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[Florida's Gulf Coast](#)

The Gulf of Mexico has many beautiful beaches and warm clear water to enjoy. The best place to experience the Gulf is from the southwest coast of Florida. This popular vacation area stretches from Tampa Bay south to Naples and Marco Island. The southwest coast of Florida not only offers some of the best white sand beaches and pristine gulf waters, but also, the beach resorts remain relatively less crowded than other popular Florida vacation destinations. The beautiful gulf waters provide an awesome playground for watersports activities, swimming, and relaxing in the Florida sunshine. When the sun goes down on the gulf, the local nightlife offers fine dining, live music, dancing, and plenty of fun entertainment choices.



The most popular gulf area to visit is the Tampa Bay region and its vast beach areas. It offers easy flight access for many into the Tampa Airport. Tampa has plenty of culture, performing arts, sports, museums and nightlife. Close by attractions include Busch Gardens, the Florida Aquarium, LEGOLAND, Adventure Island Water Park, the Lowry Park Zoo, Big Cat Rescue Park, the Science Museum, and many world-class golf courses. You can actually swim with friendly Sharks at the Florida Aquarium. Tampa has easy access to many nearby attractions. Day trips to Orlando are easy from Tampa since it's less than 90 minutes by car.

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The Tampa Bay area includes the popular St. Petersburg and Clearwater communities and beaches. Here you can enjoy the St. Pete Beach Pier and an array of watersports activities available at the Clearwater Beach Marina. Clearwater hosts the Clearwater Marine Aquarium made popular in the movie, a Dolphin's Tail. The Clearwater Beach and Beach Walk is a central gathering place day and night. The area has great restaurants, bars, entertainment, activities, beach shops and nice hotels. You will also find excellent shopping, restaurants and bars at John's Pass Village & Boardwalk south of Clearwater in Madeira Beach. If you enjoy fine art, a visit to the Dali Museum in St. Petersburg is worthwhile. Good restaurants in the Clearwater area include Café Ponte, Sea-Guin Italian, Cesare's at the Beach, Cristino's Coal Oven Pizza, the Marina Cantina, and Columbia Spanish & Latin Cuisine.



There are excellent five and four star beach resorts to choose from in this area, like the Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa, the Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort, the Sheraton Sand Key Resort, Wyndham Grand Clearwater Beach Resort, Opal Sands Resort Clearwater, Sandpearl Resort Clearwater, Clearwater Beach Marriott Suites on Sand Key, the Renaissance Vinoy Resort St. Petersburg, and the Loews Don Cesar Beach Resort at St. Pete Beach. All these luxury properties include fantastic amenities and service.



DON CESAR



HYATT



SHERATON

Heading south of Tampa you'll find the beautiful City of Sarasota. Sarasota not only has pristine white sand beaches, but it also has six islands and keys along its coast to explore. The area has an array of



activities and attractions like museums, theatres, an opera house, symphony, ballet, shops, restaurants, live music and nightlife. The beach resort areas include Longboat Key, Siesta Key, Lido Key, and the lovely Anna Maria Island. Siesta Beach on Siesta Key is often rated as the best beach in the United States. Longboat Key offers around 12 miles of white sand beaches covered with beautiful sea shells. Along Longboat Key you will find many beach resorts, time-share resorts, and condo vacation rentals. Anna Maria Island is a 7-mile island accessible by bridge. It offers a less developed small beach town vibe, free of fast food restaurants and high-rise hotels and condos. There are many small beachside inns and cottage hotels along the beach in Anna Maria that offer comfortable accommodations. Here you can enjoy the beach community lifestyle without the large resorts. Lido Key has one of the best beaches in America (includes a public Pool) and includes the popular St. Armands Circle dining and shopping area.



OPHELIA'S

Excellent dining choices in the Sarasota area include Ophelia's on the Bay, Columbia Spanish & Latin Cuisine, Tommy Bahama Bar & Restaurant, the Dry Dock Bayside Grill, the Beach House, Fleming's Steak House, and D Corata Ristorante Italiano. Sarasota offers great high-end resort accommodations like the Ritz Carlton

Sarasota, the Hyatt Regency Sarasota, the Resort at Longboat Key Club, Sand Cay Beach Resort, Hyatt Siesta Key Beach Resort, as well as many others. It is a great destination for golf and tennis enthusiasts.

Continuing south along the Gulf Coast, you will come upon the Fort Myers area. Fort Myers also has an international airport, making it a popular destination for its easy access. Fort Myers boasts an active nightlife, with its performing arts, live music, restaurants and pubs. The Fort Myers Beach area includes several popular barrier islands like Sanibel Island and Captiva Island, which have nice intimate beach resorts. Both islands are connected by a bridge, and are accessible by car from the mainland. Sanibel and Captiva have restricted development over the years, so the islands give you a feel of going back into the 1950's. You'll find quaint mom & pop shops, intimate restaurants, and small beach Inns. These islands also maintain several nature preserves to keep them in their natural state. It is an awesome place to rent a bike or a scooter.





Local Fort Myers' attractions including Thomas Edison's and Henry Ford's winter homes, several museums, and over 50 local golf courses. If you love to golf, you will love Fort Myers.

There are many excellent restaurants in

the Area like the Fresh Catch Bistro, South Beach Grill, the Bayfront Bistro, Heidi's Island Bistro, Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille, and Chloe's at the Diamond Head Beach Resort. Top seaside accommodations in the area include the popular Marriott Sanibel Harbour Resort which overlooks Sanibel Island, the South Seas Island Resort on Captiva Island, the popular Pink Shell Beach Resort, Lovers Key Resort, and the Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral. The Westin offers pools, tennis, fitness center, spa, kitchens, in-room washer & dryer, and several good restaurants, like Marker 92 and the Nauti Mermaid Dockside Bar & Grill. The Westin also offers daily water taxi service to Fort Myers Beach.

South of Fort Myers is the popular coastal city of Naples. Naples offers luxury oceanfront accommodations and beautiful sandy beaches, as well as great outdoor activities and attractions. Naples offers a beautiful historic area, plenty of high-end shopping, great nightlife, performing arts, museums, and art galleries. Naples also features the popular Revs Institute historic auto museum, a zoo, botanical gardens, a swamp sanctuary, and a popular historic pier that dates back to 1888. The pier is the perfect place to see wild dolphins. A few blocks from the pier you will find Third Street South, a beautifully landscaped historic neighborhood with wonderful restaurants & bars, nightlife, upscale shops and galleries. You will find similar shopping and dining on nearby Fifth Avenue South, and luxury shops and dining at the Waterside Shops. Local activities around Naples include an array of watersports, boat tours, fishing, tennis, biking, and over 40 local golf courses (Naples is a true golfer's paradise). You can book a tour to see Manatees, Alligators or visit the Everglades. Luxury beach resorts in the Naples area include the Ritz Carlton Naples, the Waldorf Astoria Naples, and the LaPlaya Beach and Golf Resort. There is no shortage of nice accommodations in Naples.





NAPLES



Around 50 miles south of Naples in the southwestern corner of the state, you'll find Marco Island. Marco Island is the southernmost city on the Florida Gulf Coast, around 180 miles south of Tampa. The drive from Tampa to Marco Island can be made in around 2.5 hours. Fresh sea shells wash up onto the beaches in Marco Island each morning, making it a great place to stroll. It's hard to resist looking for that perfect sea shell. Popular beaches include Keewaydin Island Beach, South Marco Beach, and Tigertail Beach. Fishing is a popular activity here. There are many charter companies to take you out to good fishing spots. You'll discover plenty of wildlife around Marco Island like seabirds, alligators, manatee and bottle nose dolphins. There are plenty of Eco Tours, Kayaking, boating and Jet Ski tours available to view the abundant wildlife in the area. Many of these tours visit Ten Thousand Islands, a popular chain of islands and mangrove islets. Everglades National Park is a little over an hour drive from Marco Island. From Marco Island (and Ft. Myers) you can take a ferry to Key West. The travel time is 3-hours from Marco Island to Key West (add half hour from Ft. Myers).



Fine dining on Marco Island includes the award winning Fin Bistro, Verdi's An American Bistro, Marco Prime Steak & Seafood, Sale E Pepe, and Café de Marco. The island also has plenty of casual and inexpensive places to eat and drink. There are some very good luxury beach resorts on Marco Island like the Marco Beach Ocean Resort, Marriott's Crystal Shores, the Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort and Spa, and the JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort golf Club and Spa. These are all great beachfront properties for a perfect vacation. They all offer full amenities and excellent service. You will also find many smaller hotels, inns, and vacation rentals.



Florida's Gulf Coast is an awesome vacation destination. Leave your cares

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