

Pensacola



By Angela Ash

Pensacola is one of the absolute most beautiful places on earth! Located in the western portion of the Florida Panhandle, it connects to the glistening Gulf of Mexico. The weather in Pensacola is almost always mild... never too terribly cold, and never unbearably hot. Is it possible that it truly might be a small chunk of paradise? My vote is definitely in!

There are many simply gorgeous areas to visit, but I spent most of my time

right on Pensacola Beach. Once you get there, you'll understand why!

With a plethora of accommodations to choose from, you may have a difficult time narrowing things down. But seriously, don't stress it. I know the perfect place!



Just for a moment, close your eyes. Pay no attention to your phone ringing, the dark barking, or the television commercials blaring from the living room. Imagine the most fabulous resort experience that your mind can conjure up on short notice. You are steps away from the beach, your room opens up to the warm breezes of the Gulf, and there are so many amenities that boredom does not exist. Your lips will refuse to even whisper the word. The service is so friendly that it is almost unreal, and a pinch or two may be necessary from time to time. Now open your eyes. You have successfully traveled back home from the Holiday Inn Resort in Pensacola, Florida. And you thought you needed ruby slippers for that, didn't you?

The Holiday Inn Resort is absolutely gorgeous! It is located right on the beach... not across from it, not around the corner, not through a parking

garage. The only separation between you and the Gulf of Mexico is is miles of sugary, white sand, that offers your feet the best pedicure nature can provide! You are right in the middle of the action here.. within walking distance of restaurants, nightlife, and plenty of shopping. This is most definitely the place to be in Pensacola.

The rooms, staying with the theme so far, are spectacular. While many different room options are available, I love the beachfront King rooms, that offer a pullout sleeper, a mini fridge and microwave, and a private balcony that affords views that are put on postcards. However, if you plan on traveling with the kids, a family suite with living area, two private balconies, beach and sound views, two queen beds, and a partitioned kids room with bunk beds is an absolute MUST. Your children will love you for it. They might even sleep late a day or two. And did I mention the complimentary WiFi?

But who can really sleep in with so much to do? The amenities at this resort are almost crazy. You will be swimming daily at the absolute BEST pool on the beach, with a 250 foot lazy river, and a refreshing, cascading waterfall. A nice, little path quickly connects you to the beach, with showers in between for your "get this sand out of my bikini" convenience. And want to heat up and relax a bit? Then slip into one of two hot tubs, or grab an expertly mixed adult beverage from the Beachfront Tiki Bar! If there's a quick summer shower, then take a dip in the indoor pool!

If you are ready to dry out a bit, play a while in the game room or at one of the game tables right by the pool. You can work out in the fitness facility, send some emails or catch up on a quick proposal at the business center, or grab lunch at Riptides Sports Grill... right in the lobby.

And there is even more for the little ones! With a supervised activity program, "Dive-Inn" movies, and interactive mermaid and pirate shows, the Holiday Inn Resort is one of the few places without a princess castle that offers this much for children... and they even eat for free!

This is one of the best properties that I have experienced. With the Holiday Inn name, you automatically expect a level of service, but this resort exceeds even the highest expectation. Have you ever had "hotel envy" before? You know, when you're driving down the road and you see the hotel that you wish you were staying in? No such luck here. I found myself telling people proudly where my home base was. I honestly snuck it in whenever even semi-appropriate. (I'm not so sure the cashier at Walmart was so interested, but I told her about the lazy river, anyway.)

Visit the Holiday Inn Resort [online](#) for additional information, or call 850-932-5331.



Now... do you ever wonder where those comfy beach beds, or those kayaks skimming around in the water come from? Your one stop shop on Pensacola Beach is the Lazy Days Beach Rentals.

They are located at the best hotels and resorts on the beach, including Hampton Inn, Hilton, Holiday Inn Resort, Days Inn, Beach Club Resort, Emerald Isle, SpringHill Suites, RV Resort, and Langdon Beach (via the Fort Pickens Outpost).

Whatever you may need to optimize your beach experience, chances are that Lazy Days Beach Rentals has it available... and at a reasonable price! They provide chairs, umbrellas, lounges, stand-up paddleboards, kayaks, sailboats, and more!

Visit them [online](#) for additional information, or call 850-261-2256.

Now, if you can somehow pull yourself away, Pensacola isn't all about breath-taking beaches. It's true! With a rich history and plenty of museums to explore, shaking off the sand and throwing on some flip flops

may be a plan. But what to do first?



Historic Pensacola Village is a wonderful, historic adventure that consists of 27 properties in the Pensacola National Register Historic District. Many of these buildings are open to visitors, including 11 of these properties that are interpreted facilities, offering a first-hand look at life in the 19th century.

The [T.T. Wentworth, Jr. Florida State Museum](#) should be your first stop on your journey back in time. It is filled to the brim with historic artifacts, both from all over the United States, and those specific to the area... housed throughout 3 entire floors.

The rest of the buildings open to the public may be seen on a guided tour that leaves 3 times daily. The tours generally last about an hour and a half, but it is difficult to imagine the facts and historical accounts that can be packed into that time! The 1832 Old Christ Church is one of the properties included on this tour, and it is simply astounding to enter, stand inside, and

actually sit in the pews of this beautiful, sacred building.

The guides are dressed in period costume, and they possess an incredible knowledge of this time in American history. They seem to actually enjoy relaying these stories and events, which makes the experience so much more memorable... rather than following about a guide who is merely reciting a monologue.□

When inside of the Village, it is easy to forget that you are minutes away from the beach... as you are easily immersed into a historical experience that is rare, cultured, and highly entertaining.

Visit the Historic Pensacola Village [online](#) for additional information, or call 850-595-5985.



Now, anyone with any knowledge of aviation knows that Pensacola is synonymous with the Blue Angels, the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron that travels the nation each year representing the best of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Aviation. And where can you actually meet these extraordinary flyers, and actually see the planes up-close? That would be at the National Naval Aviation Museum, of course!

And with an Imax Theatre, simulators, and much more, you haven't even begun to scratch the surface.□ Actually located on the air station, remember

that you must present your valid photo identification. This almost makes the process even more exciting... like you are about to visit something so exclusive and amazing that you must go through added security. This is totally worth leaving the sun for a few hours.☐

Or maybe an entire day, because over 150 aircraft and spacecraft are on display... some that you may even climb inside, or run your hand down the wing. There is even a trolley tour that takes you to see what is displayed behind the hangar.☐

And the main word to remember for all of this is FREE. General entry to this magnificent museum is FREE.☐ The parking is FREE.☐ There are also guided tours available for a minimal cost of... FREE.☐ (I must occasionally jest with this complete concept of complimentary, as that it rarely exists!) The only time you will pull out your wallet is for premium offerings, such as the Imax or simulators... or to grab a bite at the Cubi Bar Cafe, or pick up a replica plane at the Flight Deck Store.☐

This is a MUST VISIT when you are in Pensacola, and considering that it is a free attraction, with no worry of feeding a meter or paying by the hour for parking, there is really no excuse for not spending the entire afternoon!

Visit the museum [online](#) for additional information, or call 850-452-3604.

Now, if you are up for some serious adventure, that may require climbing creepy stairs and searching for spirits, then Pensacola has you covered... or caught on EVP, whichever you prefer.



The Pensacola Lighthouse has been around since 1826, with its lovely beacon shining over Pensacola Bay. The site itself includes several buildings, including the keeper's quarters, attached directly to the lighthouse. Its historical significance is significant and inspiring, so much so that it is open as a museum during the day, with exhibits, wax figures depicting the daily work and tasks, and there is, of course, the 177 steps to the top of the lighthouse, which requires good shoes with no open toes or backs and the actual ability to climb steep steps with no fear of heights.

But the steps are not the only thing to fear at the Pensacola Lighthouse... which is why it has been investigated by all manner of paranormal researchers, including TAPS, whose enlightening investigation here was aired on *Ghost Hunters* on the Syfy channel.

Fortunately, such an adventure is also available for individuals or groups who may wish to see for themselves what may lurk within the Pensacola Lighthouse. The hunts are held on select dates, and you will have two full hours to explore the keeper's quarters, with full use of investigative equipment that is available for your hunting pleasure. This tour also includes a climb to the top of the lighthouse, if you dare.

I decided to visit the lighthouse during the day, prior to the ghost hunt. The entire atmosphere of the exterior grounds is very serene. The breeze is gently blowing off the water, and the trees seem to whisper as you stroll beneath them.

Walking into the keeper's quarters, everything changes. There is a definitive feeling of depression inside. It is a weight, seeming to pulsate with dread and, ultimately, loneliness. Even though I entered with a group, I lagged behind, and found myself alone in the rooms, and what I experienced was mostly loneliness. I wanted to catch back up with my group... not out of fear, but out of the feeling of not wanting to be alone. The realization that this is probably what the keeper experienced hit me. While the keeper's family often lived there, as well, there surely had to be a feeling of isolation.

This atmosphere seems to intensify as the sun goes down. As the group gathers, this feeling seemed to remain with me. Those leading the hunt begin to pass out several mechanisms that the visitors may use in their investigations... including EMF detectors (which measure electromagnetic fields), Laser Grid Scopes (which emit a field of green lights, useful for detecting shadows and disturbances, and anything that the investigator may bring to search for entities within the lighthouse. The guides lead the group through various areas of the quarters most known for paranormal activity.

One room specifically raises the hairs on my arms. It is the exact place where one of the keepers violently murdered her husband. That could have just a tiny bit to do with it.

However, one of the most active areas on this particular night seems to be the basement, where legend has it that a young boy often played... and seems to be playing still. Several people in the room experienced playful pulls on their sleeves, and one man felt a tug on his shoelaces, only to look down and see that they were untied. I constructed a make-shift pendulum with a moonstone ring and a necklace and, when asked specific questions, the ring moved in response to yes... it was a young boy, yes... he wanted to play, and no... he did not want us to leave.

At any point during the investigation, participants may also climb to the top of the lighthouse. Not one for missed adventures, I begin to climb. And of course, I feel like something is beside me... not behind me, where a few other willing climbers trudge along, but directly beside me. Quite ironically, this feeling was almost comforting, probably considering that I needed all the help I could get to make it to the top! But finally, I emerge and can witness the beautiful view across the bay... and my helpful spirit is momentarily forgotten.

This is a location that definitely deserves a place on anyone's "Look For Ghosts" list. Orbs and strange lights are constantly captured on photos taken here, and there are plenty of cases of pulling, tugging, and pushing.

However, this seems to be a site where "feelings" really take precedent. It is nearly impossible to walk through these buildings and not experience empathic emotions.

During the day the museum is a pleasant, informative experience, but if you are looking for spirits, chance are that you will find them... even before the moon crests the tops of the trees.

Visit the Pensacola Lighthouse [online](#) for additional information on museum tours or ghost hunts, or call 850-393-1561.

Surely by now you must be wondering if there is even time to eat amidst visiting Pensacola's top notch attractions and relaxing on the beach all day. But trust me... you **MUST** create a few slots on your calendar to experience some of the the best food that your taste buds can handle.



Hemingway's Island Grill is the type of restaurant that you always look for, but never seem to find. It is the perfect mix of casual adventure, paired with the offerings that one might find in a more upscale establishment. In short, it is like a gift way beyond expectation, in a delightful, entertaining package... much like its namesake.

While the name "John Smith" may be rather common, the food that this chef prepares comes nothing close to that word. Serving lunch and dinner, Hemingway's offers a wide array of specialties to choose from, all freshly

prepared and delivered with speed and a beautiful presentation.□

You must start off your meal with an appetizer or two.□ This is not a place to skip straight to the entrees, or you will be missing the calamari, drizzled with a delightful honey chipotle, or the ribs brushed with Hemingway's own Key West jerk barbecue sauce.

And when you are ready for the main attraction, the plantain crusted tilapia is served on yellow rice with Mango, island rum glaze and vanilla rum butter sauces. If you are in the mood for pasta, the lobster and shrimp ravioli, topped with a brandy creme sauce is an excellent choice.□ Hemingway's provides everything to suit your particular dining flavor including salads, chowder, flatbreads, steaks, burgers, sandwiches, and more.

Hemingway's also offers a kids menu for the little ones, including such favorites as grilled cheese, chicken fingers, and fried shrimp.

Visit Hemingway's [online](#) for additional information, or call 850-934-4747.



Also located on the Portofino Boarwalk, the Wine Bar is an amazing find!□ I could sit here for hours, having good conversation with the friendly staff, trying new wines, and sampling the cheese.□ But this delightful establishment is so much more!□

Chef Daniel Watts is a culinary genius, and the menu at the Wine Bar is

everything you could imagine, paired perfectly with the best wines available. With soups, salads, baked brie, and mushroom bruschetta gracing the menu, the decision is where to start. And the entrees are equally impressive, with some of the favorites being a chicken breast wrapped in prosciutto, braised short ribs and rustic potatoes, and a mushroom stuffed petit filet mignon surrounded by blackened shrimp, potatoes, and vegetables.

The ambiance is warm and inviting, and one can instantly see why this is a favorite spot among the locals.

Visit them [online](#) for additional information, or call 850-916-1009.

Pensacola is not a destination to check off your list, but a place where memories are made, and repeat vacations even become a family tradition. Make sure that you check out Pensacola [online](#) for additional information, or you can even call 800-874-1234. This is a wonderful site, packed full of information, including beaches, maps, things to do, where to stay, and even a deal or two. You may also download the official visitor's guide

[HERE](#)

.