

# In Pass-a-Grille, you can forget the bustle

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ST. PETERSBURG BEACH - Sometimes, this is the worst job on earth: Having to tell hundreds of thousands of readers about a really great tiny place for a retreat.

There's the reality that the place will be unavailable the next time I try to book it, or that it will implode in its own success.



Jimmy Baron54

The boardwalk at Pass-a-Grille provides a pleasant stroll from Island's End Resort.

I don't want to see that happen here, because I simply adore the quiet Island's End Resort at the very tail end of St. Pete Beach.

It's in the historic district called Pass-a-Grille, where houses and other buildings more than a century old stand on tidy lawns, framed by the Gulf of Mexico on one side and the Intracoastal on the other. It's a mostly residential community — a far cry from its neighbors up the street, St. Pete Beach proper, or Clearwater Beach — which have become tourist bedlam, with crowds on the beaches and traffic jams.

Streets in Pass-a-Grille are perfect for cycling or long walks.

At the resort, the group of weathered wood cottages webbed by a wooden deck throughout immediately exudes feelings I used to get in Captiva. It's a calming effect — and a sense of old-Florida vacation beach life — far, far from those maddening crowds and tacky cinderblock "condo-tels" that have usurped most of the special little places like this one.

After a stay on the bustling north end of St. Pete Beach, we arrived after the resort office had closed, and found our cottage (half a duplex) open and awaiting us. It had a separate spacious bedroom, bath, and full kitchen and a dining area, as well as a sitting room with TV. Everything was spick-and-span and modern — Pergo floors, plush bath linens and the large galley kitchen. The stained plywood-parquet ceiling was intriguing.

Most of the cottages accommodate two to six people, but there's a separate three-bedroom cottage — great for groups or families — with its own pool and a view of the water.

The wooden deck connecting the cottages leads to an ample sundeck with chaise lounges. A second deck sits behind the office with teak chaises. The decks are framed with lush vegetation, fanciful fountains filled with seashells and a small pond where we saw frogs swimming in what could only be frog bliss. A bench swing with comfy cushions looks over the Intracoastal side and little private beach.

How could anyone not find peace here? You're at the end of the road, the end of the land. Off the southern horizon is Fort DeSoto Park. Off to the west, the wide gulf. The east view is of Tierra Verde, a high-end community of homes across the Intracoastal.

The resort's fishing pier juts out into the choppy water. Toss out a line and catch your own dinner. A fish-cleaning table with hose nearby tells you it's for the real thing, not show. (You could arrive

by boat, incidentally; though large bumpers would be needed since your boat would be exposed directly to the channel.)

If you want to relax, sit in the swing and contemplate the waves lapping the pure white sand on the crescent beach below.

There, you can lay out on a lounge chair, or stroll for shells — we found very nice specimens — though you can't swim here. Fierce currents in the channel leading to the gulf swirl around the tip of the island and it's deep within a few feet of the beach.

But a one-minute walk will put you on the public gulfside shore — Pass-a-Grille peninsula is barely a block wide.

A jetty of concrete boulders lines the southern end of the beach where fishermen gather at night; the beach is sparsely populated during the day — the crowds tend to be north of here.

We found a number of swell little places to grab a bite, including the Sea Horse, a breakfast-lunch place, where the pecan pancakes were some of the best we've eaten. A patio is a good idea when it's cooler weather, but you'll burn in summertime here.

Down the gulf road is the infamous Hurricane. It used to be a favorite hang-out when it was an open-air bar serving cold beer and hot grouper sandwiches. Now, it's just another tourist attraction. The food's OK; the service we'll call "spotty." Go for drinks and maybe order an appetizer, sit upstairs, and take in the main attraction on this coast: the magnificent sunset.

Best idea: Get a pound or two of steamed shrimp to go. Go back to your cottage and stir up a pitcher of margaritas. Take the shrimp and 'ritas to the little fishing pier. Toss the peels over the edge to the hungry fish below and enjoy the drinks.

Forget the crowds and forget you have a life elsewhere. Be, as they say, in the moment where life really is a beach.

### **If you go**

**Island's End Resort**, 1 Pass-a-Grille Way, St. Petersburg Beach; (727) 360-5023;  
[www.islandsend.com](http://www.islandsend.com)

**Rates:** Cottages from \$120 to \$170 a day; \$260 a day for three-bedroom unit. (Note: Rates are quoted for two guests per room; \$20 a day charged for additional people. Weekly rates available for all. Four-night minimum for holidays.)

**What to do:** Fishing pier on property; sundeck has chaise lounges for use. A public beach is within a 1-minute walk; restaurants within five blocks. Boat excursions for shelling or dolphin watching are available for charter at the Merry Pier, about five blocks away.

On nearby Tierra Verde, Fort Desoto State Park offers No. 1 rated beaches and large picnic areas with biking trails, camping sites, playgrounds, fishing piers and bathing facilities.

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