



FLORIDA *Beaches*



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Travel along a Florida Scenic Highway and discover the best

Sand and Surf

Beaches...they're probably what comes to mind first when most people think of Florida — and for good reason. Boasting some of the nicest beaches in the world, there's always gorgeous sand not far from your toes wherever your Florida journey takes you.

1 Vilano Beach

When exploring the east coast of Florida, take a drive along the **A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway** and make time to stop at **Vilano Beach**. Nestled on Florida's "First Coast," Vilano Beach is two miles northeast of historic St. Augustine and offers fun activities for the whole family. Constructed during the "Florida Land Boom" of the 1920s, the Town of Vilano Beach offers unique appeal in a style that combines Art Deco/Art Moderne and Florida vernacular.

Visitors can stroll along the wide sandy beach, watch the sunset from the fishing pier over the Intracoastal Waterway or try skim boarding. Be sure to time your visit with the "Sack of St. Augustine" festival in March, which showcases Captain Robert Searle's raid on St. Augustine in 1668.



2 Gamble Rogers Memorial State Park

Just a short drive south of Vilano Beach down **A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway**, you can stop to rest at **Gamble Rogers Memorial State Park**. Nestled between the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean, this golden-brown coquina beach park offers pristine beauty and fun for all ages. Visitors can soak up the sun, kayak, bike, swim and comb the beach for sea treasures or fish. This is also a good location for spotting local wildlife such as birds feeding in the tidal pools at low tide and, in the summer months, sea turtles nesting. This beach offers opportunities for boating, hiking and picnicking, and the park has a full-facility campground located on a sand dune above the Atlantic Ocean shore.

3 Carrabelle

As you motor along the **Big Bend Scenic Byway** in Northwest Florida, take a stop in **Carrabelle** – a small fishing town offering a taste of "Old Florida." The traditional Southern cooking at some of the local establishments will make your mouth water. Carrabelle also offers swimming, surfing, fishing, treasure hunting and hiking. And, when you've had your beach fun, take a canoe or a kayak over to Dog Island to explore what used to be a pirate's safe-haven. A little known fact: This beach was used during WWII as an amphibious training ground for

4 Mexico Beach

In the Panhandle region, world-class driving route **Scenic Highway 30A** offers a quaint stretch of shoreline along the Gulf of Mexico called **Mexico Beach**. This is as close as you get to "Margaritaville" in Florida's Panhandle. While looking for that lost shaker of salt, you'll discover that this little Gulf town has a lot to offer by way of sun, sand and sea ... as well as great eats. If you want to relax on a white sandy beach, skim board, surf, fish or watch a spectacular sunset, this is the place to do just that. Charter a boat or bring your own for excellent fishing, diving and snorkeling. Diving enthusiasts should check out the multiple sunken ships that dot the Gulf floor – at least 15 sites directly near Mexico Beach. One notable spot, known as the Box Cars, is an artificial habitat created by sunken train cars.

Located about 20 minutes east of Panama City Beach, Mexico Beach is a quiet refuge on the Forgotten Coast. But, don't let this sleepy town fool you. It's located next to Tyndall Air Force Base, home of the 325th Fighter Wing. Time your visit with the Air Show and Open House, and let some of our nation's best fighter pilots take your breath away.

5 Flagler Beach

If you like some space when you catch your rays, head to the charming community of **Flagler Beach**. Located off **A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Byway**, you can set up your towel anywhere along the six miles of beach and let the kiddies play. For a small fee, enjoy fishing from the Flagler Beach Pier – but make sure you're ready to catch "the big one." Fishermen have pulled fish as large as 190 lbs. (spinner shark) from the waters off the pier. During the winter months (December through March) you may have an opportunity to view the migration of Right Whales as they take refuge in the warmer waters to give birth and nurse their calves. Seeing these majestic animals is a memorable experience for the whole family.

6 Siesta Beach

Voted number two on Dr. Beach's top ten list for 2010, **Siesta Beach** is an ideal family vacation spot. Take a detour off the **Tamiami Trail Scenic Highway – Windows to the Gulf Coast Waters** in Sarasota to enjoy a lovely "play-cation." The crystal-quartz sand attracts sand collectors from all over the world, so bring your bucket! Located near Sarasota, the beach was formed by a crescent-shaped rock formation that creates clear, warm waters for snorkeling and scuba diving. Lifeguards, concessions, grills, restrooms and showers are available for your safety and comfort. Looking for more active recreation? Siesta Beach also offers multiple volleyball and tennis courts, and shaded playgrounds. For those with disabilities, accessibility is a top priority with reclining, floating wheelchairs made available from the lifeguards. These amenities make it easy to power through deep sand and water so you can go wherever your heart leads you.

7 Pensacola Beach

Ever toss a mullet? No, not the iconic hairdo ... the fish with supposed mystical powers. Take a detour off the **Pensacola Scenic Bluffs** and head to **Pensacola Beach** – home to gorgeous beaches, family entertainment and one wacky festival that brings peace between states. (Or a good laugh, at least.) Held during the last full weekend of April, the Interstate Mullet Tossing Contest is a beach event not to be missed. Participate in tossing a mullet fish from Alabama into Florida or vice-versa. Just be sure to duck!

