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Girlfriends Getaway to Florida's Emerald Coast

By: [Jan Ross](#)

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Sand so blindingly white you have to see it to believe it. Water so many astonishingly beautiful shades of green and blue, you feel like you have arrived on a Caribbean island. Luxurious resorts, fabulous shopping, great dining - the [Emerald Coast](#) of Florida truly has it all. The unofficial name of this gorgeous stretch of beach communities on the Gulf of Mexico from Pensacola to Panama City Beach, the Emerald Coast is also truly an apt moniker for this lovely location. Located in the middle of this heavenly destination is Destin, the jewel in the crown because of everything it has to offer.

Where to Stay

Tucked away at the very end of Scenic Highway 98, which runs right beside the beach, is the idyllic [Henderson Park Inn](#). They truly boast the best beach location in all of Destin because they are situated right beside Henderson Beach State Park. This means that guests have access to some of the most unspoiled views on the Gulf and miles of beach where you can plunk down your chairs and be the only residents except for the seagulls. Henderson Park Inn is actually designed for romantic getaway for couples since each room accommodates two but it works just as well for a girlfriends getaway if you book a couple of rooms. I had visited the Henderson Park Inn previously and was anxious to share this wonderful location and its great amenities with my two girlfriends. I had a great room with a queen bed and a nice balcony with an ocean view and my two girlfriends shared a perfect suite with a king bed. The Henderson Park inn has a wide variety of room sizes and types which include the Presidential Suite with a separate living room where we stayed on our last visit.



I have stayed in a lot of locations which offered an included breakfast but never one that also included lunch. The Henderson Park Inn provides both and both are equally wonderful. Breakfast offerings include a variety of buffet items including delicious fresh fruit but they also have a fresh omelet bar which is one of my very favorite things. For lunch, they prepare a nice boxed lunch which you sign up for at the check in desk that includes a variety of sandwich and salad options. When you ready to relax on the beach, don't worry about paying for your beach chairs and towels here like you will at most locations as they are included - and they set up your chairs and beach umbrella for you as well! You also don't need to bring bottled water, soft drinks, or candy bars as they are available for anyone to grab from the fridge in the lobby. This still amazes me. We took advantage of the free DVD library and had a movie night one night - along with a few candy bars, of course!

If you are staying at Henderson Park Inn, you must make a reservation one evening for The Beach Walk, their ocean view restaurant. Gourmet dining with an ocean view can't be beat and The Beach Walk offers both in a superlative manner. We had the most amazing and unusual Caesar salad that was wrapped in Prosciutto and some fried, local grouper that was delicious.



We were sad to leave The Henderson Park Inn after a few nights, but overjoyed to visit one of my favorite resorts. The [Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort](#) sprawls across 2400 acres of prime Gulf and bay front property and includes hotels, condos, and rental homes with a variety of configurations and number of bedrooms so it's perfect for any size group. On this visit, we checked into a three bedroom, luxury condo at Luau with an amazing view and a large, lagoon style pool. Technically, we had a two bedroom condo with an adjoining studio but it was perfect for us. With a full kitchen, roomy living room and dining room, and three full baths, it was ideal for three women traveling together. We really enjoyed the expansive patio which curved around the building and was furnished with plenty of patio furniture. I even had a small kitchenette in my studio so it would be perfect for a romantic getaway for two. Luau is ideally located right across the street from the beach and it was an easy walk.

We came to Sandestin on the perfect weekend as they were celebrating Mardi Gras with their very own Mardi Gras Dog Parade at Baytown Village, a very nice area with lots of shops and restaurants. We loved seeing the hundreds of people who turned out with their dogs decked out in darling costumes. It was a real Mardi Gras parade, with plenty of beads thrown out to the crowd.



From Sandestin, we headed to [Sterling Shores](#), a condo complex right near the beach which offers luxury units with 1 - 4 bedrooms. They have a very nice, lagoon style pool but also offer a lovely smaller pool which is across a quiet road and right beside the beach. Our three bedroom condo was roomy but only had two full baths which meant we had to take turns getting ready for evenings out, but we made it work. After a tour of one of the other condos on a higher floor, I would recommend one of those (any floor above the fifth floor) as they have a better view of the beach but all the condos are very nice with great views and nice balconies. One amenity we really enjoyed here was the free DVD's. Not a rental library but a machine similar to a Red Box where you put in a provided code and got brand new movies which has just been released, it was a really nice bonus. We had several movie nights here! If you prefer, they also have a small theater where they show movies as well. There are restaurants and shops within an easy walking distance as well.

Where to Eat

One of my favorite Destin restaurants is an unassuming little place hidden away in Baytown Village. [Bistro Bijoux](#) truly has some of the best food and the best service in Destin. Everything we ate was superlative but I tried shrimp and grits for the first time here and was just amazed at how wonderful it was. Fresh, slightly spicy, yet creamy and fresh, it was fabulous. I never knew that [Tommy Bahama](#) had restaurants until this trip and we thoroughly enjoyed our visit to the location at Sandestin. Jerked chicken tacos, coconut shrimp, and parmesan chicken - everything we ordered was fresh, delicious, and delivered with pride by our friendly waitress. They have a great patio which would be a wonderful place to have a meal on a warm afternoon or evening. The restaurant is located on Grand Boulevard where there is also

a movie theater and lots of great shops so plan to spend some time there. For a more casual dining experience, check out [Grin-Go's Tex Mex Cantina](#). Also in Baytown Village, Grin-Go's is small but the food is wonderful. We had chips with a variety of salsas and dips and they were all delicious. Enchiladas, fish tacos - you name it, everything was great.



What to Do

Lie on the beach, relax by the pool, go biking, plenty of watersports - you will find lots to do in Destin. One of our favorite activities is shopping so we always make time to spend a day at the [Silver Sands Outlet Mall](#). With dozens of high ends outlet shops, it's a great place to find the perfect outfit, shoes, purse, or pretty much anything else you need. We also spent time on this trip checking out the local vintage and consignment shops and there are plenty in the area. We even found a darling pair of like-new Coach sandals at one vintage shop! We enjoyed lounging on the beach most days which is always a good choice and bike riding at Sandestin is really fun. They have plenty of shady bike paths and bike rental is really reasonable. You can't go wrong

with a spa day and the spa at Sandestin offers a variety of treatments. They also offer a number of different exercise classes, along with plenty of exercise equipment. I really enjoyed a yoga class one day.

Wherever you stay, whatever you eat, and however you spend your time, you will love this ideal girlfriends getaway location!

Jan Ross is a freelance travel writer who has been traveling the world since way back before she can even remember. Her dad was in the Marine Corps so she is used to packing up at a moment's notice! She loves writing hotel and restaurant reviews since it means she gets to stay in fabulous places and eat wonderful food. She especially loves writing spa reviews because that means she gets phenomenally pampered and, seriously, who does not like that? She has visited lots of places but still gets a thrill of excitement when she boards a plane, steps into a new hotel room, or sees a new location for the first time. And she hopes that thrill never, ever goes away.

For more information on Jan, visit her website at [WanderlustWonder.com](#).

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