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DESTINATION

Quaint B&B offers a different side of beach life

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There's something amiss at the Henderson Park Inn in Destin.

For one, the quaint resort is only three stories high and not constructed of impersonal concrete but rustic wood more commonplace in New England. There are also no children present, and the beach exudes a more private, quiet ambience for the busy Emerald Coast.

Henderson Park Inn boasts of being the only bed and breakfast resort in Destin, and it's definitely one of the most charming and unique. Adult visitors check in to rooms opening on to the Gulf's cerulean waters and sugar fine beaches that define Destin and from the moment you kick off your shoes, say goodbye to stress.

Almost everything is at your fingertips. Chairs and umbrellas are available on the private beach, plus decks offer Adirondack chairs, lazy swings and fire rings for when the sun goes down. DVDs can be borrowed to use in the rooms, and bikes and kayaks are available for free.

A full breakfast is included in the price, with a chef on hand to create original omelets and egg dishes. A gourmet boxed lunch is served daily to enjoy on the beach, and cookies and lemonade are available throughout the day. Each of the two buildings feature stocked refrigerators in the lobbies full of soft drinks, water and candy bars for those late-night munchies. And from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. each day, there is free wine and beer on the deck.

Most of the visitors to Henderson Park, naturally, are couples. Weddings are commonplace on weekends, and it's a favorite honeymoon spot, according to Innkeeper Ryan Olin. Before Hurricane Ivan, the resort was booked a year in advance, Olin said, but then it closed for repairs after the storm. Since it reopened in May 2007, the resort has been filling back up quickly through word of mouth, he explained.

The guest book says it all. The comments from honeymooners and couples

celebrating anniversaries and other special events were glowing. Henderson Park knows romance.

Room amenities include Jacuzzi tubs, beach-view balconies and luxurious bed linens. Weddings can be performed on a grassy area by the main building or on the beach itself. The resort can accommodate catered receptions, but if wedding parties want to include children the entire resort must be reserved, Olin said.

Literally next to the resort is Henderson Beach State Park with guided hiking trails, 6,000 feet of natural shoreline and boardwalks that traverse through sand pines, scrub oaks and dune rosemary.

A romantic dinner can be found within walking distance in the opposite direction at a charming restaurant called Camille's. For a short drive you can sample a piece of Destin history while watching boaters bringing in their catch at Dewey Destin, off the main highway toward Ft. Walton Beach.

Henderson Park Inn rents from \$189 to \$519 depending on the season, days of the week and particular room. For information, call (866) 398-4432 or go to hendersonparkinn.com.

Wines of the world

Henderson Park offers wine tastings every month throughout the summer. In May, a wide variety of California wines were presented, and June's presentation will be wines of the Southern hemisphere. The June 18 "Southern Stars" wine testing will offer wines of Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand and Africa.

Getting married in Destin

There is no waiting period for non-Florida residents wanting to marry in Destin or anywhere along the Emerald Coast. You can obtain a marriage license from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Clerk of Circuit Court's office; call (850) 689-5800. You will need one valid form of identification, photo ID, driver's license, military ID card, state ID card or passport. There are various costs involved.

For county beach park wedding permits, call (850) 689-5084.
