



ST. PETERSBURG-CLEARWATER AREA
ISLAND BEACHES RANK AMONG THE NATION'S BEST

–No Other Destination Has Three Top Beaches –

CLEARWATER, FL – Beaches are Florida's calling card and when you have three of America's top beaches, you had better have the sand to back it up. St. Petersburg-Clearwater is famous for its 35 miles of powder-white barrier island beaches on the Gulf of Mexico. From undeveloped island hideaways to wide, soft city beaches that offer all the amenities a beach-lover could imagine



and even pet-friendly beach parks, St. Petersburg-Clearwater area beaches are unmatched. The area is one of the few places in the world to have a #1 beach, #2 beach, and a top city beach while also receiving a Healthy Beach award.

Area beaches have won numerous awards for everything from sand quality to environmental management. Coastal geologist Dr. Stephen Leatherman, also known as "Dr. Beach," ranked Caladesi Island State Park the #1 Beach in America in 2008 after naming it the #2 Beach in 2007 and 2006. Fort De Soto Park was America's Best Beach in 2005, and TripAdvisor's #1 Beach in 2008. He also named Clearwater Beach as #1 City Beach in the Gulf region. Four area beaches (Fort De Soto Park, Caladesi Island, Clearwater Beach and Sand Key Park) received the NHBC Healthy Beach Award.

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Dr. Leatherman, director of the International Hurricane Center at Florida International University, compiles the annual listing of top beaches. More than 650 beaches throughout the United States are judged on a list of 50 criteria under four main areas: physical factors such as sand softness,

and number and size of waves; biological factors such as color and condition of the water; presence of wildlife and pests; and human use and impacts such as lifeguard protection, far-reaching views and traffic.

Area beaches also won the Healthy Beach Award, presented by the National Healthy Beaches Campaign. Only beaches that meet the National Healthy Beaches Campaign's stringent environmental and service-based criteria, and demonstrate dedicated environmental stewardship are eligible to win this prestigious award.



The St. Petersburg-Clearwater area features eight major barrier islands, also known as 'keys,' that buffer the Pinellas Peninsula from the Gulf of Mexico. The gentle slope and calm surf make area beaches perfect for family water activities. The Gulf and Intracoastal waterways offer areas for practically every water activity imaginable including: deep-sea fishing; backwater salt flats fishing (rated among the best in Florida); boating, sailing, canoeing and sea kayaking; SCUBA diving (dive shops offer trips to artificial reefs, wrecks, rivers, springs and even through a Spanish-American War-era submerged fort); wind surfing and shelling.

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Here is a roundup of St. Petersburg/Clearwater area island beaches from the south to the north:

Egmont Key - This 440-acre island is distinguished by its 1858 lighthouse. Now a wildlife refuge, Egmont Key was a camp for captured Seminole Indians during the Third Seminole War and was a Union Navy base during the Civil War. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection cooperatively manages Egmont Key with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Coast Guard.



Several operators offer snorkeling excursions to this island, which is accessible only by boat. During peak seasons, a ferry is operated from Fort De Soto Park to Egmont Key. The island is home to Fort Dade established because of the Spanish threat during the Spanish-American War of 1898. Fort Dade had approximately 250 troops and offered tennis, baseball a gym and movie theater for the soldiers. The fort was abandoned on May 25, 1923. Parts of the fort have eroded into the Gulf offering a unique snorkeling opportunity. www.floridastateparks.org/egmontkey

Fort De Soto Park - (#1 beach in the entire United States 2005; TripAdvisor's 2008 #1 Beach in America) A historic fort built during the Spanish-American War is located on Mullet Key, the largest of the five islands which make up this unique area just north of Egmont Key.

The park consists of 1,136 unspoiled acres, seven miles of beaches, two fishing piers, picnic and camping areas, a small history museum and 2,000-foot barrier-free nature trail for guests with disabilities. A concession stand, bathrooms and covered picnic shelters are available. The area has a popular biking and skating trail as well as rental



facilities for canoes, kayaks and bicycles. Mullet and Egmont keys span the mouth of Tampa Bay, one of the busiest ports in the nation. Visitors to the area often walk out on the fishing piers to watch large ships pass through the channel. www.pinellascounty.org/park/05_Ft_DeSoto.htm

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Shell Key - Named one of the most important birding sites in the state by Audubon of Florida, this undeveloped barrier island is known for excellent shelling, sunbathing and bird watching opportunities. The Shell Key Preserve was developed to protect the island as a nesting site and yet continue to allow its use as a recreational destination. Numerous boats offer sightseeing

packages that take guests to Shell Key's recreation area for sunbathing and dolphin watching near the island. The conservation of the island's preserve resulted in Audubon of Florida, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, Audubon of Florida, local Audubon chapters and Pinellas County government to create the annual Florida Birding Festival. Held in October, it is one of the largest urban bird watching festivals in the United States.

Long Key - (St. Pete Beach) This island contains the communities of Pass-A-Grille Beach and St. Pete Beach. Pass-a-Grille was the first established town on Florida's West coast barrier islands and contains a registered National Historic District. The area has no "high-rise" buildings keeping it a unique slice of old Florida. The peninsula is only two blocks wide and features a history museum and 22 historical structures including the first homestead dating back to 1886. St. Pete Beach is a popular family beach with some of the largest resorts in the area including the Don CeSar, known as the "Pink Palace." www.stpetebeach.org



Treasure Island - Known as the "Sand Sculpture Capital of Florida," Treasure Island is one of the widest beaches in the area and plays host to several sporting activities including an annual kite-flying contest, sand sculpting contest and has held the Guinness World Record for largest sand castle. www.ci-treasure-island.fl.us

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Sand Key - (Sand Key Park) This 14-mile long key is the longest of the barrier islands and contains the beach communities of Madeira Beach, Redington Beach, North Redington Beach, Redington Shores, Indian Shores, Indian Rocks Beach, Belleair Beach and Sand Key. Fishing is popular from several public piers. Madeira Beach features John's Pass Village & Boardwalk, a quaint shopping district which overlooks "fish famous" John's Pass. The Village is home to a large commercial and charter fishing fleet. Art galleries, restaurants and boutiques are located in the area and the boardwalk provides a scenic water view. It is the site of several festivals and special events. On the north tip of the island, Clearwater's Sand Key Park has been ranked among the top beaches in the nation.



Clearwater Beach - (#1 city beach in the Gulf region) This island is the most popular of all the area's many beaches, especially with families. Clearwater Beach offers just about every water and beach activity imaginable. Pier 60 Park on Clearwater Beach features a family recreation complex on Clearwater's expansive beach with covered playgrounds, fishing and concessions. The *Sunsets at Pier 60* festival features music, entertainment and a beautiful Gulf of Mexico sunset throughout the year from two hours before sunset until two hours after. www.visitclearwaterflorida.com

Caladesi Island - (#1 beach in the entire United States 2008, #2 beach in the United States 2007, 2006) One of the few remaining large undeveloped barrier islands on Florida's Gulf Coast, Caladesi is only accessible by boat. The island, which is a state park, is ideal for swimming, shelling, fishing, picnics, skin and scuba diving and nature study. The park also has a three-mile nature trail winding through the island's interior. The park is open daily from 8 a.m. to sunset. A ferry departs hourly from nearby Honeymoon Island. Docks are available on the island for private boats. A snack bar and shelters are also available. www.floridastateparks.org/caladesiisland



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Honeymoon Island - This state park features sunbathing, shelling, swimming, fishing, picnic pavilions, bathhouses and a park concession building. Honeymoon features two bird observation areas, a pet beach, two nature trails and one of the few remaining Florida virgin slash pine stands. These large trees serve as nesting sites for osprey and bald eagle. Honeymoon Island has more than 200 species of plants and several threatened and endangered species of shore birds. The island originally was settled by members of the Tocobaga tribe of Native Americans. A wave of explorers, pirates, traders and fisherman were the first visitors. Honeymoon was named Hog Island in the 1880s. A hurricane in 1921 separated what is now Caladesi Island. In the 1940s, 50 palm-thatched bungalows were built for honeymooning couples but eventually used as R&R sites for wartime factory workers. www.floridastateparks.org/honeymoonisland

Anclote Key - Blue gulf waters lap gently upon this state preserve's 4-mile-long beach. A picturesque 1887 federal lighthouse stands sentinel on the southern end of the island while ospreys nest in the tall pines found throughout the upland areas. Located three miles off Tarpon Springs on the northern end of the Pinellas Peninsula, Anclote Key is accessible only by boat. Six biological communities provide habitat for dozens of species of bird life including bald eagle and piping plover. Anclote Key is an excellent swimming and nature study site. However, guests must plan ahead by bringing all water and supplies, and then carrying all litter out. www.floridastateparks.org/anclotekey

Pet Beaches - Dogs are not allowed to roam on many of the area's beaches because so many endangered birds nest right on the sand. However there are designated pet beaches throughout the area where animals can go off the leash and take to the water. Pet beaches include Fort De Soto Park, the Belleair Bluffs Causeway and Honeymoon Island. www.pinellascounty.org/park/paw_playgrounds.htm

Non-Barrier Island Beaches - The area has several great beaches on the Gulf, Intracoastal Waterway and Tampa Bay that are popular with visitors and residents alike. Fred Howard Park in Tarpon Springs and Crystal Beach are both white-sand beaches on the Gulf of Mexico that are attached to the mainland. Gulfport Beach and Maximo Park Beach are both on the Intracoastal's Boca Ciega Bay. Tampa Bay beaches such as North Shore Park, Spa Beach and Gandy Beach offer a beach experience from the Bay side.

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For more information on the St. Petersburg-Clearwater area, call 1-877-FL-BEACH (352-3224) in the U.S. and Canada, or 1-727-464-7200 internationally. Take a virtual visit to the area on the Internet at www.VisitStPeteClearwater.com or write to: St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, 13805 58th Street North, Suite 2-200, Clearwater, FL 33760.

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For more information, go to:

Dr. Beach	www.drbeach.org
National Healthy Beach Campaign	www.fiu.edu/~nhbc/
Clean Beaches Council	www.cleanbeaches.org
Clearwater Beach	www.visitclearwaterflorida.com
Gulf Beaches	www.tampabaybeaches.com

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