











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Best Kept Secret in Florida: Amelia Island

Travelled by [Jan Ross](#) on 18 August 2014 | [0 Comments](#)



Travelled By

[Jan Ross](#)



Jan Ross has been traveling since she was an infant as her father was a career Marine Corps officer and her family traveled the globe. ...[Find out more!](#)

Before we traveled to lovely and historic Amelia Island on the Atlantic coast of Florida, I had never even heard of it. Amelia Island is one of the Sea Islands, a chain of barrier islands that reaches along the east coast of the United States all the way from South Carolina to Florida. It's only about 13 miles long and 4 miles wide but it's such a charming place full of beautiful Victorian mansions, you are going to love it.

It's the only location in the United States to have proudly flown eight different flags and, of course, it has the requisite pirate history of most barrier islands. This place comes by that claim quite rightly as the island is located just a short sail from Savannah so it was quite easy to get rid of all those contraband goods in the big city.

There is no long bridge or causeway to get to Amelia Island; you are just driving along and suddenly you find yourself in the middle of the pretty little historic downtown area of Fernandina Beach, complete with shops and restaurants, many of which look like they have been there for a hundred years. And some of them have. Considering how small and walkable the downtown area is, they have managed to cram a large number of fabulous places to get your shopping fix. We spent a couple of afternoons browsing through the shops and can recommend Twisted Sisters, a fabulous little shop with clothes, décor, gifts and great jewelry. We bought bags full of extremely reasonably priced jewelry, especially some with an ocean theme which we love.



One of the best places to stay on the island, if you're on a budget but still want a very nice place, is the Hampton Inn and Suites Amelia Island in Fernandina Beach. We didn't know what to expect when we pulled up to this lovely historic 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 is beautifully decorated with hardwood floors, a fireplace and an incredible staircase winding up to the next floor, like something from “Gone With the Wind”. We thought the lobby could not be topped, but when we entered our large, one bedroom suite we realized we were wrong! We were amazed to see a completely separate bedroom, a very nice living room and a complete kitchen. It is the perfect place for a family. There is even a nice sized balcony overlooking the town or the harbor, depending on which way your room faces. I spent an afternoon lounging by the swimming pool which overlooks the harbor and we really enjoyed the free Continental breakfast every morning. They even provided a very nice lapdesk for reading or writing in the bedroom; something I have never seen in any other hotel.



One of the most interesting things we did on the island was taking a cruise of the area with Amelia River Cruises. We walked down to the harbor and boarded the very comfortable, shaded and large boat for the 10:30 a.m. cruise on the Cumberland Harbor. We were excited at the possibility of seeing wildlife along the way, including manatees and wild horses on Cumberland Island. Amelia and Cumberland Island both have rich and interesting histories and the captain/narrator is an expert in telling the stories.

From Fernandina's Beach shrimp boats, historic Old Towne and Ft. Clinch, a fascinating old fort from Civil War times, this tour lets you see it all. We actually saw a quickly submerging manatee and we were absolutely thrilled to see plenty of wild horses on Cumberland Island. I didn't know there were wild horses on any of the barrier islands except those off the coast of Virginia, but they are plentiful on Cumberland Island. The ruins of the Carnegie Dungeoness Mansion on Cumberland were fun to see and we got a glimpse of the famous and beautiful Greyfield Inn, where the Kennedy family stayed after John F. Kennedy Jr. was married on Cumberland Island, his childhood favorite place for vacations.

After our cruise, we were starving so we walked back down to the downtown area of Fernandina Beach for lunch on the patio of Café Karibo where I had a delicious and unique ham and apple sandwich. It was surprisingly pleasant on the patio, even on a warm summer day, as there is often a nice breeze from the harbor.

After relaxing by the quiet and private hotel pool in the afternoon, we drove out to the beautiful beach area of the island. With a wide assortment of both huge and small beach houses and condos, it should be easy to find the perfect rental for your next getaway if you want more room and beach access. A big plus on Amelia Island is the availability of public beach access and free parking which is very nice in a beach community.



We decided to check out Sandy Bottoms Beach Bar and Grill (don't you love that name) 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. Located right on the beach, you can enjoy a great sunset while consuming some of the best hush puppies I have ever tasted. Seriously, you are going to want a double order!

As we wolfed down our delicious seafood and watched the sun go down, we marveled over how much we had enjoyed our visit to this lovely little island – which I had never even known existed. Now, I have shared our secret discovery with you, so head to Amelia Island on your next getaway!

Tell the world!

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