

# A Perfect Weekend in St. Petersburg

## Condé Nast Traveler

There's no attitude, no pretense, and no finger-wagging in Florida's easygoing beach town, where even the museums are bold and exuberant. Here's where to bring the kids and let loose



**FLORIDA ALFRESCO:** The overwater Wharf restaurant is known for serving some of St. Pete Beach's best seafood.

By [Eimear Lynch](#)

A Gulf Coast city with one of Florida's most beautiful beaches, St. Petersburg is a paradoxical little place: You'll see sunbathers with peroxide- and tanning-oil-abuse problems, but also adorable families splashing in the water. The general takeaway is that there's no need for formality in jolly St. Petersburg, a laid-back town where you're free to shriek and laugh as much as you want—there'll be nary a raised eyebrow in sight.

All you'll want to do when you arrive is head straight to the beach, where you can amble the long St. Pete strand (just a short drive from St. Petersburg proper) and witness a postcard-perfect pink sunset over the Gulf of Mexico. Of the tiki bars you'll find every 500 or so feet along the shore, **Paradise Grille** is the best dinner stop. Enjoy an old-fashioned cheeseburger and crispy fries while listening to an acoustic guitarist doing Johnny Cash and Randy Travis covers (900 Gulf Way; 727-367-1495; sandwiches from \$5). After dinner, stroll a little farther south on the beach to earn your dessert: a scoop of freshly churned dulce de leche ice cream from **Paradise Sweets** (709 Gulf Way; 727-360-5830). You'll head to bed at the **Postcard Inn on the Beach**, an upscale but affordable motel with a surfy, hip style—and an unfortunate popularity among Spring Breakers (727-367-2711; doubles from \$169). On the other end of the beach,

the **Loews Don CeSar** is a huge pink palace that offers nice, standard rooms and a friendly staff who'll set up a chair on the beach for you (727-360-1881; doubles from \$299).

Spend the next morning by the water, listening to children squealing in the shallows. After a few hours, get in your car and head over to St. Petersburg, which sounds as if it should be adjacent to St. Pete Beach but is actually ten miles away. In the much-heralded new **Dali Museum**, sit down to a Spanish-style lunch, like a potato-and-onion Spanish omelet, at **Café Gala** (727-823-3767; small plates from \$5). Kids and adults alike will smirk their way through the Surrealist remnants of Dali's strange and often hilarious life. When you leave the Dali, walk north along the water, passing the yacht club and the Museum of Fine Arts. Veer inland for a sweet-potato-and-chocolate-chip muffin at **Hooker Tea** (300 Beach Dr.; 727-894-4832), and stop in **Little Brooklyn Vintage** to sift through the fabulously inexpensive array of clothing dating from the '40s to the '80s (251 Central Ave.; 727-827-2832). Then head back to the water to the **Chihuly Collection**, where you can see the only permanent public assemblage of Dale Chihuly's blown-glass sculptures, which resemble forests, gardens, and coral reefs (727-822-7872). Afterward, join the dog-walkers for a stroll around Vinoy Park, just north of the museum, before driving back to St. Pete Beach to catch another stunning sunset. Dinner is at **The Wharf**, a divey bayside restaurant. Order the Mediterranean grouper, which comes garnished with a lemony relish of capers, tomatoes, and olives (2001 Pass-a-Grille Way; 727-367-9469; entrées from \$11).

The next morning, join the rest of the town in lining up for a table at **The Seahorse**, a wood-paneled diner. Try the maple-pecan pancakes (800 Pass-a-Grille Way; 727-360-1734; breakfast from \$3). Burn off breakfast with the favorite local water sport, stand-up paddleboarding. Give the **Surf Shack Surf Shop** a few hours' notice and they'll deliver your board to you on the beach and give you a few pointers (5210 Gulf Blvd.; 727-367-9898; one-hour rental, \$20). And if you've got time, drive to Tampa to check out **The Refinery**, which earned a James Beard nomination for best new chef in 2011. A lunch of pumpkin gnocchi and cow-tongue salad is quite the culinary experience (5137 N. Florida Ave.; 813-237-2000; entrées from \$13).