



Publicity Report
April-June 2016

AMELIA & ISLAND

COME MAKE MEMORIES®

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SUMMARY FOR 4/1/2016 – 6/30/2016

	MENTIONS	REACH
INTERNET	31	122,790,955
Online Broadcast Version	2	55,577,217
News Web Sites	11	28,605,990
Online Print Version	13	36,621,588
Blogs	5	1,986,160
PRINT	12	3,725,270
Magazine	11	3,603,085
Daily Newspaper	1	122,185
TOTAL	43	126,516,225



MEDIA GROUP: INTERNET

(31 ITEMS)

A SPICY PERSPECTIVE: **Amelia Island Getaway**

9/15/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Blogs

LOCATION: Asheville, North Carolina

REACH: 294,271

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION ONLINE: **Shrimp Festival**

9/15/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Atlanta, Georgia

REACH: 1,570,514

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER ONLINE: **10 Best Beaches in Florida**

9/15/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: New York, New York

REACH: 2,280,148

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

FORT LAUDERDALE DAILY: **At Amelia Island, You Don't Have To Travel Far To Escape**

7/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: United States of America

REACH: 47,683

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...A trip to Amelia Island is an escape to the "other" Florida
Sign up for Emails/Newsletter Submitted by admin on Wed,
09/09/2...

JUPITER MAGAZINE: **Embrace The Southern State Of Mind During Your Next Vacation At Amelia Island**

7/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: United States of America

REACH: 29,285

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...A trip to Amelia Island is an escape to the "other" Florida.
It took a good 24 hours before I let myself slide into that
rela...

MEDIA GROUP: INTERNET

PALM BEACHER: **Make Your Next Vacation An Island Getaway At The Scenic And Quaint Amelia Island**

7/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: United States of America

REACH: 32,261

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...A trip to Amelia Island is an escape to the "other" Florida. It took a good 24 hours before I let myself slide into that rela...

ATHENS BANNER-HERALD ONLINE: **A weekend getaway on Amelia Island**

6/26/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Athens, Georgia

REACH: 368,092

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...along Centre Street, historic spots such as Fort Clinch State Park and the Amelia Island Lighthouse, the island...

EXAMINER.COM: **Summer Vacation Destinations: Where can you find America's best beaches?**

6/26/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: Denver, Colorado

REACH: 23,324,888

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...beaches include Daytona Beach, Amelia Island, St. Augustine Beaches, Sebastian Inlet, and Fort Lauderdale. South Florida beac...

GARDEN & GUN ONLINE: **Secrets to a Successful Party**

6/25/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Charleston, South Carolina

REACH: 316,712

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

... This is a fun way to get people talking, laughing, and reminiscing, too." -Nicki Korman, Toast of the Coast; Amelia Island,...

J'S EVERYDAY FASHION: **Today's Everyday Fashion: Ritz Carlton Amelia Island**

6/24/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Blogs

LOCATION: Orlando, Florida

REACH: 563,963

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...During our trip to Amelia Island last week we set aside a day to relax at the most luxurious place we could think of - the R...

MEDIA GROUP: INTERNET

AUGUSTA CHRONICLE ONLINE: **Tourists can explore Amelia Island at their own pace**

6/23/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Augusta, Georgia

REACH: 138,599

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...shopping along Centre Street, historic spots such as Fort Clinch State Park and the Amelia Island Lighthouse, t...

LUXURY TRAVEL MAGAZINE: **Classic East Coast Fourth of July Celebrations**

6/23/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: Fairfax Station, Virginia

REACH: 79,013

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...-Carlton, Amelia Island finds its home in a destination of unspoiled coastal beauty and Southern charm. From it's expansive be...

J'S EVERYDAY FASHION: **Amelia Island Travel Guide**

6/21/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Blogs

LOCATION: Orlando, Florida

REACH: 563,963

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...Amelia Island is located just south of the G...

SOCALPULSE.COM - LOS ANGELES: **The 12 Best Beaches of Northeast Florida**

6/20/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Los Angeles, California

REACH: 87,485

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...Jacksonville Beach offers urban fun with sand and sun, while Amelia Island nearly steals the show with its vast coastline beac...

PARENTS ONLINE: **The 10 Best Beach Towns**

6/19/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: New York, New York

REACH: 1,806,371

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...Carolina. 6. Amelia Island, Florida. 5. Cape May, New Jersey. 4. Falmouth, Massachusetts. 3. St. Pete Beach, Florida. 2. Coro...

J'S EVERYDAY FASHION: **The Ultimate Travel Wardrobe from VacayStyle**

6/17/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Blogs

LOCATION: Orlando, Florida

REACH: 563,963

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...12 outfits you can wear on your next trip. I gave it a try on our recent trip to Amelia Island, and I honestly couldn't beli...

MEDIA GROUP: INTERNET

NEWSDAY ONLINE: **The world's best islands of 2016**

6/17/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Melville, New York

REACH: 2,510,435

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

... Amelia Island, Florida...

SOCALPULSE.COM - LOS ANGELES: **A Weekend Getaway on Amelia Island**

6/16/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Los Angeles, California

REACH: 87,485

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...along Centre Street, historic spots such as Fort Clinch State Park and the Amelia Island Lighthouse, the island...

WHIO-TV ONLINE: **Day at the Beach: Amelia Island**

6/16/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Broadcast Version

LOCATION: Dayton, Ohio

REACH: 333,269

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...Fernandina Beach offers boutique shopping and a range of scrumptious restaurants. Janice and Donald Jones' favorites serve co...

MACARONI KID: **Relaxation Awaits at The Villas at Omni Amelia Island Plantation**

6/15/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: United States of America

REACH: 647,225

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...outdoors. But during our recent visit to Amelia Island, I saw my family do something different: slow down and take the time t...

NEWSDAY ONLINE: **The world's best islands of 2016**

6/15/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Melville, New York

REACH: 2,510,435

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

... Amelia Island, Florida...

GA FOLLOWERS: **11 Amazing Beaches Every Southerner Should Travel To - GAFollowers**

6/10/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: Atlanta, Georgia

REACH: 33,795

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...of Jacksonville, FL on Amelia island. This resort area provides marshland visits and plenty of history. Fernandina...

MEDIA GROUP: INTERNET

LUXURY TRAVEL MAGAZINE: **Best Bonfire Destinations For Summer**

5/27/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: Fairfax Station, Virginia

REACH: 79,013

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

..., but with an upscale twist. Guests of The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island are invited to gather around a bonfire nestled in the...

LUXURY TRAVEL MAGAZINE: **Best Bonfire Destinations For Summer**

5/26/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: Fairfax Station, Virginia

REACH: 79,013

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...a private bonfire experience, The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island also offers a romantic bonfire in the dunes. Additionally, gues...

JETSETTER: **Best Seaside Inns - Jetsetter**

5/18/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: New York, New York

REACH: 2,126,907

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...restaurant. Elizabeth Pointe Lodge, Florida Southern charm blends with New England style at this beachfront bungalow on Amelia...

JETSETTER: **Best Seaside Inns - Jetsetter**

5/17/2016

MEDIA TYPE: News Web Sites

LOCATION: New York, New York

REACH: 2,126,907

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...restaurant. Elizabeth Pointe Lodge, Florida Southern charm blends with New England style at this beachfront bungalow on Amelia...

ORLANDO SENTINEL ONLINE: **The 25 Florida beaches you have to visit**

5/15/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Orlando, Florida

REACH: 1,945,547

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

...Island Tourist Development Council Amelia Island Tourist Development Council...

THE FLORIDA TIMES-UNION ONLINE: **Sea Turtle Regulation**

5/11/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Jacksonville, Florida

REACH: 453,018

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

**MEDIA GROUP: INTERNET**TRAVELPULSE CANADA: **Allure of Amelia****5/1/2016**

MEDIA TYPE: Blogs

LOCATION: United States of America

REACH:

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

CNN ONLINE: **Top 10 Islands****4/1/2016**

MEDIA TYPE: Online Broadcast Version

LOCATION: Atlanta, Georgia

REACH: 55,243,948

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:

USA TODAY ONLINE: **Seafood Festival****4/1/2016**

MEDIA TYPE: Online Print Version

LOCATION: Mc Lean, Virginia

REACH: 22,546,747

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

TEXT SNIPPET:



MEDIA GROUP: PRINT

(12 ITEMS)

ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION: 5 spots for recreation

6/12/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Daily Newspaper

REACH: 122,185

TEXT SNIPPET:

... Fort Island Trail, Crystal River, Fla. 1-800-632-6262,
plantationoncrystalriver.com.Fish in the Gulf of
MexicoHooked on ...

LOCATION: Atlanta, Georgia

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

CORPORATE & INCENTIVE TRAVEL: Exceptional Hotels & Outlets

6/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Magazine

REACH: 40,005

TEXT SNIPPET:

LOCATION: Boca Raton, Florida

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

FLORIDA TREND: Overnight Visitors

6/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Magazine

REACH: 55,238

TEXT SNIPPET:

LOCATION: Saint Petersburg, Florida

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

GARDEN & GUN: Coastal Cruising

6/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Magazine

REACH: 357,036

TEXT SNIPPET:

LOCATION: Charleston, South Carolina

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

RECOMMEND: Out-of-the-Box Weddings

6/1/2016

MEDIA TYPE: Magazine

REACH: 48,379

TEXT SNIPPET:

LOCATION: Miami Lakes, Florida

SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)

**MEDIA GROUP: PRINT**REDBOOK: **Girlfriend Getaways**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 2,222,115
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION: New York, New York
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**6/1/2016**COASTAL LIVING: **High Spirits**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 663,842
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION: Birmingham, Alabama
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**5/1/2016**FLORIDA SPORTSMAN: **Reel Time Florida Sportsman**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 77,164
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION: Stuart, Florida
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**5/1/2016**GRANDEUR MAGAZINE: **Florida's Secret Paradise**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 36,275
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION:
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**5/1/2016**SUNSEEKER - EAST COAST EDITION: **Amazing Amelia**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 35,000
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION: Las Vegas, Nevada
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**5/1/2016**CONVENTIONSOUTH: **NE Florida**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 18,031
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION: Gulf Shores, Alabama
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**4/1/2016**FLORIDA SUN MAGAZINE: **Concours**MEDIA TYPE: Magazine
REACH: 50,000
TEXT SNIPPET:LOCATION: Orlando, Florida
SOURCE URL: [Link to Source](#)**4/1/2016**

The 10 Best Beaches in Florida

Written by **Paul Rubio** • March 28, 2016

10 PHOTOS



Here, our favorite swaths along the Sunshine State's 1,197-mile coastline, from the Panhandle to the Keys. There's no shortage of powder-fine sand, national parks, and scenes that are both cocktail-friendly and kid-friendly.



Amelia Island

Why we love it: Old Florida is still alive and well on this barrier island in the state's northeast reaches. Pull up an Adirondack chair, swap the mojito for an old-fashioned ice cream cone, and watch the kids build sand castles and cavort across uncongested beaches.

Hilton Head Island
Deals

CURRENTS

HOT SIPS

HIGH SPIRITS

Cheers to these five coastal craft distilleries that are doing rum right

1 MAINE CRAFT DISTILLING

Based in Portland, Maine, this spirit maker uses locally farmed Maine ingredients to create its liquors. The Queequeg Spiced Rum—named for the harpooner in *Moby-Dick*—pays homage to the many ships that were built along Maine's coast in years past. In addition to rum, the distillery also produces gin, whiskey, and blueberry moonshine; mainecraftdistilling.com.

2 MANULELE DISTILLERS

This Oahu-based distillery produces farm-to-bottle rum using local ingredients like vanilla, honey, and the abundant Hawaiian sugar cane, known as ko. The KoHana Agricole Rum is aged in oak barrels, softening the flavors of cinnamon and caramel; kohanarum.com.

3 MARLIN & BARREL

Step into any restaurant in Fernandina Beach, Florida, and there's likely a bottle of this slightly sweet spirit behind the bar. It's handmade with care at every step, from combining fermented blackstrap molasses with pure sugar cane to "resting" (rather than fully aging) the rum in freshly emptied whiskey barrels; marlinbarrel.com.

4 MALAHAT SPIRITS CO.

Named after an early 1900s rum-running schooner, this San Diego-based distillery uses "multiple types of molasses and an unexpected strain of yeast" to handcraft an ultra-smooth rum perfected by the distillery's three

discriminating founders. In addition to four types of rum (including ginger, which is infused with fresh ginger-root), the distillery will also make whiskey, beginning later this year; malahatspirits.com.

5 SOUTH HOLLOW SPIRITS

When the family that owns Truro Vineyards decided to open the first legal distillery on Cape Cod since Prohibition, they did so with a winemaker's mentality, a 250-gallon copper pot for distilling, and Chardonnay- and whiskey-soaked barrels for a yearlong aging process. Their highly aromatic Twenty Boat Rum is a nod to the number of police and Coast Guard vessels it took to break up a brazen booze-smuggling ring in the Provincetown Harbor in 1930; southhollowspirits.com.

MIX IT UP! Find our top rum recipes at coastalliving.com/rum



3 MARLIN & BARREL

Step into any restaurant in Fernandina Beach, Florida, and there's likely a bottle of this slightly sweet spirit behind the bar. It's handmade with care at every step, from combining fermented blackstrap molasses with pure sugar cane to "resting" (rather than fully aging) the rum in freshly emptied whiskey barrels; marlinbarrel.com.



America's annual seafood festivals and cook-offs

by Susan B. Barnes, Special for USA TODAY | Published on April 18, 2016

From shrimp to oysters, lobster to crawfish, Maine to Alaska and Florida to California, we Americans love our seafood, which is quite evident in the number of festivals celebrating the stuff throughout the country each year. There's a shrimporree, cook-offs, and even a kissing-of-the-flounder in North Carolina. Whether served steamed with butter, a la po' boy, cooked into a chowder, or boiled in seasonings and served hot, we're ready to dig in to seafood this spring!

Join us – take a look at the gallery above and start mapping out your travel-worthy festival destinations well into next year.



The Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival is held the first weekend in May each year in Fernandina Beach, Fla. Kimberly Kappel



The festival hosts contests, a pageant and a parade (pictured). Judie Jackie

 **USATODAY TRAVEL**
EXPERIENCE FOOD AND WINE

[FIND MY FOOD AND WINE EXPERIENCE](#) | [CHEFS](#) | [NEWS](#) | [BEST OF](#) | [TOURS & TRAILS](#) | [FESTIVALS](#) | [VIDEOS](#) |

DESTINATION GUIDES:

[TEXAS](#) | [CALIFORNIA WINE COUNTRY](#) | [AUSTIN](#) | [CHARLESTON](#) | [CHICAGO](#) | [COPENHAGEN](#) | [HONG KONG](#) | [LAS VEGAS](#) | [LONDON](#) | [LOS ANGELES](#) | [MIAMI](#) |
[NEW ORLEANS](#) | [NEW YORK CITY](#) | [PARIS](#) |

[See All](#)

Coastal Cruising

The rubber meets the sand on these car-friendly Southern beaches

AMELIA ISLAND, FLORIDA

This southernmost Sea Island is perhaps best known for its coastal golf courses, lush maritime forests, and picturesque downtown. But at several locations along the slow-paced beach near the Georgia line, you can roll right up to the water's edge. Note: Four-wheel drive is recommended on the sand. nassaucountyfl.com

HOLLY BEACH, LOUISIANA

After being leveled by Hurricane Audrey in 1957, and then again by Rita, Ike, and Gustav, Holly Beach adopted the motto "built to be rebuilt." You won't find many tourists or posh resorts, just quiet spots to read, wildflowers blooming near the shore, and an ideal avenue for a slow beach drive. parishofcameron.net

NEW SMYRNA FLORIDA

The tradition of beach driving goes back more than 100 years in New Smyrna Beach, a beachier neighbor, Daytona Beach, where the wide, hard sand once served as the early days of NASCAR. You need to take a little time to still tool around to sundown. cityofnassau.com

OUTER BANKS NORTH CAROLINA

Driving on the beaches is permitted year-round in most spots hereabouts. For some of the



island in a chest marked with a Spanish silver dagger. cityofportaransas.org—Will Price



AMELIA ISLAND, FLORIDA

This southernmost Sea Island is perhaps best known for its coastal golf courses, lush maritime forests, and picturesque downtown. But at several locations along the slow-paced beach near the Georgia line, you can roll right up to the water's edge. Note: Four-wheel drive is recommended on the sand. nassaucountyfl.com

TRULY WORTH-IT GIRLFRIEND GETAWAYS

It's high time for your squad to take a trip together, no? So make it flat-out spectacular with one of these: They've got good food, knockout scenery, and scads of fun. Pick one and start planning *now*.

BY KARA K. MURPHY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY JULIEN PACAUD

FOR YOU OUTDOORSY TYPES

1 **FAYETTEVILLE, WV**
Relive your summer-camp days here, minus the knee socks and early lights-out. This small town is perched on the rim of the **New River Gorge**, a stunning ravine that winds through the mountains. The resort Adventures on the Gorge can hook you up with pulse-quickenning ways to explore the area, like **zip-lining**, **rock climbing**, **ATVs**, and **horseback riding** (from \$69). The rivers are known for world-class **white-water rafting**: Newbies can stick to

a manageable pace on the Lower New River, but experienced rafters should hit the Gauley River. Start the day with sweet potato pancakes at the Cathedral Café; later, raise a glass to falling out of the raft only once at the Secret Sandwich Society, beloved by locals for innovative sandwiches like the Truman turkey, topped with peach jam and blue cheese spread. To get a true sense of the area's vast beauty, drive over the **New River Gorge Bridge**. It has a spine-tingling catwalk 851 feet above the river (tour from \$69). Thrill seekers, you're home.

WHERE TO STAY Get a cabin at Adventures on the Gorge

(from \$199*) with AC and Wi-Fi in nearby Lansing, or rent a chic apartment through Lafayette Flats (from \$160).

2 **DOOR COUNTY, WI**
Known as the Cape Cod of the Midwest, this long peninsula is made up of a dozen quaint **waterfront villages**. There's plenty to do for active travelers, but the vibe here is supremely easygoing. Glide through the waters of Green Bay in a **kayak** or challenge your

muscles with a **stand-up paddleboard yoga class** (from \$35; Bay Shore Outfitters). Pontoons and speedboats (from \$90; Sister Bay Boat Rental) allow groups to cover more of this picturesque shoreline, with its rock ledges and tall white cedar trees. At lunchtime, hit up Wild Tomato for pizza and fried cheese curds (it's Wisconsin, remember?) before going next door to **Peninsula State Park**. It has a sand beach, **tree-lined hiking**, and a bird's-eye view of the foliage from **Eagle Bluff Lighthouse**. Those who hate getting sand stuck between their toes will love **Schoolhouse Beach** on Washington Island, which is covered in smooth limestone rocks. It isn't summertime here without a **Door County fish boil**, a local tradition in which whitefish is cooked outdoors in a big kettle, so try the one at The Old Post

redbook
Fresh start for Summer!

GROW YOUR CONFIDENCE
The nice person's guide to getting what you want

LOOK BETTER (ALMOST) NAKED
23 swimsuits for your body type

THE FUN SLIM-DOWN SECRET

INSTANT KITCHEN MAKEOVERS!

COUNTRY SUPERSTAR Jennifer Nettles
On taking risks, feeling sexy and learning to love who she is now

14 ways to make your skin ageless

FAST & HEALTHY COMFORT FOOD

JUNE 2016 REDBOOKMAG.COM 117

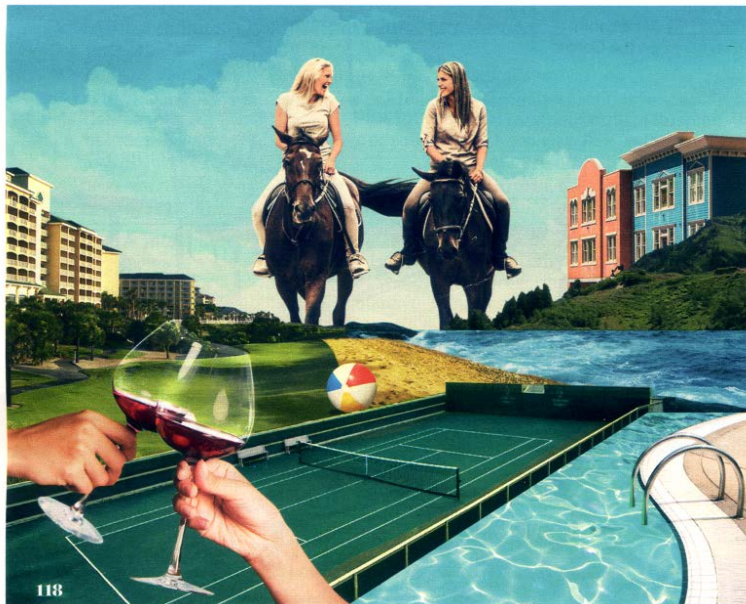
WHEN YOU NEED TO RELAX

3 AMELIA ISLAND, FL

Your pal says **white-sand beaches**, you say low-key Southern charm; this place has both (so do *not* call the whole trip off). Just peering out at the acres of **salt marshes**—streams of water twisting through tall green grass—will calm your souls. Explore these mazes in kayaks, or try a nighttime meditation paddleboard session (from \$35; Kayak Amelia). **Horseback riding** is allowed on the beach here, a rare opportunity on the East Coast, so take a slow, easy ride at sunset or sunrise (\$88; Happy Trails). If you like the sound of *all* of that, The Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort (from \$349) provides many of these activities, plus

golf, tennis, fishing, and an adults-only pool—all on a lovely property surrounded by live oaks dripping with Spanish moss. The historic downtown area of nearby **Fernandina Beach** is filled with dreamy Victorian-era architecture. While there, fill up on locally caught shrimp at the Crab Trap or smoked alligator ribs (yes, they taste like chicken) at Gilbert's Underground Kitchen. The Palace Saloon, an over-100-year-old bar, serves a sweet Pirate's Punch that's reason enough to come back yearly.

WHERE TO STAY Besides the Omni, you can get nice ocean views at Amelia Hotel at the Beach (from \$184) or Seaside Amelia Inn (from \$157).





Memorable family time...

AMAZING AMELIA ISLAND

WHERE PARADISE AND PERFECTION MEET AT THE OCEAN'S EDGE

Story by Gabriele Walkow; Photos courtesy of Amelia Island Convention & Visitors Bureau

Conveniently located just 30 minutes from Jacksonville International Airport, off the coast of northeast Florida, Allegiant travelers will discover delightful island charm complemented by an abundance of activities and amenities in this tropical paradise. An unhurried pace of life greets visitors, inviting them to kick back and reconnect with all things island. It's time to make lifelong memories.

A visit to Amelia Island promises an experience that's uniquely Floridian and countless travelers agree. Amelia Island consistently ranks among the "Top 10 U.S. Islands" and "Top 25 Islands in the World" as recognized by the *Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards*.

A timeless destination, 13 miles long and approximately two miles wide at its widest point, Amelia Island is home to breathtaking beauty, pristine parks, vast stretches of tranquil beaches and a rich history. World-class golf, soothing spas, luxury resorts, a roster of restaurants and a world of water activities await travelers of all ages.

Start your exploration at the newly reopened Amelia Island Welcome Center, located in the lovingly restored historic train depot at 102 Centre Street in Fernandina Beach. The expert ambassadors here ensure that visitors get the most from their vacation.

Armed with brochures and information, head to Fernandina's historic downtown district, a treasure trove of history and heritage with the 50-plus blocks listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Stroll the brick streets of this graceful port town where generations have

walked before you and learn about 4,000 years of history. For example, the Victorian courthouse, built in 1891 and located in the heart of town on Centre Street, is the oldest county courthouse in Florida that is still in use today. Hop on the Amelia Island Trolley for a one hour and 15 minute tour of downtown Fernandina, Old Town and the silk stocking district. Located at the end of Centre Street at the marina, tickets for this journey back in time



Amelia Island is a timeless destination



Explore unique shops and galleries



DESTINATION ✈ AMELIA ISLAND



Scenic Fernandina Beach Marina

are purchased from the driver. After the tour, be sure to stop by the Palace Saloon, Florida's longest-operating saloon and reportedly designed by Adolphus Busch of Anheuser-Busch fame, for a cool one!

Eight different flags have flown over Amelia Island since May of 1562 and this unique history is honored by the Amelia Island Museum of History, housed inside the old Nassau county jail. Catering to many interests and age levels, walking tours and docent-led museum tours are scheduled regularly. Don't miss the popular Ghost Tours, where guests tiptoe through dark streets and walk in the footsteps of a haunted past through the skillful storytelling of a guide.

Time for fun in the sun? Prepare for natural Appalachian quartz beaches framed by sand dunes, some as high as 40 feet! Amelia Island is home to five main stunning beaches each with its own amazing appeal. Main Beach Park is Amelia Island's most well known beachfront park and a family favorite with a playground,



A delectable shrimp basket!

picnic areas, two sand volleyball courts, a skate park, beach accesses, and restroom and outdoor shower facilities.

Fort Clinch State Park boasts a fishing pier and a wide variety of family-friendly recreational activities including swimming, fishing, sunbathing, hiking, biking and wildlife viewing.



The Amelia Island Welcome Center is located in the historic train depot



Shelling and shark tooth hunting are also popular here. Visit historic Fort Clinch and step back to the year 1864, as soldiers reenact life during the Civil War.

Peters Point Beachfront Park is popular for its fishing, covered picnic areas and limited beach driving. This is also the departure point for memorable beachside horseback riding tours. American Beach, now listed on the Black Heritage Trail, is a historic beach community popular with African-American vacationers. Amelia Island State Park, at the southernmost end of Amelia Island, offers visitors a secluded setting for fishing, strolling and bird watching.

Savor the area's natural beauty on a sunset sail from Fernandina's historic waterfront. With an abundance of native wildlife, it's not uncommon to spot dolphins, sea turtles, herons and even wild horses roaming free on Cumberland Island. Learn about local history and the fragile eco-system from the expert history and nature narrators.

After a busy day of soaking up the sun, connecting with nature and discovering the area's rich history, thoughts always turn to food and the anticipation of a delectable dining experience. Visitors can savor over 70 distinctive restaurants, sure to satisfy every appetite, on Amelia Island. Breakfast options include cozy cafes and sweet-smelling bakeries while a range of delis and diners, pubs and grills beckon invitingly for lunch. Dinner can be enjoyed oceanside, patioside or inside! The flavors of fine dining, international cuisine and fresh Florida seafood will tempt everyone's palate.

Amelia Island also offers unique boutique shopping, colorful art galleries, cool collectables and much more. Visitors can wander through a dizzying selection of fresh fruits, vegetables, organic products and specialty foods at the Amelia Farmers Market at The Shops of Amelia Island Plantation. - Continued on page 16

FUN IN THE SUN

Amelia Island is a perfect playground for travelers of all ages. Come play!

PIRATE PLAYGROUND

Set in a breezy, shaded area behind the Atlantic Rec Center Auditorium and next to Egan's Creek, at 2500 Atlantic Avenue in Fernandina Beach, this is a unique community-accessible playground. Integrating exercise, art, nature, music, imagination and local history for children of all physical and mental abilities, this park promises fun for all!



HORSEBACK HAPPINESS

Enjoy the scenery of Amelia Island's fantastic white sand beaches and the beauty of the ocean by horseback. What greater freedom than riding miles of beach along pristine Atlantic shores? Choose from several beach horseback-riding outfitters.

TAKE TO THE SKIES

Learn to "trike" fly and enjoy the beauty of the island flying just a few feet or up to a thousand feet off the ground. Experience pure joy with your hands on the control bar and fly like a bird! Or take to the skies with an experienced United States Parachute Association instructor for an exhilarating tandem skydive over Amelia Island. What a rush!



TAKE TO THE WATER

Enjoy the calm, clear waters surrounding Amelia Island from a canoe, kayak or wave runner and then head under the surface with scuba diving classes.

For more information on these and many other activities, visit ameliaisland.com.

DESTINATION ✈️ AMELIA ISLAND

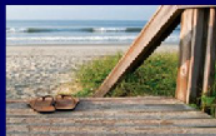


The chic Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort

The upscale, oceanfront Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort is a vacation destination in itself. Nestled on 1,350 spacious acres with a 3.5-mile private beach and offering over 400 oceanfront guest rooms and suites with patios and balconies, guests can relax in oceanfront luxury. Featuring an infinity edge adult swimming pool, a 10,000-square-foot family friendly pool, a children's splash park and two hot tubs, guests can lounge poolside on the largest multi-tiered pool deck in northeast Florida. Spend an afternoon kayaking and

paddleboarding through preserved marshlands and then visit the nature center. Tee off on three championship golf courses or head to the award-winning courts at the Amelia Island Racquet Park. Still have energy to burn? Hit the fully equipped fitness center and then take some time out at the full-service spa before sampling the nine on-site dining venues, serving up casual to gourmet fare. The shopping village, complete with 14 boutiques and a French-style deli and market, is perfect for a shopping spree!

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Other island accommodation options range from quaint B & B's to welcoming motels to luxury hotels. The Residence Inn Amelia Island is a modern all-suite hotel, just three miles from Fernandina Beach. The bright rooms range from studio to two-bedroom suites and come with full kitchens and living areas. A free cooked breakfast, an outdoor pool with hot tub, a fitness center and BBQ facilities round out the amenities.

The Amelia Hotel at the Beach is located across from a white sand beach and is a five-minute walk to restaurants. All rooms feature wet bars, mini fridges and microwaves and offer pool views and partial ocean views, some with balconies. The terrace suite has a jacuzzi tub and an oceanfront balcony. Stays include a free hot breakfast, afternoon cookies, an outdoor pool and 24/7 fitness center.

Looking for a vacation rental to call your home-away-from-home? With four offices and over 35 years of experience, ERA Fernandina Beach, Amelia Island's full-service real estate and rental company, will help you find the perfect place to vacation or live.

Amelia Island is home to a number of captivating festivals throughout the year, including the Amelia Concours d'Elegance, Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival, Amelia Island Jazz Festival, Petanque America Open, the Holiday Home Tour and Dickens On Centre.

For more information on this blissful barrier island, including a complete Calendar of Events, visit ameliaisland.com. 🌞

GO FLORIDA

AJC.com

Go to AJC.com/travel to read more about destinations in the Southeast you should be visiting.

FAMILY FUN

5 spots for recreation

Activities run gamut from swimming with manatees to golfing near the ocean.

By Tracey Teo
For the AJC

To escape the fast pace of city life, Atlantans need only head south and call on their charming neighbor with the sunny personality — Florida. Stressed city dwellers may find it tempting to do little more than work on their tan, but each region of this vast state is packed with a remarkable variety of sports and leisure activities, so get out from under that beach umbrella and immerse yourself in a memorable adventure.

Swim with manatees in Crystal River

In Crystal River, you don't have to be pretty to be popular. The 1,500-pound West Indian manatee is shaped like a blimp and has a saggy snout covered in bristly whiskers, but people can't get enough of the gentle giants that inhabit Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge in King's Bay, home to the largest concentration of manatees in the world. It's the only place in North America where it's legal to swim with this endangered species.

Plantation on Crystal River, a resort 80 miles north of Tampa, offers manatee snorkeling tours that include a pre-tour orientation on how to respectfully interact with the docile leviathans.

Manatees can be spotted in King's Bay year-round, but they are most abundant in the winter, when the water temperature in the Gulf of Mexico falls below 68 degrees. That's when hundreds flock to their cozy winter refuge in King's Bay, a constant 72 degrees thanks to a continuous flow of warm water from dozens of natural springs.

Those willing to brave the chill in a wet suit will be richly rewarded.

Manatees are curious creatures that seem to genuinely enjoy human interaction, but, if they need solitude, they can retire to a roped-off oasis.

While surrounded by manatees, it may be hard to comprehend they are endangered, but habitat loss and collisions with watercraft are a constant threat.

Here's the good news: The species has made a dramatic comeback from about 30 in the 1960s to more than 1,000 today.

Plantation on Crystal River, 9301 W. Fort Island Trail, Crystal River, Fla. 1-800-632-6262, plantationoncrystalriver.com.

Fish in the Gulf of Mexico

Hooked on fishing? Whether you are an experienced angler or just learning to cast your line, the staff at Fifth Generation Charters in Panama City are pros at customizing private deep-sea fishing trips in the Gulf of Mexico or inshore excursions in St. Andrew's Bay. Captain Clarence ensures families introducing kids to fishing on a short day trip have just as much fun as hardcore fishermen who spend all day at sea.

Reeling in a fat red snapper is a goal for many, and the Gulf is teeming with them. King mackerel, black grouper and mahi-mahi also abound.

For Type A vacationers who find it impossible to simply relax in a tranquil spot waiting for a bite, there's a more exciting option — nocturnal shark fishing. Adventur-



The Plantation on Crystal River, a golf resort on Florida's west coast, offers snorkeling tours that allow guests to interact with the endangered West Indian manatee. CONTRIBUTED BY THE PLANTATION ON CRYSTAL RIVER.

Fifth Generation Charters customers reel in a big catch in the Gulf of Mexico. CONTRIBUTED BY FIFTH GENERATION CHARTERS



ous anglers sit under a starry eagerly anticipating a chom their bait. When one of the fadable sea creatures finally b the fun begins. Once you've a hammerhead or a bull s being wrestled into a boat, will understand why fishi considered a sport. Whatever catch, you will want to eat it i it's fresh, so take advantage cleaning service offered, then across the street to the Capit Table, where your catch w cooked any way you like it.

Fifth Generation Charters, 1201 Beck Ave., Panama City, Fla. 850-867-3511, fifthgenerationcharters.com.

Dive in Looe Key

The Florida Keys are world renowned as a scuba diving paradise, but for many, Looe Key is a special place. The 5.3-mile stretch of protected reef in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary is widely regarded as one of the most beautiful coral reefs in the world. No other dive site in the Lower Keys boasts such a spectacular underwater topography. Calm, clear water makes it easy to observe eagle rays, nurse sharks, sea turtles and sinister-looking moray eels as they glide over a rainbow of coral. More than 150 species of fish thrive here, including parrotfish and angelfish that



The Ocean Links Course at Omni Amelia Island Plantation has five oceanfront holes.

CONTRIBUTED BY OMNI AMELIA ISLAND PLANTATION

Golf on Amelia Island

Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, a sprawling luxury resort on a barrier island just south of the Georgia border, features a trio of scenic golf courses, but the 18-hole Ocean Links Course, which runs parallel to the Atlantic Ocean, is the one seasoned golfers long to conquer.

The par-70, Bobby Weed-designed course meanders over undulating sand dunes and features an impressive five oceanfront holes. Hole 15, an uphill par-3, threatens even the lowest of handicaps. An unpredictable sea breeze further increases the challenge.

Golfers wanting to polish their swing before battling the course can enroll in the resort's Golf Academy, which offers sessions for all ages and levels of play.

39 Beach Lagoon Road, Amelia Island, Fla. 904-261-6161, omnihotels.com/hotels/Amelia-island-plantation.

because of its serpentine neck, dive headfirst into a marsh and emerge with a fish impaled on its spear-like beak.

39 Beach Lagoon Road, Amelia Island, Fla. 904-261-6161, omnihotels.com/hotels/Amelia-island-plantation.

Destination

The new Breeze Ocean Kitchen restaurant at Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

Florida

Exceptional Hotels & Resorts and Superior Service Draw Groups Back Year After Year

By John Buchanan

There are two simple, overarching reasons why Florida ranks perennially as the undisputed king of statewide meeting destinations. One is the quality of the Sunshine State's unparalleled hotel and resort product. The other is the Florida brand itself, which appeals to meeting attendees of all demographic profiles, especially during the winter.

And every year as a result, Florida attracts planners and attendees who come for the first time, hold a successful meeting, and then immediately decide to come back.

Amy Hanson, executive assistant at Minneapolis-based equipment manufacturer Graco, used a Florida destination for the first time in January, when she arranged a five-day, four-night meeting for 95 attendees at Streamsong Resort, a sprawling property located in rural Bowling Green, south of and about equidistant between Tampa and Orlando.

The selection of a Florida destination was an easy one. "Because the meeting is in January, we want a warm destination, because Minneapolis is cold in the winter," Hanson says, noting that her timely discovery of Streamsong was a matter of fortuitous coincidence.

"As a meeting planner," she says, "I send in their sales staffs so I can see the resort and the food and the service. So, at just the right time, I went to one of those lunches, and Streamsong was one of the resorts that was represented. So I met with them and was very intrigued, because my attendees like to play golf. But we also like to offer other options that are fun. And Streamsong not only has great golf, but it has also clay sport shooting, fishing on an onsite lake and a nice spa. So it was a perfect choice for us. And it was also something new and different."

Streamsong, which offers 24,600 sf of meeting space, also represented a perfect match demographically. "Ninety percent of our attendees are men," Hanson says. "And with the four main amenities that Streamsong offers, I knew all of our attendees would be interested in at least one of them."

Another positive factor was Streamsong's location, in a fairly rural setting, away from major urban centers — and typical meeting destinations — such as Orlando and Tampa. "That was good for us for two reasons," Hanson says. "One is



that our event is very meeting- or business-focused, so we like a destination that does not offer a lot of distractions like big cities do. But at the same time, we want our attendees to be able to relax and have a good time. And Streamsong met both of those requirements. It's just a very unique property."

High Marks Across the Board

After experiencing Streamsong, Hanson has high praise for the property on all counts, starting with its room product.

"What's amazing to me about the rooms at Streamsong is that they all have a great view, of either the lake or the beautiful grounds," Hanson says. "And all of the rooms are very modern and clean. So in addition to having a nice view, the rooms are warm and inviting at the same time. The rooms are also built for the business traveler, with all the functionality and amenities that people in business want and need when they're on the road, from a beautiful shower to a little refrigerator and a nice coffee maker. And every room has a couch, so at a meeting, they're perfect for getting together and networking in your room if you want to. That also makes them very comfortable." Rooms also have free Wi-Fi. "And for me as the planner, free Wi-Fi is a big deal."

Hanson also singled out Streamsong's food and beverage service as superb. "The food and beverage at Streamsong was excellent," she says. "And one of the highlights of the meeting was an amazing awards reception we did the first night. We had an open bar and served heavy hors d'oeuvres and tons of great desserts. And all of the food was done exceptionally well. And the presentation and service were as good as the food."

One item that really created enthusiasm among her attendees was fish tacos. "They actually bring out an entire, big fish and cut it up for the tacos right from the oven," Hanson says. "Our attendees thought the fish tacos, done that way, were really something special. But all of the food was equally good. And everything is very fresh. You couldn't ask for better food for a meeting group. In fact, the feedback we got from attendees was that the food at Streamsong was the best they've ever gotten at any of our meetings."

As a planner, Hanson also cited Streamsong's service standard as a key element in the success of her meeting. "I give them an A+ for service, across the board," she says. "The service was consistently excellent, even when it came down to the smallest things. Everything was done right. They always went the extra mile for us. And that's true from the catering staff to meeting services. They just pay attention to every detail. I can't say enough about how amazing the service is. The resort is beautiful. The amenities are great. The food is great.

But it's the service that makes the experience so amazing for a meeting planner and attendees that you want to go back and have that experience again. You just know from the minute you get there that you're going to be well taken care of."

Hanson and her attendees were so well taken care of, she says, that Graco is already talking about going back for the same meeting in 2018.

A Longtime Florida Loyalist

Unlike Hanson, who experienced Florida as a planner for the first time this year, Kristin Tschirn, director of continuing medical education at New Orleans-based hospital operator Ochsner Health System, has been enthusiastically using a number of Sunshine State destinations for years.

Among the properties she uses in a regular rotation is The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, located on the Atlantic coast near Jacksonville. Tschirn uses the hotel every other year for a 45-50 attendee, three-day CME meeting of colon and rectal surgeons.

"My attendees and I cannot say enough good things about The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island," Tschirn says. "It's wonderful for that particular meeting, because a lot of the physicians like to bring their families. And there is just so much to do there, including shopping and also things for kids to do. Amelia Island itself is beautiful. But The Ritz-Carlton itself is fabulous.

And they do a phenomenal job for meetings. They just make everyone feel welcome and at home. And the property itself is just gorgeous. And it's beautifully maintained."

The 446-room hotel, with more than 48,000 sf of meeting space, also is perfectly sized for Tschirn's meetings. "It's big enough to accommodate a range of group sizes or multiple meetings at the same time," she says. "But it's

also small enough that you don't get lost, like you do in a really big hotel. It's just the perfect size for most meetings. And the amenities — the beach, the pool, the spa, the golf course — are fantastic. And the food is great, too."

She and her attendees also love the nearby small town of Fernandina Beach, a timeless throwback to unspoiled old Florida. "It's just so quaint and wonderful. All of our attendees love it because they can walk up and down those old cobblestone streets."

Among Floridians in the know and well-informed meeting planners, Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach rank high on "favorite place to go" lists. Last year, Visit Florida, the Official Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation, held its annual Florida Encounter, a hosted buyer show for meeting planners from across the country, at Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort. The hotel and the destination earned a



Natural light streams into a meeting room with extraordinary views of the golf course at Streamsong Resort in Central Florida.



The Falcon's Nest restaurant and pub at Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort boasts the best burgers in town.

chorus of accolades. Florida Encounter has built a reputation as one of the premier hosted buyer programs in the meeting industry. As a result, it selects each year's destination and hotel with great care. And for 2015, Omni Amelia Island did an outstanding job for attendees, including a representative from *Corporate & Incentive Travel* as a media member. Florida Encounter will partner with Experience Kissimmee and Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate next year. The event is set for November 29–December 2, at the Omni property.

Located on 1,350 acres of unspoiled property on a barrier reef just off the northeast coast, Omni Amelia Island features 404 guest rooms and 80,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. One of its most unique venues is the largest multitiered pool deck in northeast Florida.

Amenities include nine restaurants, including Bob's Steak & Chop House, and Verandah, which serves fresh seafood and Southern-inspired cuisine. Other key amenities include a trio of 18-hole golf courses designed by legendary golf architects Pete Dye, Bobby Weed and Tom Fazio; and a world-class spa. Activities include kayaking and paddleboarding among pristine and well-protected marshlands that abound with wildlife.

Located just 18 miles south of Jacksonville is another of Tschirn's go-to properties, the charming AAA Five Diamond Ponte Vedra Inn & Club. Built in 1928, the resort is another time-honored symbol of the history of Florida tourism, but one with markedly modern amenities and service.

"Ponte Vedra Inn is just such a neat property," says Tschirn, who is going back later this year. "It's very unique. And like Fernandina Beach, it's that 'old Florida' that you don't see any more. But there's also just so much to do. And you can be in Jacksonville in a matter of minutes if you want more options. I just love Ponte Vedra Beach. And like The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Ponte Vedra Inn has great amenities, like great beach, great tennis courts, the great TPC Sawgrass golf course. And a lot of my doctors love golf and tennis." The resort offers 25,000 sf of meeting and banquet space.

A Newly Discovered Gem

Earlier this year, Tschirn discovered a new Florida property that quickly earned a spot on her favorite hotels list when she used it for the first time in her rotation for the meeting that goes to Amelia Island and Ponte Vedra Beach — the 602-room Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa. Located in South Walton, near Destin on Florida's Emerald Coast on the Gulf of Mexico, the Hilton Sandestin features what is arguably the best, unspoiled white sand beach in Florida — and one of the best in the world. The Hilton Sandestin also is Northwest Florida's largest, full-service beachfront resort hotel.

Like other planners who experience it for the first time, Tschirn and her attendees were enthralled by the unique beauty of the Emerald Coast.

"The Emerald Coast of Florida is just somewhere that everybody wants to see and experience," she says. "It has soft, white sand beaches that are some of the best in the world. The water is clear. It's just unlike any other place I've seen in Florida, and I've been to a lot of the state's resorts. And Hilton Sandestin, by far, has the best beach I've ever seen."

The room product at Hilton Sandestin also is excellent, Tschirn says. The rooms are especially suited to her group, because many of the doctors bring their families. "The rooms are huge," Tschirn says. "And you're getting a very large room without paying a premium rate. I brought my family to the meeting and there was plenty of room for my two kids. The rooms are not just large — they're fantastic."

Tschirn also was surprised by how much there is to do.

The Hilton Sandestin, part of a sprawling resort complex, features six restaurants, three bars, a one-mile stretch of beach, three swimming pools, four championship golf courses and a world-class Serenity by the Sea spa. It also features 40,000 sf of newly redesigned indoor event space including the all-new 7,500-sf Coastal Ballroom and 20,000 sf of outdoor space.

Nearby offsite attractions include the charming Village of Baytowne Wharf, Topsail Hill Preserve State Park, Big Kahuna's Water and Adventure Park, Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park and the Silver Sands Premium Outlet shopping center.



A newly refreshed deluxe ocean suite at Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club in northeast Florida near Jacksonville.



The Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort.

Despite such onsite and offsite amenities, Tschirn — like virtually all planners — values service above all other factors. And based on her experience as a first-time client, she hails the service at Hilton Sandestin as some of the best she has ever received.

"I've done a lot of meetings," Tschirn says. "And the thing that really struck me about Hilton Sandestin is the service. And one of the people responsible for the service we got was our onsite event concierge. I never had to ask for anything. He was always just right there, anticipating my needs. He was absolutely fantastic. He took care of every single thing I needed, sometimes before I even knew I needed it. And any time there just might have been any kind of problem, he knew about it before I did and took care of it. He never missed a beat. The service at the hotel is just outstanding."

The Magic of Marco Island and Sanibel Island

Kristie Daniel, meetings and events manager at The Valvoline Company in Lexington, Kentucky, is another longtime user of Florida as a destination. But over the years, she has remained loyal to a single, and relatively little-known destination located in the Gulf of Mexico off the southwestern coast — Marco Island.

Daniel has used the 727-room, Balinese-themed Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa multiple times over the past decade as the site for Valvoline's annual 425-attendee, company-wide employee workshop held in October. The company will go back this year. "The hotel is in our normal rotation of destinations for the meeting," Daniel says. "We love it."

The resort features nearly 80,000 sf of event space, two private 18-hole championship golf courses and an acclaimed spa.

Why is the Marco Island Marriott so popular with Daniel and her attendees?

"The main reason we keep going back is the customer service," she says. "This meeting is mostly attended by young people, between 18 and 25, who managed QuickLube service centers. And for them to feel as welcomed as they are and to

feel as comfortable as they do is very important to us. And the staff at the hotel remembers people's names from two or three years ago, or even further back. The customer service there is so good that it's the standard I compare every other hotel to when I do site visits."

Daniel also praises the hotel's rooms. "The accommodations are wonderful," she says. "And one reason I say that is because every room has a balcony with a nice view. And again, because the majority of our attendees are young and they haven't traveled much yet on their own, Marco Island and the Marriott give them a special experience. It's a real treat for them to stay in such a nice hotel in such a nice place."

She and her attendees also appreciate what she calls truly exemplary food and beverage service. "I don't think there's another hotel out there, at least not one I know of, that has food and beverage that can compare to the Marco Island Marriott," she says. "It is phenomenal. And it never runs out. Because we have a young group, they eat a lot. And not once in all these years have we ever run out of food before everybody had everything they wanted."

Her attendees like the hotel as much as she does, she notes. "The other thing that makes it such a great destination for this meeting is that the attendees don't have much free time," Daniel says. "It's a very serious business meeting. But they do get a couple of afternoons free, and they just like to go to the



"The Emerald Coast of Florida...has soft, white sand beaches that are some of the best in the world. The water is clear. It's just unlike any other place I've seen in Florida."

Kristin Tschirn, Director, Continuing Medical Education
Ochsner Health System, New Orleans, LA

beach. But we do also have a couple of small groups that will go fishing or to the spa. And then, of course, there is golf. And the golf there is great. But the main thing people want to do is just relax on the beach."

Of course, the main thing Daniel wants is flawless service. And she always gets it at the Marco Island Marriott, she says.

"For me, the highlight of every meeting I do there is the service I get," she says. "The team the hotel has in place is just impeccable. And they always go above and beyond to give us the best service we get anywhere. We have a genuine relationship that has been in place for a long time. And that relationship and their commitment to us shows in everything they do."

Although Hanson, Tschirn and Daniel agree that the service they get at the Florida properties they use is a critical factor in



BROOKE PHOTOGRAPH

Out-of-the-Box Weddings

Michelle Marie Arean

Weddings have taken on a personality of their own, as couples are opting for distinct destination weddings versus the standard walk down the white-sand aisle. "There has been a rise in out-of-the-box wedding options as couples begin to capitalize on making their special days as unique as their relationship," says Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort's executive chef Daven Wardynski.

A Plantation Wedding

In Florida, the Omni Amelia Island Plantation has launched its *Sprouting Project*, the creation of chef Wardynski, as the property's latest wedding offering.

"More couples are looking to capitalize on epicurean trends, such as the farm-to-table movement fully exemplified by *The Sprouting Project*, as well as the ever-popular destination wedding. Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort allows guests to indulge in the beauty of Amelia Island, without ever setting foot off-property," Wardynski says.

The Sprouting Project consists of an aquaponic greenhouse, an organic garden, a large collection of beehives, and the soon-to-open smokehouse. "*The Sprouting Project* ensures the freshest ingredients are incorporated into wedding meals—from sampling straight-from-the-barrel to fresh honey dripping from the comb, and fresh basil from the aquaponic greenhouse," says Wardynski.

The organic garden seats about 140 guests in a lush, intimate setting surrounded by strawberry vines, blackberry bushes, and pineapple guava trees. The aroma in the air is filled with sage, rosemary, and basil, while handwritten garden markers mark the herb beds. A hand-built bridge takes guests from the garden to an apiary that houses over 100,000 native bees.

In addition, chef Wardynski has added a barrel room to *The Sprouting Project*, where he'll age honey varietals, vinegars, hot sauce, and cocktails. The barrel room will also provide a space for intimate events

such as rehearsal dinners, or even as the bridal party's private dining room as it can accommodate seating for up to eight guests. Wedding packages start at \$208 pp; and starting room rates at the property are \$299 per night.

A Glamping Wedding

Glamping has been gaining popularity over the past few years and to respond to that popularity, Conestoga Ranch, a high-end resort in northern Utah, has added a glamping venue for weddings and private events.

"Glamping has really taken off around the world (UK, Asia, etc.) and is growing in popularity in the United States, particularly in the West. The ranch had so many requests for private events during its first summer that it made sense to offer a dedicated space to accommodate weddings and family reunions," says Tom Hendrick, partner of Conestoga Ranch. In response, the 18-acre



Top, left: Weddings at Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass in Arizona tie in the surroundings.
Top, right: Event at *The Sprouting Project* at Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort.

property, which has an onsite event planner who assists with wedding coordination, is constructing a new *Event Tent* and a new *Royal Tent Suite*.

The *Event Tent* will be situated on the hillside overlooking Bear Lake and the surrounding mountains. This 1,700-sq.-ft. space can accommodate up to 100 guests seated at round tables, or 125 theater/ceremony style, and features 15-ft. ceiling heights at its peak. Plus, the tent is equipped with built-in power to facilitate for a DJ, a band, or slideshows.

"The new *Event Tent* allows wedding parties to have a Western-style, open-air experience with magnificent views," says Hendrick. To add to the festivities, couples can also host a welcome reception, an outdoor adventure activity, a pig roast and line dancing rehearsal dinner, a groom's luncheon, or a farewell breakfast.

The *Royal Tent Suite*, meanwhile, which opens this summer with rates of \$135, offers luxurious private accommodations for

couples, featuring an en-suite bathroom with a clawfoot tub and separate shower, as well as indoor and outdoor seating areas. There's also enough space for the bride to get ready, a king-size bed, and a campfire. "It is the ranch's honeymoon suite; ideal for couples and honeymooners," points out Hendrick.

He adds, groups can take over the whole resort, and there's plenty of dining options between the Campfire Grill Restaurant, the banquet offerings, and Shakes at the Lake, which serves raspberry shakes, lemonade and snacks.

A Heli Wedding

Daredevils can go on the thrill ride of a lifetime, and we don't mean just saying "I do" to a lifetime of commitment. **Rockies Heli Canada** offers an experience like none other—*Heli Weddings and Elopements*. Three distinct packages—*Love in the Rockies*, *Exclusive Love in the Rockies* and *Heli Weddings and Elopements*—offer daring couples the ultimate in an "I do" experience.

After soaring thousands of feet above the mountains on an aerial tour, the couple then lands on a romantic alpine location with stunning views. Here, with nature as their backdrop, the ceremony is performed. The most inclusive package, starting at \$395 pp, includes a helicopter flight to and from the location for all attending the ceremony, including bride and groom, wedding commissioner, photographer, and guests. Additional perks can be added to this package such as sparkling wine, picnics, and desserts, as well as fly-in tents and port-potties, chairs and tables for a fully catered reception. The *Exclusive Love in the Rockies* package, starting at \$1,296 per couple, includes a 42-minute heli flight and a 1-hour stop, plus a demi-bottle of sparkling wine, and dessert, as well as a photo. Guests can opt to add a light meal for an additional \$30, a professional photographer, and a wedding commissioner for an additional fee. ➤

The Treehouse
at Maui's Hotel Wailea.

TRAVEL
ADVISOR
CORNER

Weddings Away from Home

Susan Farewell

Chances are, your clients planning destination weddings are Millennials. These "kids" are digital natives. They've grown up with technology. They're also a generation of travelers. Many studied abroad, and possibly lived overseas. Their friends are from all over the globe; and their worlds are increasingly borderless.

How you fit into their universe is key. They're busy. They want their weddings to be in places that speak volumes about who they are. They know what they want and they want it to happen seamlessly.

Making this happen requires elite travel planning skills, but also an ability to communicate effectively and efficiently with your clients. You need to be engaged with them, and have an ongoing dialog. You also have to get their feedback every step of the way and answer their questions within 48 hours.

Most importantly in the whole process is to steer clear of what you think they want and listen carefully. Try to meet with both of them (live, if you can) and understand not only what each of them wants, but what they truly want as a couple for their wedding. "She gets it," should be the words they utter to each other when they walk away from that first meeting with you. And from then on, your job is to stay on the beam.

Fail along the way and they'll simply move on. You are totally replaceable. Thrill them with your resourcefulness and can-do spirit. Make magic happen and you will learn that each newlywed couple is a door into an enormous network. They are huge influencers. Make them feel unique, personalize the relationship, and make them look like superstars, and you will succeed. ■

Susan Farewell is the owner of Farewell Travels LLC (FarewellTravels.com), a travel design firm based in Westport, CT. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @FarewellTravels.



A Horseback Wedding

A wedding ceremony followed by the bride and groom being whisked away by horseback sounds like the makings of a movie romance, but at Arizona's **Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass**, couples can do just that. Let me paint the picture: The wedding would be set up at the Sierra Estrella Sunset Lawn, and just as the sun begins to set over the western Sierra Estrella mountain range and the couple have said, "I do," two Mustang horses approach the wedding lawn to whisk the bride and groom across the river that flows behind the ceremony lawn and into the sunset on either a private carriage or on an individual horse. Following the horseback ride, the couple joins their guests for a reception on the Wedding Terrace (ceremony plus horseback is approximately \$3,000, depending on the season; reception is based on guest count and is anywhere from \$8,500 to \$14,500).

And to add just a little more oomph to that fairytale story, the following day the couple can take advantage of the offerings in the *Wild About You* package, which includes deluxe overnight accommodations, a 50-minute companion massage at *Aji Spa*, two prickly pear mimosas, an exclusive hand-painted gourd bowl by local artisan Aaron Sabori with a special story of love depicted through art and a special blessing for guests' journey home, a bottle of massage oil, a custom fragrance, a romantic 3-course Chef's Tasting dinner at Kai, and a 60-minute Margarita Sunset horseback ride by Koli Equestrian Center ending with cowboy margaritas on the rocks plus chips and salsa. Package starts at \$579 per night; ask for rate plan WLDABTU.

The property, which offers desert views, plenty of outdoor wedding venues, a 17,500-sq.-ft. spa, 36 holes of championship golf, fine dining, and an onsite equestrian center, has all the ingredients for the making of a unique wedding, with lots of bragging rights. Couples also earn triple *Starpoints* when their guests stay at Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass, while guests earn *Starpoints* on the eligible nights. Plus, the couple also receives special rewards and bonus *Starpoints* for booking their wedding at the property, which can be used immediately towards honeymoon nights.

A Treehouse Wedding

Couples opting for more intimate nuptials can opt for a ceremony in the Treehouse at **Hotel Wailea** in Maui. This grand Treehouse, suspended over the canopy in the property's mango and avocado orchard, offers views of the coastline, and for a truly magical moment, recommend the sunset nuptials. Weddings at Hotel Wailea can be reserved along with onsite wedding planning services by the Maui Wedding Company.

The hotel itself is the first and only **Relais & Chateaux** property in Hawaii, offering a European-inspired elegance mixed with relaxed island luxury. The all-suite property completed a \$15 million renovation in January 2015, transforming it into an intimate adults-only escape featuring 72 suites. Accommodation rates start at \$499. ■

Contact Information

Conestoga Ranch: conestogaranch.com

Hotel Wailea: hotelwailea.com

Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort:

omnihotels.com/hotels/amelia-island-plantation

Rockies Heli Canada: rockiesheli.com

Sheraton Grand at Wild Horse Pass:

wildhorsepassresort.com/chandler-wedding-venues

recommend.com

AROUND THE STATE

» NORTHEAST

By Mark Basch basch.mark@gmail.com

Business Briefs

AMELIA ISLAND – The number of **overnight visitors** to the resort community increased 7.6% in 2015 to 618,200, according to the Amelia Island Tourist Development Council. Those visitors spent \$433 million, up 1.7% from 2014.

