



Photos supplied by Melissa Wolcott and Palm Island Resort

Old Florida Revisited

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by Melissa Wolcott and Al Martino

You've seen the old sepia photos of an unspoiled Florida. Clapboard homes set among the dunes along the gulf — no bright lights, no neon signs, just natural landscape and peace. Gone forever you say? Not so, for we have discovered a lovely bit of life as it once was, only a 1 1/2 hour drive from Tampa, on a portion of pristine beach called Palm Island, in Cape Haze. A short ferry boat ride (and I DO mean short - 6 minutes) takes you to a wonderful resort for a true relaxing get away.



Lights at night are kept to a minimum to protect the sea turtles who nest in the dunes and make their way back to the gulf. The limited lighting also adds the general ambiance of the island. It is so refreshing to walk along the

beach at night guided only by moonlight (not to mention romantic) listening to the sounds of little creatures of the night and rolling surf rather than the whooshing of cars and noise spilling out of beach bars. When we say this is a true getaway, we mean it in the purest sense of the word, as it is not a place for a wild time, so read no further if that's what you're looking for. This is where you go to experience what the Florida you thought was lost, still has to offer — a lovely white soft sandy beach, fishing and long walks in a natural setting.

The island itself is approximately 7 miles long and 700 yards wide at the largest part. When you first arrive on the island, you park your car, and from then on, you either walk everywhere or rent a golf cart for the remainder of your stay, as there are no cars allowed on the narrow island roads. We opted for the golf cart (mostly due to laziness) and enjoyed tooling around everywhere in it.

Palm Island Resort consists of 15 private homes, and 154 villas — mostly 2 stories.



This is not to imply you will stay in an old fishing shack. On the contrary, the accommodations are modern and very comfortable, as the oldest structures in the resort are less than 20 years old.

We stayed on the second floor of a 2-story villa in a one-BR/one bath unit overlooking the pool and the gulf. The view was through a

whole wall of sliding glass doors. Our unit was move-in ready, with a fully outfitted kitchen, several TVs and a VCR. The units are privately owned and rented through the resort, so each unit will vary slightly by owner. Ours was heavily stocked with books and games, so one could never be bored.

According to Administrative Assistant, Stephanie Ryder, the resort has different floor plans for different size accommodations: One & two BR Beach Villas (1 & 2 bath, 800 and 1100 sq. ft.), 2 BR Island Villas (2 bath, 1750 sq. ft.), 3 BR Island Villas w/loft (3 bath, 1750 sq. ft.) and 3 BR Land's End Cottages w/den (3 bath, 2000 sq. ft.) All are roomy and well appointed. When the resort was built, the ecology was always on the mind of the builders, and only trees and brush that



were planted where the homes would stand were removed, so the natural look is preserved.

In addition, the resort has tennis courts





(11!), 4 pools, and a playground for children. The Rum Bay Restaurant has a full menu and is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. A little shop adjacent to the restaurant has sundries and some groceries for the convenience of guests. Water sports equipment and bicycles are available for rental as well. Sea Turtle Awareness

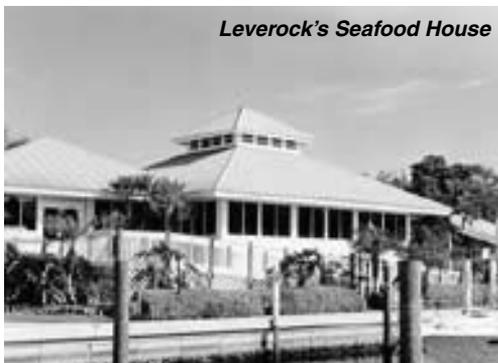


Rum Bay Restaurant

Walks are lead by the island's naturalist.

If you go for total relaxation (which would include NO COOKING) not to worry — in addition to the tasty fare at Rum Bay Restaurant, Leverock's newest Seafood House is just a brief ferry ride away — no car needed. We sampled some of Leverock's specialties and were very pleased with everything we ordered, especially the Seafood Harvest, and Crab Wontons.

Palm Island is a



Leverock's Seafood House

wonderful environment for children, for in addition to the great pools and beach, there are activities Monday through Saturday for them (and their moms and dads) if they choose to participate in "Kid's Club" from February to August. Activities such as basketball, fishing, scavenger hunt, bingo, midway games, face painting, treasure hunt, bead making, shell crafting, fossil hunt and many more. At certain times Red Beard the Pirate comes to tell tales, sing songs in a casual concert.

For an off island adventure, mosey over to Placido (just off the island) where you will find Grande Tours. Here guests can take boat tours with different themes (Eco-Tours, Dolphin sightings, Pirate Treasure Hunt, Sea Life Excursions, etc.) Rentals of kayaks and kayak tours are also available.

Bird watching is supposed to be as good as it gets at Palm Island. Out of the 123 species of birds in the Southeastern US, 88 species can be seen on the island.

Richard Dunham, Jr., Director of Sales and Marketing for the resort let us know that for the fisherman, back bay and flats fishing for snook, snapper and redfish are excellent

at Palm Island. Tarpon fishing excursions can be arranged through the resort. A charter boat picks you right up at the dock (again, no car needed!)

The golfers are saying "but what about me?" No problem. The resort has golf privileges at four challenging area courses close by on the mainland.

The resort can also be reached by boat, as there are 60 slips to accommodate boats up to a 10 1/2 ft. beam in their marina.

I decided I had to find a shark's tooth on a beach walk before I left this unspoiled paradise. I figured I would just stumble over tons of them, since the section of the



beach is called "Shark's Tooth." After 2 hours and a strained neck, still no shark's tooth — some pretty shells, but alas no shark's tooth. At dinner that evening a fellow guest produced a shark's tooth which she found within "seconds" of her beach stroll. Next trip.

Summer/Fall Resort Rates (4/20-12/15) are daily or weekly and range from \$200-\$360 (daily) and \$1500-\$2725 (weekly) depending on unit size. Winter rates run from 2/15-3/09, and peak season is 3/10-4/19. Special vacation packages are also available. Palm Island resort: 7092 Placida Rd., Cape Haze, FL 33946. For more information, call 800-824-5412 or visit www.palmisland.com.

