



[Home](#) [News](#) [Opinion](#) [Movies](#) [Music](#) [Events/Exhibits](#) [About Us](#)



## Local News

# Getaway: One tank away from watching the waves

## The white beaches of Destin, Fla., offer a summertime escape only a few hours' drive from Lafayette.

by Cheré Coen

This time of year, the beach beckons like a cold beer on a hot day after mowing the lawn.

Cool Gulf waters the color of emeralds and sapphires, plus white sugar sand beaches lie just a few hours' drive from Lafayette in Destin and Fort Walton. In fact, filling up at the Ambassador Caffery exit, my gas didn't run out until I hit the waves of Destin, one tank of gas exactly.

There are numerous accommodations scanning the coast, from inexpensive motels to elaborate houses for rent. Somewhere in between lie the high-rise condominium complexes, most of which offer one- to three-bedroom floor plans with full kitchens, balconies overlooking the water and other amenities to make a beach trip comfortable.

Sterling Shores in Destin, for instance, is situated on Scenic Highway 98 but positioned slightly back from the beach. You can access the salt water via the property's Gulf-front clubhouse that offers a private pool and snack bar or relax by the 4,300-square-foot lagoon-style pool with fountain and spots to barbecue, all of which are enclosed with a security gate.

The furnished condos feature Gulf views from large balconies, fully stocked kitchens, washer and dryers and large, comfortable baths, some of which contain Jacuzzi tubs. Visitors receive free unlimited DVD rentals and high-speed Internet access.

In addition, the property includes a fitness room, meeting space facilities and a 42-seat theater for watching your favorite film or a baseball game.

Nearby, within walking distance, are several restaurants, and across the highway kids can enjoy the amusement and water parks. Wal-Mart, Target, grocery stores and the popular Destin Commons, with its trendy shops and Rave movie theater, are a short drive away.



Photo by Cheré Coen

**Destin's and Fort Walton sit at atop the Florida panhandle, and boast pleasant white sand beaches.**

### What's new in Destin

Camellia Grill, the New Orleans landmark eatery on the uptown streetcar line, has opened its first

branch restaurant outside the Big Easy. Located in the Harbor Walk Village of Destin, Camellia Grill is situated next to Pat O'Brien's and Commander's Palace overlooking Destin Harbor. The Destin version offers the same menu as the one located on Carrollton Avenue, but there is almost double the eating space.

Visitors have many outfitters to choose from when it comes to water sports. You can rent your own pontoon boat or jet ski or hop aboard a glass-bottom boat and search for bottlenose dolphins. For something completely different, try a clear kayak from eco-friendly Blu Fusion Kayaks, boats made out of synthetic polymer that allows boaters to view everything beneath the sea, beneath their feet. Visitors can rent a solo kayak or join a professional naturalist for a guided tour. A portion of the profits go to [www.saveourseas.com](http://www.saveourseas.com).

## If you go

Sterling Shores  
866-5RESORT, SterlingResorts.com

Camellia Grill Destin  
(850) 650-2907

Blu Fusion Kayaks  
blufusionkayaks.com

## Upcoming events

May 15-16: 6th Annual Bob Hope Memorial Charity Golf Classic, Fort Walton Beach Golf Course  
(850) 651-3766

May 16: Chalk It Up! Sidewalk Painting Festival begins at 9 a.m. at Uptown Station in Fort Walton Beach.  
(850) 243-0401, uptownstation.com

May 17: Family Fun Arts Fest from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Henderson Beach State Park in Destin.  
(850) 499-8335, okaloosaarts.org

May 23-24: Memorial Day Concert Celebration at Harbor Walk Village in Destin.  
(850) 337-8000

May 23-28: 2009 Catalina 22 National Championships, Fort Walton Beach Yacht Club  
(850) 243-7102, fwyc.org

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