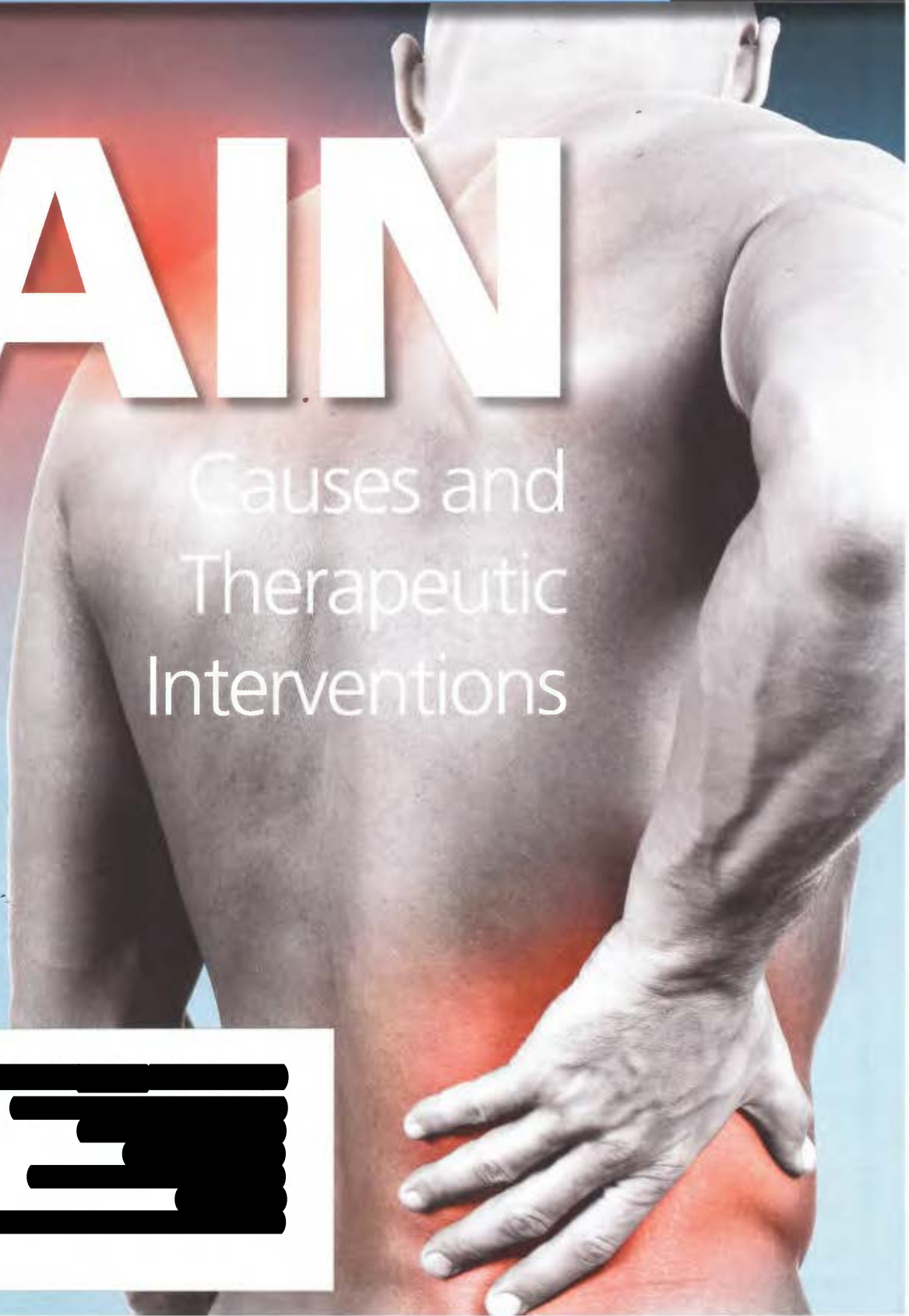




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by Jan Ross,
Staff Writer

Before we drove to lovely, historic Amelia Island off the Atlantic coast of Florida, I had never heard of it.

Amelia Island is one of the Sea Islands, a chain of barrier islands that stretches along the east coast of the United States all the way from South Carolina to Florida. A charming place full of beautiful Victorian mansions, it is the only location in the United States to have flown the flags of eight different countries and, of course, it has the requisite pirate history of most barrier islands.

The pretty downtown area of Fernandina Beach is complete with shops and restaurants, many of which look as though they have been there 100 years. Considering



▲ View from our balcony.

how small and walkable the downtown area is, there are a lot of shops, including Twister Sister, a fabulous little place with clothes, décor, gifts and great jewelry.

One of the best places to stay on the island is The Hampton Inn and Suites. We didn't know what to expect when we pulled up to this hotel located only about a block from the harbor and a short walk from the shopping district, but when we stepped into the gorgeous lobby, we were immediate fans. The lobby was only surpassed by our large one-bedroom suite. We were amazed to see a completely separate bedroom, a very nice living room and a complete kitchen. We especially enjoyed the

free continental breakfast served at the hotel every morning.

One of the most interesting things we did was take a cruise of the area with Amelia River Cruises. We were excited at the possibility of seeing wildlife along the way, including manatees and wild horses on Cumberland Island. Amelia Island and Cumberland Island both have rich, interesting histories, and the captain/narrator was an expert at telling these stories as we cruised. From Fernandina Beach's shrimp boats, historic Old Towne and Ft. Clinch, an interesting fort from Civil War times, this tour lets you see it

all. We saw a quickly submerging manatee and were absolutely thrilled to see plenty of wild horses on Cumberland Island. The ruins of the Carnegie Dungeoness Mansion on Cumberland Island were also fascinating. We also got a glimpse of the famous Greyfield Inn.

We walked back down to the downtown area of Fernandina Beach for lunch on the patio of Café Karibo, where I had a delicious, unique ham and apple sandwich. After relaxing by the hotel pool in the afternoon, we drove out to the beach area of the island. We noticed there is a great deal of public beach access and plenty of free parking, which is much appreciated in a beach community. We decided to check out Sandy Bottoms Beach Bar and Grill (don't you love that name?), located right on the beach, for dinner and we were so glad we did – it was truly one of the best seafood dinners I have ever eaten, and I am a seafood connoisseur.

Now that we have shared our secret with you, you'll want to head to Amelia Island on your next getaway.



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