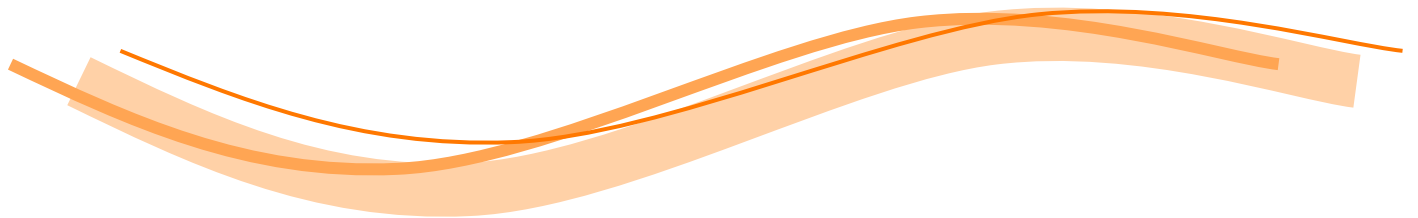




**BRADENTON,
ANNA MARIA ISLAND
& LONGBOAT KEY**





BRADENTON

Explore the Bradenton Area of Florida's west coast and discover the calm natural world of Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key. The white sand beaches, parks, restaurants and resorts all bask in warm sunshine - set against the lush Florida landscape and the shimmering Gulf of Mexico. But while you may come for the beach, don't miss out on the area's many unique cultural attractions and activities.

Explore **quaint towns** with authentic "old Florida" charm. You can meet local artists in the vibrant community of Bradenton's the Village of the Arts – with over thirty-five artists living and working together, the Village is Florida's largest art community. Monthly artwalks fill the streets with art lovers looking for affordable fine art, jewelry, ceramics, designer wear and collectibles of all kinds. You'll also find many special events, an inviting bookstore and gourmet cafes and restaurants.

In fact, the Bradenton Area is home to a wealth of independent **restaurants**, all boasting fresh foods and unique dining experiences. You can meet the local farmers and growers as well. A visit to Dakin Dairy Farm is not only fun; it's good for you and a great place to take the family. You'll learn about the health benefits of milk and watch the cows in action. Kids can ride the cow train or hay ride and pet fuzzy farm animals. Mixon Fruit Farms is famous for its plump, juicy citrus, its gift shop and Groveside Café. Visitors can take a ride on the Orange Blossom Express through the groves past the Children's Magical Maze and Wildlife Rescue, where the family will delight in an interactive show with rescued Florida animals, reptiles and birds. And don't miss the homemade orange swirl ice cream!

The Bradenton Area also has two world-class **wineries**: Bunker Hill Winery is a "GREEN" Environmentally Responsible Winery and offers complimentary tours and tastings of their handcrafted wines. They grow their own Muscadine grapes, rent out a peaceful cottage on property and even have a resident ghost! Rosa Fiorelli Winery has a 10-acre Muscadine vineyard and their wines have won more than 100 awards. Tours include your choice of an authentic Italian lunch and wine in a complimentary souvenir glass to take home. They also offer complimentary tastings.

If you love **animals** the Bradenton area has opportunities to meet all kinds of creatures in all kinds of ways! You are quite likely to simply come across dolphins playing off shore. The Bear Show at Bearadise Ranch was established in 1926 to educate and generate public awareness for habitat preservation and conservation for all bear species. These talented creatures are featured in movies, commercials

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	<p>and festivals. However, when the bears aren't working they live at beautiful Bearadise Ranch, a natural habitat facility. And you can witness the beauty and grace of The Original Lipizzan Stallions of Austria at Herrmann's Lipizzan Stallion Farm. Colonel Hermann, whose ancestors aided in the rescue of these animals, maintains a 200-acre ranch in the Bradenton Area.</p> <p>A unique activity in the Bradenton area is "horse surfing" along Palma Sola Causeway. BeachHorse is the only horseback riding stable in Florida that offers horseback riding on the beach and swimming with horses. The adventure begins with a sunset horseback ride along the beach of the Palma Sola Bay. From there, the horses will glide into the salt water and swim. Thrill-seekers also have the opportunity to try "horse skiing" and "horse surfing". Believe it not, it's fun for the whole family... riders can be as young as 3 years old.</p> <p>Bradenton's South Florida Museum is home to the oldest manatee living "happily" in captivity - Snooty, who turned 64 years old in July! In addition to Snooty, the museum is the largest natural and cultural history museum on Florida's Gulf Coast. The museum interprets the region from the Pleistocene to the present. Highlights include fossil evidence of Florida's earliest mammals and marine species. Also check out the Bishop Planetarium.</p> <p>Every March for more than 40 years, a very popular rite of spring has taken place on Florida's Gulf Coast - the Pittsburgh Pirates arrive in Bradenton to play their spring training games. And the Bradenton Area is well-known for hosting numerous regional and national sporting events year round, including world-class rowing and soccer.</p> <p>But perhaps the most unique "sport" is to be found at "People at Play, the Heavy Equipment Experience" - a new concept in adventure travel. If you have always had a hankering to put on a hard hat and harness the power of an enormous CAT excavator, bulldozer or skid steer loader – here is your chance. Anyone 18 years and older can be a heavy equipment operator for a day and tackle an obstacle course on its 21-acre construction site (aka construction playground).</p> <p>Website: www.annamariaisland-longboatkey.com</p> <p>Check out the new Pinterest board at http://pinterest.com/visitbradenton</p>
Location	On Florida's southwest coast in Manatee County on the Gulf of Mexico between Tampa and Sarasota, Florida's Gulf Islands are

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	comprised of two islands, Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key, accessible by free bridges from the mainland areas of Bradenton and Lakewood Ranch
Geography	Bradenton has a total area of 37.4 km ² of which, 31.4 km ² is land and 6.0 km ² of it (16%) is water. Bradenton is located on US 41 between Tampa and Sarasota. The area is surrounded by waterways, both fresh and saltwater. Along the Gulf of Mexico and into Tampa Bay are over 30 kms of Florida beaches - many which are shaded by Australian pines. Bordered on the north by the Manatee River, Bradenton is located on the mainland and is separated from the outer barrier islands of Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key by the Intracoastal Waterway.
Name	The original town of Bradentown was incorporated on May 19, 1903 and the city took the name of Dr. Joseph Braden , whose nearby fort-like house was a refuge for early settlers during Seminole Indian attacks. Manatee County gets its name from the gentle creature in the local waters.
Population	With 319,000 residents, Manatee County is comprised of 741 square miles of which 240 kms are waterfront. The beaches of Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key represent 25 kms of powder white sands along the Gulf of Mexico.
Language	English
Currency	US Dollar – which is currently close to parity with the Canadian Dollar, so there's great value in the States right now for Canadians!
Tipping	The custom of tipping is a common practice in the US: 15% to 20% for waiters; 10% to 15% for taxi drivers; \$1 per bag for bellmen. Occasionally gratuities are automatically added to restaurant checks, but not usually.
Government	The city is incorporated and the largest city in Manatee County. It is governed by a City Council with five members. It also has a mayor and vice mayor.
Documentation	Passports are required for Canadian visitors.
Time zone	Eastern Standard Time, same as Toronto and Montreal
Health	Excellent services available but ensure that you have travellers' health insurance as health costs in the US can be very high.
Safety tips	This is a relatively safe destination for the tourist. One should use the same precautions as when traveling anywhere - try not to travel alone and avoid deserted areas at night.

CLIMATE	
General climate	This destination has a warm and humid subtropical climate, and there are two major seasons each year. One of those seasons is hot and rainy, lasting from April until October (roughly coinciding with the

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	<p>Atlantic hurricane season). The other is a cooler season (November through March) that brings more moderate temperatures and less frequent rainfall.</p> <p>October - May Average Daily Temperatures Days - 22 C to 27 C Nights - 16 C to 20 C</p> <p>June - September Average Daily Temperatures Days - Upper 27 C to 32 C Nights - 20 C to 25 C</p>
Today's weather	Bradenton is 31C and sunny on 28 th July 2012
Best time to visit	This is very much a year-round destination, but it has a particular attraction for Canadians in Winter as an escape from the cold northern snows and freezing temperatures.

GETTING AROUND	
Getting There	<p>Fly to Florida with Air Canada. Air Canada offers the only daily non-stop service between Toronto and Tampa, with convenient connecting service from Montreal. And Air Canada resumes direct Montreal to Tampa service on December 14, 2012 with service three times per week. Effective October 28th, Air Canada will resume its seasonal service from Toronto to Sarasota Bradenton International Airport, with two flights weekly on Saturday and Sunday.</p> <p>Sarasota Bradenton International Airport is located at the southern edge of the county in greater Bradenton, and is serviced by most major airline carriers and rental car companies. Flight time from Montreal or Toronto to southern Florida is around 3.5 hours.</p> <p>Toronto: there are direct flights to the area from Pearson to Fort Myers, Orlando, Sarasota and Tampa.</p> <p>Montreal: there are direct flights to the area from Trudeau to Fort Myers, Orlando and Tampa.</p> <p>Bradenton is connected to St. Petersburg, Florida by the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. The Sunshine Skyway is a 8.9 km cross-bay bridge that rises 76 m above the bay at its highest point. Remnants of the old Skyway bridge have been converted into a fishing pier extending into Tampa Bay from both sides of the bay.</p>
Cities	The area is made up of 9 distinct communities; Anna Maria, Bradenton, Bradenton Beach, Ellenton, Holmes Beach, Lakewood Ranch, Longboat Key, Palmetto and Parrish.

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The Communities of Manatee County

Anna Maria

The city of Anna Maria is a finger-like stretch of homes, beaches, dunes and sea oats at the mouth of Tampa Bay. It lies between the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay. A mere 1.5 square miles in size, Anna Maria has 1,831 year-round residents in a quaint, beachfront community. Beach access is available both on the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay. Two rustic, “Old Florida” fishing piers, Anna Maria City Pier, over a century old, and Rod n’ Reel Pier, are popular with visitors and anglers.

Bradenton

Bradenton is the largest city in the Greater Bradenton Area with a population of approximately 54,000. It is also the seat of the government for Manatee County. A center for finance, business, healthcare and culture, Bradenton has a business friendly environment. It is a city, yet it has a small town charm and appeal. In addition to an Enterprise Zone to promote business development, efforts to renovate the city’s central core area including “Old Main Street” and to develop city owned property along the Manatee River continue.

Bradenton Beach

Bradenton Beach is a small beach community at the southern tip of Anna Maria Island, with 1,577 year-round residents. A vacation destination, Bradenton Beach boasts a variety of accommodations from no-frill to luxury inns. Thirty-five percent of the town’s property is set aside for public recreation. At the southern tip of the town are two large public beaches. The historic and renovated Bridge Street is dotted with restaurants and nightlife. On Leffis Key, a restored salt-water marsh, visitors can use nature trails, boardwalks, and view Sarasota Bay from scenic overlooks.

Ellenton

Ellenton, located in the north central part of Manatee County, is best known for its two major attractions, the Gamble Plantation State Historical Site and the Premium Outlet Mall. Both can be found on U.S. 301. Ellenton is located along the Manatee River and just minutes away from Bradenton or Sarasota. Over a fifth of the area within Ellenton’s designated boundaries is water.

Holmes Beach

Holmes Beach is the largest of three municipalities on the barrier island

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	<p>of Anna Maria and is bordered by Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Primarily a residential community with a year round population of almost 5,119, Holmes Beach is also a popular vacation destination with numerous motels and cottages. Wide accessible beaches complement the Manatee County Public Beach and year-round events and festivals bring a strong sense of pride to the community.</p> <p>Lakewood Ranch Lakewood Ranch is a 7,000-acre master-planned community featuring seven villages that offer a variety of lifestyles from townhouses to estate living. Dramatic landscapes include forest and wetland preserves and hundreds of species of native wildlife. Recreational facilities include Lakewood Ranch Country Club and Athletic Center, the Sarasota Cricket Club, nine world-class Polo fields and a variety of community parks, lakes, and preserves. Lakewood Ranch is home to retail businesses, industrial firms and professional practices, plus a wide choice of high-quality sites and buildings. The community features shopping, dining, excellent schools and healthcare facilities.</p> <p>Longboat Key Located south of Anna Maria Island, across the Longboat Pass, Longboat Key is primarily a luxury resort and retirement community. The Key is shared by two counties...Manatee in the north and Sarasota in the South. Longboat Key's 7,000 year-round residents enjoy 20 kms of Gulf-front beaches. A barrier island lying between Sarasota Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, Longboat Key features a nationally known tennis resort, luxury resorts, fine dining, exclusive shops, and two private golf courses.</p> <p>Palmetto Palmetto is the second largest city in the Greater Bradenton Area with a population of 14,407. Located north of Bradenton across the Manatee River, it is the home of the area's agricultural industry, primarily the growing and shipping of tomatoes. An Enterprise Zone in Palmetto offers tax benefits to new and expanding businesses. Like Bradenton, Palmetto is placing renewed emphasis on public spaces along the Manatee River and is renovating its "Old Town," historic and commercial district. Palmetto has one of the largest community redevelopment districts in the state, and has the historic grace of old Florida waterfront, a sense of community, and a sense of purpose.</p>
Distances	<p>Approximate mileage from Bradenton: Sarasota Bradenton Intl (SRQ) 16 kms St Pete / Clearwater Intl (PIE) 64 kms Tampa International (TPA) 72 kms</p>

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	Southwest Florida Intl (RSW) 160 kms Orlando International (MCO) 192 kms Orlando Sanford Intl (SFB) 224 kms
Trains	Amtrak charter buses run through downtown Bradenton outside the courthouse to Tampa Union Station and Venice.
Boats	Enjoy a sunset cruise on the Kathleen D Catamaran . Kathleen D Charters are the perfect way to explore Floridas Sun Coast offering public and private charter sailings. They operate Sailing Catamarans for up to 6 passengers - perfect for families and intimate group sailing - and they also operate a 49 Passenger Classic Power Launch. Enjoy a sightseeing tour or a sunset dinner cruise.
Bikes	Between Beach Bums' Green Transport Rentals and the Island Trolley System, you can enjoy your Anna Maria experience without ever using a car! Anna Maria Island is very bike friendly and it is often said that the best way to travel Anna Maria is by pedal power. Many of the local roads have bike paths and local shops and restaurants have racks in front to store bikes. Rent a bike at Beach Bums and it comes with a lock, basket, helmet and a light.
Car Rental	All major car rental companies are available in the region and probably the best way of renting a car here is to do so on arrival at your gateway airport. The good news is that car rental in Florida is among the cheapest available anywhere in the US. Sarasota Bradenton International also offers its travellers eight on-site car rental companies which have counters conveniently located in the baggage claim wing. Alamo, Avis, Budget, Dollar Rent a Car, Enterprise, Hertz, National, Thrifty are all there.
Buses	Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) buses serve Bradenton, with transfers to Sarasota and Palmetto. From the Anna Maria Pier on the north to Coquina Beach on the south, the Manatee Trolley provides free transportation for shopping, dining, beachcombing, sightseeing and more. Trolleys offer both air-conditioned as well as open-air seating. Connects with Manatee County Area Transit's 11 routes serving Manatee County. Trolleys offer wheelchair lifts and bike racks. Service runs every 20 minutes daily; 6 a.m. - 10:30 p.m. www.mymanatee.org
Passes	Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key's " Your Summer, Your Way " program offers irresistible options for a one-of-a-kind, budget-friendly vacation experience in the summer months. Visit www.AMILBK.com/Deals for all offers and complete details.
ACCOMMODATION TYPES	Florida's Gulf Islands offer 6,000 rooms ranging from small to mid-sized accommodation options including full-service hotels, boutique inns, beachside cottages, and vacation homes.

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LIFESTYLES	
<p>Kids</p>	<p>Anna Maria Island, Longboat Key, Lakewood Ranch and Bradenton are most definitely family friendly. Spend a fun day on the water – go kayaking through mangrove tunnels or drop a line with the kids and try your luck catching dinner. Take the family out to the ballgame – catch a spring training game or minor league baseball game at McKechnie Field. Meet Snooty the manatee, see a planetarium show and learn about local history at the South Florida Museum. Or head straight to the beach for sandcastles, Frisbee, skim boarding, football in the surf and a picnic at the water's edge complete with ice cream for dessert.</p> <p>Visit the Bears! You can catch the Bear Show at Bearadise Ranch. Established in 1926 to educate and generate public awareness for habitat preservation and conservation for all bear species. These talented creatures are featured in movies, commercials and festivals. However, when the bears aren't working they live at beautiful Bearadise Ranch, a natural habitat facility the bears call home. Here they swim, climb trees, and enjoy life in Florida while keeping in tune with nature. Families also have the opportunity to witness the beauty and grace of The Original Lipizzan Stallions of Austria at Herrmann's Lipizzan Stallion Farm. Founded in the 16th century for the exclusive use of the Hapsburg Royal family of Austria, the Royal Lipizzans are the rarest, most aristocratic breed of horses in the world. Colonel Hermann, whose ancestors aided in the rescue of these animals, maintains a 200-acre ranch in the Bradenton Area. The ranch offers winter shows and training sessions.</p>
<p>Teens</p>	<p>Here are some suggestions for those with older kids:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take a Water Ride Rent a pontoon boat and cruise from Florida Water Sports in Cortez (grab free snorkel gear before you go). Or, rent a kayak from Anna Maria Island's Beach Bums. 2. Go Wild With its canopy walkway and tower (74 feet up in the air!), nature trails, kayaks, bike rentals and airboats, Myakka River State Park provides endless adventures for outdoorsy families. "I Spy" gets interesting here with alligators, roseate spoonbills and vultures as objects. 3. Get Sporty Catch the Pittsburgh Pirates in training (March); skate at Ellenton Ice and Sports Complex (where Olympians Mark Ladwig and Amanda Evora train); or register the whole crew for a sports clinic at IMG Academies. 4. Museum Mania The South Florida Museum in Bradenton displays a full-scale cast of the largest mastodon found in North America; an all-digital, full-dome

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	<p>planetarium; and the Parker Manatee Aquarium, home to 64-year-old Snooty the manatee.</p> <p>5. Scenic Segue Zip along the beach and Intracoastal with Zegway by the Bay in Holmes Beach; glimpse Bradenton’s Main Street and riverfront with Manatee Segway Tours.</p> <p>6. Putt for Fun Play through caves, past waterfalls and next to a shipwreck on the miniature golf course at Smugglers Cove Adventure Golf in Bradenton.</p>
<p>Romance</p>	<p>Two suggestions to smooch with your loved one...</p> <p>Enjoy the world famous sunsets from any of the many vantage points along the keys and relish a sundowner along the way. At the north end of Anna Maria Island in the city of Anna Maria is the Sandbar (941-778-0444), a popular restaurant with an enviable plot of real estate on the Gulf. Part of the outdoor dining area is right in the sand, so you can watch the sunset while literally eating on the beach. Live music and delicious cocktails tie up this experience. It's the perfect way to end a day in paradise...</p> <p>Indulge in a spa...of which there are many in this destination – here are some details:</p> <p>Acqua Aveda Salon and Spa, 5311 Gulf Dr. Holmes Beach, FL 34217 941-778-5400</p> <p>Blue Door Spa & Salon, 5234 S.R. 64 E. Bradenton, FL 34208 941-747-0111</p> <p>Gallen Massage & Yoga, 414 26th St. Bradenton, FL 34205 941-713-1637</p> <p>Lemon Blossom Salon Spa, 8318 Market St. Lakewood Ranch, FL 34202 941-907-2247</p> <p>Longboat Body Retreat, 6824 Gulf of Mexico Dr. Longboat Key, FL 34228 941-383-9692</p> <p>SpaRenity, 810 - 53rd Ave. W. Bradenton, FL 34207 941-727-7711 Website</p>
<p>Honeymoons & Weddings</p>	<p>Beach Brides</p> <p>For obvious reasons, Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key are both popular locales for romantic wedding ceremonies. Couples choose the colorful Gulf sunsets and balmy breezes as the unforgettable backdrop to their most special of days. Beyond the beach, beautiful courtyards lined with striking bougainvillea and other tropical blooming vegetation, river vistas, and gulf waterfront landings all provide lovely alternatives for a walk down the isle. Destination weddings can be as simple as an intimate wedding for two or a larger gathering with more fanfare. Many island restaurants, boutique resorts and charming inns can work with local vendors to help make that special day even more memorable. Beachside cottages and delightful inns make perfect weddingmoon</p>

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	<p>packages for couples wanting to tie the knot and honeymoon all in one location. And each year the Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce hosts their annual Wedding Festival allowing brides-to-be an up-close and personal island destination wedding experience.</p>
<p>Seniors</p>	<p>Agri-Tourism When older visitors need a break from the sun and sand, there are several agri-tourism treasures to explore, offering entertainment and education for curious minds of all ages. All you need to is head inland. Here are just a few of the many great places to start: The Bradenton Area boasts not one, but two world-class wineries: Bunker Hill Winery is a "GREEN" Environmentally Responsible Winery and offers complimentary tours and tastings of their handcrafted wines. They grow their own Muscadine grapes, rent out a peaceful cottage on property and even have a resident ghost! Rosa Fiorelli Winery has a 10-acre Muscadine vineyard and their wines have won more than 100 awards. Tours include your choice of an authentic Italian lunch and wine in a complimentary souvenir glass to take home. They also offer complimentary tastings. Dakin Dairy Farms – A visit to Dakin Dairy Farm is not only fun; it's good for you! The farm is one of only three dairy farms left in the Bradenton Area. In addition to it being a thriving business, it's also a great place to take the family. There, you'll learn about the health benefits of milk and watch the cows in action. Kids can ride the cow train or hay ride and pet fuzzy farm animals. Mixon Fruit Farms have always been famous for its plump, juicy citrus, its gift shop and Groveside Café. But now, visitors can take a ride on the Orange Blossom Express through the groves past the Children's Magical Maze and Wildlife Rescue, where the family will delight in an interactive show with rescued Florida animals, reptiles and birds.</p>

<p>UNIQUES</p>	<p>As the holiday season approaches, People at Play: The Heavy Equipment Experience, the Southeast's first Heavy Equipment Playground, has added turkeys to its demolition experience with a fun new "TurkeyToss Package". Visitors climb into the cab of a CATERPILLAR 312 Steel Track Excavator to navigate a fun and challenging obstacle course. They then have three chances to toss a piñata-style brown, gold and orange Gobbler into one of three strategically placed hoops on the ground – using the excavator bucket, of course. If successful, participants win a gift certificate for a frozen turkey. Recently featured on the "TODAY Show", this new spin on "men at work" allows anyone 18 years and older to be heavy equipment operators for a day and tackle an obstacle course on its 21-acre construction site (aka construction playground). People at Play</p>
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	emphasizes safety first in their heavy equipment games, giving each guest their own hard hat as a keepsake, along with a commemorative photo. This one-of-a-kind experience costs \$425 (plus tax) per person. Another themed “Heavy Equipment Holiday Package” is available December 1-31 that includes a holiday gift bag full of construction goodies for \$475 (plus tax) per person.
Surprising	Over 2.5 million visitors enjoy the Bradenton Area each year; 50% of visitors are couples and 40% are families.
History	The first settlers drawn to enjoy this natural wonderland were the Timucuan Indians who inhabited the area as early as 1000 A.D. Legend has it that these settlers named the Manatee River for the gentle sea cows which can be found slowly swimming in area inlets. In 1530, Spanish explorers (including the infamous Hernando DeSoto) laid claim to the area, proclaiming it to be ruled under the Spanish Crown. After unsuccessful attempts at colonization, the Spaniards eventually abandoned the area and the Florida Gulf Coast was quiet once again and for several hundred years to follow. In 1892, George Emerson Bean became the first permanent resident, annexing an area which today comprises most of the city of Anna Maria. Curiously enough, one of the founding citizens was George Roser, inventor of the Fig Newton. The memorial chapel he built in honor of his mother in the early 1900s still stands and is an active church for locals. At the turn of the century, the atmosphere was uniquely scenic and very remote as the only way to reach the island was by boat. It wasn't until 1922 that Anna Maria was connected to the mainland. A wooden bridge extending from the fishing village of Cortez was constructed, the remnants of which can still be spotted today if you drop by to check out the sights in Cortez.
Books	Frommer's Florida 2012
1000 Places to See Before You Die	Baseball Spring Training in Florida is listed as a must-see and the Bradenton Area hosts the Pittsburgh Pirates each year.
Must Sees	The gorgeous Gulf Coast beaches define vacation experiences here – among the very best beaches anywhere in North America.

SPORTS ACTIVITIES	In addition to baseball Spring Training , the Bradenton Area is well-known for hosting numerous regional and national sporting events year round, including world-class rowing and soccer, with many focused on youth athletics. In 2011 alone, the destination hosted more than 100 events including the Sarasota Rowing Invitational in February, the Tour De Cure Cycling Meet and the Dragon Boat Regatta in March, and the Nations Baseball World Series in July, the Labor Day Nike Cup Soccer Tournament in September and the US Soccer Winter Showcase in December. The Bradenton Marauders (the Pittsburgh Pirates' minor league team) also enjoyed a winning season!
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	<p>Benderson Rowing Park is a world class rowing facility that has brought great attention to the destination from northern visitors, including several Ivy League college rowing teams from Harvard and Northeastern to the University of Notre Dame. These teams have all used the new facility for training within the past year.</p> <p>IMG Academies: For the young or just young at heart, novice or professional, weekend warrior or passionate year-round player, individual or full team, the opportunity to improve your game exists at IMG Academies. Set over 400 pristine acres in Bradenton, IMG Academies features programs throughout the year for the IMG Bollettieri Tennis Academy, IMG Leadbetter Golf Academy, IMG Performance Institute, IMG Baseball, IMG Basketball, IMG Soccer, IMG Madden Football and IMG Lacrosse Academies. Options include a weekend's worth of lessons, one week, multiple weeks, or an entire summer of athletic advancement with some of the industry's top coaches and trainers. http://www.imgacademies.com</p> <p>Lakewood Ranch Premier Sports Campus: The Premier Sports Campus, with Celebration-seeded grass on 22 fields, and more than 140 acres, can support a variety of field-related events. The field irrigation allows for efficient water drainage, which provides for better time-out weather management. The campus is available to host soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, rugby, archery, senior games, Ultimate Frisbee, Special Olympics, flag football, youth football, Frisbee golf and punt/pass/kick football on local, state, regional and national levels. In addition, future phases will accommodate Special Olympic softball and baseball organizations, tournaments, camps, and clinics and special events of all sizes. When you are not on the sidelines watching the sports events, step out to nearby beaches, world-class shopping, gourmet dining, a round of golf or simply sit by one of the beautiful lakes and read. http://www.premiersportscampus.com</p>
<p>Baseball: Spring Training</p>	<p>Every March for more than 40 years, a very popular rite of spring has taken place on Florida's Gulf Coast. As residents put away their winter sweaters and spring moves into high gear, the Pittsburgh Pirates arrive in Bradenton to play their spring training games. The local ballpark, McKechnie Field, was built in 1923 and renovated in the 1990's. It's now one of baseball's finest facilities. Named after Pittsburgh native, former Bradenton resident and Hall of Fame manager Bill McKechnie, it's a throwback to the bygone days of baseball, hot dogs and roasted peanuts. The city exudes a friendly Southern charm, and the surrounding islands</p>

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	<p>welcome baseball fans of all ages. The game schedule includes more than 30 games, about 15 of which are home games. Season highlights include home games against the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, Philadelphia Phillies and Tampa Bay Rays.</p> <p>The Pittsburgh Pirates play on 80,000 square feet of new Celebration Bermudagrass installed at the state-of-the-art McKechnie Field. Adding to the ideal, ball-playing Florida weather, several area accommodators are making it easier – and more affordable – for families and fans to enjoy a few days of baseball fun and Florida sun in March. Three hotels offer special rates and unique travel packages that include everything needed to enjoy a game at Pirate City, from popcorn and peanuts to Cracker Jack. Visitors can also head over to Anna Maria Island, just 30 minutes from McKechnie Field, and witness a historical Spring Training display, “The Boys of Winter--Spring Training and the Island Connection”, at the Anna Maria Island Historical Society. The display pays tribute to the Boston and Milwaukee Braves and Pittsburgh Pirates teams who have played in Bradenton over the years, their players and their families. Several notable players built homes on Anna Maria Island in what is known as the ‘Baseball Zone’ while others spearheaded the creation of the Island Youth Center and adjacent baseball fields, now known as the Anna Maria Island Community Center.</p>
<p>Golf</p>	<p>A great collection of more than 20 courses make Florida’s Gulf Islands a swinging place for golfers. Throw in nearby Sarasota and golfers find more than 45 golf courses to choose from — not too shabby for an island getaway. The beautifully landscaped courses showcase Florida’s natural beauty, from densely wooded acres of oaks and maples, to protected wetlands and sweeping views of the Manatee River. And avid golfers will enjoy their pick of public, semi-private, and private clubs all just a short drive from beachside accommodations. The River Club, a four-star Gold Digest pick, is a must-play for most golfers. The David Leadbetter Golf Academy and other golf schools are available for those looking to sharpen their skills.</p>
<p>Fishing</p>	<p>Whether you’re a seasoned old salt or you’ve never cast a line in your life, you’ll find that Anna Maria Island, Longboat Key, Lakewood Ranch and Bradenton cater to anglers of all ages and abilities. Charter boat captains can take you deep into the Gulf of Mexico, or you can reel in tonight’s dinner from atop a pier or bridge or straight off the beach. Or try your hand at kayak fishing in the grass flats and backwaters of Palma Sola Bay and haul in redfish, snook or speckled trout. And Lakewood Ranch offers small freshwater lakes for anglers staying in the eastern part of the area.</p>
<p>Horse riding</p>	<p>Anna Maria Island and the Bradenton area offer numerous outdoor adventures, such as paddling, eco tours, fishing and golf, but the</p>

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	<p>newest experiences are both wet and wild. Great World Adventures in Bradenton is one of the only outfitters in the world to offer horse surfing, a truly one of a kind equestrian experience. Riders enjoy a beautiful one mile bareback ride along the beach on Palma Sola Causeway, and then take the plunge by riding their horse as it swims in the water. Daring riders can stand up and "surf" through the water on their horse's back. Riders should choose bathing suits over cowboy boots, since most end up wet from head to toe.</p> <p>The adventure begins with a sunset horseback ride along the beach of the Palma Sola Bay. From there, the horses will glide into the salt water and swim. Thrill-seekers will have the opportunity to try "horse skiing" and "horse surfing". Believe it not, it's fun for the whole family... riders can be as young as 3 years old. The BeachHorses experience is the #1 rated local tourist attraction/tour on TripAdvisor.com.</p>
<p>Hiking</p>	<p>Wake up early while on vacation. Trust me, it's worth it. Because if you wake up early, you can walk the beach at sunrise and snag the best shells, do a free beach yoga class (call Sea-renity Spa for times, 941-779-6836), or chat with fishermen on one of Anna Maria's fishing piers.</p> <p>Renovations to Bradenton's Riverwalk are nearly complete. The \$6.2 million project will have a grand opening ceremony on October 18th 2012. The 3km strip along the Manatee River stretches from Manatee Memorial Hospital to a pedestrian access gateway near the Green Bridge. The completed project will have a fishing pier, amphitheatre and a skateboard park and will be perfect for strolling.</p>
<p>Cycling</p>	<p>At 11kms long, Anna Maria Island is just a little bit too long to browse on foot all day. Besides, it's more fun to rent a bicycle or scooter and traverse the length of the island on wheels. Try Island Scooter Rentals in Bradenton Beach (at the Silver Surf Resort, 941-726-3163), which offers such perks with their rentals as free training, free helmets and locks, and special group rates.</p>
<p>Diving</p>	<p>Blue Water Explorers Dive Charters are the largest dive charter operator in the area and offer daily trips to the many (over 100!) offshore reefs, ledges and wrecks in the beautiful waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Roomy custom dive boats are all U.S.C.G. inspected and certified -- an important safety feature.</p> <p>Most dives are in 40-65 feet of water and 10-18 miles off shore, but specialty dives are usually in 80-100 feet depths and up to 25 miles out. Visibility varies, with an average of 30 feet. But, there are also days with 80+ feet of visibility! There is a huge variety of marine life to be seen and each site has "regulars" that live there in addition to fish that are just passing through.</p> <p>In addition to scuba and spear fishing charters, they offer snorkeling and shelling excursions. They're located right on the Intracoastal Waterway</p>

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	<p>and can get out to the Gulf in only 5 minutes. It's all about convenience. Park your car next to the Scuba Shack/dive shop, get your tanks and gear inside and walk down the ramp to get on the boat. No shuttle vans or gear hauling.</p> <p>They offer 2-tank, 3-tank and 4-tank scuba dive charters, including night dives. Nitrox fills, air fills and scuba equipment rentals are also available in the dive shop. "Bubble watchers" (non-diving friends and family who would like to come along for a boat ride) are welcome aboard.</p> <p>12507 Cortez Rd. W. Bradenton, FL 34215 http://www.bluewaterexplorers.com</p> <p>Also try: Aqua Pro Divers at 4328 101st St. W. Bradenton, FL 34210 Tel: 941-792-3493</p>
Sailing	<p>Sail into the sunset aboard a chartered catamaran. Let someone else do the tacking and jibing while you sit back and relax, cool drink in hand (soft drinks and bottled water are often included) and the horizon so close it's almost as if you can touch it. Take a two-hour excursion with Kathleen D. Charters.</p>
Watersports	<p>Parasailing Go on a parasailing adventure to see the water from a completely different point of view – a bird's-eye view, to be exact. Feel like a human kite as a boat pulls you (and a friend, if you'd rather share the adventure) through the sky 500 feet above the Gulf. Spot dolphins, turtles, rays and other sea life from your perch, and don't forget to appreciate how calm and relaxing the experience is – and the incredible views it gives you. Have some fun in the sky with Fun & Sun Parasail.</p> <p>Stand-Up Paddling Get a great workout – and have fun, too! – with the newest craze, stand-up paddling. This surfing-kayaking hybrid is a unique way to paddle where dolphins play and, if you're more confident, through a tunnel of mangroves. Learn with a local guide from Native Rentals, or get an overview of the sport and rent a paddleboard from Feeling Swell Surfbar and Cafe. Both are on Anna Maria Island.</p>

CULTURE	
Arts	<p>Village of the Arts: If you're an art lover, Bradenton is the place to visit! A national arts magazine has listed Bradenton as one of the nation's top 10 small cities for art. The June 2011 issue of "American Style," a lifestyle magazine that focuses on art, artists and galleries, ranked Bradenton as tenth in its nationwide poll of the public arts and cultural amenities in small cities.</p> <p>Located in the heart of Bradenton is the Village of the Arts. The Village of the Arts is a vibrant community of artists living and working together.</p>

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	<p>With over thirty-five artists, the Village is Florida’s largest art community. Monthly artwalks fill the streets with art lovers looking for affordable fine art, jewelry, ceramics, designer wear and collectibles of all kinds. They’ll also find an inviting bookstore, gourmet cafes and restaurants and many special events.</p> <p>The Manatee Players, who current play at Bradenton's Riverfront Theatre, have a three-year record of first-place wins within the Florida Theatre Conference and the Southeastern Theatre Conference competitions. In addition, the theatre currently holds the first place title from the American Association of Community Theatre competition.</p>
<p>Music</p>	<p>Enjoy a concert with Anna Maria Island Concert Chorus & Orchestra (AMICO). Known informally as "the gem of the Island" AMICCO is the centrepiece of the Bay Area's extraordinary cultural life. Against a background of laid back old Florida, Anna Maria has produced an accomplished Chorus and Orchestra, which year after year thrills and amazes audiences. AMICCO is made up of professional and volunteer musicians (many of them retired professionals) who love to make music together. Its repertoire is chosen from the beloved Classics, Opera and signature American music.</p> <p>Anna Maria Island Community Chorus and Orchestra P.O. Box 1213 Holmes Beach, FL 34218 Tel: 941-778-1716 Presents four classical music concerts from November to March each winter. Visit their website for dates, times, concert location and program listings. Tickets are just \$15. https://www.amicco.org</p> <p>Manatee Jazz Fest Join the South Florida Museum, in affiliation with the Smithsonian Institution’s Jazz Appreciation Month, for the Manatee Jazz Fest, celebrating jazz music, culture and history. Events are held at the South Florida Museum, ArtCenter Manatee, Manatee Players, Village of the Arts, Manatee Village Historical Park, Palmetto Historical Park, Palmetto Art Center and others. For more information, visit www.manateejazzfest.com .</p>
<p>Films</p>	<p>Sarasota Film Festival: April 5 - 14, 2013. Explore the brightest new stars of independent film. They have 11 days of film screenings, premieres, conversations and parties with film makers. http://www.sarasotafilmfestival.com</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>Bradenton’s South Florida Museum is home to the oldest manatee living “happily” in captivity. Snooty, who turns 64 years old in July 2012, is always a fan- favorite!</p> <p>In addition to Snooty, the museum is the largest natural and cultural history museum on Florida’s Gulf Coast. The museum interprets the region from the Pleistocene to the present. Highlights include fossil evidence of Florida’s earliest mammals and marine species and the Montague Tallant collection of prehistoric and early post-contact</p>

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	<p>archeological artifacts. Also at the museum is the Bishop Planetarium. The Planetarium is a multipurpose, all-digital domed theatre, boasting one of the most advanced projection systems in the world. The theatre is capable of accommodating a wide range of programs, from lectures to film series to live performances. http://www.southfloridamuseum.org</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Spring brings glorious weather to Anna Maria Island, Bradenton and Longboat Key, and with the warmth and sunshine come numerous fun festivals and events. The destination's springtime schedule includes a slate of popular monthly favorites, including the Village of the Arts' Artwalk, the Bridge Street Market, Get Down Downtown, Mixon's Concerts in the Grove and Yoga on the Beach. The calendar is filled with major annual events as well, including the De Soto Heritage Festival, Visions of the Future Film Series, Gulf Coast Rhythm & Ribfest, Manatee Jazz Fest, Arts Fashion Show & Brunch, Geckofest Preview Party and the Real Florida Festival. Catering to families, history buffs and music and food lovers, the events calendars for Anna Maria Island, Bradenton and Longboat Key appeal to people of all ages and all interests.</p> <p>MONTHLY EVENTS</p> <p>ArtWalk Enjoy time with fellow art lovers as you discover affordable fine art, jewelry, ceramics, small furniture, bookshops, clothing, collectibles, gourmet cafes and more in the Village of the Arts in Bradenton, Friday evenings and all day Saturdays. Food, drinks and entertainment. Visit www.villageofthearts.com for details.</p> <p>Bridge Street Market Held the first and third Saturdays of every month, the outdoor Bridge Street Market in Bradenton Beach lets visitors peruse produce, jewelry, local artwork, wood art, metal art, apparel, sunglasses, cut flowers, music, food and more. For more information, call (941) 518-4431.</p> <p>Get Down Downtown Join Bradenton's free street party the third Thursday evening of every month for live music, food, and arts and crafts along Old Main Street. Dance in the street to live music on two stages from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.</p> <p>Mixon's Concert in the Grove Enjoy live local entertainment the second and fourth Thursday evenings under the Garden Oasis Pavilion at Mixon Fruit Farms in Bradenton.</p>

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Food and beverages are available for purchase. Chairs are available, or bring your own. Parking is \$5. For more information, visit www.mixonevents.com .

Yoga on the Beach

Bring a beach towel and join fellow yogis for vinyasa in the sand every Saturday beginning at 8:30 a.m., weather permitting. Appropriate for beginners, this free class meets at the Pine Avenue Gulf-side public beach access in Anna Maria. Donations are encouraged. For more information, call (941) 794-6723.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Bradenton Blues Festival December 1, 2012

The Bradenton Blues Festival is an annual festival featuring a stellar team of top blues artists. Food, drink, art, and an array of vendors complement the live music to create an awesome experience. The inaugural festival kicks off on Saturday, December 1 2012 at the redeveloped Riverwalk overlooking the Manatee River. Here are some of the artists in this year's line-up:

Ruthie Foster
Kenny Neal
Dave "Biscuit" Miller
Johnny Sansone
Southern Hospitality
Homemade Jamz
Steve Arvey Horn Band
Ben Prestage

<http://www.bradentonbluesfestival.org>

De Soto Heritage Festival

Enjoy the annual series of events hosted by the Hernando de Soto Historical Society, celebrating the historical significance of Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto's landing near the mouth of the Manatee River in May 1539. De Soto, along with his 600 conquistadors, claimed possession of La Florida on behalf of the Spanish crown and then began exploring what is now the southeastern United States. The De Soto Heritage Festival, hosted by the organization's 225 volunteer conquistadors, begins with a three-day Seafood Fest held along Bradenton's downtown riverfront, featuring outstanding cuisine and multi-stage entertainment. Next is the annual Children's Parade, followed by the Easter Egg Hunt, the Bottle Boat Regatta and the Grand Parade. For more information, visit www.desotohq.com .

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'Visions of the Future' Film Series

The South Florida Museum's spring film series, "Visions of the Future," peeks into the future with classic films from some of the most visionary filmmakers of our time. The schedule includes presentations of "A Space Odyssey," "Forbidden Planet," "Metropolis," "Sleeper," "Fahrenheit 451," "Planet of the Apes," "THX 1138" and "Alien" in the state-of-the-science Bishop Planetarium Theater. For more information, visit www.southfloridamuseum.org .

Gulf Coast Rhythm & Ribfest

Join the best rib masters in the nation at the Gulf Coast Rhythm & Ribfest, held at the Manatee County Fairgrounds. Sample the best ribs from Florida, Alabama, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia – all carrying the titles of "Greatest Ribs in America," "Golden Ribs Award" and "Best Sauce in the Nation." Live entertainment has included The Charlie Daniels Band, as well as R&B and country bands. Tickets are \$5 in advance, and children 12 and under are free. Visit www.gulfcoastribfest.com for more information.

Arts Fashion Show & Brunch

Visitors have the rare opportunity to experience an arts fashion show in Bradenton's Village of the Arts. Enjoy a delicious brunch in the garden at Bits & Pieces Gallery and witness exciting spring fashions from Hearts Desire, plus accessories from several Village galleries on the catwalk. Bonnie Gray will entertain with live jazz music as part of Manatee Jazz Month, and there will be visual arts on display, plus a silent auction. Tickets are \$20. For more information, visit www.villageofthearts.com .

Geckofest Preview Party

Get your gecko on and view the colorful, six-foot fiberglass geckos that are crawling on buildings throughout Bradenton and Palmetto during the Geckofest Preview Party at Rossi Park. Then, bring your blanket or lawn chair and enjoy a free show by Reels at Rossi Park of one of the largest geckos around, Godzilla. Food and drinks are available. For more information, visit www.bradentongeckofest.org .

Real Florida Festival

The Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce, along with the Anna Maria Island Community Center, the Bridge Street Merchants, and the cities of Anna Maria, Bradenton Beach and Holmes Beach host the Real Florida Festival. Featuring live music, a kayak festival, karaoke, skateboarding competitions, beach yoga, a treasure hunt, arts and crafts, food and drinks and much more, the festival supports local efforts

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	<p>to keep the popular Anna Maria Island Trolley free for all visitors. Activities take place throughout Holmes Beach and Bradenton Beach. For more information, visit www.realfloridafestival.com .</p> <p>Orange Blossom Festival Mixon's in the Grove celebrates its annual Orange Blossom Festival in East Bradenton. Visitors can celebrate the peak of Florida's citrus season with this all-day event featuring games, gem mining, live entertainment and plenty of fun for the kids with rides, ponies, bounce houses, a rock climbing wall and trampoline. The festival also includes arts and crafts and great food. Free admission and parking. For more information, visit www.mixon.com/orangeblossomfestival .</p> <p>Other events happening in the spring include the Palmetto Heritage Day, Manatee Heritage Days, Gamble Plantation Spring Open House and Manatee Village Historical Park Open House.</p>
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ATTRACTIONS	
Beaches	<p>More than 40 kms of white sand beaches offer amenities such as barbecue pits, concession stands, lifeguards, and free parking. The area's award-winning beaches have recently been recognized by "Florida Travel + Life" and "Parents Magazine." "Florida Travel & Life" ranked Anna Maria Island as one of the best beach locations in Florida. And in 2011, "Parents Magazine" ranked Coquina Beach (another AMI beach) number seven in their "10 Best Family Beaches."</p> <p>With kms of sugary white sand, many visitors just want to relax in the sun. Australian Pines dot the beaches in several places providing shade and most stretches offer wide expanses of sand and plenty of public beach access, with the exception of Greer Island on Longboat Key, which is only accessible by boat. But all of Manatee County's beaches provide a stunning backdrop for the sunset and several beachfront restaurants host their own unique celebrations year-round.</p>
Wildlife	<p>Turtles No doubt about it, the life of a loggerhead turtle is fraught with danger. Between the imminent danger of the all too eager bird's beak, the jaws of a hungry fish, and the rough and tumble welcome of the gulf surf, baby sea turtles have the odds stacked against them. So the non-profit Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch figures the least they can do is see that the turtle nests are undisturbed. There are over 150 turtle nests on Anna Maria Island, each under the watchful protection of a dedicated team of volunteers. The Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch also hosts nesting morning beach tours and educational classes for kids. A trained team of volunteers also serves as a highly-specialized rescue team that can be called upon should anyone encounter an injured turtle or</p>

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	<p>exposed nest. If you're lucky, you might even catch an enormous loggerhead turtle lumbering across the sand at night to lay her eggs – loggerheads visit the island from May through November.</p>
<p>Parks</p>	<p>Myakka River State Park is a Florida State Park that is located 11 km east of I-75 in Sarasota in Sarasota County and southeastern Manatee County. A small portion (1,920 acres) of the park was the gift of the family of Bertha Palmer to the state, being a portion of her massive property holdings in Florida. The park is named after the Myakka River. During the early 1900s Bertha Palmer was the largest landholder in the region and one of the greatest developers and promoters of Florida. Practices she developed and established enabled the Florida farmers and ranchers who followed her to enter the national market with their farm products and cattle. Consisting of 37,000 acres (150 km²), this is one of the state's largest and oldest parks.</p> <p>The park is noted for its wildlife and some of the rare birds seen only in Florida, such as the Roseate Spoonbill, frequent the park. Other species that are less rare, but still seldom seen in backyards and urban parks also are residents of the park. Native flora flourishes in the park. There are many species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals to learn about and enjoy watching as well.</p> <p>Myakka River State Park has an excellent system of hiking trails. Walking trails crisscross the eastern side of the park. Horseback riding and biking is permitted on certain designated trails and roads in the park. This part of the park is dominated by expanses of very low vegetation, fields of palmetto, that make a transition to islands, or hammocks, of tall pine and oak trees.</p> <p>A good portion of the park is accessible by automobile. Myakka River State Park's main road leads visitors to a boardwalk out to the river and a lake that is excellent for bird watching.</p> <p>Another short walk from the main road reveals Myakka's Canopy Walkway, a novel suspension bridge and tower providing researchers and visitors with views of the forest canopy and a spectacular above-the-treetops view of the entire park. Picnic areas, canoeing, boat tours, and developed campsites are available.</p> <p>Native Rentals on Anna Maria Island offers stand up paddle boarding rentals and tours into Anna Maria Sound and Robinson Preserve. As they explore mangrove tunnels, tidal rivers and rookery islands, paddlers can expect an up close and personal look at the area's marine life and wildlife – from dolphins and manatees, to thousands of fish and birds.</p>
<p>Gardens</p>	<p>Palma Sola Botanical Park Palma Sola Botanical Park provides the community with a unique opportunity to enjoy educational programs, passive recreation and</p>

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	<p>public events in the midst of 10 acres of natural beauty. The Park is located in the Old Palma Sola section of northwest Bradenton. The site is an unusually warm microclimate and a protected parcel of land, it is notably frost-free. Because of these environmental conditions, the Park showcases collections of rare palms, fruits, and flowering trees. Other subtropical plants can be safely grown in our protective environment. The Park contains lush tranquil gardens and three lakes for enjoyment. http://www.palmasolabp.com</p>
<p>Farms</p>	<p>Florida's sweetest attraction since 1939, Mixon Fruit Farms is open year round as an entertaining and informative way for visitors to learn about Florida's citrus industry. Among the farm's many attractions are the Orange Blossom Express tram tour of the citrus groves; an interactive wildlife show featuring rescued Florida animals, reptiles and birds; a koi pond and butterfly garden; and a tour of the working juice processing plant and packing house. Lunch, breakfast and their signature Orange Swirl Ice Cream are served at the Groveside Café, while at the Groveside Market visitors can taste Florida wines or homemade fudge, and order fresh fruit to be shipped home. The Mixon family welcomes everyone back for their annual special events, including the Orange Blossom and Harvest Festivals, and Concerts in the Grove held in the outdoor pavilion.</p> <p>Known for its fresh vegetables, farm market and u-pick operations, Hunsader Farms opens in mid-September (through June) to sell their fresh produce and prepare for the annual Pumpkin Festival held in October. During the festival, visitors can pick fresh-from-the-farm Halloween pumpkins, enjoy live country music, shop more than 100 craft booths, hop on a hay ride or watch the corn and pumpkin cannons in action. The festival also caters to children, with a colossal corn maze; hay, train and pony rides; a petting zoo and barnyard playground.</p>
<p>Historical Sites</p>	<p>Historic properties in Bradenton include: Braden Castle Park Historic District, off of Manatee Avenue and 27th St East Bradenton Bank and Trust Company Building, 1925, 1023 Manatee Avenue, West, Iron Block Building, 1896, 530 12th Street West (Old Main Street) Manatee County Courthouse, 1913, 1115 Manatee Avenue, West Old Manatee County Courthouse, 1860, 1404 Manatee Avenue, East</p> <p>Gamble Plantation Historic State Park: This antebellum mansion was home to Major Robert Gamble and headquarters of an extensive sugar plantation. It is the only surviving plantation house in South Florida. Come see what life and living conditions were like in the mid 1800's.</p>
<p>Responsible Travel</p>	<p>Florida's first LEED Platinum and Net Zero Energy Retail Park On the quaint island of Anna Maria, history is being made with the</p>

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	<p>soon-to-be first platinum LEED and Zero Net Energy Commercial Park. The collection of historic relics turned retail will be completely powered by solar energy and geothermics.</p> <p>Recently recognized among the top ten in Florida by the Florida Green Building Coalition, with a focus on energy conservation, water management and storm strength, these “Platinum” rated structures (highest available from the FGBC) are set in “Sense of Place” native landscapes, making the “green” in green construction a visible, sustainable, reality.</p> <p>The mission is to “show people that a small island community can be a very modern place.” Completely restored to their original charm more than 12 retailers are open for business on Pine Avenue, which connects the beach to the 100-year-old Historic Anna Maria City Pier. Completion date is Spring 2012.</p>
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<p>OTHER ACTIVITIES</p>	
<p>Shopping</p>	<p>It’s hard to imagine such an abundance of wonderful shopping just a hop, skip, and a jump away from this secluded beach paradise. Ellenton, a nearby sleepy hamlet, is home to Ellenton Premium Outlets, with over 135 brand-name outlet stores. Fashion-conscious shoppers relish chalking up brand-name products at discount prices. Main Street at Lakewood Ranch, just a short jaunt away, offers more than 20 specialty boutiques filled with fashions, gifts and décor. For art aficionados and those who just like to stroll about town, the Village of the Arts is just the ticket. The area’s largest artist-in-residence community features nearly 40 homes and bungalows that have been refurbished into colorful art galleries and studios where artists live, work and sell their creations.</p> <p>Pine Avenue Shopping is a complete green village, with retail outlets including guest services for visitors and property owners, shabby chic furniture, hair dresser, Podiatrist, Olive Oil and gourmet food items, the top two rated boutiques in Sarasota and Manatee Counties, Children’s crafts and gifts, an Art Gallery and even a doggie spa. You would never know that the charming, two story buildings along Pine Avenue are built to the strongest, energy efficient and hurricane-resistant standards. Project planners used the latest in green technologies; elements such as insulated concrete forms for walls that you can see clearly on the two latest buildings going up. There’s also energy efficient and impact resistant windows and Florida-friendly landscaping that includes sandy parking areas and sidewalks. It all fits with the charm that is Anna Maria Island and their goal of preserving the past and embracing the future.</p>

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<p>Markets</p>	<p>Bridge Street Market is open once again and will be open every Sunday through April. Its hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and you can find the outdoor market at 107 Bridge St. You can even reach it via the island’s free trolley.</p> <p>The Bridge Street Merchants, artists and vendors offer artwork, crafts, locally grown fresh produce, gourmet foods, plants, jewelry, sculpture, photography, candles, soaps, souvenirs, chair massages, food and drinks, live music and more. For three years now, the Bridge Street Market has given visitors as well as locals an opportunity to support the community while having fun.</p> <p>Even when the market isn’t going on, Bridge Street has much to offer visitors, including restaurants, shops, miniature golf and accommodations. It’s also on the historic Bradenton Beach City Pier, which is an attraction in itself.</p> <p>Those who like to forage through a hodgepodge of unique stands love Red Barn Flea Market, one of Florida’s most popular flea markets with more than 650 booths selling, well, just about anything. Shoppers can indulge in a little breakfast or lunch at one of the many restaurants or pick out some of Florida’s farm-fresh produce.</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>Up and down the beach, you won’t find neon lights, but you will find the ever-changing hues of yet another spectacular sunset over the Gulf of Mexico. Nightlife in the Anna Maria Island, Longboat Key, Lakewood Ranch and Bradenton area tends toward the dulcet tones of steel pan at Jamrocks Jamaican Grill or dancing in the sand to live music at the Sandbar Restaurant or the BeachHouse Restaurant.</p>
<p>CUISINE</p>	<p>Seems like the best vacation experiences always include some memorable dining moments. This is certainly the case in Florida’s Gulf Islands, where visitors can be spoiled at least three times daily with numerous independent dining locales serving a tasty mix of cuisines that seem to enhance the taste of the islands. From fresh Florida seafood straight from the Gulf waters, to “Floribbean” cuisine, island restaurants cover all the bases with eclectic bistros, waterfront grills and charming cafes.</p>
<p>Food</p>	<p>Floribbean-style cuisine using local herbs and crops prepared by award-winning chefs makes this a rich dining destination.</p>
<p>Wine</p>	<p>Two local couples, one from Sicily, the other Bradenton natives, operate the Bradenton area’s finest wineries, including Rosa Fiorelli Winery and Bunker Hill Vineyard & Winery. Both wineries are open daily and offer free vineyard tours and wine tastings, and Rosa Fiorelli welcomes u-pick of their muscadine grape varieties (through September). The Rosa Fiorelli Winery caters to visitors with group tours of their 10-acre vineyard and 3,000 square foot winery featuring lunch, a tasting and</p>

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	<p>souvenir glass. Thanks to convenient online ordering, guests can easily try one of the new featured wines, such as the NV Aurora, boasting an essence of fresh peaches, or the 2007 Southern Red with floral aromas.</p> <p>Bunker Hill focuses on “green” operations, using only 100 percent recycled wine bottles, natural corks, and origami gift wrapping instead of bags. All 10 of their handcrafted wines are aged in their “wine cave”. They are a popular choice for destination weddings and special events, and now also offer Fresh Whole Fruit wines.</p>
<p>Restaurants</p>	<p>Florida’s Gulf Islands are home to The Sarasota-Manatee Originals, a select group of independent restaurateurs who banded together in 2003 to celebrate their passion for culinary excellence. The first Florida arm of Dine Originals, the nationally-recognized trademarked brand for the Council of Independent Restaurants of America, the Sarasota-Manatee Originals collectively market more than 50 members and the fresh, local flavorful cuisine they serve. Listed below are a few sizzling selections of Originals and others, including emerging newcomers on the scene and some tried-and-true favorites. The first two are part of our prize packages on the radio shows:</p> <p>BeachHouse Restaurant (Anna Maria Island) Located smack dab on the beach, this laidback eatery lives up to its name. Munch on stuffed snapper, a House favorite featuring golden snapper stuffed with shrimp, tomatoes, and pepper jack cheese, while listening to live island entertainment. The kid-friendly atmosphere makes it a popular spot for whole families of beach bums. www.beachhouse-restaurant.com</p> <p>Mar Vista Dockside Restaurant & Pub (Longboat Key) Consider this the most likely place to rub elbows with a millionaire and not even know it! Tucked away in the historic district of Longbeach Village, you’ll find the outdoor deck has some of the best views around. Casual cuisine like tasty Greek salads, burgers, and garlic fried shrimp are menu staples. Shellfish lovers won’t want to miss the steamer pots of mussels and clams. And you’ll love the Key lime pie – it’s the real McCoy. www.marvista-restaurant.com</p> <p>Beach Bistro (Holmes Beach) Selected as the Top Restaurant for food in the West Coast Region of Florida in Zagat Restaurant Guide’s “Top Restaurants in America” 2010 edition, this posh waterfront bistro boasts an outstanding wine list and a drawer full of FloridaTrend’s Golden Spoon awards. The Bistro Bouillabaisse is a menu starlet. Sample the Bistro “White Castle” sliders – Foie gras and prime tenderloin on a butter grilled sweet bun</p>

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with demi-glace and béarnaise. They're straight from heaven.
www.beachbistro.com

Euphemia Haye (Longboat Key)

Art, antiques, and fine food are a good mix – so say fans of a Florida Trend Hall of Fame winner. Highly rated by ZAGAT and a Fodor's Choice 2009 selection for being a leader in their field of service, quality and value, Euphemia Haye mixes this interesting blend with a lush tropical setting to create an exceptionally romantic dining atmosphere. Crisp roast duckling with bread pudding and a seasonal berry sauce is an inventive and sumptuous treat. Don't miss dessert at the upstairs Hayeloft – all desserts are homemade on the premises.
www.euphemiahaye.com

Gulf Drive Café (Bradenton Beach)

The Key West style beach shack vibe has made this a perennial favorite for visitors and locals alike. It's casual cuisine in a friendly, low-key atmosphere. Yummy burgers and sandwiches, as well as homemade milkshakes and pies, make this a satisfying stop, any time of day. Breakfast served any time, lunch and dinner. www.gulfdrivetiki.com

MacAllister's Restaurant – the Restaurant on the Ranch (Lakewood Ranch)

Karen and Malcolm Ronney welcome visitors to MacAllisters at the Ranch, Lakewood Ranch's own Scottish golf-themed dining concept. Opened in 2006, the Ronney's serve up traditional American cuisine with a Scottish kick. Guests can join the Malt Whisky Club – an exclusive group who share a passion for the 'water of life'. Popular entrees range from Ahi Tuna and Crab & Avocado Salad to more traditional fare with MacAllisters Haggis Bites, Braveheart Burger and Fish & Chips. www.macallisters.com

Mangrove Grill (Palmetto)

Patterned after a Spanish tapas bar, this stylish new eatery offers up more than small appetizer portions. Who could resist the chardonnay-kissed blue crab claws in garlic butter or the seasoned cornmeal-crust oysters served with Key lime aioli? Located at the Riviera Dunes Marina Resort, this newcomer is quickly becoming a dining hot spot. Casual attire meets upscale dining.
www.mangrovegrill.com

Mattison's Riverside(Bradenton)

Executive Chef and Proprietor Paul Mattison combines his Mediterranean flair with a hint of Asian flavor while focusing on fresh

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seafood, lamb, duck and beef, and popular sushi bar, too. Dining is offered indoors or out, with a 140-seat deck and outdoor bar featuring live music nightly.

www.mattisons.com

Moore’s Stone Crab (Longboat Key)

Overlooking the bay on Longboat Key, this family owned and operated restaurant has been dazzling taste buds since 1967. As the name implies, the stone crab is excellent (and fresh in-season from October-May), but other seafood offerings include snapper, grouper, pompano, mahi mahi and more. Fresh fish can be cooked to order: broiled, fried, sautéed, or blackened. Picky kids need not worry; there’s a kid’s menu that even includes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches!

<http://www.moorestonecrab.com>

Rod & Reel Pier (Anna Maria)

Take a stroll out to the end of the Anna Maria Island Pier any time of day and you’ll be rewarded with far more than a gorgeous view. Enjoy a sinfully good breakfast of Belgian waffles accompanied by fresh fruit and whipped cream, or a fresh seafood omelet. The lunch and dinner menus feature a consistently good grouper sandwich. The location guarantees some quirky local flavor, too, as fishermen work the pier and jealous birds circle overhead. Tel: 941.778.1885

Sandbar Restaurant (Anna Maria)

Housed in a building dating back to 1911, this dining establishment captures the best of old Florida in its heyday. Ever popular for its nightly live music out on the deck and exceptional native Florida seafood, the Sandbar is a great place to enjoy the outdoors while gulping down a frothy pina colada and one of the best grouper sandwiches in town. And at sunset, diners can guess the time the sun sinks below the horizon for a chance to win a bottle of bubbly. A new outdoor wedding pavilion provides the perfect backdrop for sunset weddings.

www.sandbar-restaurant.com

MORE INFO	
Brochures	Bradenton Area Convention & Visitors Bureau P.O. Box 1000, Bradenton, FL 34206 Tel: 941-729-9177 http://www.annamariaisland-longboatkey.com/visitor_guide
Website	Web: www.annamariaisland-longboatkey.com Pinterest: http://pinterest.com/visitbradenton Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/AnnaMariaIslandLongboatKey

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HOTEL PRIZE PARTNER	Cedars Tennis Resort on Longboat Key. Cedars Tennis Resort, 645 Cedars Ct. Suite A, Longboat Key, FL 34228 USA Phone: 877-670-1778 Website: http://www.cedarstennisresort.com Cedars Tennis Resort is a luxury vacation rental resort on Longboat Key. It offers world-class facilities, magnificent beaches and tropical sunsets. Guests enjoy an unforgettable Florida Vacation in spacious town homes perfect for families and couples.
Location	Set in the northern part of Longboat Key, just minutes from both Anna Maria Island and the City of Bradenton.
Facilities	A junior Olympic swimming pool with Tiki bar, fitness centre, fishing pier, bicycle and kayak rentals, provide activities to suit every mood. The newly renovated clubhouse features a restaurant with full bar for a casual dining experience.
Accommodation	Enjoy beautifully decorated and comfortably furnished tri-level rental townhouses. Each unit in this village-like resort has a spacious living area that has plenty of windows to let in the sunshine and the warm tropical breezes. The fully equipped kitchen feels open and airy, with a full breakfast-bar opening to the dining area. The living room area has cozy furniture and a colour TV with basic cable and a DVD and/or VCR. Most of the units have a screened-in porch that adjoins the living room area invites you to sit out and enjoy the breeze and wonderful views of the nature preserves.
Activities	Their acclaimed tennis program with some of the area's best HarTru tennis courts, USTA tournaments, kid's tennis camp and pro shop attracts players from all over the world. For those wishing to venture out, you can cycle or stroll along beach pathways or explore their gorgeous landscaped grounds and walkways. Nature lovers enjoy kayaking through Sarasota Bay. Boat rentals and fishing trips along the gulf coast can also be arranged.

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