

Bean Point, named after George Emerson Bean, the island's first permanent resident, is at the northernmost tip of the island. Ask any local what image comes to mind when they think of Anna Maria Island, and Bean Point, with its famed Australian Pine trees, will likely be their answer.

ANNA MARIA ISLAND

PHOTOS: GABRIEL BURGOS | STORY: JENNIFER STEVENS | DESIGN: CHRISTY BEEGLE

Bay-area Residents Have Long Enjoyed The Luxury Of Lazy Summers And Turquoise Waters

▮ Come end of May, the breeze from Anna Maria Island begins to drift north, swirling around the heads of those who've been there before. Images of pastel beach cottages and turquoise waters fill their minds, and the feeling of complete relaxation washes over them.

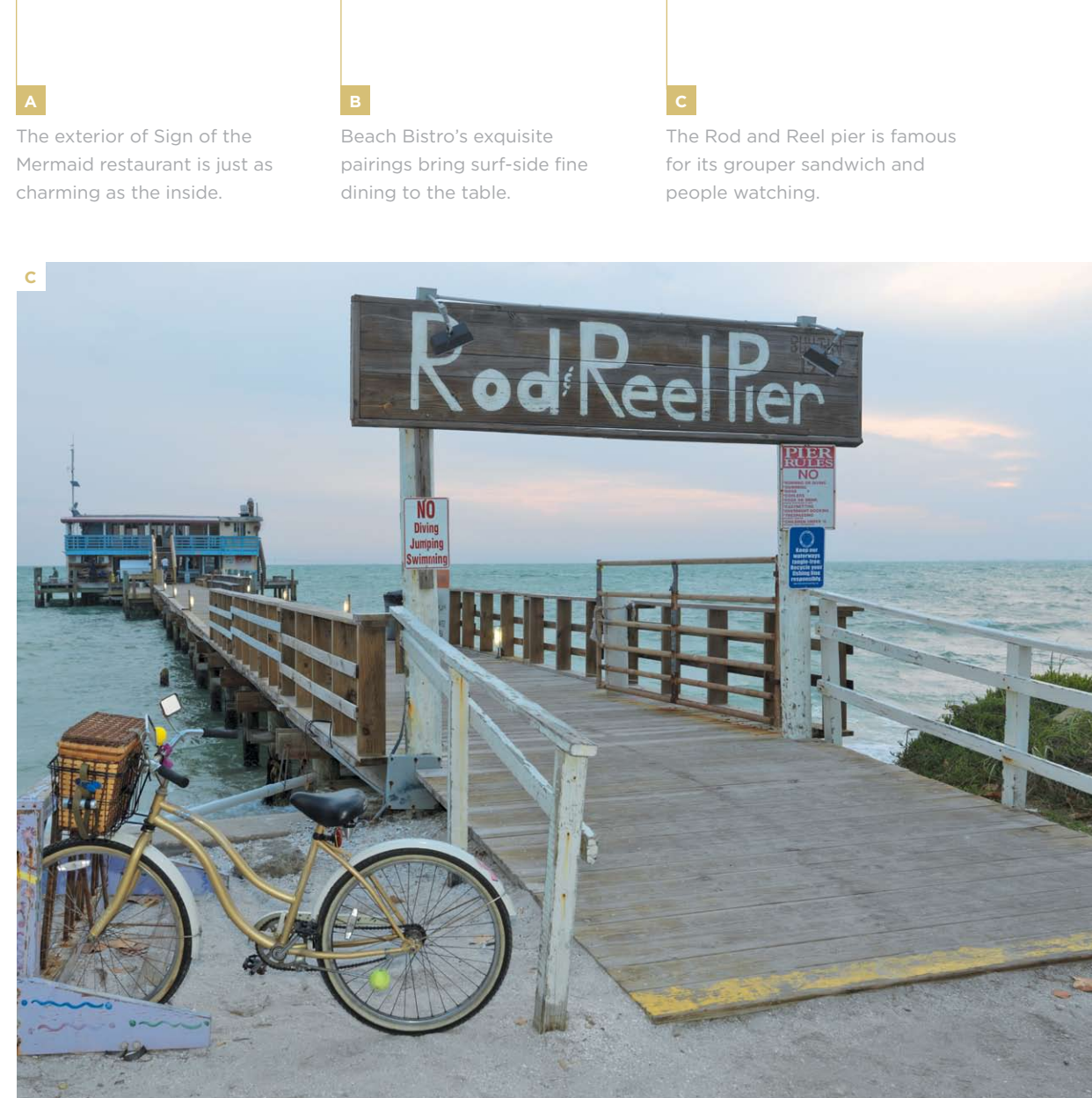
For years, the island 50-or-so miles south of Tampa Bay has captivated the attention of travelers from all over the globe. Looking to escape the cold, northerners and Europeans have flocked here during the spring and fall months, while Bay-area residents take advantage of the short commute during the summer.

Visiting the 7.5-mile-long stretch of sand, beach-inspired shops and restaurants is like stepping back in time. There are virtually no high-rises, very few chains and no hectic work schedules. It's a place where flip-flops are worn to five-star restaurants, where a bike, boat or trolley is your main source

of transportation, and where a sunset is cause for celebration. While fishing, biking and kayaking are popular island activities, ask around and you'll quickly uncover the favorite local pastime, which is, quite simply, doing nothing at all.

As the northernmost of a string of barrier islands that stretch south to the Florida Keys, Anna Maria Island is accessible to the mainland by two bridges. Even during the high season, the three tiny cities that make up Anna Maria Island—Bradenton Beach, Holmes Beach and Anna Maria—feel peaceful. With an estimated population of 8,500, there is no home mail delivery for the most part, very few traffic lights, and the speed limit rarely exceeds 25 miles per hour.

Anna Maria Island has managed to capture the attitude and charisma of Old Florida, and the hearts of anyone who has been there. It's what Jimmy Buffett sings about, what Ernest Hemingway books are made of. Simply put, it's paradise.



while you're HERE

Places to eat, things to do and where to shop on the island

eat

BEACH BISTRO

Eight-time recipient of Florida's Golden Spoon Award, the Beach Bistro has been a destination for foodies everywhere since 1985. From the ocean views and intimate setting to the mouthwatering lamb and seafood creations, this place is worth finding a reason to celebrate. 6600 Gulf Dr., Holmes Beach; beachbistro.com; Hours: 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. daily

FEELING SWELL

While it's one of the newest eateries on the island, we still thought it deserved a mention. The funky surf-shop-meets-bistro is a great place to grab a light meal, drink a glass of wine and leave with a new surfboard. There's also free WI-FI. 9903 Gulf Dr., Anna Maria; feelingswellsurfbar.com; Hours: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily

MR. BONES BBQ

With Tiki heads hanging from the walls, a coffin serving as a beer cooler and a skeleton in the corner, this quirky barbeque restaurant will make you feel as though you're in New Orleans. Famous for its ribs and Indian food, Mr. Bones also offers vegetarian options, making it an island favorite since 1992. 3007 Gulf Dr., Holmes Beach; mrbonesbbq.com; Hours: Mon-Sat, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sun noon to 9 p.m.

OCEAN STAR JAPANESE RESTAURANT

Snag a stool at this relaxed sushi bar, and watch while chefs show off their fancy knifework behind the glass. With a large assortment of creatively presented maki rolls, nigiri and sashimi sushi, this is largely regarded as the best sushi on the island.

3608 East Bay Dr., Holmes Beach; Hours: Tues-Thurs 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., Fri-Sat 5 p.m. to 11 p.m., Sun 5 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.

ROD & REEL PIER RESTAURANT

This no-frills restaurant located at the end of the Rod & Reel Pier has one of the best grouper sandwiches in town. Make sure to grab a seat outside or by a window to watch the fishermen and pelicans. Rods, reels and bait are also available. 875 North Shore Dr., Anna Maria; Hours: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily

SIGN OF THE MERMAID

Eating here is like going to dinner at your eccentric grandmother's 1913 cottage: Huge portions of rich, homemade food, white lace table cloths and the most eclectic mix of decorations

A

The exterior of Sign of the Mermaid restaurant is just as charming as the inside.

B

Beach Bistro's exquisite pairings bring surf-side fine dining to the table.

C

The Rod and Reel pier is famous for its grouper sandwich and people watching.

C



A



B

WATERFRONT RESTAURANT

A cool breeze, covered patio and view of the Sunshine Skyway bridge would make this local favorite worth visiting even if the food was mediocre. The good news: The food is delicious. The menu offers a large selection of salads, sandwiches, pasta and fresh seafood and tasty grouper tacos.

111 Bay Blvd. S., Anna Maria;
thewaterfrontrestaurant.net; Hours: Sun-Thurs 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Fri-Sat 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

shop

GINNY'S & JANE E'S AT THE OLD IGA

You can buy an antique piece of furniture, used books, even fresh produce at this Anna Maria institution. You can also grab a cup of coffee, a quick breakfast or lunch and surf the Internet (free WI-FI).

9807 Gulf Dr., Anna Maria; annamariacafe.com;
Hours: Mon-Sat 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

THE SAND DOLLAR

This trendy boutique offers candles, home accents, soaps, shells, jewelry and clothing—everything a woman could possibly want.

5302 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach;
myyellowshovel.com; Hours: Mon-Sat 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun, noon to 5 p.m.

RESTLESS NATIVES

Browse the work of more than 100 local artists at this funky art gallery. Items range from mixed media, crafts and oil paintings to jewelry and pottery.

5314 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach; Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily

WEST COAST SURF SHOP

Even if you're not a surfing buff, a trip to the West Coast Surf Shop is still worth your while. Said to be the oldest surf shop in the state of Florida (est. 1964), you can find everything you

need for a day of swimming, skateboarding, skim boarding, and of course, surfing.

3902 Gulf Dr., Holmes Beach; Hours: Mon-Thurs 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Fri 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Sat 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

drink

SANDBAR RESTAURANT

This place is why you go on beach vacations. You can order a daiquiri or a grouper sandwich and bet on what time the sun will go down. If your guess is the closest, you win a bottle of champagne.

100 Spring Ave., Anna Maria, sandbar-restaurant.com; Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily

HURRICANE HANK'S

This unassuming watering hole is popular for so many reasons: Good food, great cocktails and there's a liquor store right next to it (also

Hurricane's). But the best part has to be the hours: 11:30 a.m. 'til "whenever."

5346 Gulf Dr., Holmes Beach

D COY DUCKS BAR & GRILLE

This is where the locals go to drink and listen to live music (Fridays and Saturdays), or to participate in dominoes tournaments and Texas Hold 'em Poker matches. Definitely worth checking out if cigarette smoke doesn't bother you.

5410 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach; Hours: 10 a.m. to 3 a.m. daily

boat

CANNONS MARINA

If you want to rent a boat, look no further. Open since 1995, the marina offers half-day and full-day rentals, as well as water skis and tubes. It also sells bait and tackle and offers fuel and boat service.

6040 Gulf of Mexico Dr., Longboat Key;
cannons.com; Hours: 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily

CATCHERS MARINA

This charming marina has a great tackle shop, an onsite mechanic, boat chartering captains and slip rentals. Slips can hold boats up to 28 feet long.

5501 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach; Hours: Mon-Thurs 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Fri 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sat 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

GALATI YACHT SALES

Soak up the sight of a few luxury yachts at Galati, which is rumored to be the only spot on the island that offers slip rentals for boats larger than 30 feet. Fuel, service and repair for Viking, Cruiser Yachts, Tiara, Regulator, Marquis and Carver Yachts are also available.

900 S. Bay Blvd., Anna Maria; galatiyachts.com;
Hours: Mon-Fri 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sat 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sun 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

NATIVE RENTALS

Kayaking is a great way to explore the island. Native Rentals offers self-guided eco tours, guided eco tours and kayak/bicycle rentals. Kayak tours available from sunrise to sunset.

5416 Marina Dr., Holmes Beach; Store hours: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



C

A Bike riding is one of the best ways to get around the island.

B Sip your cocktail al fresco, with Feeling Swell's outdoor seating.

C If you want to explore on foot, there are places to dock your boat all around the island.

local CHARMERS

four reasons to fall in love with anna maria island



1

CAPT. JOSH PEURIFOY

Born and raised on Anna Maria Island, this 23-year-old

fishing captain looks the part: Sandy blonde hair, day-old scruff and a tarpon tattooed on his forearm.

"When I'm not fishing, I'm thinking about fishing," Josh says with a carefree smile. And it's that smile (along with his local knowledge) that's kept his schedule—and his 24-foot Pathfinder—packed since he got his captain's license at age 18. "There's nothing like taking people out who've never fished before, and seeing their eyes light up when they catch a tarpon for the first time," says Josh. "It just doesn't get any better than that."

Fishing charters include tackle, bait, ice, water and of course, Capt. Josh. He recommends you book your charter at least one week in advance to guarantee availability. For additional information, including rates, call 941.447.6345 or visit captainjoshcharters.com.

2

ANDREA SPRING

Known as "The Pie Queen" to anyone who has tasted

her desserts, Andrea Spring has developed quite a following, and not just in Anna Maria. In 2007, the owner of Sign of the Mermaid restaurant and Southern Belle Bakery & Café was declared champion in the Crisco National Pie Championship Great American Pie Festival for her Gold Coast Key Lime Pie. Her Chocolate Espresso Explosion Pie also took home a blue ribbon, and the following year her Macadamia Crunch and Apple Oatmeal Crunch pies were recognized as some of the best in the country. "I just love making desserts and experimenting in the kitchen," says Andrea. The fact that she sells about 100 pies a week proves there are quite a few others who like her in the kitchen, too.

You can visit either of Andrea's restaurants to try a slice of pie, or call 941.778.9399 to reserve a whole pie (pick-up only).

3

CHARLOTTE HUNTLEY

With her long blonde hair, orange slickers, feminine

yet raspy voice and sarcastic wit, it's no wonder there are men waiting for commercial crabber Charlotte Huntley nearly every afternoon at the dock of Cortez Kitchen. A former real estate agent, Charlotte got into crabbing three years ago after the housing market went bust. About a year ago, she started her own bait company, "Fish On," and began offering crab charters. "Even if the real estate market picks back up, I'm still gonna be out here fishing," she says. While the other crabbers and fishermen have taken awhile to warm up to the idea of sharing business with a 28-year-old woman, they've gotten used to seeing the blonde beauty cruising around the island in her 24-foot Carolina Skiff.

The best way to track down Charlotte is to swing by Cortez Kitchen (4528 119th St. W., Cortez, FL) around 5 p.m. for a few beers.

4

ROBERT JOHNSON

Standing next to his rusted blue tricycle

underneath a multi-colored umbrella, Robert Johnson recreates the old Sandbar Restaurant with oil paints and canvas. As the scene comes to life, a small crowd forms around him. "People get a kick out of watching how paintings get made," he says. He also gets a kick out of the tourists watching him, even after doing it for so long. Robert started painting shortly after moving to Key West at age 20. After 22 years of painting South Florida's scenery and wildlife, he made the move to another beautiful island, Anna Maria, in 2004. "I'm constantly inspired by the surrounding beauty of Anna Maria Island... it's really hard to go for a bike ride and not see something you want to paint," says Robert. "The nature, the wildlife—I get to record history as it looks today."

To see some of Robert's paintings, or to learn more about him, visit roberttheartist.com or call 941.779.9888.



ROOMS WITH A VIEW

a look inside one of anna maria's rental homes

While many cozy hotels and bed and breakfasts line the shores and sidewalks of Anna Maria Island, the most popular way to enjoy the lazy days of summer is by renting a beach house. They come in all sizes and décor schemes, but for those seeking the ultimate experience, nothing beats

tropical-inspired luxury. In search of our island oasis, we contacted Sato Real Estate, which found the perfect place for us to hang our straw hats. For information on this home and others like it, contact Sato Real Estate at 941.778.7200, or visit www.satorealestate.com.



A Each family member has a front row seat for sunset in these colorful Adirondack chairs.

B Take a look at this quintessential home, shot from its backyard in Holmes Beach.

C Most rental homes are decorated in "beachy chic" style, incorporating works from local artists.

D Who needs TV when this is the view from your living room?