

MEDIA CONTACT:
Wit Tuttell at 800-822-6461
or 727-464-7200
wit@FloridasBeach.com

FLORIDA'S BEACH STORY IDEAS

NATURE TOURISM AT ITS BEST:

- The Clearwater Marine Aquarium **Offers three New Adventures: Sea Life Safari Cruises, Kayak Adventures and Marine Life Adventures.** Sea Life Safari Cruises are two-hour cruises guided by a marine biologist and include an “up-close” look or touch of sea horses, crabs and sea urchins. **Kayak Adventures** feature three-hour kayak trips with a marine biologist through Clearwater Harbor and St. Joseph’s Sound. **Marine Life Adventures** are one- or four-day trips where visitors team with marine biologists to study endangered animal and plant species. 727-441-1790.
- The Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary is the largest wild bird hospital in the United States.
- We have three of the top beaches in the United States out of 650 in an annual survey by Environmental Science professor Dr. Stephen Leatherman; Caladesi Island (#6) and Ft. De Soto Park (#7). Clearwater Beach was named the #1 city beach in the Gulf Region. No other single destination has as many public beaches in the top 10. Kayaking is available at Ft. De Soto and dolphin watch sailing cruises are available to Caladesi.
- Brooker Creek Preserve has free nature hikes every Saturday.
- In-line skate and bicycle rentals are popular along the Pinellas Trail, a 37-mile linear trail that runs through the county just a few miles inland from the beach. The Pinellas Trail is one of the country’s longest linear parks.
- The area has one of the best park systems in the U.S. with 22 county parks offering 4,348 acres of beauty, variety and interactive experiences.
- Fort De Soto Park offers beautiful waterfront camping on the Gulf of Mexico in addition to 900 acres of park land.
- The area has some of the state’s best shelling opportunities, especially on Shell Key and Honeymoon Island.
- Moccasin Lake Nature Park features an environmental and energy education center
- The county is developing Pinewood Cultural Park. The 190-acre project will include the Florida Botanical Gardens, Gulf Coast Museum of Art and Heritage Village -- all attractions will be free.
- Boyd Hill Nature Trail features 216 acres with six nature trails to enjoy.
- Sawgrass Lake Park is a 360-acre park with one mile elevated boardwalk.
- The area has four natural recreation area and/or wildlife preserves at Anclote Key, Egmont Key, Weedon Island and Brooker Creek. Canoe trips are available around Weedon Island which also has Native American Indian burial and shell mounds.

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BEYOND THE BEACHES: ARTS & CULTURE

- St. Petersburg has become the cultural capital of Florida with six museums in the heart of the downtown area.
- The Salvador Dali Museum regularly has special exhibits with unusual ties to Dali.
- The Museum of Fine Arts features the only comprehensive art collection, from antiquity to the present day, on Florida's west coast including works by Monet, Renoir, Henri, O'Keeffe and more.
- The Florida Holocaust Museum, the third largest in the United States, is the only Holocaust Museum in the U.S. with permanent art displays.
- The Florida International Museum's 1998 Titanic Exhibition was the most attended museum offering in the United States since 1994 with more than 800,000 attendees. The Museum's new exhibit features the world's largest private collection of memorabilia from President John F. Kennedy.
- The area is home to the largest collection of George Inness works in the world. They are displayed in a church in Tarpon Springs that is free and open to the public.
- Art gallery hopping in St. Petersburg (15 galleries and museums in greater St. Pete area)
- The Gulf Coast Museum of Art is a major community arts organization that is moving to a new site next to Heritage Village and the Florida Botanical Gardens -- three free attractions.
- The Mahaffey Theater and Ruth Eckerd Hall are two world-class performing arts theaters.
- Several major special events take place annually including Epiphany, Renaissance Festival, Festival of States, Highland Games, Mainsail Art Show, Beachfest, Clearwater Jazz Holiday, John's Pass Seafood Festival and St. Petersburg Boat Show.

HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT:

- There are only six resorts in Florida listed on the National Register of Historic Places and three are on Florida's Beach -- the Don CeSar Beach Resort, Renaissance Vinoy Resort and Belleview Biltmore Resort Hotel.
- The Don CeSar, known as the pink palace, was once a R&R center for the U.S. Military.
- The 103-year-old Belleview Biltmore is the oldest major resort in Florida and reputed to be the largest continuously occupied wooden structure in the world.
- The Renaissance Vinoy Resort was built in 1925 and underwent a \$93 million renovation in 1992.
- St. Petersburg is the birthplace of commercial aviation. Scheduled airline passenger service originated in St. Petersburg in 1914 when a flying airboat called the Benoist carried one passenger from the city's waterfront to Tampa while 34,000 spectators looked on.
- Florida's Beach has several historical museums including the Safety Harbor Museum of Regional History which has Native American artifacts dating back 10,000 years.
- Early Spanish explorers Ponce de Leon in 1513, Panfilo de Narvaez in 1528 and Hernando De Soto in 1539 explored the area including a search for the Fountain of Youth at what is now Safety Harbor Spa. The springs at Safety Harbor are still considered to have healing powers.

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- Fort De Soto regularly features Spanish-American War battle reenactments.
- Heritage Village allows visitors to experience a slice of early Florida with 22 historic homes and buildings and is home to the county's Historical Museum.
- Philippe Park in Safety Harbor was home to Florida's first grapefruit trees and is the site of a burial mound for Tocobaga Indians. The area was settled by a surgeon in Napoleon's Navy, Count Philippe.
- The history of Dunedin is preserved in a Historical Museum constructed out of the city's old railroad station.
- Pass-A-Grille south of St. Pete Beach was area's first tourist resort. This quaint strip of land is still one of the most sought-after get-away spots in the area.

SPORTING PARADISE:

- The Tampa Bay area as a whole is fast becoming a center for national and international sporting events including: the 1999 NCAA Basketball Final Four, the 2001 NFL Super Bowl and the 1999 NHL All-Star Game.
- There are 45 golf courses including three golf resorts. One of the golf resorts, the Westin Innisbrook Resort, is home to one of the top courses in Florida and is the site of the annual Tampa Bay Golf Classic, a PGA tour event.
- Every water/beach sport imaginable is available: parasailing, jet skiing, speed boats, water bicycles, professional beach volleyball, and canoeing and kayaking.
- Florida's Beach boasts the largest indoor skate park on the east coast. The Central Skate Park features more than 40,000 square feet of every type of ramp imaginable including a beginner's course and air-conditioned viewing/concession area.
- The new Tampa Bay Devil Rays Major League Baseball team play every week from the spring through the fall in St. Petersburg's Tropicana Field and tickets are available for as low as \$3.
- The area is also home to Major League Baseball Spring Training during the month of March with the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, Philadelphia Phillies, Toronto Blue Jays in Florida's Beach and the New York Yankees in nearby Tampa.
- Minor league baseball continues from April until September with the St. Petersburg Devil Rays, Clearwater Phillies and Dunedin Blue Jays.
- NFL Football, NHL Hockey and professional soccer are nearby with the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning and Major League Soccer's Tampa Bay Mutiny all playing in Tampa.
- There are hundreds of fishing charter boats available and the area is a fishing center for freshwater and salt water angling.
- Derby Lane greyhound track is the nation's oldest and Florida's most successful and popular dog racing track.
- Other major sporting events including powerboat racing, sail boat races, professional golf tournament; and a large triathlon.

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CELEBRATE OUR MULTINATIONAL HISTORY

- (SPANISH) Hernando de Soto explored the area in 1539. In his search for wealth, de Soto discovered five mineral springs near a large Tocobaga Indian village in what is now Safety Harbor. He named the springs “Espiritu Santo” or “Springs of Sacred Spirit” since the Indians believed the springs had healing qualities, a legend that persists today. This is now the site of the Safety Harbor Resort & Spa.
- (AMERICAN INDIAN) Thousands of years before the Spanish came, Tocobaga Indians flourished in the area. Tocobaga burial mounds are preserved throughout the county and can be seen at Philippe Park and Weedon Island Preserve.
- (FRENCH) A group of pirates advised Dr. Odet Philippe, a surgeon in the French navy under Napoleon, to visit the area in the 1830s. Philippe established a plantation near Safety Harbor, and with citrus stock brought from the Bahamas, he cultivated Florida’s first grapefruit grove.
- (SCOTTISH) In the northern part of Florida’s Beach, a small community grew. Scottish merchants opened a general store and petitioned the government for a post office named Dunedin, a Gaelic word meaning “peaceful rest.” A wave of Scottish settlers moved to Dunedin, and it became a major citrus producing area and the birthplace of the citrus concentrate industry. Today, the citrus business has all but disappeared, but the community’s Scottish heritage is kept alive with the annual Highland Games and other festivals.
- (RUSSIAN) Peter Demens (originally Petrovich A Demensheff) was a Russian immigrant who brought his small gauge, Orange Belt Railroad to the Gulf Coast in the early 1900s resulting in a flood of new residents, visitors and the makings of a city. Demens and the city’s other founding father John Williams differed about a name for the new community. Legend has it that they drew lots and Demons won, naming the city St. Petersburg after his hometown in Russia.
- (GREEK) Tarpon Springs features a Greek Mediterranean village on the northern tip of Florida’s Beach. In the 1890s, Tarpon Springs entrepreneur John Cheyney encouraged Greek sponge divers to investigate the fertile sponge beds off the coast. By 1905, the Greek population had grown to more than 500 with some 200 sponge boats in operation. Sponge fishing remains a part of Tarpon Springs’ present economy. The influence of the Greek settlers is more evident in the community’s festivals, music, food and its 1943 Greek Orthodox Cathedral.
- (MULTICULTURAL) Florida’s Beach annually hosts the SPIFFS International Folk Fair. This three-day festival held since 1975 features cultural customs of more than 50 countries and nationalities. Each ethnic group sets up a village with cultural exhibits, ethnic foods and gifts.

GENERAL

- The area is Florida’s most popular Gulf Coast visitor destination drawing more than 4.39 million visitors in 1998, with more than 800,000 European visitors.
- Florida’s Beach features 35 miles of pristine beaches among 26 communities with 400 miles of shoreline containing beautiful vistas and scenic properties.

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- The area's weather is ideal -- and in the Guinness Book of Records for continuous days of sunshine and was suggested as the "World Health City" by the American Medical Association in 1885.
- Florida's Beach is considered the "Sailing Capital of the South" and home to several international yacht races.
- Wonderful yet affordable restaurants abound many specializing in fresh seafood. The area has more than 2,276 restaurants.
- Shopping is a special experience with unique shopping villages include Corey Avenue, Silas Bayside Market and John's Pass Village.
- The Sunshine Skyway Bridge, modeled after the Brotonne Bridge over the Seine River in France, is 4.1 miles long and the roadway soars 183 feet above Tampa Bay. Florida's first suspension bridge, it makes for a memorable trip across the Bay.
- The Pier in downtown St. Petersburg is a fabulous festival marketplace on the St. Petersburg waterfront. The five-story inverted pyramid is a unique structure.
- Great Explorations is a fun and educational "hands-on" museum for kids.
- The area features Europa and SunCruz cruises with many of the benefits of a longer ocean voyage including Las Vegas-style entertainment and a full casino.
- Several area boats offer excellent dinner and sightseeing cruises including a themed cruise in a Pirate ship.
- Busch Gardens, Tampa Bay offers numerous story opportunities.
- The area is home to the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, a think-tank for journalism.
- The historic Coliseum Ballroom opened in 1924 and was featured in the movie "Cocoon." It is still a hot spot for ballroom dancing.
- St. Petersburg is also home to the Shuffleboard Hall of Fame.

AREA PERSONALITIES

- Evander Preston, master jeweler, gourmet chef and art collector has one of the most unique studios anywhere.
- Ralph Heath, founder and director of Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary, from one injured bird to the country's largest bird hospital.
- Eugen Fuhrmann, from Munich, Germany to owning one of the finest seafood restaurants in Florida.
- Bruno Falkenstein, owner of The Hurricane restaurant and caretaker of endangered sea turtles.
- Peter Kreuziger, fine dining on the waterfront or the high seas.
- Norma Bigler, founder and director of the Frog Prince Puppetry Arts Center.

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WHAT'S NEW

- The area features the Florida Birding Festival & Nature Expo every fall. The only major birding festival to take place in an urban, resort area, the Festival features a chance to see 19 “state-listed” bird species.
- The Clearwater Marine Aquarium has developed one- and four-day Marine Life Adventures where visitors team with marine biologists to study endangered animal and plant species.
- The new Florida Holocaust Museum in downtown St. Petersburg features the only permanent Holocaust art exhibits in the United States.
- The Weedon Island Preserve recently reopened with a 4-mile canoe trail, a 9-mile hiking trail and other nature related opportunities. Future plans call for a Native American Cultural Center on the property.
- Plans call for a \$6 million environmental education center at Brooker Creek Preserve.

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