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The Gorgeous Gulf Coast of Florida

Travelled by [Jan Ross](#) on 14 April 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!](#)

Beach loving travelers all have their favorite beaches and I have visited plenty of them. Green or black sand beaches in Hawaii, pink sand in Bermuda, tan sand in California, and the many hues and colors of the Caribbean islands. But none truly compare to the beautiful beaches which line the Gulf of Mexico in Florida.

Pure, sugar-white sand and warm water which ranges from the palest Peridot to the darkest Lapis Lazuli, these beaches are a joy to just look at, but with an amazing variety of accommodations, great seafood restaurants serving locally caught shrimp and grouper, tons of shopping opportunities, and great fun activities, you will also find plenty to do. This coast is the perfect choice for a getaway for any size group.

One of several beaches sprawling along the Gulf Coast in what is commonly known as "The Panhandle" because of the resemblance to a frying pan handle on the state of Florida, Destin has a number of hotels and resorts to choose from. But I have stayed numerous times at the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort and it's a wonderful place for families, couples, or girlfriend getaways. With plenty of houses, condos, and hotel rooms, Sandestin offers a wide choice of accommodations, many right on the beach. The sprawling, 2400 acre resort is a great place to ride bikes with wide, tree-lined paths wending through the resort from the bay side to the gulf side. Some accommodations come with bikes provided but, if not, it's easy to rent them for a very reasonable rate from the bike rental shop at the marina.



Plenty of pools dot the resort but the beach is always a great way to entertain kids or just lounge on the sand. You can also choose to stay on the bay side of the resort near The Village at Baytown Wharf, which offers a myriad number of things for kids to do from the free Adventure Land Playground to the Baytown Adventure Zone with fun activities like zip lining to the more sedate Baytown Carousel. They even have a complete arcade and laser maze. There's also plenty of shops to pick up everything from a new bathing suit to a souvenir of the area. When you are ready for dinner, dress up a bit and spend the evening at Bistro Bijoux in the Village where you will have an amazingly delicious dinner in a cozy location where the service is splendid. Be sure to try the shrimp and grits – you won't be sorry! If you want to go more casual, stop in Gringo's, also in the Village for some fresh tacos or burritos, all made with local and fresh ingredients. If you have a rainy day (or even if you don't), spend some time at the Silver Sands Outlet Mall where you can find dozens of shops with some great deals.

If you are having a romantic getaway or girlfriends getaway, you have to stay at the quite fabulous Henderson Park Inn in Destin. Reminiscent of a New England style inn with its shingled exterior, the Inn is located right on the beach and is adults-only so it's quiet and lovely. It's the only place I have ever stayed which offered such an extensive array of amenities at no extra cost. Breakfast and lunch are both included, along with beach towels, beach chairs, beach umbrellas, and a fridge in the lobby stocked with bottled water, soft drinks, and candy bars. Don't even try to set up your own beach chair as they will rush over to set it up for you! Many of the employees have been there for years and actually remember you when you visit years later. All of the rooms are great but the Presidential Suite is truly amazing with a large living room, separate bedroom, and a fabulous deck overlooking the beach.



Further down the coast, Panama City Beach has long been known as a great spring break destination, but it's a great choice for a visit any time of the year. With that same beautiful beach, tons of fun activities, and great accommodations, it's the perfect location for any size group. You will have your choice of accommodations, but the Laketown Wharf Resort is a perfect choice. With one, two or three bedroom condos, all furnished beautifully and all facing the Gulf, you will be very happy with your selection. They offer a seasonal Kidz Club for kids aged 4-12 with tons of fun things to do and my grandson especially loved the five pools so we had to check out every single one! The small pool situated on an island in the middle of the lake was a favorite.



Be sure to check out the local Gulf World Marine Park. Small but beautifully maintained and with healthy, happy sea life, the location is a lot of fun for the whole family. The extensive Titanic exhibit and Ripley's Believe or Not may seem touristy but kids love them. For lunch or dinner, check out Pineapple Willy's right across the street from the resort. And you have to book a cruise with Paradise Adventures one day as everyone in the family will love it. We took the cruise to Shell Island where they have inflatable water slides, trampolines and other items floating in the lagoon for everyone to climb on. They also have kayaks and beach toys available at no extra charge. It's a great, fun day in the sun and is very reasonably priced.

Drive a few hours further down the Gulf Coast and you will find Sarasota and Siesta Key, voted the best beach in the United States. The white sand here is the same blinding white color but is uniquely powdery soft. It's made from 99% pure quartz so it stays cool underfoot even on the hottest days. Make a reservation for the Crescent Royale condos in Siesta Key and you will be right across the road from the beach with a great view. We stayed in 7a which is a huge, four bedroom condo with an amazing, glassed-in porch which we found ourselves reluctant to leave. The recently renovated unit has a large living room with a state-of-the-art kitchen that includes a subzero fridge, granite countertops, and every amenity you can imagine. The pool at the condos is also nice when everyone wants a break from the beach.



Just a few blocks away is the Siesta Key Village with lots of cute little shops and restaurants. Have dinner one night at Café Gabbiano in the Village and be sure to order the lobster ravioli as it is to die for. If you are a wine aficionado, they also have an amazing assortment of wines. Sarasota is the winter home for the Ringling Brothers Circus so there are performances, a museum, and reminders of the circus history everywhere. If you want to see some local wildlife including alligators in the wild, take a tour with Myakka Wildlife Tours. Spend a day playing on the beach at the nearby Lido Key, then head to the local Tommy Bahama restaurant for an amazing dinner. Trust me, order the Parmesan Crusted Sanibel Chicken – everyone will love it!



No matter where you go along the Gulf Coast of Florida, you will find beautiful beaches with amazing views and plenty of ways for everyone in your group to have fun. Now, start making plans!

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