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DISCOVERING THE WORLD ONE TRIP AT A TIME

HIGHLIGHTING 'STAYCATIONS' TO BE  
HAD AROUND THE WORLD

ANCIENT BAVARIAN STREETS

THE PLEASURES OF ANTIGUA

TRAVEL.  
EXPLORE.  
UNCOVER.

A SEASIDE CITY IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Fall 2019

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# Discovering Tampa Bay Like a Local

WORDS + PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
MARCEA CAZEL

Living in Clearwater, St. Petersburg, or Tampa — collectively known as the Tampa Bay area — has a lot of advantages. Home to one of the top beaches in the United States of America, people pay well to come to visit these picturesque cities. For these reasons, appreciating a staycation in Tampa Bay is both easy and fun for locals, as well as remaining a must-see destination for out of towners!

Located on the west coast of Florida, the Tampa Bay area consists of several counties and has a reputation for three main features: water, excitement, and relaxation. It is also an incredible spot to discover many museums, educational opportunities, and theatre. No matter the reason for your staycation or visit, there are countless things to do in the area.

Busch Gardens and Adventure Island are a great place to begin any trip to Tampa Bay, as Florida is known for its amusement parks. With most of these situated more centrally within the state, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay is an exception.

Located on over 330 acres in East Tampa, Busch Gardens features a Serengeti theme and is home to eight rollercoasters, including 'Tigris' — Florida's tallest roller coaster. There are also river rapids, a flume, sky ride, and Sesame Street area for younger children.



Not into amusement parks? Busch Gardens also includes shows such as an ice-skating exhibition and concerts. As well, there are over two hundred species of animals that live at Busch Gardens; if visiting, don't miss the Animal Care Center. Should you visit on the right day, you will have the opportunity to get up close and personal with the animal care experience. Here, you can watch treatments, X-rays, and if you're lucky, maybe even surgery.

Also a part of Busch Gardens Tampa Bay (but with a separate entry fee), is Adventure Island. With over thirty acres of waterpark escapades to be had, one has their choice of slides, lazy rivers, a wave pool, and rental cabanas to relax in. If you're visiting the area during the summer, Adventure Island is a must-see attraction to help you cool off and relax.

If you've seen the movie *A Dolphin's Tale*, you're familiar with the Clearwater Marine Aquarium and its star, Winter, the dolphin. Opening in 1972 on Clearwater Beach in a former water treatment plant, the aquarium is dedicated to rescuing, rehabilitating, and releasing sick and injured animals, while also educating the public. In addition to Winter,

Hope (the star of *A Dolphin's Tale 2*), and one other dolphin, it's also home to sharks, pelicans, rays, and sea turtles.

Once you visit the beautiful creatures at Clearwater Marine Aquarium, head over to the shoreline of Clearwater Beach; with an impressive four kilometres (2.5 miles) of sugarsand beaches, restaurants, and bars, Clearwater Beach is a very popular destination during the winter months. It's also a beautiful place to catch the sun setting amidst a cotton candy-coloured sky.

Due to its popularity and a limited amount of parking on the island, the best way to reach the beach is via the Clearwater Ferry. A pontoon used to taxi people back and forth, it's an inexpensive way to get from either Dunedin or the mainland of Clearwater to Clearwater Beach. You can also take one of their lines to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium (get off at the Island Estates stopover) and pick it back up to go to the Clearwater Beach Marina. While you're on the ferry, be sure to ask the crew for their suggestions on the best places to eat. I would suggest The Bait House, as it's right next to the ferry stop on the dock at Clearwater Beach Marina. The food is fresh, they have lots of cold local beer



selections, and you get a great view of the landscape while dining.

Are you the type of person that can't get enough time spent in nature? Located just north of Clearwater, in the city of Dunedin, are Honeymoon Island State Park and Caladesi Island State Park. Two separate grounds, they are connected by an intriguing history (both require an entrance fee if you enter by car).

Once a single island, the islets were divided in two in the 1920s by a hurricane that created a small waterway between them. If you are going to Caladesi Island and don't want to kayak over, nor do you own a private boat, you'll have to drive to Honeymoon Island and pay their small entrance fee before paying to take the Caladesi Island Ferry over (there's no additional entrance fee for Caladesi Island if

you take the ferry over). If you have a boat or want to kayak over — kayak rental stands are located on the causeway to Honeymoon Island — there are separate park entrance fees.

I highly recommend visiting Caladesi Island if you can, as Dr. Beach voted Caladesi Island one of the Top Ten Beaches of 2018. A serene place with no development other than a concession area, restrooms, and the park ranger station, it's the perfect way to relax at the beach without the crowds of some other local coastlines. There are also great opportunities for beachcombing on the island, along with bird watching and hiking trails.

Further exploring the area's natural beauty, one can enter Sunken Gardens and completely forget that they are right in the middle of downtown St. Petersburg. Sunken Gardens is known as the city's oldest museum, located

on four acres lush with vegetation, striking birds, and the utmost tranquillity.

Once a popular roadside attraction in the 1930s to '50s, Sunken Gardens was created at the beginning of the twentieth century, when avid gardener George Turner Sr. purchased some land, drained the onsite lake to fall below sea level, and planted local and exotic plants alike to create his personal gardens. Eventually purchased by the city, Sunken Gardens is home to over five hundred species of plants, waterfalls, seating areas, flamingos, and other birds.

Another Florida roadside attraction from the mid-twentieth century is Weeki Wachee. Located about an hour north of Clearwater, the park is home to a boat tour of the local springs, kayak rentals, and mermaids. Yes, mermaids!

The original owner had the idea to have local ladies swim underwater to attract tourists and, being a Navy SEAL, developed a tube system as a way for them to breathe underwater; thus, he had created mermaids. Now, you can watch them eat apples, drink soda, and dance underwater in a submerged theatre with a thick plexiglass window. Once a private attraction, the state purchased Weeki Wachee to help preserve its historical value in 2008, which interestingly made the mermaids government employees! Due to the fact that the mermaids swim in a true Florida spring, if you're lucky, you may spot a manatee moseying by during their performance. Truly, the Tampa Bay area is also full of eclectic neighbourhoods, which are often 'cities' within cities.

Downtown St. Petersburg, once known solely as a home for the elderly, has blossomed in the past twenty years and has a huge arts and craft beer scene. Spend the day looking at the museums in the area, including the Salvador Dalí Museum (which houses the most extensive collection of Dalí's work outside of Europe), the Museum of Fine Arts, the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum, and the James Museum, which focuses on art based on the American West.



After visiting museums or spending the morning taking a walking mural tour through the downtown area, grab a bite to eat at one of the many local restaurants, drink a beer at one of over ten local breweries, or catch a show at the live concert venue, Jannus Landing.

Another amazing neighbourhood, Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks are a great place to view the history of sponge diving in the North Pinellas County area. Home to the largest percentage of Greeks in the United States, Tarpon Springs has been home to the sponge industry since the late 1880s. While at the Sponge Docks, you can unearth the history of sponge diving in the U.S., see old diving suits, enjoy some authentic Greek food, and relish the day on the Anclote River.

Located in Tampa, Ybor City is another excellent place to explore. A base for the cigar-making industry in the 1800s, it shifted in the 1990s to become known as a rowdy bar area. Along with a vibrant past, Ybor has finally come into its own with a mix of restaurants, local breweries and distilleries, and bars. Have a café con leche and Cuban sandwich at the oldest restaurant in Florida, Columbia Restaurant. Visit the Ybor History Museum, or even take a walking tour of historic Ybor City. There's plenty to do here, but if you run out of options, hop on the free Tampa trolley and take a ride into downtown Tampa for more fun.

Whether you're visiting the Tampa Bay area for a short time, or you live there and are looking for fun things to do, appreciating a trip to St. Petersburg, Clearwater, or Tampa will show you plenty local history while also allowing you have a great time. I love the Tampa Bay area and know that after you visit these places, you absolutely will, too! ➔



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