



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Judy James

Things to do in Sarasota on a Budget

Sarasota, Tampa, Bradenton, 1 Day

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: For those vacationing on a tight budget there is plenty for you and your family to do and see when visiting this beautiful city. Much of Sarasota's downtown waterfront is designed for walking or for bicycling. There are wading birds to observe and porpoises that playfully leap out of the water not far from the shore. You can walk through neighborhoods with attractive homes and beautifully landscaped yards. See tall palms, and live oaks with old man's beard (sometimes called Spanish moss) dangling from the branches. Sarasota has miles of white sand beaches. And there is one outstanding, usually expensive attraction that is free every Monday: viewing the art at the Ringling Museum.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Tampa, Sarasota, Bradenton



Siesta Beach

Whitest, finest sand beach in the world



FSU Ringling Center for the Cultural Arts



Shark's Teeth on Venice's Beaches

Collecting Fossilized Shark's Teeth on the Beach of Venice, Florida



DeSoto National Memorial



Art Center Sarasota



The Rookery

Looking for birds?

Day 1 - Tampa, Sarasota, Bradenton

QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: 941/861-7275

location:
948 Beach Road
Siesta Key Florida 34242

1 Siesta Beach

DESCRIPTION: Siesta Beach, in Sarasota, is often ranked among the top two or three beaches in the United States. Wider than a football field is long, it stretches for roughly half a mile beside the sky blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The pure white sand gives visitors the sensation of walking on finely ground sugar. Sarasota County points out that "at the Great International White Sand Beach Challenge, Siesta Beach was recognized as having the whitest and finest sand in the world." The shallow Gulf waters are ideal for wading. Life guards are on duty year round. Located on Siesta Key, it is an easy drive from downtown Sarasota, from the Sarasota/Bradenton Airport, or from Interstate 75. The free parking lot can accommodate 800 cars. Shade trees tower over 50 or 60 or more picnic tables with grills, ideal for family gatherings. There also is well designed playground equipment for younger children, lighted tennis courts, nets for beach volley ball and a soccer field. Be sure to bring your sun glasses and/or a baseball cap or a straw hat because the sand is 99 percent pure, brilliant white granulated quartz that reflects the sun.
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Howard James

contact:
tel: 941/359-5700
www.ringling.org

location:
5401 Bay Shore Rd
Sarasota FL 34234

hours:
Daily 10am-5:30pm

2 FSU Ringling Center for the Cultural Arts

DESCRIPTION: By far the top attraction here, this 66-acre site is where showman and circus legend John Ringling and his wife, Mable, collected art and built a house on a grand scale. Now under the aegis of Florida State University, the **John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art** is the state's official art museum. It's filled with more than 500 years of European and American works, including one of the world's most important collections of 17th-century baroque paintings, collections of decorative arts, and traveling exhibits. The Old Masters collection includes five renowned tapestry cartoons by Peter Paul Rubens. Built in 1924 and 1925 at a cost of \$1.5 million and modeled after a Venetian palace, the Ringlings' 32-room palatial bayfront, four-story winter residence, **Ca'd'Zan** ("House of John" in the Venetian dialect), has been recently restored. An 8,000-square-foot terrace leads down to the dock at which Mable Ringling moored her Venetian gondola. Don't miss a tour of this house to see the period furniture and stunning architecture and artwork; in fact, I'd make it the first stop on your Ringling itinerary. The **Ringling Museum of the Circus** is devoted to circus memorabilia (which is, in a way, more fascinating than the circus itself), including parade wagons, calliopes, costumes, and colorful posters. The grounds include a classical courtyard, a rose garden, a museum shop, and the historic **Asolo Theater**, a 19th-century Italian court playhouse, which the Ringlings moved here in the



FSU Ringling Center for the Cultural Arts

1950s. It's now the centerpiece of the Florida State University Center for the Performing Arts. If you're hungry, check out the museum's on-site restaurant, **Treviso**, an elegant lunch-only spot serving fine Italian fare from 11am to 4pm. You can dine inside or, better yet, outside overlooking the Ringling's pristine grounds. A museum admission ticket isn't required to dine in the restaurant. You'll need most of a day to see everything here. © Frommer's

location:
Sarasota

Shark's Teeth on Venice's Beaches

DESCRIPTION: Wander on a white sand beach beside by the warm, gentle Gulf of Mexico waters, in Venice, Florida and you will undoubtedly want to join locals and out-of-towners in their search for prehistoric, fossilized sharks teeth. The fossilized teeth, which range from smaller than the nail on your little finger to three or more inches long, are brown, grey or black. Fossilized sharks teeth can be attached to a gold or silver chain to create an attractive pendant necklace that will remind you of your delightful trip for years to come. Over the centuries, when an elderly shark expired, his remains would sink to the floor of the Gulf and be covered with sand. In time there would be little left but the teeth, which absorbed minerals and were eventually washed ashore by storms or left from the days when much of Florida was under water. People travel great distances to Venice to find shark teeth treasures. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: 941/792-0458
www.nps.gov/deso

location:
Bradenton FL 34205

hours:
Daily 9am-5pm

3 DeSoto National Memorial

DESCRIPTION: Nestled on the Manatee River, west of downtown, this park attracts history buffs by re-creating the look and atmosphere of the period when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto landed here in 1539. It includes a restoration of de Soto's original campsite and a scenic .5-mile nature trail that circles a mangrove jungle and leads to the ruins of one of the first settlements in the area. Start by watching the 21-minute film about de Soto in America. From December to March, park employees dress in 16th-century costumes and portray the early settlers' way of life, including cooking and the firing of an arquebus, one of the world's earliest firearms. © Frommer's



DeSoto National Memorial

contact:
tel: 941/365-2032
www.artsarasota.org

location:
707 N. Tamiami Trail
Sarasota FL 34236

hours:
Tues-Sat 10am-4pm; Sun
noon-4pm

4 Art Center Sarasota

DESCRIPTION: In addition to the marvelous John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art , Sarasota is home to more than 40 galleries and exhibition spaces, all open to the public. A convenient starting point is this downtown community art center, next to the Sarasota Convention and Visitors Bureau. It contains three galleries and a small sculpture garden, presenting the area's largest display of works by national and local artists, ranging from paintings and pottery to sculpture, cartoons, jewelry, and enamelware. There are also art demonstrations and special events. © Frommer's



Photo courtesy of Art Center Sarasota

location:
Sarasota

The Rookery

DESCRIPTION: Birding in Southwest Florida is popular year round. The Rookery, a small island near the center of a quiet pond behind Sarasota County's South County Building on busy U.S. 41 (Tamiami Trail near Jacaranda Blvd.) has long been a birding hot spot. A variety of large shore birds nest on the island, including great blue herons, glossy ibis, great egrets, anhingas and night herons. A call for volunteers has gone out to help restore the vegetation on the outer shore of the pond. Dozens of Brazilian Peppers have been ripped out as part of an effort to get rid of the unwanted invasive species, so the shoreline is looking rather naked. The island itself retains thick vegetation. There is picnic shelter in front of the pond to shade one from the sun and to protect visitors from an unexpected rainstorm. A little more than a block from WalMart with a busy shopping center nearby, this quiet spot comes as a surprise to many tourists.

© NileGuide

location:
Sarasota

1 Amish Restaurants in Sarasota

DESCRIPTION: It may surprise you that Amish and Mennonite families charter buses in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and other states to winter in the Pinecraft neighborhood of Sarasota. They have been coming to Sarasota since the 1920s. Despite the heavy traffic on Bahia Vista St. and Beneva Rd. men and women wearing traditional clothing often ride their three wheel bicycles, some with boxes attached behind the seat, to carry things. There are several excellent Amish style restaurants – Yoder's Amish Village and Troyer's Dutch Heritage lead most local's lists, along with Mom's Amish Country Cooking, Der Dutchman, Dutch Haus, Dutch Oven, and out on Cattlemen Rd. Sugar & Spice. All offer wholesome, traditional Amish meals, such as chicken and dumplings, liver and onions and meatloaf. Yoder's 25 varieties of pie includes shoofly, key lime, rhubarb, and many berry and creme pies.

© NileGuide

contact:
tel: (941) 359-5700,(941)
351-1660

2 State of Florida: John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art

location:
5401 Bay Shore Road
Sarasota FL 34243

DESCRIPTION: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art
First time visitors to the John and Mable Ringling Museum in Sarasota may be surprised to find that it consists of several massive buildings scattered over 66 acres. Fortunately people who don't like to walk are provided free rides in open air "trams" beneath sprawling bayon trees. Others may not realize the Museum of Art on the grounds is the official art museum of the State of Florida, ranking among the top 20 in the United States. It does not feature circus posters. Instead, its gilded rooms include heroic-sized paintings by such illustrious sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century European artists as Rubens, van Dyck, Velázquez, Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, El Greco, Gainsborough and more.. The Ringling's amazing European style mansion, completed in 1926, and called Ca' d'Zan, has 56 rooms, and is open to the public. Two more building are dedicated to the circus that made the Ringlings tremendously wealthy. Short films depict how circus trains were unloaded and how the tents were set up in small towns almost overnight. Perhaps not as exciting as the attractions aimed at 21st century youngsters in Orlando, still the John and Mable Ringling Museum and all that is on their landscaped former grounds is one of those must-see places for adults.

© NileGuide

Tampa Snapshot

Local Info

Tampa Bay, one of the world's great secluded harbors, is a vast body of water separated from the Gulf of Mexico by a peninsula that stretches from Clearwater on the north to St. Petersburg on the south. In the center of the huge bay is a peninsula with MacDill Air Force Base at its southern tip. North of that is the city of Tampa, which got its name from a Native American word meaning "sticks of fire," a reference to the region as a campsite.

Tampa/Clearwater/St.Pete are often grouped together as a single local because of their proximity and all that there is to do in these areas. Sunny skies and beautiful beaches make this a year round vacation destination. Many northerners also call the area home during the winter months due to the typically warm winters.

There is never a shortage of things to do in Tampa and the warm climate makes it possible to enjoy outdoor activities year round. Whether it's beach life, professional sports, cultural events, or shopping, Tampa delivers. In the spring, a short drive north, south, or east, will take sports enthusiasts to any of several training camps, including that of the New York Yankees. Tampa is also home to the Florida State Fair with twelve full days of rides, games, shows, and of course...fair food!

Many come to the area for the beaches and for good reason. Some of the country's top rated beaches are nearby including Clearwater Beach and Fort DeSoto State Park. The white powder sand and emerald waters never fail to please. Water sports of all kinds are popular with fishing, boating, snorkeling, and jet skiing rentals available in several locations.

Besides the many outdoor entertainment options, Tampa also offers arts and cultural options. The David A. Straz, Jr. Center for Performing Arts is one of the biggest centers of its kind in the country, bringing famous Broadway shows to the area as well as operas, concerts, and children's educational programming. The 1-800-Ask-Gary Amphitheater is an outdoor concert arena where live music can be enjoyed on warm summer nights. Don't forget to stop in and spend an afternoon at one of the area's several museums. Once the sun sets, the nightlife in Channelside, Ybor

City, or on the beach will keep the good times rolling. Clubs and bars offer dancing, bands, and drinks of every kind.

Centered in the middle of the state, it's only a half of day in either direction whether it's Miami Beach or Pensacola- it's attainable with only a few hours in the car. Orlando's many amusement and water parks are about an hour away from the area so there are endless chances to please everyone's taste, no matter what the age. Rain or shine, indoor or out, there are many ways to spend the days and nights in Tampa.

Tampa Airport/Westshore

The award-winning Tampa International Airport sits on the city's west side, in the Airport/Westshore region. With a passenger volume of about 14 million annually, Tampa International Airport ranks among the top 10 airports in the nation for on-time departures. Here you will find some of the city's most impressive hotels, like the Embassy Suites Tampa, as well as the WestShore Plaza shopping area and the Raymond James Stadium.

Travel north on I-275 and visit the Lowry Park Zoo, a family-friendly zoo with animal encounters, kiddie rides, and the chance to cool down in the interactive fountains. Voted #1 zoo by Parents Magazine, this is a sure win for children and adults.

Busch Gardens/University of South Florida

A major north-south interstate highway, I-75, streaks up the east side of the bay, while I-275 branches off from I-75 north of Sarasota and travels through St. Petersburg, crossing the Howard Frankland and heading north from downtown. Those two interstate highways meet just north of town and create a triangle known as the Busch Gardens/University of South Florida region.

This is where you will find Tampa's famed Busch Gardens. With thrilling roller coaster rides, animal attractions, and live shows, each visit will find something new to discover at this beautifully manicured park. Other attractions in the vicinity include the Tampa Greyhound Track, the Museum of Science & Industry, Adventure Island water park and the D. G. Yuengling Brewery.

Downtown Tampa

Tampa's Hillsborough River winds its way through the Busch Gardens/University of South Florida section of the city and through downtown Tampa, bisecting the city as it makes its way to the sea. On the east side of the river, you will find a number of attractive hotels in the city's downtown core, such as the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina.

Points of interest in this part of town include the Tampa Museum of Art, the Florida Aquarium and the Tampa Performing Arts Center. Channelside is an array of restaurants and bars that form a circle around an outdoor courtyard overlooking the cruise ship harbor.

Ybor City

On the southern edge of downtown Tampa lies tiny Ybor City, the center of the cigar industry; cigarmakers moved here after a fire destroyed the industry in Key West. There are only 10 streets in either direction, but the area carries a wealth of history.

Solid brick warehouses that once served as cigar factories now house offices and shops. Thanks to a strong restoration effort, Ybor City is the liveliest spot in town on weekends. Restaurants like the Columbia, dance clubs like Prana, The Improv comedy club, cigar stores and specialty shops line Ybor City's narrow streets. Exhibits in the Ybor City Museum chronicle the city's colorful history.

Plant City

Traveling east of Tampa on I-4, built to connect Tampa to Daytona through Orlando, will bring you to Plant City, a farming community renowned for its annual Strawberry Festival and an variety of related special events. During late winter and early spring, the sweetest strawberries can be found on nearly every major intersection in the area with farmers selling the freshest berries straight from the fields.

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History

In 1527, Spanish explorer Panfilo de Narvaez set off with a fleet of four galleons in search of that coveted New World treasure—gold. His plans failed. A

Tampa Snapshot continued

hurricane blew his ships off course to a landing on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

In the village, so the story goes, de Narvaez spotted a glittering gold ornament and thought he had found every early explorer's dream. But, that treasure turned out to be Spain's very own doubloons, salvaged by native tribes who had plucked them from shipwrecks!

More explorers came seeking treasure. The pirates Black Caesar, José Gaspar and Jean Lafitte left a legacy, literally and figuratively. They are remembered fondly—even honored—today at the region's annual Gasparilla Festival, a party that features a pirate invasion in full costume.

When fishing fleets arrived to take advantage of the fish-rich waters of Tampa Bay, another industry developed. Fish remains a mainstay of the region's economy and the backbone of the area's restaurants.

As commerce grew, the addition of miles-long causeways and bridges connected the string of islands with the mainland. The Skyway Bridge, a series of connectors that stretches 14 miles across glittering Tampa Bay, is now a tourist attraction in its own right.

Eventually, contemporary buccaneers began promoting the Tampa region as prime real estate. During the 1920s boom years, promoters followed in the tracks of entrepreneur and railroad magnate Henry Plant. Plant brought a railroad line from cold northern climes to the sunny South and engendered a legendary rivalry with his entrepreneurial counterpart, Henry Flagler, who also built a railroad on the Florida peninsula's Atlantic coastline.

Plunking down what was then the staggering sum of USD3 million dollars, Plant opened the massive Tampa Bay Hotel in 1891 at the water's edge, topping it with glittering silver minarets and trimming its verandas with Moorish woodwork. Visible for miles around, the beloved Tampa Bay Hotel remains the city's landmark. A magnificent structure, it once boasted corridors so wide the hotel's indolent

wealthy could hire a rickshaw to trot them off to their rooms. To get upstairs, they rode a hand-carved, wood elevator powered by hydraulic force, the only one of its kind in the world. Here, the famous and the infamous strode the wide verandas—Teddy Roosevelt, Babe Ruth, Clara Barton, William Jennings Bryan.

Plant went on to build another hotel, the imposing Belleview Biltmore, which is still operating today. Soon these two hostelries were joined by the bubble-gum pink Don Cesar Hotel, flagship of the coastal island hotels and possessor of a notable guest list that includes F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda.

As time passed, Scots settlers moved into nearby Dunedin, which, nearly 150 years later, still toasts its Gaelic connections with an annual highland games festival that features such entertaining competitions as the log throw and a performance of the military Tattoo and Retreat ceremony.

Scots were not the only foreigners to find their way to Florida's tranquil Tampa Bay coastline. Generations ago, Greek sponge fishermen settled into Tarpon Springs; you can still buy a straight-from-the-sea sponge here, and chat with folks whose heritage has long been tied to the glittering waters of Tampa Bay. None of that heritage has been forgotten, either. Bouzoukis still strum at tavernas in Tarpon Springs, and it is said that many a platter is smashed at local pubs when the dancing goes deriverish in the wee hours. At Easter, the community celebrates the Ekiphany by tossing a cross into the sea—divers plunge in after it, and the winner is guaranteed a year of good fortune.

Meanwhile, serene St. Petersburg was taking its own tack. Here, history was made in the halcyon days at the turn of the century before Prohibition and the bust in the boom. In 1885, an American Medical Association report dubbed the city a healthy place to live; dozens of green benches were scattered about town to provide respite to sun-seeking, elderly tourists. The city's newspaper, the Evening Sun, was once distributed free on any day that

the sun did not shine. In 76 years, readers got their paper free just 295 times, or an average of four times a year! The city also made the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest consecutive run of sunny days—768—stretching from the February, 1967 to March, 1969.

In 1889, the Orange Belt Railway built the St. Petersburg Municipal Pier and added an ornate bathing pavilion and a toboggan slide into the sea. A horse-drawn flatcar carried passengers from the docks two miles away, and a jitney service shuttled them down the mile-long strip of concrete. Smack dab in the middle of town, that slab of concrete is today called simply Pier(The), and it is no less unusual than it was in those early days—in the middle of it all is an upside-down pyramid!

In ensuing years, the city has tried hard to dispel its retirement community image—St. Petersburg Beach boasts discos that rock until dawn. The city still remains popular with an older crowd; there is a softball team open only to players age 70 and up, as well as the largest shuffleboard club in the world. So beloved is shuffleboard here that the city is home to the National Shuffleboard Hall of Fame!

Today's St. Petersburg remains a lovely place, filled with serenely beautiful old homes, manicured lawns, two miles of shoreline, 2,000 acres of recreation area and a plethora of parks so pretty you'll wonder if city gardeners measure the grass blades. The flagship of the city's hotels is the postcard-perfect Renaissance Vinoy Hotel, restored to its flapper-era splendor and, after some dark days, once again one of the most spectacular antique hotels in Florida.

With a regional population now topping 2.5 million, Tampa Bay opened the sleek waterfront Tampa Convention Center in 1990, the Florida Aquarium in 1995 and a 20,000-seat Ice Palace Arena a year later. Soon, a downtown development will connect downtown Tampa to Ybor City with the 230,000-square-foot Channelside at Garrison Seaport Center, an entertainment complex of theaters, restaurants and retail

Tampa Snapshot continued

shops. Meanwhile, Holland America Lines and Carnival Cruises dock and depart regularly from the nation's 11th largest docking area.

Tampa Bay has long been a welcome sight for explorers, promoters and sun-seekers, a water-locked land blessed in abundance with sunlight and sand.

©

Hotel Insights

Location, attention to detail and an eye for the season—these are the attributes that define the region's hotels, each relying on one or more of these elements to define itself in this split-personality region. Some accommodations pride themselves on their convenience to business connections in downtown Tampa, but everywhere else relies on miles of scenic beaches to lure guests.

Tampa Airport/Westshore

Staying next to the airport can be convenient for those in town on business. The Radisson Bay Harbor Hotel and the Tampa Airport Hilton are among the most deluxe options. Enjoy the luxury of having a pool, fitness center, tennis court and whirlpool all on-site. The Intercontinental Hotel Tampa is convenient to many shopping and dining options, and offers comfortable rooms. Guests enjoy the garden at Embassy Suites Tampa, which also offers complimentary breakfasts, an cafe and a lounge. The Quorum Hotel Tampa offers guests the chance to stay in the city in style, with spacious rooms, and even a free airport shuttle to get you at check-in on time.

Busch Gardens/University of South Florida

Just a few blocks from the University of South Florida, you'll find Embassy Suites Tampa-USF, convenient for families looking for extended stay accommodations. There are living rooms in addition to the bedrooms, offering space and comfort. The Bayboro House offers a different type of lodging with a cozy bed and breakfast atmosphere. The refrigerator comes

stocked, and the complimentary breakfast will never disappoint. In addition to its large meeting room, the Howard Johnson Hotel has a heated outdoor pool, for those looking to cool off in the evening. The prices at LaQuinta Inn& Suites and Days Inn West of Busch Gardens, both near Busch Gardens, are a bit more reasonable, yet still offer all the comforts of home.

Downtown Tampa

Downtown has many different options to choose from when it comes to accommodation. The Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel& Marina offers waterfront views, and is just a few blocks from the Convention Center. The staff at the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay is multi-lingual, and strives to make sure your stay is comfortable. Embassy Suites Tampa-Downtown Convention Center and Hyatt Regency Tampa are two luxury hotel options. The Hyatt has tropical decor and a restaurant that specializes in serving healthy, contemporary meals.

©

Restaurants Insights

Tampa Bay is a land of natural abundance. All manner of fish thrive in the warm waters of the Gulf, and the region's more than 2,500 farms harvest everything from winter vegetables to spring strawberries. You'll find the most dining options near the Airport, in Ybor City and in the area around the University of South Florida.

Tampa Airport/Westshore

Bern's Steakhouse is equally celebrated, and is known worldwide for its excellent cuts of beef and extensive wine cellar. Owned and operated by the Laxer family for more than 40 years, Bern's continues to win praise from judges for its stained glass lamps, its U.S. prime beef(aged up to 10 weeks in special lockers), and herbs and vegetables grown just for this restaurant. You will also find a 65-page dessert menu and the comparatively new addition, Sidebern's, designed to accommodate the main restaurant's overflow of diners with a taste of what it calls "One World Cuisine."

While those two retain all their justifiable fame in Tampa Bay, they have been joined by a host of competitors offering a wide range of dining opportunities, both elegant and casual.

Donatello features Northern Italian cuisine, served amid glittering crystal by tuxedoed waiters. The restaurant has won numerous awards for its excellence in food and service. Armani's aims toward the pinnacle of Tampa Bay dining, both literally and figuratively—it sits high atop the Hyatt Regency Westshore, overlooking Tampa Bay. It is a local favorite for views and equally popular for its stylish Italian cuisine and a notable wine list. With a view of the Bay that inspired its name, Oystercatchers is tucked into a 35-acre nature preserve and lures diners with seafood plucked straight from the waters and served in a stylish setting.

Busch Gardens/University of South Florida

Tampa Bay likes its beer; it is the site of the state's first brewery, the Florida Brewing Company(est. 1897). Anheuser-Busch brews and dispenses its suds at a special exhibit in its Busch Gardens theme park. The smoked seafood at Skipper's Smokehouse can't be beat, while the cooks at The Cuban Sandwich Shop know how to prepare traditional Cuban fare with a modern twist. Try the Media Noche, their take on ham and cheese. The Mongolian Beef at Fu Wah Chinese Restaurant keeps the dining area packed. Ristorante Francesco is worth a stop if you're in the mood for savory, traditional Italian, while Taj has a wide variety of Indian favorites.

Ybor City

Bistros have broken out all over, turning up by the dozens in Ybor City. Ovo Art Café caters to the chic with a flower-bedecked dining room and soft music. Le Bordeaux turned a bungalow into a bistro, and Mise En Place lives up to its name, situated across from the onion domes of the whimsically magnificent Tampa Bay Hotel.

The region's claims to culinary fame have traditionally rested on two dining mainstays.

Tampa Snapshot continued

The sprawling Columbia Restaurant, Florida's oldest dining establishment, has been serving up blue margaritas and Spanish cuisine since 1905, and racking up dozens of awards in the process. Here, you can dine in one of 11 ornately decorated dining rooms that cover an entire city block! Bernini Restaurant features a changing array of delicacies, from beef laced with white truffles to an upmarket Vesuvio Pizza topped with three-chili oil, sun-dried tomatoes, chicken and smoked mozzarella.

©

Nightlife Insights

While Tampa's business environment takes itself very seriously, its entertainment empire offers a good laugh, great dining, an impressive nightlife and plenty of sports activities tossed in for good measure.

Amusement Parks

Busch Gardens is the undisputed king of the Tampa entertainment scene. More than 3,000 animals dwell on a Serengeti veldt in this African-themed park. Visitors can observe wildlife in natural habitats on over 300 acres, as well as enjoy a number of amusement rides, animal shows and nature exhibits.

The park is home to five terrifying roller coasters, including the Montu and the Kumba, which were ranked among the top five steel roller coasters in the world by Amusement Today magazine. A third, Gwazi, is the Southeast's largest and fastest dueling wooden roller coaster. Busch Gardens' Adventure Island offers 30 acres of water-themed amusements ranging from a bevy of corkscrew slides to a wave pool, waterfalls and a children's play area.

Two attractions devoted to injured animals make for a heartstring-tugging adventure here. In Tampa, Wildlife on East Street harbors a coterie of lions, tigers and other big cats without a home, and you can even sleep among them in three rustic cabins. The Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary in Indian Rocks Beach offers a close-up look at the care and feeding of injured birds.

Other intriguing amusements in the Tampa Bay region include Lowry Park, an "open" zoo where 1,500 animals are separated from visitors by moats or other natural barriers; The Florida Aquarium, which offers a close-up look at 4,300 salt and fresh water dwellers, including an encounter with some toothy sharks and gentle sting rays; Dinosaur World, where you can go eye-to-ankle with 200 massive dinosaurs, including one 40 feet high and a Brachiosaurus that's 80 feet long, all dwelling in a cypress forest. Fantasy of Flight offers a look at 20 historic aircraft and let's you try your hand at a flight simulator.

Museums

Tampa Bay's museums cover a wide range of informative adventures. St. Petersburg's Florida International Museum has welcomed many a notable traveling exhibit in its short history, including the "Treasure of the Czars," "Splendors of Ancient Egypt" and a tribute to former President John F. Kennedy, showcasing the world's largest private collection of Kennedy memorabilia.

Tampa's free-wheeling days of yore are chronicled at the Henry B. Plant Museum in the whimsical Tampa Bay Hotel, once one of the nation's most extravagantly elegant hostelries. The Tampa Bay History Center outlines the geography, history and multicultural influences that have affected Tampa Bay, while the St. Petersburg Museum of History does much the same for that city.

Tampa's Museum of Science & Industry is a playground for budding scientists, offering 450 hands-on activities and a Hurricane Chamber that offers you the dubious thrill of 74 mile-per-hour winds, plus an IMAX theater adventure.

And talk about museums! How many cities can lay claim to a history museum that's 10 blocks long and 10 blocks wide? Antique Ybor City stretches over that much territory and more, its streets lined with antique buildings tied closely to the 200 cigar companies and 12,000 cigarmakers who once rolled the world's stogies here.

Tampa Museum of Art features a permanent collection of Greek and Roman classical pieces as well as contemporary art and sculpture. The University of South Florida's Contemporary Art Museum houses a 3,600-piece permanent collection that includes work by Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist, as well as African art. Salvador Dali's Surrealist art is displayed in the largest collection of its kind at St. Petersburg's Salvador Dali Museum.

Theater

As for performing arts, the city's Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center claims to be the largest performing arts complex south of Washington, D.C. It has four theaters for opera, cabaret, plays, dance, music, alternative and Broadway theater. The legendary Tampa Theater, established in 1926, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and hosts film series, concerts, special events and backstage tours.

Nightlife

Many clubs throughout the region, particularly in St. Petersburg Beach and the string of islands along the coast, cater to the late-night crowd with music and dance options. Jillian's Bistro & Piano Bar offers live music and exotic food. Jannus Landing hosts a variety of concerts for all ages. The party's always in full swing at Shadracks, and Newk's Café is popular after a hockey game at the Ice Palace.

Sports

Tampa Bay loves its sports. From the Tampa Bay Buccaneer football team to professional baseball and hockey teams, the city is strong on sports and always has been—baseball great Babe Ruth hit his longest home run here at Plant Field on April 4, 1919, when he whacked a 587-foot, record-setting homer. Another famous baseball name, Al Lopez—also known as "El Señor," and named to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1977—was an Ybor City native.

Tampa Snapshot continued

Tampa Bay's Raymond James Stadium is a nationally acclaimed arena that frequently hosts the Super Bowl. Tampa's Lightning hockey team plays in the city's new Ice Arena. Enthusiastic fans closely follow Tampa Bay's Devil Rays baseball team.

For racing enthusiasts, Tampa Bay has two greyhound racing tracks—Derby Lane in St. Petersburg, billed as the world's oldest continuously operating dog track, and Tampa Greyhound Track in Tampa. In nearby Oldsmar, Tampa Bay Downs thunders with the racing hooves of thoroughbred horses.

Finally, for those who want a scenic walk or jog, Bayshore Boulevard runs alongside Tampa Bay for a serene 4.5 miles of panoramic views and greenery. A favorite with joggers, walkers, skaters and bikers, it's the city's epicenter for fitness fans and was cited by the American Automobile Association as one of the state's "Top Roads." In St. Petersburg, the historic, mile-long pier is a delightful place to stroll the region's historic past, enjoy the present and contemplate the future.

©

Things to Do Insights

Spread out across many miles, the sprawling Tampa Bay area lies at the heart of the western Florida coastline. Within that vast expanse is a sunny coastline whose popularity has skyrocketed in recent years, turning tiny towns into sprawling metropolitan centers.

Florida Aquarium In Downtown Tampa, you will find the vast Florida Aquarium, located next to the Port of Tampa, where visitors can watch the ships come in or board one themselves. The Yacht StarShip Dining Cruise is a great way to see the harbor and enjoy some of Tampa's best cuisine. If you'd rather stay on land, tour the historic Centro Asturiano de Tampa.

Tampa Bay History Center The downtown area also offers the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, which features a 135-foot dome and a marble altar. For another glimpse into the city's past, visit the Tampa Bay History Center. If the season is right, you can watch a Tampa Bay Lightning hockey game, then

enjoy dinner at the Colonnade or the Rusty Pelican, which both offer harbor views.

Tampa Museum of Art Downtown St. Petersburg is filled with cultural attractions, such as the St. Petersburg Museum of History and the Florida International Museum. Grab a bite to eat at Pacific Wave Restaurant and then explore the offerings at the Tampa Museum of Art.

Museum of Science and Industry While exploring the area around the University of South Florida, many choose to spend the day at the Busch Gardens theme park or the D.G. Yuengling Brewery, but the family-friendly Lowry Park Zoo and Museum of Science & Industry can also be found in this district. The nearby Cuban Sandwich Shop is a good place to grab a fast, delicious lunch.

Moccasin Lake Nature Park Clearwater is known for its many beautiful golf ranges, such as those found at the Countryside Executive Golf Course. You can also explore the wilderness at the Moccasin Lake Nature Park, or spend some time on the ice at the Sunblades Ice Skating Center. Enjoy dinner at the nearby Tia's Tex Mex or Antonio's Pasta Grille.

Tampa Bay offers much to enjoy, yet seeing it all can be tough. Planning your trip with a tour guide can keep you on the right track.

Adventure Tours Hubbard's Sea Adventures, Inc. (+1 727 393 1947/ <http://www.hubbardsmarina.com>) Canoe Escape (+1 813 986 2067/<http://www.canooescape.com>)

Boat Tours StarLite Cruises (+1 800 444 4814/<http://www.starlitecruises.com/>) Billy's Stone Crab Boat Tour (+1 727 866 2115) Dolphin Quest Eco-Tour (+1 813 273 4000) River Odyssey Eco-Tour (+1 813 935 8552) Sarasota Bay Tours (+1 941 388 4200) Tampa Duck Adventures (+1 813 341 3825/<http://www.duckadventures.com>)

Brewery Tours D.G. Yuengling Brewery (+1+1 813 972 8500/<http://www.yuengling.com>)

Segway Tours Tampa Bay Segs (+1 727 772 3639/<http://www.tampabaysegs.com/>)

Ghost Tours St. Petersburg Ghost Tour (+1 727 894 4678/<http://www.ghosttour.net>) All The Best Haunts (+1 727 398 5200/<http://www.allthebesthaunts.com>)

Balloon Tours Big Red Balloon Sightseeing Adventures (+1 813 969 1518/ <http://www.bigredballoon.com>)

Sports Tours Big League Tours (+1 866 619 1748/<http://www.bigleagueturns.com>) ©

Travel Tips

Getting There

Air

Tampa International Airport(TPA)+1 813-870-8700/<http://www.tampaairport.com>

TPA is located six miles from downtown and services the following airlines:

Air Canada(+1 800 776 3000/ <http://www.aircanada.ca>) American(+1 800 433 7300/ <http://www.aa.com>) British Airways(+1 800 247 9297/ <http://www.british-airways.com>) Continental(+1 800 525 0280/ <http://www.continental.com>) Delta(+1 800 221 1212/ <http://www.delta.com>) Jet Blue(+1 800 538 2583/ <http://www.jetblue.com>) Southwest(+1 800 435 9792/<http://www.southwest.com>) United(+1 800 241 6522/ <http://www.ual.com>) US Airways(+1 800 428 4322/ <http://www.usairways.com>)

From the Airport

Shuttle: Bay Shuttle(+1 866 259 9929;+1 813 259 9998/ <http://www.tampabayshuttle.com>) Super Shuttle(+1 800 282 6817;+1 727 572 1111/ <http://www.supershuttle.com>)

Taxi: Yellow Cab of Tampa(+1 813 253 0121) United Cab(+1 813 253 2424)

Car Rental: Payless Car Rental(+1 727 381 5377/ <http://www.paylesscarrental.com>) Avis(+1 800 831 2847/ <http://www.avis.com>) Alamo(+1 800 327 9633/ <http://www.alamo.com>) Budget(+1 800 527 0700/ <http://www.budget.com>) Dollar(+1 800 4000/ <http://www.dollar.com>) Hertz(+1 800 654 3131/ <http://www.hertz.com>) National(+1 800 227 7368/ <http://www.nationalcar.com>)

Train

Tampa Snapshot continued

Amtrak(+1 800 USA RAIL/
+1-800-872-7245/ www.amtrak.com)

Bus

Greyhound(+1 800 231 2222/ <http://www.greyhound.com>) accesses Tampa daily.

Car

You can reach the area by Rt. 4 from the East and from the South, Rt. 75 from the North and South, and Rt. 275 from the North.

Getting Around

Bus

Greyhound(+1 800 231 2222/ <http://www.greyhound.com>) Hillsborough Area Regional Transport(HART)(+1 813 254 4278/ <http://www.hartline.org>) Provides local transport and to the airport. Sarasota Tampa Express(+1 941 727 1344)

Train

Teco Line Streetcar System(+1 813 245 4278/ <http://www.tecolinestreetcar.org>) Historic Streetcars.

Traffic Information:

To find out city traffic information go to <http://www.traffic.com>

If traveling overseas, take the safety precaution of registering your trip at <https://travelregistration.state.gov> and for helpful, practical advice about traveling technicalities and safety standards check out <http://travel.state.gov/>.

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Fun Facts

Tampa/St.Petersburg

State: Florida

Country: United States

Tampa/St. Petersburg by the Numbers:

Population: 1,000,000

Elevation: 13 feet

Average Annual Rainfall: 46 inches

Average Annual Snowfall: 0 inches

Average January Temperature: 60 degrees F

Average July Temperature: 82 degrees F

Quick Facts:

Major Industries: Oil, Electronics, Computers, Automobile Manufacturing, Agriculture

Ethnic Mix: 58% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, 27% African American, 2% Asian, 4% Other

Electricity: 110 volts, 60Hz, standard two pin plugs

Time Zone: GMT-5

Country Dialing Code: 1

Area Code: 812, 813

Did You Know?

The name Tampa comes from an Indian word meaning "sticks of fire." Lightning is common in this area. St. Petersburg is Takamatsu, Japan's sister city.

Orientation:

Tampa and St. Petersburg are located on the coast. Tampa is at the head of Tampa Bay. Florida is bordered by Georgia, Alabama, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Ocean.

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