

# In search of the perfect holiday hideaway

## Travel Outlook

The perfect holiday hideaway may not even exist - but we can dream, can't we?

Many pleasure-seekers would dream (especially in January) of a sunny tropical island with long white beaches and the ceaseless crashing and sighing of the sea.

They probably recognize, though, that certain Caribbean islands have problems that spoil the dream, such as unfinished hotels, sky-high prices in restaurants and bars, and perhaps a less than friendly attitude toward outsiders.

Growing numbers of snowbirds seem to be coming to the realization that there are tropic-like islands on the near side of the Tropic of Cancer, where lower prices prevail.

A glance at the map of Florida shows a string of islands just off the mainland in the central part of the state's Atlantic seaboard, and a smaller group of islands in the southwest of the state near Fort Myers and the Gulf of Mexico.

East or west, Florida's coastal islands offer the visitor a broad range of accommodation, restaurants, sightseeing and shopping - all of it in that special insular environment, and yet relatively close at hand.

### WINTER RETREAT

On the eastern side, much of Florida's coast is separated from the Atlantic by the Intracoastal Waterway (a chain of rivers and lakes), to the east of which is a string of low-lying barrier islands that come close to achieving the ideal of a winter retreat, whether the vacationer wants total relaxation or prefers such activities as fishing and boating.

The crossroads of the waterways is the fast-growing city of Stuart, some 55 km north of glitzy, ritzy Palm Beach. (One reason for its rapid growth is that it was linked to busy Interstate 95 only a year or so ago. Gossip is that the Stuart-to-Palm Beach section of I-95 had been left unfinished for years, so that most drivers would pay to use the near-by Florida's Turnpike, a toll road.)

Stuart has not only one of the few inlets connecting the Intracoastal Waterway with the Atlantic, but it's also at the eastern end of a waterway that stretches across the state (through Lake Okeechobee) to Fort Myers and the Gulf of Mexico.

### IDYLLIC ISLAND

A lift-bridge connects Stuart to

idyllic Hutchinson Island. Older local residents can remember when the island could be reached only by boat, and they still recall the island's role in the rum-running trade of the Prohibition Era.

(Local boat-owner William McCoy bought whisky in the Bahamas, and transhipped it to New York. Unlike other bootleggers, he didn't water down his liquor, which thus became known as "the real McCoy" - or so the legend has it.)

Development of Hutchinson Island is being carefully controlled and monitored by local authorities, to ensure that it retains its "old Florida" character while providing facilities for the inevitably expanding number of visitors. One restriction, for instance, is that buildings may be no more than four storeys high.

That might have stumped some entrepreneurs, but Radnor Corp. (a subsidiary of Sun Oil Co.) succeeded in creating a pleasing, 200-acre resort, Indian River Plantation, at the southern end of the island. Its centerpiece is a 200-room low-rise hotel, which opened just a year ago and already has won the American Automobile Association's four-diamond award.

The resort combines the hotel with a condominium complex - an unusual pairing elsewhere, although not in Florida. The site's golf course, 13 tennis courts, five restaurants and marina are accessible to hotel guests and condominium occupants alike.

### SPANISH TREASURE

The Indian River Plantation's 500-metre-long Atlantic beach is part of Hutchinson Island's Treasure Coast, so named because of the booty that has been washed ashore over the years, from sunken Spanish galleons on the sea bottom some 550 metres offshore.

As recently as last August, an estimated \$240 million in gold and artifacts was discovered a few hundred metres out to sea. Every now and then, a lucky beachcomber finds a gold doubloon washed up onto the Treasure Coast beach.

On the other side of Florida, some 200 kilometres south of Tampa, the tides of the Gulf of Mexico constantly deposit seashells on the beaches of Sanibel and Captiva islands - less valuable than Spanish gold, perhaps, but far more numerous (more than 400 species of shells can be found there).

As on Hutchinson Island on the Atlantic side, the atmosphere at Sanibel and Captiva is gentle and the development restrained. A recently opened condominium, Pointe Santo de Sanibel, looks out over the Gulf waters from a height of no more than four stories, and a respectful distance back from the beach and its myriad of shells.

### NATURE RESERVE

Visitors to these Gulf islands should drive through the 5,000-acre "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel, to see several unusual species of birds; admission is free. (Indian River Planta-

tion on the Atlantic side is also a stopping-off place for large numbers of migrating birds that follow either salt water or river routes).

Another recommendation: In Fort Myers on the Florida mainland across from the islands, visit the winter home of inventor Thomas Edison (1847-1931), set in a beautiful 14-acre garden, where his early laboratory may be visited; the home is open daily except Sunday morning.

The Hutchinson Island counterpart of the Edison home is the museum dedicated to Sterling

Elliott (1852-1922), displaying some of the hundreds of inventions that he patented such as the quadricycle, the addressing machine and the first knot-tying machine; the museum is open every afternoon.

Indian River Plantation is at 555 N.E. Ocean Blvd., Hutchinson Island, Stuart, FL, 34996, telephone 800-327-4873 or 305-225-3700.

For further information on Sanibel and Captiva, contact Lee County Tourism Development Council, P.O. Box 2445, Fort Myers, FL, 33902, telephone 813-335-2831.

## Texas begins 800 telephone number for Canada

(NC)—Canadians planning a visit to Texas may now receive the state's free promotional travel package by calling Texas' new toll-free number for Canada—1-800-MEET-TEX (633-8839).

"Our toll-free telephone number will appear in all promotional advertising that the Tourism Division places with Canadian publications," said J. William Lauderback, executive director for the Texas Department of Commerce. "We are confident that this new service will help persuade more Canadian vacationers and business travelers to choose Texas as their destination."

Persons calling 1-800-MEET-TEX will be asked for their name and address for use in shipping promotional materials on Texas. Operators will not offer travel counselling. Telephone travel counselling is available by calling (512)463-8971, which carries regular long-distance charges.

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