a.m. for the best finds. Four miles of beach include one of the few pet beaches in the county, where you can take Fido and friends to swim and chase the surf. If you bring your line and tackle along, it's also a good place to fish for snook, but you'll need a Florida fishing license to stay on the right side of the law.

On the northern end of the island, the Osprey Trail winds through pines. Take a hike, and you might spot tortoises, owls and raccoons, and the occasional eastern diamondback rattlesnake.

For even more of a wilderness experience, head over to Caladesi Island State Park, accessible by a 20-minute ferry ride from Honeymoon Island or by renting a kayak at the Dunedin Causeway. Caladesi and Honeymoon were one island until storms opened a channel called Hurricane Pass.

Caladesi ranked No. 7 on a 2017 list of best U.S. beaches rated by Dr. Beach, aka Stephen Leatherman, director

of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at Florida International University. Along with 3 miles of pristine and uncrowded beach, the island has 3 miles of nature trails. Kayak and canoe trails on the bay side dart among mangroves and into sea grass flats where blue heron perch and feed. A nice cafe serves tasty burgers and other lunch fare, and a modern pavilion has changing rooms and showers.

Bustling beach

At the other end of the spectrum, Clearwater Beach has evolved into a busy resort area. Rated in 2016 by TripAdvisor as the No. 1 beach in the nation (No. 4 in 2017), it hums with activity. High-rise condos, vacation rentals and hotels form a wall along a lengthy stretch of sand dotted with beach chairs, volleyball courts and inflatable rides for kids and kids-at-heart. A beach walk lined with palm trees stretches half a mile. Excursion boats at Clearwater Beach Marina can take you sightsee-

ing, fishing and dolphin watching.

The epicenter of activity, Pier 60, has a fishing pier at its farthest end, but closer in it becomes a craft market full of jewelry, artwork, souvenirs and trinkets. Crowds form in the hours just before sunset, when street performers appear. Live music adds to the nightly festival and ritual of watching our solar system's golden orb slowly descend behind the Gulf on the horizon.

Crowds also gather to watch the spectacle at the beachfront Frenchy's Rockaway Grill, the largest of the region's Frenchy's restaurants. Before sunset, you might wait an hour or more for a table before you can dig into its "Floribbean" cuisine. It's famous for grouper sandwiches served in three sizes and prepared five ways.

Parking, especially around Pier 60, can be hard to come by. Problem solved with the Clearwater Ferry. Park in a free lot in downtown Clearwater and ride to the marina.

Sandy middle ground

Two beach communities along the southern section of the Pinellas Peninsula seem to have found a balance between quiet island parks and highly developed beachfronts.

The town of Treasure Island has an extraordinarily wide beach with plenty of room to spread out, fly a kite and run circles around your kids. An hour before sunset on Sundays, a drumming circle sets up with bongos and bucket drums. Hula hoopers and fire dancers join in the fun.

A 2-mile paved beach trail for walking, biking and skating runs along a row of lodgings, bars and restaurants. In 2016, the 77-suite Treasure Island Beach Resort became the first luxury lodging to open on the beach in a decade; rates start around \$340 in February. Its BRGR Kitchen + Bar made a name for itself with signature burgers — 10 of them — and "burger bowl" salads.

St. Pete Beach remains an old-school vacation spot that's kept up with modern amenities. TripAdvisor ranked it No. 3 on its 2017 list of best U.S. beaches. You can go parasailing and windsurfing here and rent stand-up paddleboards.

Turn away from the surf, and you can't help but be bowled over by the "Pink Palace" that seems to stand guard near the end of the Pinellas Byway that links this barrier island to the mainland. The Moorish style Don CeSar hotel dates from 1928, and its 277 rooms (starting at \$389 in February) have been occupied by movie stars, politicians and gangsters over the years.

Al Capone had his own dining table in the hotel's King Charles Ballroom. Given his notoriety, he was probably particular about his dinner companions.

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6 of world's best beaches in U.S., survey says

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Chicago Tribune

A list of "The World's 50 Best Beaches" from FlightNetwork, the largest Canada-based online travel agency, was compiled from its survey last fall of more than 600 travel journalists, editors, bloggers and agencies.

I was one of them. One of my favorites was the top-rated on U.S. soil, No. 10: Trunk Bay in Virgin Islands National Park on St.

John in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

St. John was pummeled by a pair of hurricanes in September. All of the beaches in its national park, which covers most of the Caribbean island, were back in business as of late December.

Not only does Trunk Bay have a lovely curve of sand, but it also boasts a 225-yard-long underwater trail for snorkeling, one of my favorite pastimes.

A ferry ride from St. Thomas, it scored 7 out of

10 for remoteness. It also received 10 of 10 for untouched beauty, and for sand and water quality. That's three of the five criteria used in the FlightNetwork rankings. Those plus the other two — annual days of sunshine and average annual temperature (140 days and 80.6 degrees at Trunk Bay) — resulted in a list of beaches on six continents. Sorry, Antarctica.

The top vote-getters in U.S. states and territories: ■ Trunk Bay, U.S.V.I., No.

- 10 ■ Flamenco Beach, Puerto Rico, No. 19
- Honokalani Beach, Hawaii, No. 28
- Tunnels Beach, Hawaii, No. 32
- Lanikai Beach, Hawaii, No. 41
- Cannon Beach, Oregon, No. 50

For the full list of beaches, visit flightnetwork.com/blog/worlds-50-best-beaches.

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GETTY

St. John's Trunk Bay, pictured a couple of months after last year's devastating storms, was named the best U.S. beach.