

[Travel](#)

posted: 7/10/2018 6:00 AM

St. Petersburg, Florida, goes from senior rest home to hipster hangout



The building housing the Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla., has avant-garde architecture making it a work of art itself.

Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

By Katherine Rodeghier

Daily Herald Correspondent

"'God's Waiting Room'? Oh, that's long gone," said Greg Stanek, a guide in St. Petersburg, Florida.

The city's old tongue-in-cheek nickname dates from the days when it was just another Sunshine State retirement community, one that lost its vibrancy as its elderly population aged. Twenty years ago there

were no restaurants to speak of in downtown St. Pete, said Stanek, and Central Avenue was lined with "dusty old antique shops that never sold anything." After the 2008 recession the city deteriorated, but the accompanying real estate crash made property more affordable for young people and small, startup businesses. It sparked a renaissance that's transformed St. Pete into a very livable, walkable city, said Stanek.



Shuffleboard isn't just for old folks in St. Petersburg, Fla. The Friday-night St. Pete Shuffle is open to all and attracts plenty of hipsters and millennials. - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

One example of its new youthful vibe: the St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club's y'all come Friday-night shuffle. Founded in 1924, the world's oldest -- and at one time largest -- shuffleboard club became the "Cooperstown of Shuffleboard" when it standardized the rules of a game once associated with old folks. But as players aged, membership dropped to 25, said executive director Christine Page. Now it's risen to more than 1,000 thanks, in part, to the club's St. Pete Shuffle. Every Friday it opens most of its 80 courts to nonmembers, residents and vacationers alike, from 7 to 11 p.m. The crowd gets younger as the evening wears on, sometimes topping 250 people, said Page. BYO booze and food with music and a party atmosphere bring out hipsters and millennials.

But there's more to St. Pete's rebirth than sliding heavy disks down a narrow court. Millennials mean microbreweries, bike-share stations, new-age restaurants and edgy art.



A mural by Ricky Watts has transformed a parking lot into a work of art in St. Petersburg, Fla. -

Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

Haven for art lovers

The Huffington Post lists St. Petersburg among 15 of the world's best street art cities. Buildings across the metro area, especially in St. Petersburg's five arts districts, are painted with dozens of murals. "Too many to count," said Stanek, one of the guides leading Saturday-morning tours past more than 30 works of street art.

After the housing crash, commercial buildings stood empty so the city offered artists incentives to occupy them, he said. They painted eye-catching murals over ugly graffiti on building exteriors. Soon businesses were hiring artists to dress up their properties. More murals went up during the first Shine St. Petersburg Mural Festival in 2015. Now an annual fall event, the nonprofit public art project brings in artists from around the world to transform blank walls into paintings.

Guided mural tours begin at Florida ArtCraft, a retail gallery selling the work of Florida artists with exhibit space showcasing regional and national artists. It's one of about 40 galleries and studios participating in the city's free Second Saturday ArtWalk. Owners open their doors from 5 to 9 p.m. on the second Saturday of every month inviting visitors to check out their artwork, watch a demonstration and nibble munchies.

St. Petersburg's artsy side goes beyond murals and galleries to encompass major museums.

Chief among them, the Dali Museum displays the largest collection of works by Spanish artist Salvador Dali outside his homeland. The permanent collection traces his career from student pieces through periods of anti-art, surrealism, nuclear mysticism and later works. The building itself is a work of art with

giant bubble windows protruding from the exterior and an interior atrium with spiral staircase twisting toward a latticed skylight. Outside in the "avant-garden" Dali's surreal melting clock drips over a bench. Shoppers shouldn't miss the museum store with a surprising variety of unusual items: scarves, leggings and other clothing with Dali designs, wine from Spain with Dali-inspired wine bags, jewelry, books.

In the Central Arts District the Morean Arts Center displays the work of local, national and international artists. In 2016, it moved the Chihuly Collection into a new space across the street in a building designed specifically to showcase the mesmerizing glasswork of Dale Chihuly. Pieces in the permanent collection are installed in darkened rooms where spotlights make Chihuly's vibrant colors pop.



St. Petersburg, Fla., has changed from a retirement community to a vibrant city of art, craft breweries and new-age restaurants, said Neil Keidel at the city's St. Pete Brewing Co.- Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

Drinking and dining

Other evidence of St. Pete's rebirth as a hip city lies in the sheer number of craft breweries, more than 30 on what has come to be called the "Gulp Coast."

While pouring drafts at the bar of the St. Pete Brewing Co., Neil Keidel explained a change in the law in 2012 allowed microbreweries to produce and sell their products. His brewery opened in April 2014. A few months earlier, Cycle Brewing opened its bike-themed taproom and brewery a few blocks away in the Central Arts District. Now breweries dot the Pinellas Peninsula from downtown St. Pete to outlying communities to the beach towns strung along the Gulf Coast. Beer enthusiasts following a designated beer trail can have a passport stamped at breweries along the way to snag prizes. Those without a designated driver can hop on a trolley or book an Uber.

St. Petersburg has gone from a dearth of bars and dining to the highest concentration of restaurants and night life in the region, many on the cutting edge of the new-age food scene.

FarmTable Kitchen opened late in 2015 on the second floor of the curated food hall Locale Market. Both are from celebrity chefs Michael Mina and Don Pintabona. The full-service restaurant offers a casual but gourmet dining experience with entrees such as the St. Petersburg deluxe burger made with 30-day dry-aged beef and 32-ounce Niman Ranch prime rib eye for two. An eight-course tasting menu is served at the 10-seat Chef's Table.

Most of the restaurant's ingredients come from Locale, the 20,000-square-foot new-age food hall downstairs with wine bar, expansive cheese counter, meat case where slabs of beef hang in the window alongside plates of Himalayan salt, and Zen Belly food bar serving sushi, poke bowls and hot ramen. Foodies familiar with Eataly food halls will see similarities.



Provençal Chef Guy Leroy supervises the cheese counter at Locale, a new-age market in downtown St. Petersburg, Fla. - Courtesy of Katherine Rodeghier

Also opened in 2015, The Mill ranks among St. Pete's most talked-about restaurants with American cuisine from rising chef Ted Dorsey. Dog-friendly outdoor seating capitalizes on the energy from neighboring downtown bars and clubs while inside diners find a touch of steampunk in décor accented by gears, tooled leather and vintage waterwheels. Popular starters include charcuterie and watermelon bruschetta while mussels and meatloaf Wellington are standouts among the entrees.

The emerging food scene extends beyond the city to the beaches. BRGR Kitchen & Bar opened in 2016 in the new Treasure Island Beach Resort. Signature burgers, 10 of them, are the main item, including the

Hot 'n' Spicy custom blended beef grind with green chilies, jalapeño and Diablo Dust. Low-carb dieters order "burger bowl" salads.

Up the coast in Clearwater Beach, Frenchy's Rockaway Grill, the largest of the region's Frenchy's restaurants, has "Floribbean-style" cuisine and is known for its grouper sandwich served grilled, fried, Cajun, buffalo, Reuben or Caribbean in three sizes. Millennials, hipsters, vacationing families and couples pack the place, especially around sunset. They might hang around an hour for an open-air table right on the beach. The food and the view are worth the wait.

• *Information for this article was gathered on a research trip hosted by Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater.*

• • •

St. Petersburg, Florida

Details: Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater, (877) 352-3224, visitstpeteclearwater.com

Lodging: Treasure Island Beach Resort, new all-suite boutique resort, 10800 Gulf Blvd., Treasure Island, (855) 660-6366, treasureislandbeachresort.com.

Dining:

• FarmTable Kitchen/Locale Market, 179 Second Ave. N., St. Petersburg, (727) 523-6297, farmtablecucina.com

• The Mill, 200 Central Ave., Suite 100, St. Petersburg, (727) 317-3930, themillrestaurants.com

• BRGR Kitchen & Bar, 10800 Gulf Blvd., Treasure Island, (727) 322-7040, brgrkitchenandbar.com

• Frenchy's Rockaway Grill, 7 Rockaway St., Clearwater Beach, (727) 446-4844, frenchyonline.com/locations/frenchys-rockaway/

St. Pete Shuffle: Suggested donation \$2, 559 Mirror Lake Drive N, St. Petersburg, (727) 822-2083, stpeteshuffle.com

St. Pete Mural Tour: \$19, 10 a.m. Saturdays, Florida CraftArt, 501 Central Ave., St. Petersburg, (727) 821-7391, stpetemuraltour.com/official-walking-st-pete-mural-tour/. Self-guide maps at Florida CraftArt.

Shine mural maps at shineonstpete.com.

Gulp Coast Craft Beer Trail: Gulpcoast.com

<http://www.dailyherald.com/entlife/20180710/st-petersburg-florida-goes-from-senior-rest-home-to-hipster-hangout>