



Tampa Bay & Southwest Florida

Includes »

Tampa Bay Area	364
Tampa Bay	364
St Petersburg.....	376
Sarasota.....	389
Myakka River State Park	397
Fort Myers.....	399
Pine Island & Matlacha.....	405
Sanibel & Captiva Islands.....	407
Naples.....	411
Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary	414
Crystal River	416

Best Places to Eat

- » Refinery (p371)
- » Peg's Cantina (p386)
- » Cafe Lurcat (p413)
- » IM Tapas (p413)
- » Columbia Restaurant (p370)

Best Places to Stay

- » Dickens House (p379)
- » Postcard Inn (p384)
- » Hotel Ranola (p394)
- » Mango Street Inn (p404)
- » Gram's Place (p369)

Why Go?

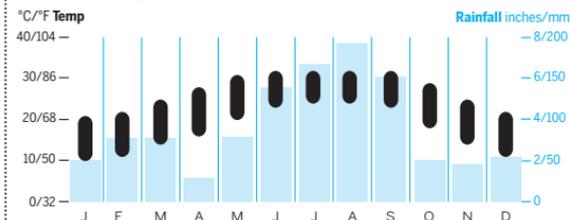
To drive southwest Florida's Gulf Coast is to enter an impressionistic watercolor painting: first, there is the dazzling white quartz sand of its barrier-island beaches, whose illuminated turquoise waters darken to silver-mantled indigo as the fiery sun lowers to the horizon. Later, seen from the causeways, those same islands become a phosphorescent smear beneath the inky black, star-flecked night sky.

The Gulf Coast's beauty is surely its main attraction, but variety is a close second: from Tampa to St Petersburg to Sarasota to Naples, there is urban sophistication, passionate artistry and exquisite cuisine. There are secluded islands, family-friendly resorts and Spring Break-style parties, as at Clearwater and St Pete Beach.

Here, Ringling's circus and Salvador Dalí's melting canvases fit perfectly – both are bright, bold, surreal entertainments to match wintering manatees, roseate spoonbills, open-mouthed alligators, earthy Ybor City cigars in corrugated rows and the flamenco dancer's blood-red dress.

When to Go

Tampa Bay



Mid-Feb–mid-Apr Peak season. Ideal weather, high prices. Best for camping, hiking, manatees.

Jun–Sep Very hot, muggy, rainy. Low season; some places close. Bargain-hunter's beach time.

Nov–Dec Snowbirds start arriving. Weather cools and dries, water still warm, great off-season prices.

Tampa Bay & Southwest Florida Highlights

- 1 Getting lost on secluded Cayo Costa Island, mostly preserved as **Cayo Costa State Park** (p406)
- 2 Strolling aprés beach along 5th Ave in **Naples** (p411)
- 3 Juggling art and circus at Sarasota's **Ringling Museum Complex** (p390)
- 4 Kayaking with alligators at **Myakka River State Park** (p397)
- 5 Pondering *The Hallucinogenic Toreador* at St Petersburg's **Salvador Dalí Museum** (p377)
- 6 Building pure white sandcastles at **Siesta Key** (p391)
- 7 Smoking cigars, drinking mojitos in Tampa at **Ybor City** (p368)
- 8 Swimming with manatees at **Crystal River** (p416)
- 9 Sunning, shelling and solitude on **Caladesi Island** (p388)
- 10 Admiring bald cypress and wood storks at **Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary** (p414)

