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Car-Tripping To Amelia Island, Florida

by TFB EDITORS on SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

By Jan Ross



The beach on Amelia Island

Yesterday Inka sang the praises of Downtown Miami as a wonderful vacation destination. Today I want to entice you with another very different destination in Florida...

Before we drove to lovely and historic [Amelia Island](#) on 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 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 four miles wide, but it's such a charming place full of beautiful Victorian mansions. And it's the only location in the United States to have proudly flown eight different flags. It also 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 over to Amelia Island. You're just driving along and suddenly find yourself in the middle of the pretty little historic downtown area of Fernandina Beach, complete with shops and restaurants, many of which look as if they have been there a hundred years. And some of them have. Considering how small and walkable the downtown area is, the town has managed to cram a large number of excellent shopping locations there.

I spent a couple of afternoons browsing through the shops and can recommend [Twisted Sister](#), a fabulous little shop with clothes, décor, gifts and great jewelry. I bought bags full of reasonably priced jewelry, especially some with an ocean theme, which I love. If you love shells, you are going to love this place.



The view of the little town from our balcony.

One of the best places to stay on the island is [The Hampton Inn and Suites Amelia Island in Fernandina Beach](#). We didn't know what to expect when 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 OO 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's the perfect place for a couple or even a family. There's even a nice-sized balcony

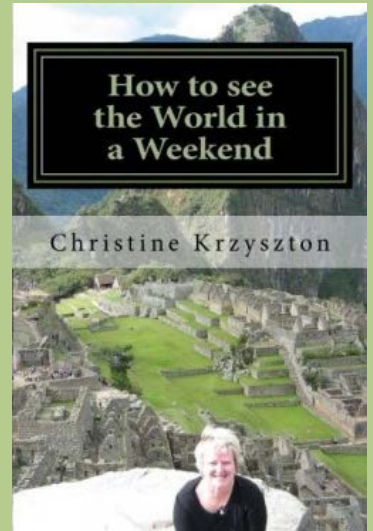


The beautiful staircase in the Inn's lobby.

overlooking the town or the harbor, depending on which way your room faces. I spent an afternoon lounging by the Inn's lovely pool that overlooks the harbor. And we really enjoyed the free Continental breakfast every morning. The hotel even



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provided a very nice lapdesk in the bedroom, something I've never seen in any other hotel.

Aside from shopping and relaxing in our hotel, one of the most interesting things we did was to take a cruise of the area with [Amelia River Cruises](#). We walked down to the harbor and boarded the very comfortable, shaded, 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 islands have rich and interesting histories and the captain/narrator shares with you along the way.



Tickets for our exciting cruise.



Greyfield Inn on Cumberland Island

From the Fernandina's beach area on Amelia Island to shrimp boats, historic Old Towne, and Fort Clinch (an interesting Civil War-era fort), this tour lets you see it all. We also caught sight of a quickly submerging manatee, but 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 Dungeness Mansion](#) on Cumberland were also fascinating. And we got a glimpse of the famous and beautiful [Greyfield Inn](#) where the Kennedys stayed after John F. Kennedy Jr. was married on Cumberland Island. The latter was his favorite place for vacations when he was a child.

After our cruise it was time for lunch so we walked back to the downtown area of Fernandina Beach to dine on the patio of [Café Karibo](#), where I had a delicious and unique ham and apple sandwich. I highly recommend it! 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 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 if you don't want to stay in a hotel. One of the nicest things we noticed is that there is a great deal of public beach access and plenty of free parking, which is very nice in a beach community.



A sign at the dock



We passed a shrimp boat along our tour.

For dinner, we decided to check out [Sandy Bottoms Beach Bar and Grill](#) (don't you love that name?) 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've ever tasted. Seriously, you are going to want a double order.

As we consumed 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 we had never even known existed!

Have you visited Amelia Island? What are your best memories of this special place? Please share with us in the Comments section.

{ 2 comments... read them below or [add one](#) }

Brad September 28, 2012 at 10:18 am

I love it here. We stay at this place: <http://www.18oceanplace.com>, its a vacation rental in the ocean front condos right next door to the Ritz Carlton. My wife and I were married on Amelia Island years ago and we've been coming back ever since.



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