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BEACH HAPPY



**JESSIE JAMES
DECKER**
Mastering Balance

DAISY KENT
Sound of
Resilience

A New Dynasty

SADIE ROBERTSON
& CHRISTIAN HUFF

FALL 2024 • ISSUE NO. 18

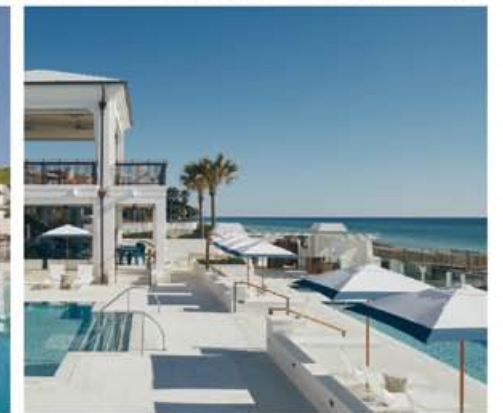
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The Silva will join existing amenities, including Caliza Pool & Restaurant, ZUMA Wellness Center, the owner-exclusive Beach Club, and, of course, the beach, to provide beautiful and functional spaces for the community to utilize in their pursuits of connection, wellness, and joy.

The Silva has been designed to create another opportunity for events and programming, including children’s programming, in addition to providing a vast and nature-centric complex for play, gathering, and relaxation. Caliza Pool & Restaurant offers an oasis of a retreat with multiple pools and daytime dining for owners and guests; ZUMA Wellness Center is a comprehensive campus of fitness training, aerobic swimming, meditative spaces, and extensive, newly expanded racquet sports facilities alongside a café, retail, and spa services – whole mind and body fitness and recovery; and the private, owner-exclusive,

Gulf-front Beach Club sets pools, dining spaces, and lounging around the panoramic views of the Gulf and horizon, creating a sacred space for owners to gather together and enjoy the town’s greatest amenity, the Gulf of Mexico. With a 1,500-linear-foot stretch of white sand beaches, residents and guests of Alys Beach enjoy a spacious, private beach experience with options for beach set-ups, recreation, a variety of beach experiences (from sunset bonfires to sunrise beach yoga) and direct-to-beach chair food and beverage delivery.

Beyond the built spaces are the common greens, pocket parks, pedestrian paths, and Nature Preserve, which provide the organic landscapes we crave, taking us from beach to forest, in a communal capacity that not only reduces maintenance for individual residents, but provides open areas for daily activities and special moments shared amongst the community. A permanent collection of outdoor sculpture and art installations also utilizes these common areas as natural galleries. These artworks have been chosen to enhance the cultural experience of life in Alys, to prompt conversation about the dynamic ecosystem, to share the history of the area, and to beautify these common areas, with self-guided walking tours to share the story of each piece, its origin, and the artist.

The landscape of the civic realm is vital to the New Urbanist master plan and is what activates and brings the town to life. The duality of the private realm’s life within the walls of the homes coinciding with the vibrance of life in the civic realm fosters the signature sense of grace, balance, and beauty behind Alys Beach’s life defined.

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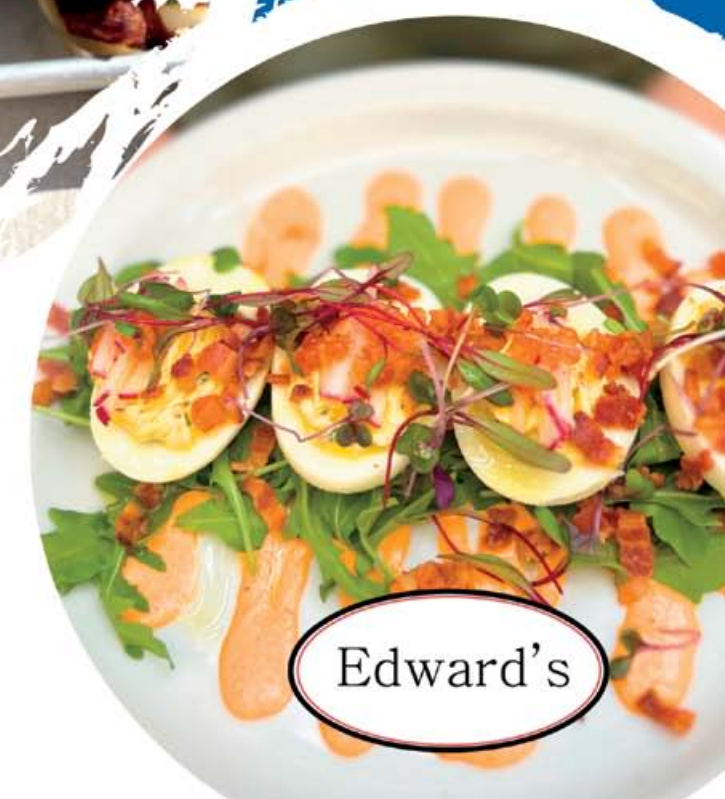


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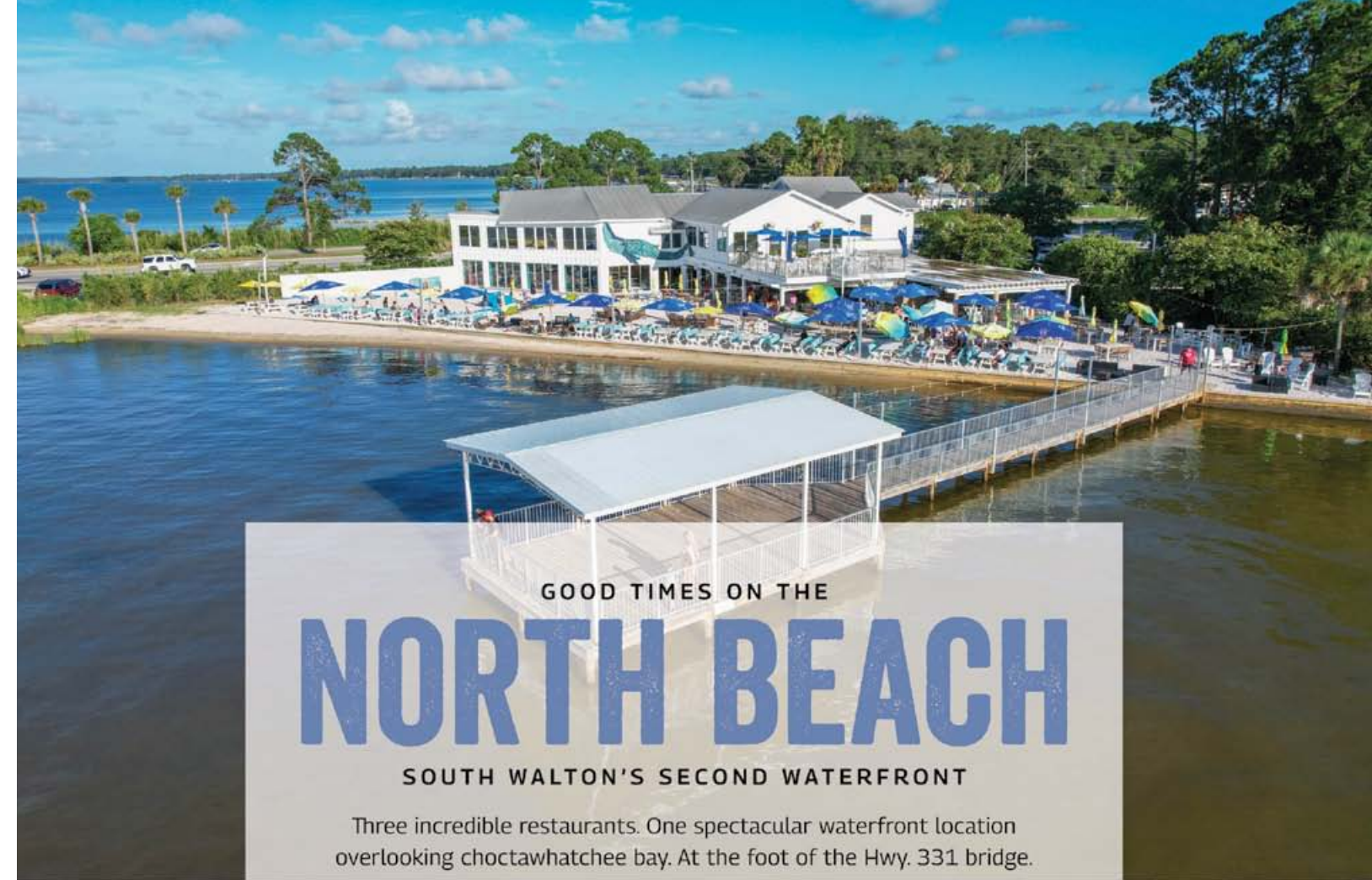
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THOUGHTS
From The 30A Guy

AUTUMN REFLECTIONS

As the hot summer sun fades into gentle fall breezes, we find ourselves drawn to reflection and renewal. In this issue of *Beach Happy* magazine, we invite you to embrace these moments—to find joy in both the everyday and the extraordinary.

Our cover story spotlights Sadie Robertson and Christian Huff, who remind us that true happiness often lies in small, meaningful rituals, like watching a beach sunset or sharing stories with your loved ones. Their journey of love, faith, and family along Florida’s coast inspires us to cherish the present and to trust the uncertain path that lies ahead.

Daisy Kent’s story of resilience illuminates how adversity can be transformed into hope. After facing life-altering challenges with her hearing, Daisy channeled her experiences into a mission to empower others through children’s books and a nonprofit supporting those with hearing loss. Her journey exemplifies how joy often emerges from courageously embracing new realities.

Jessie James Decker embodies the art of balancing a flourishing career with a joyful family life. From her early days on stage to launching her Kittenish brand and writing cookbooks, Jessie reveals that true fulfillment stems from passion and purpose, deeply rooted in family. Her approach to life is a masterclass in living fully and authentically.

We take a journey abroad to the vibrant beach town of Ballito, South Africa, just north of Durban. Ballito’s strong community spirit encapsulates the universal allure of coastal living, where adventure meets tranquility.

Closer to home, Aaron Barrett’s triumphant return to Major League Baseball after serious injuries stands as a powerful testament to perseverance. His remarkable story encourages



us to pursue our passions relentlessly, even in the face of formidable setbacks.

The beauty of staying true to oneself is further echoed in Mason Ramsey’s journey from viral sensation to a maturing artist. His debut album reflects a coming-of-age marked by creativity, courage, and a deep sense of authenticity.

Jonah Allen’s stunning photography captures the magic of our coastlines—the harmonious interplay of water, sand, and light. Meanwhile, the pickleball craze sweeping 30A proves that joy is often rooted in community and the simplest pleasures.

Finally, Jimmy Burgess’s insights on beach real estate remind us that owning a piece of the coast transcends financial returns—it’s about creating memories with loved ones that last a lifetime.

As we move into autumn, we invite you to immerse yourself in these inspiring stories of happiness and renewal. Whether you’re dreaming of a coastal escape or seeking a better life, remember that happiness often blooms in the simplest moments—the ones that reconnect us with ourselves and each other.

Here’s to embracing fall with open hearts and a spirit of adventure. Thank you for being an integral part of our Beach Happy community, where every story serves as a gentle reminder to live fully, love deeply, and stay happy.

Beach Happy, my friends!
Mike Ragdale
Founder, The 30A Company



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BEACH HAPPY

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RESERVATIONS



BEACH HAPPY Team



Gary John is the CEO & Partner at The 30A Company. Gary and his family relocated to 30A from California in 2020, after first discovering it on social media in 2018. Upon their first visit in 2019, Gary and his family fell in love with the community, the beautiful landscape, and everything 30A has to offer. Gary's background spans product and venture development, branding, social media, and consumer product launches. He leads the 30A team across the board, working with the sales, marketing, and editorial teams to ensure the 30A company continues to deliver beach happiness through media, content, editorials, and products. You can reach Gary at CEO@30A.com.

Gary John
CEO & Partner



For over 13 years at The 30A Company, I've had the privilege of crafting stories that capture the essence of beach life while celebrating the spirit of those who embrace it. My journey—from Mumbai's bustling coastline to the tranquil beaches of Goa, and now to Vietnam's vibrant shores—has deepened my love for life by the water. My greatest joy comes from weaving together narratives, visuals, and layouts, adding a touch of beauty to the world through each issue of *Beach Happy*. Whether you're landlocked or have your toes in the sand, I hope these stories bring a bit of sunshine to your day and inspire your own sunny moments by the shore.

Amandeep K
Editor-in-Chief



1. Hailing from the vibrant city of New Orleans and now residing in North East Alabama, my fondest memories involve vacationing on Florida's Gulf Coast beaches. Embarking on my design journey quite some time ago, I've been privileged to work across a spectrum of genres and platforms. With time, my expertise has honed in on magazine design and publishing, encompassing topics from travel to healthcare, and from education to transportation, with several others sprinkled in between. At *Beach Happy* magazine, I channel this passion and hope to share a sunny greeting with you on the coast someday. (Featured alongside me is my beautiful wife of 22 years, Bobbi.)

David Coffey
Art Director

2. Hailing from Fort Walton Beach, I am a lifelong 30A local. As a proud Air Force brat with a loving family that includes my wife and twins, I've witnessed the dynamic transformation of the Gulf Coast since the early 1980s. With a degree in Broadcast Journalism from Louisiana State University, I've embraced various roles within the realms of on-air local radio and television, and advertising sales. Now, as I celebrate over a decade with The 30A Company as Director of Advertising, it continues to be an absolute delight to collaborate with both local and national clients in the idyllic paradise we call 30A.

Cory Davis
Sales Director

4. Based on 30A, I manage marketing initiatives for the 30A and Beach Happy lifestyle brands. My responsibilities encompass content creation, social media marketing, influencer collaboration, editorial strategy, and digital media, all aimed at spreading the Beach Happy lifestyle. From dreaming up exciting features for *Beach Happy* magazine to curating captivating social media content, my day to day is a dance between strategic vision and creativity. Put simply, my job is to bring our audience bits of beach happiness each day with hopes of inspiring them to embrace the joy and vibrancy of coastal living from wherever they are!

Logan Burgess
Marketing Manager



3. My role is full of purpose, balance, and fulfillment while promoting all that we have to offer. You'll find me around town with a drone in my hand, slinging our ever-popular 30A stickers, *Beach Happy* magazine, and everything in between. There's a spark within me that is ignited each and every day as I work with this incredible community. Bringing fellow beach lovers together, near and far, is what makes my role feel less like work, and more like catching up with friends all throughout the year!

Ragan Smith
Brand Ambassador

5. Raised in Italy's family advertising legacy, I ventured to New York City in the early '90s, immersing myself in the prestigious world of fashion publishing. Over three decades, I've worked as a Creative Director, with contributions to renowned magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* and *Glamour*. My narrative intertwines Old World charm with New World innovation, marked by collaborative endeavors with industry giants and a ceaseless drive for excellence.

Emiliano Neri
Designer

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2

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2 MARTIN LIPTROT
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3



4

3 ANDREA STEHLE
is a freelance writer and editor with a passion for storytelling and wellness. Her career has woven the industries of national digital news startups, magazines, and public relations. She is also an essential oil educator. A former lifestyle magazine editor-in-chief and director of PR for a global, luxury hotel brand, Andrea resides in a Pittsburgh suburb with her husband and two children.



5

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is an author, essayist, and journalist. She lives in Manhattan, Kansas, with her husband and three small children. Enjoy her writing and interviews at CarmenSchober.com or @carmen_schober_writes.

5 SEAN MURPHY
has returned to the panhandle after 30 years shooting celebrities and advertising on the west coast. He has built an inspiring studio in Fort Walton Beach, where he continues to work on national campaigns. When Sean isn't shooting, he can be found fishing from his BOTE Board or spending time with family.



6



7

6 ABBIE LEE WEBSTER
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7 GEN HANDLEY
is a music writer living in Vancouver, BC, where he can be found running its wet streets or trying its many restaurants with his wife and son.

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Sound

of Resilience

Daisy Kent's Journey to HOPE and HEALING

By Carmen Schober

When Daisy Kent first appeared on *The Bachelor*, it was clear that America had found a new favorite. With her warm smile, down-to-earth charm, and wholesome upbringing on a Christmas tree farm, Daisy quickly became a standout in the competition for Joey Graziadei's heart. However, behind her sweet exterior lies a story of profound faith and resilience.

Unlike most Bachelor contestants who apply and undergo rigorous screenings, Daisy was approached by the show's producers after they discovered her TikTok videos, where she candidly shares her experience with hearing loss. Daisy was a longtime fan of the show, having grown up watching it with her mother, so imagine her surprise when they reached out with such a unique opportunity.

"I just received a DM one day," she explained, still a bit in awe of how naturally everything fell into place.

"My cochlear implant was still pretty new," said Daisy. "It was activated that April, and I was still adjusting. My life had changed so much in the past few months, and I felt like everything that was happening was meant to happen."

Daisy discussed the opportunity extensively with her family, who were supportive of her decision to take the leap. "We all thought, 'Okay, nothing bad can come from this,'" she said. "I was single at the time, and I'm so thankful I did it. It completely changed my life, and it was such a positive experience for me."

Her life before *The Bachelor* was equally unique. Growing up on a Christmas tree farm in Minnesota was nothing short of idyllic. "Christmas time was always magical," she reminisced. "People on a Christmas tree farm are always in high spirits. Families come together, enjoying hot chocolate, candy canes, horse rides—it's pure happiness for everyone."

However, it wasn't just the festive season that shaped Daisy's outlook. Growing up surrounded by nature instilled in her a deep appreciation for life's simple joys. "My whole childhood was outdoors," she said, recalling ziplining adventures with her siblings. "Technology wasn't a big part of our lives, and it was a really fun time."

Daisy also credits her family with teaching her valuable life lessons, the most important of which was how to love. "My parents always emphasized love and how to express it to others," she reflected. This philosophy has guided her through life's highs and lows, including her time on *The Bachelor*.

One of the most significant moments on the show occurred during the final rose ceremony, where Daisy's grace in the face of heartbreak won her widespread admiration as viewers witnessed her navigate the loss with a rare combination of bravery and vulnerability.

"In any situation, understanding what others need and how to support them is crucial," she said. "Sometimes it's not about you—it's about them. And when you care about someone, you want the best for them, even if it means putting their needs before your own."

For Daisy, the journey to happiness has been about more than just finding love—it's also about staying true to herself and trusting the process. "I always return to the belief that everything happens for a reason," she added. "Sometimes things aren't meant for you because something better is on its way. It doesn't mean the next person is better than the last; it just means they're better for you."

Many were stunned when she turned down the coveted role of *The Bachelorette*—an opportunity most contestants seize without hesitation. However, Daisy knew deep down that her path was different. "It was definitely tempting," she admitted. "But I knew at that moment in my life, I needed to take time for myself. The last year had been monumental—I got my cochlear implant, relearned how to hear, and went on *The Bachelor*, which completely changed my life. I had to deeply reflect and ask myself, 'Is this the best thing for you right now?' And when I truly considered it, I realized it wasn't. I had a great experience on *The Bachelor*, and I know *The Bachelorette* would have been amazing too, but it just wasn't meant for me."

This decision wasn't about stepping away from the spotlight; it was about stepping into a period of personal growth, and her choice was another

testament to her faith in the idea that the right opportunities would come at just the right time. Her faith has been her guiding light, helping her navigate the challenges and disappointments, particularly with her hearing loss.

She first noticed her hearing loss at age 15, and it rapidly worsened over the years. By her early twenties, Daisy's hearing had deteriorated to the point where daily life became increasingly challenging. "When I was 21 or 22, it got really, really bad," she recalled. Soon after, she was diagnosed with Ménière's disease, an inner ear disorder, and Lyme disease, which



can also impact the auditory system. "I received my cochlear implant when I was 24," Daisy said.

The decision to get the implant wasn't easy. It required Daisy to confront the reality of her situation and trust in a process filled with uncertainty.

"Mentally, it was overwhelming," she said. "You're losing your hearing, and then you're told that this implant could help, but you have to put in the work to make it effective. It's like rehabbing your hearing and retraining your brain to hear, because the implant sends electrical signals to your brain."





“ I took control of my
thoughts and choices,
and it made all the difference.”

One of the most difficult aspects of her journey was the overwhelming sense of helplessness brought on by her hearing loss. “The hardest part was acceptance,” she said, describing the weight of those difficult days. “There were so many times I would pray, meditate, cry—I’d do anything for my hearing to return, to not have to go through this.”

In the midst of her struggle, a conversation with her pastor became a turning point. “He said, ‘What if instead of praying for this to go away, you prayed for acceptance, understanding, and guidance to move through it?’”

That advice changed everything. “Something inside me shifted. I realized that if this was something I had to go through, I needed to find a way to get through it. That shift in perspective really helped me move forward.”

This mindset shift wasn’t just about making peace with her situation—it was about reclaiming control over the one thing she could manage: her beliefs. “I took control of my thoughts and choices, and it made all the difference,” Daisy said. This new determination not only helped her navigate the challenges of hearing loss but also inspired her to channel her experiences into a meaningful project.

Yet another challenging aspect of the process was the unknown—how the implant would work, what sounds, if any, she would be able to hear. “You don’t know what you’ll hear when they activate it,” she

said. “Some people hear beeps and scratches, some hear nothing, and some hear words. It’s all about how your brain interprets it.”

“The scariest part was definitely the time between surgery and activation. You have this piece inside your head, but without the external processor, it doesn’t do anything yet. It’s just very uncertain.”

When the moment of activation finally arrived, Daisy was filled with anxiety, but also hope. “I could hear speech right away,” she said, the gratitude evident in her voice. “Everyone just sounded like chipmunks at first, but it was so exciting because I hadn’t heard speech clearly in a long time.”

One of the most memorable moments of her journey came when she first heard her grandmother’s laugh. “They had me FaceTime my grandma, and her laugh sounded just like I remembered. I hadn’t heard that in so long. That was my moment of hope—I knew it was going to be okay.”



Following her cochlear implant, Daisy embarked on a new creative path—writing a children’s book titled *Daisy Doo: All the Sounds She Knew*. The book, which tells the story of a child’s perseverance in the face of hearing loss, is a project deeply personal to her. “After my implant, I spent months rehabbing it, and during that time, I realized there weren’t many resources that reflected my experience. I wanted to create something for kids facing similar challenges.”



The writing process was a labor of love for Daisy. She delved into research, watched countless YouTube tutorials, and even tried designing the character herself using AI programs. But when the limitations of technology became clear, Daisy turned to Upwork, where she found an illustrator who brought her vision to life. “I had this character in mind, and when my illustrator sent back the first drawing, it was perfect.”

The book's release has received overwhelming support, not just from children with hearing loss, but also from others navigating their unique challenges. “I receive messages from parents, from people in wheelchairs, with prosthetic eyes, with various health issues—it's been so inspiring.”

Daisy's passion for empowering others didn't end with her book. She also founded a nonprofit, Hear Your Heart, during her college years. Originally conceived as a personal passion project, the organization has grown to focus on helping children and individuals with hearing loss. “I want to empower people to embrace what makes them unique,” she said.

Daisy's days are now filled with exciting projects, collaborations, and, as she describes it, a life

that's “crazy because every day is different.” She's especially excited about a new workshop she's developing with her mother, a first-grade teacher. “We're developing a workshop to visit schools, read my book, and do fun activities with the kids. My mom has so much experience, and it's going to be really special to do this together.”

While she can't reveal all the details, Daisy hinted at an exciting collaboration with Daisy Brand—a project that promises to be just as enjoyable as the rest of her endeavors.

Amidst this whirlwind of opportunities, she finds comfort in the small things that keep her grounded.

“I'm still the same person. I hang out with the same friends and spend time with my family. From the outside, it looks like everything has changed, and in some ways, it has, but I'm still me. I go on a lot of walks,” she said, sharing practical tips for those with busy schedules. “Over the last two years, walking has become something I really love. It's a way for me to clear my mind.”

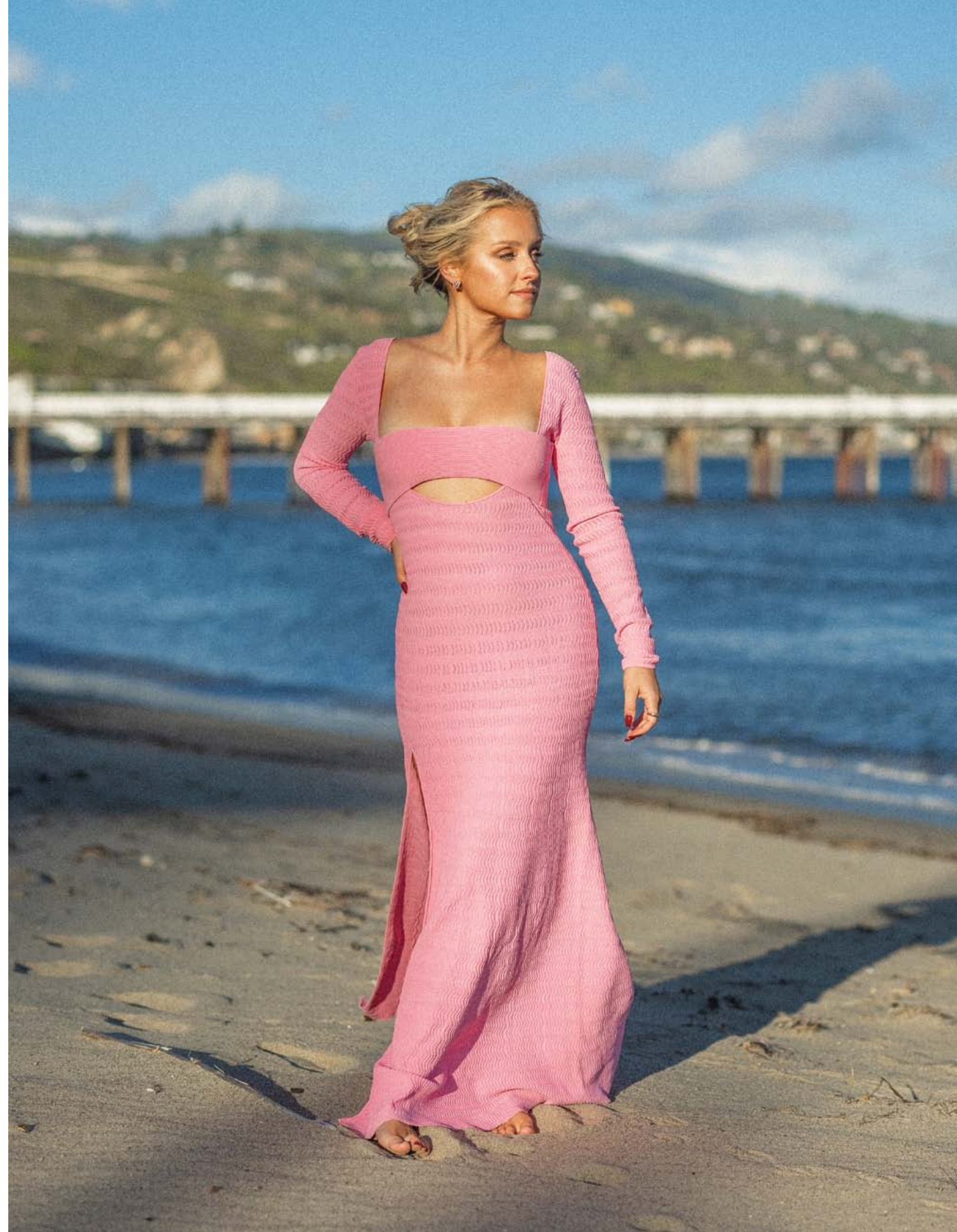
Journaling has also been a crucial part of Daisy's self-care routine. “I journaled throughout the show and afterward,” she said. “It's so cool because you can look back and see where you were, emotionally and physically, and realize how far you've come.”

Another constant in Daisy's life is her love for the beach—a connection that has remained strong since childhood. Family vacations often brought her to the sun-soaked shores of Florida, a place she still holds dear. “I love Florida beaches,” she said with a smile. “We always vacationed there with my cousins, playing games on the beach all day. We'd play ‘Survivor,’ dividing the family into teams and competing. It was hilarious and so fun—something I'll always cherish.”

Now, as an adult, Daisy is drawn back to the beach whenever she needs a break from her hectic schedule.

Looking ahead, she's taking it one day at a time. “Right now, I'm just taking it all in. I don't know exactly what the next few years will hold, but I'm open to whatever comes my way.” 🌊

Follow Daisy Kent's journey of hope, healing, and resilience on Instagram and TikTok (@daisyykent).



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A Lasting Legacy

Power Couple Sadie Robertson and Christian Huff on Faith, Family, and Their Journey to Lasting Joy

By Carmen Schober
Photos: Sean Murphy

In the quiet, balmy charm of Scenic Highway 30A, a love story unfolded—serendipitous and sweet. Sadie Robertson and Christian Huff, now partners in life and love, recall how it all began. They first crossed paths in Seaside, Florida, a place rich with memories for both. Christian grew up in nearby Niceville, spending countless summers there, surrounded by family. Sadie, though not a local, was no stranger to the area. Her family often vacationed in Florida, with Seaside as a frequent destination.

Sadie recalls the Fourth of July that changed everything. “I had just broken up with my boyfriend the day before,” she said. She had gone to Seaside with girlfriends, looking for a distraction. Sadie’s sister had already met Christian’s cousins through a mutual friend, sparking a connection that led to Sadie meeting Christian. “We all decided to meet up at the Seaside Tower, right in the middle of the square. It was supposed to be just his two girl cousins, but then Christian tagged along,” she laughed. “I thought I was done with dating, but the moment I saw him, I knew I was in trouble.”

Christian, equally smitten, recalls their easy conversation—from shark diving to skydiving—and the spark that ignited.

“I thought I was done with dating,
but the moment I saw him, I knew
I was in trouble.”

“I told my best friend to delete a video I had made saying I wasn’t going to date anyone for six months,” laughed Sadie.

For them, Seaside isn’t just a place—it’s the setting where their love story began. It’s where they met, where their families came together, and where they continue to return, now with their own children. The couple speaks of 30A with deep affection, listing their favorite spots with ease. “La Crema in Rosemary Beach is the best,” said Christian. “We always pick up Pizza by the Sea and eat it on the beach.” They have their go-to orders—Sadie loves a Hawaiian pizza, while Christian sticks with barbecue chicken. They cherish the peaceful privacy of those beachside dinners. And the sunsets. “We’re big sunset people,” said Sadie.

Whether meeting up with friends or taking their kids to Black Bear Coffee for giant cinnamon rolls, 30A has been home to their most cherished memories. “We did our engagement photo shoot on 30A, and we also announced our pregnancy with Honey there,” said Sadie. “We have so many special moments captured in pictures from 30A, and they’re all over our home. It’s a place that’s truly special to us.”

Their young daughters, Honey and Haven, are starting to build their own memories there too. “Honey loves the beach,” Sadie said, describing how her daughters dip

their toes in the water, but only on calm, still days when the waves seem more like a gentle invitation than a roaring challenge.

For now, it’s the simple sight of the Gulf that they love, a symbol of the beauty and power of creation. Sadie and Christian turn these moments together into adventures, telling their girls stories about seeing Ariel in the water or Maui on his sailboat. As they return to 30A year after year, they add new chapters to their story against the backdrop of the Florida coast.

When asked about life as new parents, they shared a story about a recent trip to 30A when a stunning pink cloud appeared in the sky. “I said, ‘Honey, look, God drew a pink cloud in the sky just for you,’” recalled Sadie.

Honey was mesmerized by it, but the real magic happened weeks later. “We were lying in bed, and she suddenly asked, ‘Mommy, do you remember when God painted me that pink cloud? Why did He do that?’ and I said, ‘Because He loves you so much, just like when Mommy and Daddy bring you flowers because we know how much you love them.’”

Honey’s response was a simple yet heartfelt shout of “Thank you, God!”

Their younger daughter, Haven, is already showing signs of her personality too. “She can’t say full words yet, but she knows how to communicate,” said Christian. “She’ll babble, laugh, and then just walk away. And when she does something she knows she’s not supposed to, she has this funny way of deflecting it.”

“I think probably one of the most fun parts of parenthood is seeing their originality at such a young age,” added Sadie. “You see that they are sisters, but they could not be more different.”

Parenthood isn’t without its challenges, and Sadie shared that one of the best pieces of advice she received was from her mom, who told her not to get too caught up in following every new parenting book too closely, especially with their on-the-go lifestyle. “If I followed every method strictly, I’d always feel like a failure. Instead, I’ve learned to be confident in our parenting style, and that confidence is what’s going to raise confident kids. You have to be confident in your choices because if you’re not, it’ll just confuse the kids. And I think that’s something we’ve really tried to stick to.”

On the topic of marriage, the couple emphasized the importance of patience. “I think the idea of ‘finding the one’





can sometimes lead to trying to control the situation too much,” said Sadie. “I wish I had trusted more in God’s timing instead of trying to force things. Looking back, I can see that it was all part of God’s plan, and I wish I had rested in that more.”

Echoing Sadie’s sentiments, Christian added that preparation is key. “You have more control over your life’s inputs than you might realize.” He advised cutting out anything that might set unrealistic expectations in relationships—whether it’s certain movies, music, or social media. “If you’re serious about having a good relationship one day, start preparing for it now, before you even meet that person.”

The conversation eventually shifted to Christian’s career—a journey that could have included playing baseball in college until life threw him a curveball. An accomplished catcher with a strong arm and a love for the game, Christian and his brother, a skilled pitcher, shared a bond over baseball and pushed each other to excel. But by college, Christian was ready for a change. “I just got burned out on it,” he reflected. “I loved it growing up, but I knew continuing wasn’t right for me.”

The decision was bitter-sweet, but he has no regrets. “If I had continued, we probably wouldn’t be here today, doing what we’re doing.”

And neither would trade anything for the life they’re living now—parenting and pursuing their dreams together. For Christian, that dream includes hosting a podcast called *4:8 Men*. Inspired by Philippians 4:8, Christian digs into the ways discipline and athleticism are about more than just the physical—it’s about the spiritual too. “There’s so much in the fitness industry focused on the external—on how you look,” he said. “But it’s not healthy if that’s all you’re pursuing. I wanted to create something that encourages men to not only work on their physical health but their spiritual health as well.” For Christian, it’s about finding that balance—training the body while

also nurturing the soul.

“He’s the most disciplined person I know,” said Sadie. “If he starts a plan, he’s going to finish it. Me? I’m like, 12 days in and already off track.” Their differences, they agreed, are what make their partnership work. Christian’s steadfastness balances Sadie’s spontaneity, and together, they navigate life with a shared sense of faith and purpose.

Christian has also created fitness devotionals designed to challenge both the body and the spirit, each one integrating physical and spiritual exercises in a practical and meaningful way.

When the focus shifted to Sadie, we talked about her journey and the legacy of *Duck Dynasty*, the television show that introduced her family to the world. She was just 13 when it all started, and now at 27, she looks back with nostalgia and amazement at how much time has passed.

“It’s wild to think it’s been that long,” she said. “The best part of the whole experience was doing it with my family. We got to spend so much time together, more than we ever had before, and probably more than we ever will again. It was a unique job, and we made so many memories—on set, during the dinner scenes, just laughing and being together.”

She also shared her experience on *Dancing with the Stars* and the contrasts between the two reality TV experiences.

“People always ask me if it was fun, and I say ‘absolutely,’ but it was the kind of fun that’s also incredibly hard.” She described the intense pressure of live performances, where every misstep was broadcast to millions in real-time.

But *Dancing with the Stars* wasn’t just another reality show; it was a pivotal moment in her personal growth. Until then, she said she had lived somewhat in the shadow of the Robertson family legacy—a shadow she didn’t mind, but one that limited her individuality in the public’s eyes. “That experience allowed people to see me for who I am, apart



Sadie and Christian share a quiet moment on the rooftop at Seaside, 30A, during their engagement photoshoot.



from just being a Robertson. It was scary, stepping out like that, but it was one of the best decisions I've ever made."

Although she's not ruling out more television opportunities, these days Sadie is deeply invested in her ministry, Live Original, which has grown to encompass conferences, books, worship events, and robust online resources.

"Live Original started with a book, and that message has carried through into everything we do now," she said. Her latest release, *The Next Step: 50 Devotions to Find Your Way Forward*, continues to encourage people to embrace their God-given lives and find happiness. Sadie has always been passionate about sharing her faith, but Live Original has taken that mission to new heights. What began as a simple message in her first book has grown into a multifaceted platform that reaches people worldwide. Through her podcast, also titled *Live Original*, Sadie engages in heartfelt conversations with a wide array of guests—ranging from pastors to celebrities and sometimes familiar faces from *Duck Dynasty*. The podcast delves into topics that matter most to Sadie: faith, relationships, personal growth, and the pursuit of a happy, purpose-driven life.

For Sadie, happiness is not just a fleeting emotion but a deeply rooted state of being, anchored by faith. Whether she's speaking on stage, leading a discussion, or writing her next book, Sadie's message remains consistent: true joy and fulfillment come from living in alignment with God's purpose.

Looking ahead, the couple has new projects in the works, though they're keeping some details under wraps. What they did share was their excitement about the release of Sadie's first song, "Mirror," coming this fall.

Sadie and Christian's journey to happiness is built on a shared commitment to living with purpose. Whether they're enjoying a sunset on 30A, raising their daughters, or pursuing their individual callings, for Sadie and Christian, faith is not just a foundation—it's the source of the inspiration, happiness, and fulfillment that enriches every aspect of their lives.

To explore more of Sadie and Christian's journey, visit liveoriginal.com. Stay connected with Sadie (@legitsadierob), follow Christian (@christian_huff), and tune in to his podcast (@4.8menpodcast) on Instagram. Special thanks to Spears Group (spearsgroupfl.com) for allowing us to use their beautiful property for this feature.

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BEACHES ABROAD

BALLITO, SOUTH AFRICA

By Craig Jarvis

A Bustling Yet Safe Beach Bubble North of Durban

Just 45 minutes from Durban, South Africa, lies the lively coastal town of Ballito. Like many coastal towns in South Africa, it has experienced a considerable growth spurt due to COVID migration. However, not all of them have held up. Many people find out that small seaside villages aren't always as cozy as depicted, with issues like inefficient municipal services, small-town politics, and overcrowding becoming apparent after a prolonged stay.

Ballito, however, has flourished as an efficient and welcoming town with glorious beaches, top-notch restaurants, and everything you need at your fingertips without the need to travel far. With friendly people, excellent weather year-round, stunning coastlines, and some fine waves, it's hard to find fault with the place.

Instead, we will highlight its positives and share some insider tips about this marvelous location. It's also worth noting that Ballito is a safe town with low crime rates and a strong community spirit.

WHY GO?

The weather. People often question the weather in South Africa, as we have the Cape of Storms and the cyclone season in the Mozambique/Durban area. Durban's weather is sublime. In June, the temperature gets pretty cold due to the land breezes that blow offshore through the early hours of the morning. You might wake up to temperatures below 50 degrees (10 degrees Celsius), but don't be fooled into wearing heavy-duty clothing. As soon as the sun rises to a certain point in the sky, somewhere around 8:45 am or thereabouts, the temperature will increase to about 72 degrees F (22 Celsius), and the wind will stop blowing. Then it will heat up some more, the bikinis will be out, and surfers will be surfing all day long in their boardshorts. The only thing that can possibly spoil it all is the onshore easterlies, but they only come around August.

Ballito and its surroundings offer a wide range of activities, from relaxing on beaches like the bustling Willard Beach, known for hosting The Ballito Pro surfing competition, to the more serene settings of Thompson's Bay and Sheffield Beach. Whether you're looking to explore the picturesque limestone coves

at Thompson's Bay, stroll along the promenade at Willard Beach, or enjoy a quiet day at the northernmost beaches of Sheffield and Christmas Bay, there's something for everyone to ensure an exciting and memorable trip. For those interested in adventures beyond the beach, safaris and scuba diving are also popular options.

Surfers in Ballito can choose from four main spots at Willard Beach—Sunrise, Surfers, Bathers, and Bog—all conveniently located near amenities like the promenade, skateboard park, and restaurants. For a change of scenery, you can explore nearby beaches such as Salt Rock, with its wide sandy shores and tidal pools, or Tinley Manor for a more secluded experience. For golf enthusiasts, the nearby Maidstone Golf Course, Zimbali, and Umhlali Country Club offer excellent courses.

With the South African Rand (ZAR) being a weak currency, foreign money goes a long way in Ballito. So, you can enjoy your stay without worrying about breaking the bank.

HOW DO I GET THERE?

Qatar and Emirates fly directly to King Shaka International Airport in Durban, but otherwise, you'll need to go through the OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. It is a central hub, and most travelers will end up moving through the airport at some stage. It is best practice to watch yourself in all South African airports. While there is excellent security in all airports, caution is still advisable.

Once in King Shaka, it is about 25 minutes to drive to Ballito. You can hire a car at the airport and GPS it all the way home, book an Uber from your mobile, or meet the Uber drivers gathered outside. They do the Ballito run all day, every day. There are also registered taxis at the taxi rank, and they will do the same job as Uber drivers at roughly the same cost. Just remember to hire a bigger vehicle or a van if you have surfboards or other outsize sporting goods with you.

If it's a daytime drive, enjoy the beautiful north coast scenery, and if it's a nighttime drive, you won't see much as there aren't too many lights along the back roads to Ballito.



WHERE SHOULD I EAT?

There are too many options to list here. Still, one of the most popular restaurant destinations in the area is The Market at the Lifestyle Shopping Centre. This large, open-plan area offers a variety of restaurants that offer something for everyone, and the service is excellent.

The food market is wonderful for families that can't agree on what they want to eat, which is the case for most families. Each one can choose from a different food source, such as meat for the carnivores, fish, pizza, sushi, vegetarian, and snacky/deli platters. All in all, it is a fantastic center.

The best restaurant in the area is Mozambik Ballito, with a varied Mozambican-flavored menu featuring chicken, prawns, calamari, and squid heads that are delicious, flavorful, and well-priced.

WHERE SHOULD I STAY?

This depends entirely on budget, but the best option is to stay right on the beach. There are so many choices, and when you see the number of accommodation options, you immediately think this place must be overcrowded. It does get that way, during peak holiday season, but it is mellow for the rest of the time. There are some friendly hotels, apartments everywhere, and Airbnb options as far as the eye can see. The only time it gets fully booked is during the Ballito Festival when the best surfers in the world arrive for the Ballito Pro Challenger Series contest. In fact, there are four contests back to back, all worth different ratings, from the local Surfing South Africa Junior Rookie Rippers contest to the JQS pro junior contest, a WQS 100 tournament and the Challenger Series event. There are over a hundred surfers and their entourages, a market running every day, live music, and more. If you're interested in the competitive side of surfing and want to hang with some of the best surfers in the world or even compete against them, this is the time to be in Ballito. Loads of parties are happening, pro surfers hold signings at the local surf shops, and more.

Coco De Mer is a favorite, quaint, and friendly boutique hotel. However, with all the modern conveniences, and although it might be within easy walking distance to the beach, it remains very private and quiet.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

The South African rand fluctuates quite dramatically depending on the political situation in the country, but it currently sits at R17.83 to the dollar and R19.83 to the Euro.

An Uber ride from the airport should cost you around \$20 for a larger vehicle, while an ice-cold beer on arrival will cost around \$2.50. To get 20 of the most succulent signature prawns at Mozambik will cost about \$16, while a wonderful bottle of South African Chenin to wash them down will add about \$10 to the bill.

Accommodation at the upscale Coco De Mer will cost about \$150 for two people per night. A self-catering unit in the decent but slightly older units at La Ballito costs about \$56 per night and can sleep three or four people.

A trip to Ballito can be inexpensive, but if you feel the need to spend more money and do all the nice things in the environs, plenty of game farms and other adventures will cost more. This coastal getaway can be surprisingly affordable if you are content to chill on the beaches, surf, enjoy local food, and absorb the vibe. ☺



PHOTO: SARAH JANE PHOTOGRAPHY



Mozambik restaurant, Ballito



TWICE

to the Top

By Martin Liptrot



Aaron Barrett's Comeback from Career-Ending Injuries to World Series Glory and New Purpose

Born in a small town in Indiana, sports and competition always played a significant role in Aaron Barrett's life. The son of a kindergarten teacher and a sprinkler installation engineer, Aaron has two brothers—one older, one younger—so winning and jostling for bragging rights were always in the family mix. The Barretts are also a large extended family, meaning get-togethers with aunts and uncles, cousins, nephews, and nieces were always competitive affairs too.

The Early Years: A Passion for Sports and Family

Getting to the top of the heap—what pro-athletes call “climbing the mountain”—was always going to be a tough task, but Aaron's journey there is a particularly remarkable one because he did it twice.

Talking to Aaron, you get a feel for how he has addressed the challenges he has faced and repeatedly overcome. He talks about faith, about believing that “things happen for a reason,” and how he has been surrounded by good people whose advice he was grateful to accept.

Aaron's road to the top of his mountain began at school. Describing himself as “not-particularly-gifted,” he worked hard and got good grades. He enjoyed playing all sports—basketball, of course, featured highly in Indiana—without really excelling at one. What he knew he could do, though, was throw a ball really hard.

This talent was spotted by local baseball coaches who worked with Aaron on improving the mechanics of his pitch and adding technique and skill to the raw power he was able to generate.



Overcoming Adversity: The Yips and a Life-Altering Injury

Unlike other professional athletes who were spotted early, shipped off to specialist camps, and shaped and molded for great things from a very early age, Aaron followed a more traditional route, playing for local teams, the school, and thinking about getting into a college team. He enjoyed time around his family too, and recalled one summer break when the Barretts went to a little place called Seaside on Florida’s Gulf Coast. “It felt right. We did all those things kids do on holiday—went crabbing, bike riding, playing on the beach—I felt grounded there.”

Under the continued guidance of his two coaches, Aaron worked his way through high school baseball and accepted a place at a community college in neighboring Illinois where he played two seasons for the Wabash Valley Warriors. His game was improving; he threw his first 90 mph ball in his freshman year and hit 95 mph in his sophomore season. The pitcher was soon spotted by pro-ball teams and by scouts from universities competing in higher divisions of the college sports pyramid.

Aaron accepted an offer to complete his junior and senior years at Ole Miss and, other than that one trip to Seaside, moved south for the first time in his life. Aaron had grown

up in a diverse school system and had friends from a range of different communities. Arriving in Oxford, Mississippi, in his sneakers, cut-off denims, and Indiana shirt, Aaron cut an odd figure amongst the preppy-types whose families had been attending Ole Miss for generations.

His game struggled too. Starting his junior season as the #1 pitcher, he ended it as a reliever, but Aaron was stoic and focused on what he could control. He continued to get good grades, knowing that while his dream of perhaps making a living from playing baseball took shape, he would need something to fall back on, just in case.

He also met his future wife Kendyl at this time, and her guidance, support, and influence have been a huge part of Aaron’s success.

The Climb to the Top: Major League Success

In his senior season, his pitching game really started to flourish. Aaron had been drafted in 2008 and again in 2009 but chose not to sign any contracts. When telling the story, Aaron again says things happen for a reason and notes that if he had accepted either move to the Minnesota Twins or the Texas Rangers, he wouldn’t have met Kendyl, nor had his best season, which attracted the attention of the Washington Nationals.

Upon arriving in D.C. in 2010, Aaron was immediately dispatched to learn his trade in the minor leagues. Playing for the Harrisburg Senators, Aaron was used as a closing pitcher, called upon to shut games down and deliver the

win. Newly married, Kendyl and Aaron moved to Florida’s Scenic Highway 30A full-time. Kendyl accepted a job as an event planner with property and hospitality group St. Joe and worked for local restaurateur Dave Rauschkolb at Bud and Alley’s.

But adversity struck again. A few games into his first professional season, Aaron suffered what ball players call “the yips”—the inability to control the baseball. While Aaron focused on fixing his game, Kendyl ensured they had a solid foundation, grounding them firmly in the sand along the Emerald Coast.

Facing Setbacks: Surgery, Rehabilitation, and a New Challenge

From this solid base, Aaron’s arm improved. He was recognized as an ‘All-Star’ player and quickly became a prospect for the major leagues. Invited to join the Nationals’ Major League Spring Training, Aaron impressed and was added to the 40-man squad for 2014 and, in the opening game of that season, came out of the bullpen to strike out two and pick up his first major league win.

Aaron had reached his mountain top. He was a professional athlete, playing a game he loved, for a franchise in the nation’s capital. Happy days.

But there were new challenges awaiting Aaron. Early in the 2015 season, Aaron reported discomfort in his elbow and was put on the disabled list. The Nationals decided he should undergo a common but grueling surgery called Tommy John, named after the first baseball





“*But once again, Aaron’s faith that ‘there was a plan’ prevented him from quitting on his dream of playing in the major leagues.*”

player to undergo it, where the ligaments from one arm are removed to replace the damaged ones in the other.

Recovery and recuperation were taking place at the Nationals’ complex in Viera Beach, Florida, when in July 2016, Aaron suffered a further setback. Pitching his fastball, he managed to break his arm, creating damage so intense the surgeon deployed to fix it likened it to the injuries normally suffered in a car crash, requiring two metal plates and sixteen screws.

But once again, Aaron’s faith that “there was a plan” prevented him from quitting on his dream of playing in the major leagues. He recognized that while he was on the long-term injured list, Kendyl was going to be the chief breadwinner. She gave their family security, and her encouragement and strength bolstered his faith that this was all happening for a reason.

He set himself the target of securing a renewed contract in 2017, but medical scans indicated the injury wasn’t healing as it should. On the advice of doctors and coaches, Aaron handed the ball back and stopped pitching entirely for the remainder of the 2017 season.

Things were also changing for Aaron off the field as Kendyl was now pregnant with their first child. Aaron recognized he now had additional responsibilities. But this seems to have just spurred him on further. He knew he would have to climb that mountain again.

[A Triumphant Return: From Minor Leagues to World Series Glory](#)

When Aaron talks about this moment, he tears up; it’s clearly still an emotional topic for him. He explains that he realized the sacrifices so many people had made to get him this far, that this was his chosen livelihood, it was how he was going to make a living and support his new family, and to achieve that he had to get back to the major leagues.



He also knew he didn’t want his newborn daughter to not see her dad play professional baseball; he didn’t want to miss out on that moment, being resigned to just telling stories of what could have been.

Aaron doubled down on his efforts in rehab, listening to the advice of those around him. He slowly but steadily began to get his pitching arm back. Still under contract with the Nationals, he threw his first professional pitch since early 2015, during a game for the Auburn DoubleDays, on November 2, 2018. That success was followed by even better news: the Nationals agreed to a new contract, which gave Aaron the option to attend Major League Spring Training again.

Aaron was back at the base of the mountain, about to try for a second ascent. In a remarkable repeat of his earlier journey, Aaron made his way back to the Harrisburg Senators to begin building up his strength and recovering that power and velocity that made him a successful closer.

He had hoped for a good season... but had a great one. He led the minor leagues in saves and set a new Senators’ record in



the process. As the regular season drew to a close, Senators' manager Matt LeCroy revealed that the Nationals had been hatching a plan and on September 4, 2019, more than four years since his second attempt to tackle the challenge had begun, they offered Aaron a major league contract again.

He was back. Not only had he overcome the physical obstacles of a serious injury, but buoyed by the support of his wife and family, he had weathered the mental and emotional anguish and uncertainty that can derail so many professional sportsmen and women dealing with setbacks.

Three days later, Aaron had the opportunity to play Major League professional baseball again, and this time in front of his new family. He took to the mound and threw his first pitch, the second time around, to record a scoreless inning with a strikeout against Ronald Acuna Jr.



Aaron defines that moment as perhaps his peak achievement. Walking off the field in Atlanta and into the tunnel where his wife and daughter were waiting for him is something he still counts as one of his greatest moments. But that wasn't the only success that season—the Washington Nationals won a wild card berth in the postseason and against all odds went all the way to win the 2019 World Series.

Aaron now has a Winners' Trophy and World Series ring as reminders that he not only scaled the mountain again but also reached the absolute peak of his sport. Aaron retired from baseball the following year and has now taken a position with the Philadelphia Phillies franchise, working with pitchers recovering from injury. This was a wise recruitment by the ball team, because for any individual struggling with injury or doubt, could there be a better role model to help them through?

Aaron and his family now live full-time along 30A. It is a place that through all the turmoil and change, has provided them with a solid foundation over the years. Having already achieved so much, there are new opportunities and challenges ahead, and the family has chosen Florida's Gulf Coast as the place to start building the next chapter of their lives.

New opportunities are already in the works. Kendyl runs The Spark Collection, a bespoke jewelry business, and Aaron's remarkable story is the focus of a documentary being made and scheduled for broadcast in spring 2025.

Aaron and Kendyl are grateful for their success. When they watch their children play on the sugar-white sands of 30A, they give thanks for the opportunities they have been blessed with. He knows none of this would have been possible without Kendyl's support or their unbending belief as a couple that "things happen for a reason."

Their story serves as a powerful reminder that perseverance and unwavering resolve are essential to turning dreams into reality. 📺

Get a closer look at Aaron Barrett's life on and off the field by following him on Instagram (@aaronbarrett30).

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SUN, FUN, and ACES

Join the Pickleball Craze on the Coast

By Abbie Lee Webster
Photos: Noah Escobar

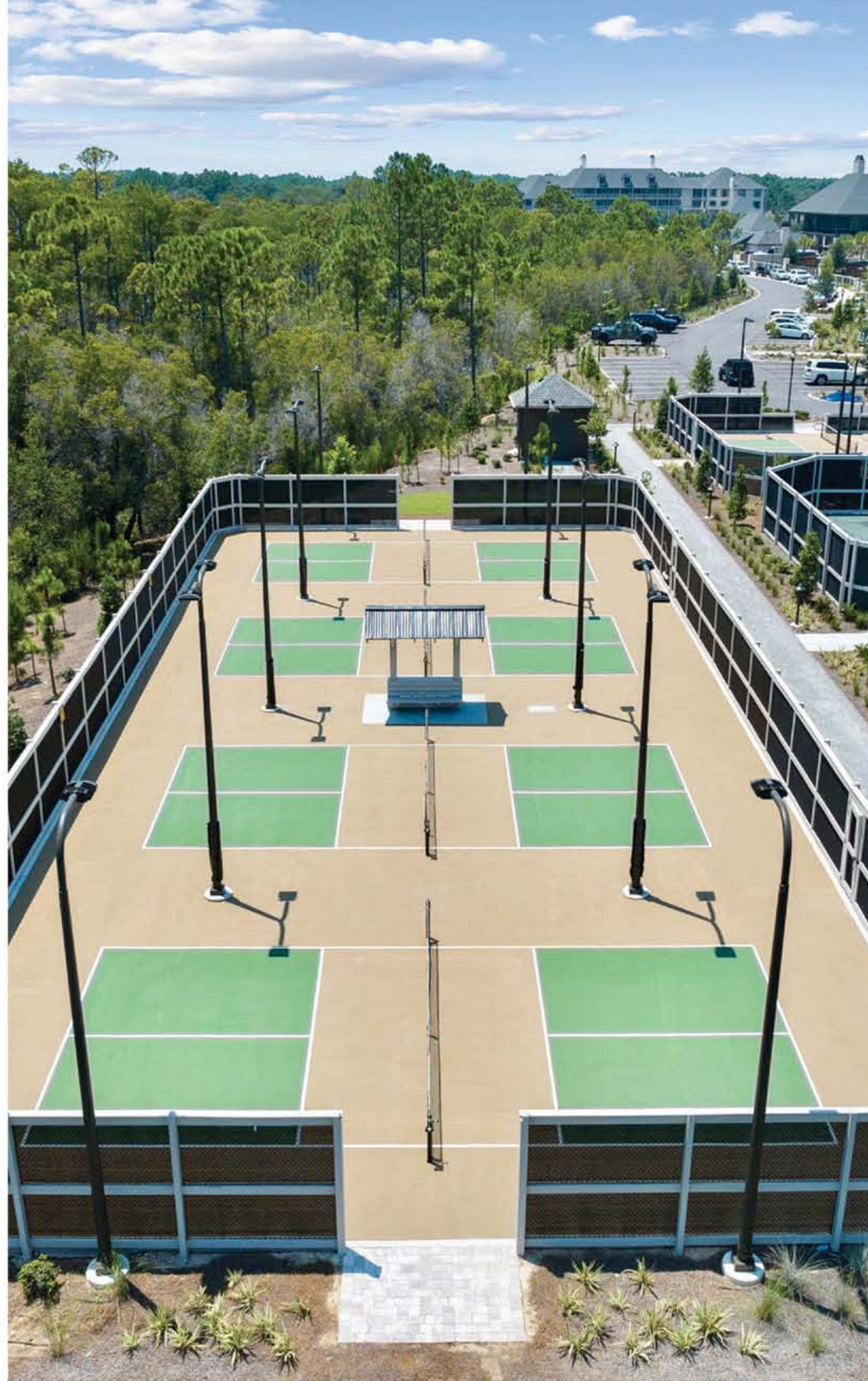
The pickleball wave has swept across beach towns everywhere, making a splash with fans of all things sun, sand, and sport. This fast-growing phenomenon is bringing together players of all ages for fun, fitness, and sun-soaked socializing, perfectly complementing the carefree beach lifestyle. Whether you're hitting the sand for a game of volleyball, cornhole, or frisbee, pickleball is the latest craze to add to your list of beachside activities. We're excited to share the best pickleball spots, insider tips, and fun facts so you can dive into this seaside sensation and keep the good times rolling on the shore.

Pickleball Fever: How It Took Over

Have you been asked lately, "Do you play pickleball?" and found yourself wondering, how did this little sport get so big? It's no surprise—pickleball has swept the nation, but what's behind its growing popularity?

Pickleball combines the best of tennis, badminton, and ping-pong into a fan-favorite game that's both easy to pick up and thrillingly fast-paced. The sport provides the opportunity for players to "jump in" with little experience and leave having had some physical and social interaction. Because the game moves on a rotating serve, there are high levels of verbal communication, providing the perfect space for socializing.

Pickleball's boom in our own little slice of paradise along Florida's Scenic Highway 30A comes as no surprise—our friendly, adventurous community loves anything that promotes social interaction, active lifestyles, and fun for the whole family. It is easy to learn, requires minimal equipment, is available to all ages, accommodates different skill levels, and provides a low-impact yet full-body workout.



Alexa Bruner, the director of tennis and pickleball at the Watersound Club at Camp Creek, highlighted the enjoyment of pickleball when we asked her why it has become so popular. "It's so great because most anybody can pick it up and play and see results. Whereas tennis takes years to see success, in pickleball, you can see it almost right away."

A Slice of Pickleball History

Pickleball, a truly "American" sport, was invented in 1965 by U.S. Congressman Joel Pritchard and his friends, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum, on Bainbridge Island, Washington. The first pickleball tournament was held in 1976 in Tukwila, Washington. After the tournament, pickleball was recognized in a national tennis magazine. Its traction stirred, and by 1990, the sport was played in all fifty states.

The three dads invented the game to create some summertime fun for their families—little did they know they were originating what would later become a long-lasting national phenomenon.

Pickleball 101: The Basics You Need to Know

Pickleball can be played as a singles or doubles game. The objective is very similar to tennis. You score points by hitting the ball over the net and into your opponent's court. The game is played to eleven, and you must win by two points. You can only score points on your serve, and the server rotates between teams based on winning and losing points. No volleying can occur in the front-most part of the court (called the kitchen). The players use solid paddles made of wood, graphite, carbon fiber, or fiberglass and a plastic ball with mini holes, similar to a wiffleball.

Learning to play is a breeze. Just grab a friend who knows the rules and hit the court. The best way to learn is to jump right in and play with someone leading you through it or to engage in a pickleball clinic led by a professional.



There are many locations across 30A where introductory clinics are offered. The Watersound Club at Camp Creek has a specific clinic designed for first-time players. These pickleball clinics are titled “Learn to Play” and provide all the knowledge a first-time player needs. Bruner shared that the Watersound Club “really is a hidden gem. Members or vacationers staying at Camp Creek have access to all these amazing amenities, such as pickleball courts and lessons.”

30A's Pickleball Hot Spots: Where to Serve and Volley

Our Beach Happy community has embraced pickleball to the fullest. There are so many places for players to meet up for some fun in the sun. The Walton Sports Complex has four public courts currently open for play and four additional courts opening by the end of September. This is a fantastic place to spontaneously meet your friends, reserve a court, or show up for rotating open court games of doubles in the evenings.

Whether you are a homeowner or a vacationer, there are plenty of courts throughout our beach communities. Seaside Swim & Tennis Club, The Watercolor Tennis Club, Sandestin Tennis Center, The Watersound Club at Camp Creek, and Alys

Zuma Wellness Center all feature pickleball courts.

The growth of these pickleball hubs directly corresponds with our community’s desire for them. The director of public relations at Alys Beach, Diana Lane, shared that “this decision [to build pickleball courts] was based directly on our homeowners’ feedback.” She explained that “wellness is such a brand pillar for Alys, and pickleball encompasses being outdoors with friendly interaction... there is a beautiful comradery that comes with racquet sports like pickleball. Our homeowners are passionate about it, and we are excited to provide something that our homeowners and vacationers have wanted for a while.” The pickleball courts are brand new and designed for use by the Alys homeowners and guests of their vacation rental program.

Catch You on the Courts

Whether you’re a newbie or a seasoned pro, the vibrant pickleball scene at the beach has something for everyone. With beautiful courts set against stunning coastal backdrops, plenty of clinics to choose from, and a lively community that embraces this exciting sport, there’s never been a better time to hit the sand, grab a paddle, and doink with your friends. 🍷



Fun Pickleball Trivia to Wow Your Court Mates

Why is it called pickleball?

Believe it or not, the sport was named after a dog. The game’s founders had a pup named Pickles who loved chasing down the ball and bringing it back. What started as “Pickle’s Ball” quickly evolved into the catchy name we all know today—pickleball.

Which U.S. presidents have hit the pickleball court?

Ever wonder if pickleball has reached the White House? Well, it has! Both Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton were known to have enjoyed a game or two.

How many people in the U.S. are pickleball fanatics?

A whopping 4.8 million people in the United States proudly call themselves pickleball players, and the number’s only growing.

Why is the no-volley zone called “the kitchen”?

Back in 1965, when pickleball was invented, the no-volley zone earned the nickname “the kitchen.” Just like avoiding chores, players tried to stay out of this small, tricky space.

What’s the record for the longest pickleball game ever?

Think you can handle a marathon match? The longest recorded pickleball game lasted an incredible 17 hours and 25 minutes. Tyler Loong and Yvette Hinton set this record on August 12, 2022, during a professional event.



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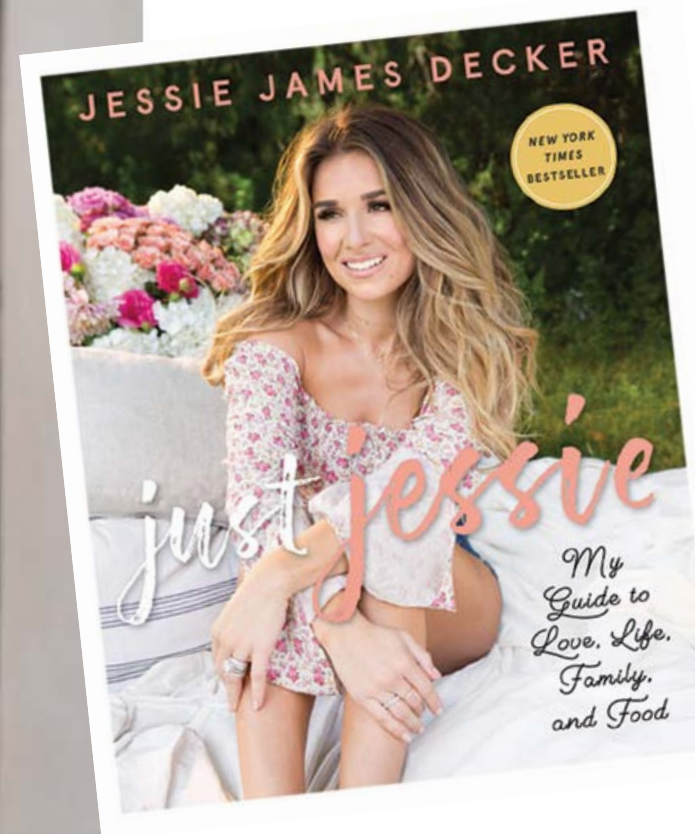
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Balancing Act



Jessie James Decker on Orchestrating a Thriving Career and Blissful Family Life

As a dynamic powerhouse in entertainment and lifestyle, and a devoted mother of four, Jessie James Decker has mastered the art of finding happiness in life's small moments. Supported by her husband, former NFL star Eric Decker, Jessie skillfully balances her successful career with her fulfilling roles as a partner and a mother to their four children. What started as a passion for performance and a vibrant music career has blossomed into ventures in fashion, cookbooks, and more, showcasing her boundless creativity. From the rise of her Kittenish brand to her beloved wine club and expanding kitchenware and eyewear lines, Jessie's journey illustrates the fulfilment that comes from embracing diverse passions. As she navigates a thriving career and a vibrant family life, Jessie shared with *Beach Happy* how she finds balance and joy.

PHOTO: JOHN HILLIN

“
I started writing cookbooks because I love sharing recipes and helping families create memorable meals together.
”

Cooking Up Memories: Jessie and her NFL star husband, Eric Decker, enjoy quality time in the kitchen, bringing the family together with favorite meals.



What was it like growing up in Italy and moving frequently as a military family? What did you learn from those experiences?

I only lived in Italy for a year, but my mom will tell you it was one of the best experiences of her life. From there, we lived in about fourteen different places. Being a military kid definitely shaped me into the person I am today. I'm extremely adaptable and able to change situations and my surroundings pretty easily. But it's also been nice living in one place now for my kids and having a hometown because I never did.

What is your earliest memory of singing or performing, and what do you love most about singing, performing, and songwriting?

Some of my earliest memories of performing are singing the ABC's and "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" in front of my big Italian family in Louisiana. I would sit in their little house surrounded by all my aunts and uncles. My great aunts and uncles were all in their eighties, and I would sing for them from as early as two and three years old. They would lose their minds! They were super expressive like Italians are. I remember loving how much they loved it. Then my first time ever being on stage was when I was nine years old. My mom put me in a talent show in Baker, Louisiana. I had never performed on stage in my life. I just remember getting up there and feeling like it was where I was meant to be. I sang and yodelled a song called "Cowboy's Sweetheart." I had on red high-top tennis shoes, a blue jean vest, blue jean pants, and this cute little red headband. I sang and ended up winning the entire talent competition. When I say the entire talent competition, I mean they had different divisions: kid, teen, and senior citizen. I won the whole thing, so after that, I knew that was what I wanted to do forever. I loved singing and I loved performing.

When did you decide to explore cookbooks, and what inspired you to dive into this new venture?

I started writing cookbooks because I love sharing recipes and helping families create memorable meals together. I didn't really start cooking until I met Eric. I lived on my own or had female roommates before him. It was just your typical takeout or throw in a pack of oatmeal for breakfast. But I had a hungry football player on my hands. He was always ordering Jimmy John's. I was tired of it, so I called my mom and asked for the recipes she made when I was a kid, determined to figure it out. And I did figure it out. As I honed my cooking skills, I began sharing recipes on Instagram, which quickly garnered interest. People were asking for more, so I connected with my team to explore the possibility of a cookbook. I'm now on cookbook number three and working on my fourth.

I enjoy sharing recipes for people to make for their families. Sharing a meal at night when you're all sitting around the table together is something that was embedded in me as a child, and it's so special and so important for families. I feel like the heart of the home is the kitchen.





When did you start your own clothing line and stores, and what inspired you to pursue fashion?

I've always loved fashion. I started designing clothes in middle school, specifically for my stage performances. I was deeply inspired by Selena Quintanilla who designed her own performance outfits and owned a boutique. I thought I wanted to be just like her and do that, so I started sketching. I knew I was going to have a clothing line. Then I had the opportunity to make a capsule collection of Kittenish in 2014. It continued to grow, and I officially launched the brand and the store in 2019. It took off and hasn't slowed down since. I still pinch myself every day that I get to do what I love—helping women feel amazing with pieces that they truly love.

Did you always envision having a big family, and when did you make that decision?

I always knew that I would have kids. I didn't know I would have three let alone four! Now that I do, I can't imagine life without them. I love having a big family. I grew up as a big-family girl. My family was everything to me, so having a family of my own now has been the greatest blessing.

What is it like having four kids, and how do you manage family life with your busy schedule?

I get asked this question a lot. I will tell you that it is putting children and your family at the top of the pyramid. I always envisioned a pyramid, with what's most important—your children and your family—at the top, and then you layer everything else underneath to balance it all out. When you put what matters most at the top of this pyramid, everything kind of falls into place and you don't feel any guilt. I've learned a lot along the way, but I think I've got it more figured out now than ever before. I always put my children first. I don't book any work appointments or phone calls past picking them up from school. I try not to leave them for work trips unless it's absolutely necessary.

What are some of your family's core values, and what makes your family unique?

Eric and I are committed to instilling core values in our kids, focusing on faith, love, kindness, and the importance of family time. We encourage them to work through everything together as a family. We do everything together, and from my experience as a parent, I can see how we're building incredible confidence in our children. I couldn't be more proud of them. I think when you're asking what our core values are, I would just say that putting each other first, making sure that we're all together as much as we can be, and always being kind are the fundamentals of our household. We're a wolf pack.



What are your family beach trips like, and how do they fit into your life?

I've been going to the beach, specifically the Destin and Panama City Beach area of Florida, since I was a little girl. It is my happy place. It's where I've created countless cherished memories with my parents and siblings during our boat trips to Crab Island. Riding up and down Panama City Beach during spring break with the music on and the windows rolled down with the other spring breakers. The sugar-white sand and the gorgeous emerald water—it's just such a special place to me. I remember saying that when I got older, I was going to have a place down here one day. I wanted to be able to do this with my family. I'm pretty fortunate that I've been able to do that and now it is a happy place for my children. It's our second home.

How do you find happiness amidst your busy life, and are there any daily rituals you follow to boost your well-being?

I find happiness in simple, everyday moments with my family, whether it's savoring a morning cup of coffee or watching my little ones wake up. Over time, I've learned to live in the present, appreciating life's little moments without constantly worrying about what's next. My career still drives me, and I am an entrepreneur and an artist. It's my creative outlet, and I still need that part of myself too.

What are your latest projects and what are you focusing on in the coming year, both professionally and personally?

I am gearing up for some more projects. I have taken a lot of time off since having my baby, and with Denver, I don't like having to rush to be anywhere. I work from home, and I prefer not having to be anywhere, especially after having a baby. I just needed some time to be home and just be. But I have a lot of projects coming up. I have more music coming out and more Kittenish news coming. I'm also working on another cookbook, and I have a home cookware line at Walmart that is expanding. There will be some great news coming out about that at the top of the year.

From her early days as a performer to her rise as a successful entrepreneur and devoted mother, Jessie exemplifies how ambition and contentment can harmoniously coexist. Whether reminiscing about treasured beach moments, managing a variety of projects, or savoring daily joys, Jessie's experience offers an authentic example of finding happiness amid the busyness of life. As she continues to evolve and expand her horizons, her story serves as a reminder of the beauty in balancing ambition with the joys of everyday life. Her journey is a testament to the harmony that can exist between professional success and personal fulfillment. 🍷

Explore more of Jessie James Decker's world at jessiejamesdecker.com and follow her adventures on Instagram (@jessiejamesdecker).

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Finding His Voice

Mason Ramsey on Crafting a Coming-of-Age Debut Album

By Gen Handley
Photos: Kristen Johnson

2024 is a year Mason Ramsey will always remember. In the future, he'll remember it as the year he sang his new single, "Blue Over You," with Lana Del Rey at Fenway Park. He'll remember it as the year he officially entered young adulthood, turning 18 years old on November 16, during which he will be on a major 38-date tour across the US. But looking back, Ramsey will most likely think of 2024 as the year when he released his first record, *I'll See You in My Dreams*, on September 20.

"It's my coming-of-age album," he said, after a day rehearsing in his Illinois studio. "I've been waiting a long time for this now—and I know my fans have as well."

Both the 17-year-old singer and his growing fan base have been waiting for several years, ever since a video of him at 11 years old singing Hank Williams' classic, "Lovesick Blues," went viral

on the internet. While he has released three EPs and many singles, including holiday songs and the recent track, "Shake Shake (All Night Long)" from the *Twisters* movie soundtrack, this is his first full-length album.

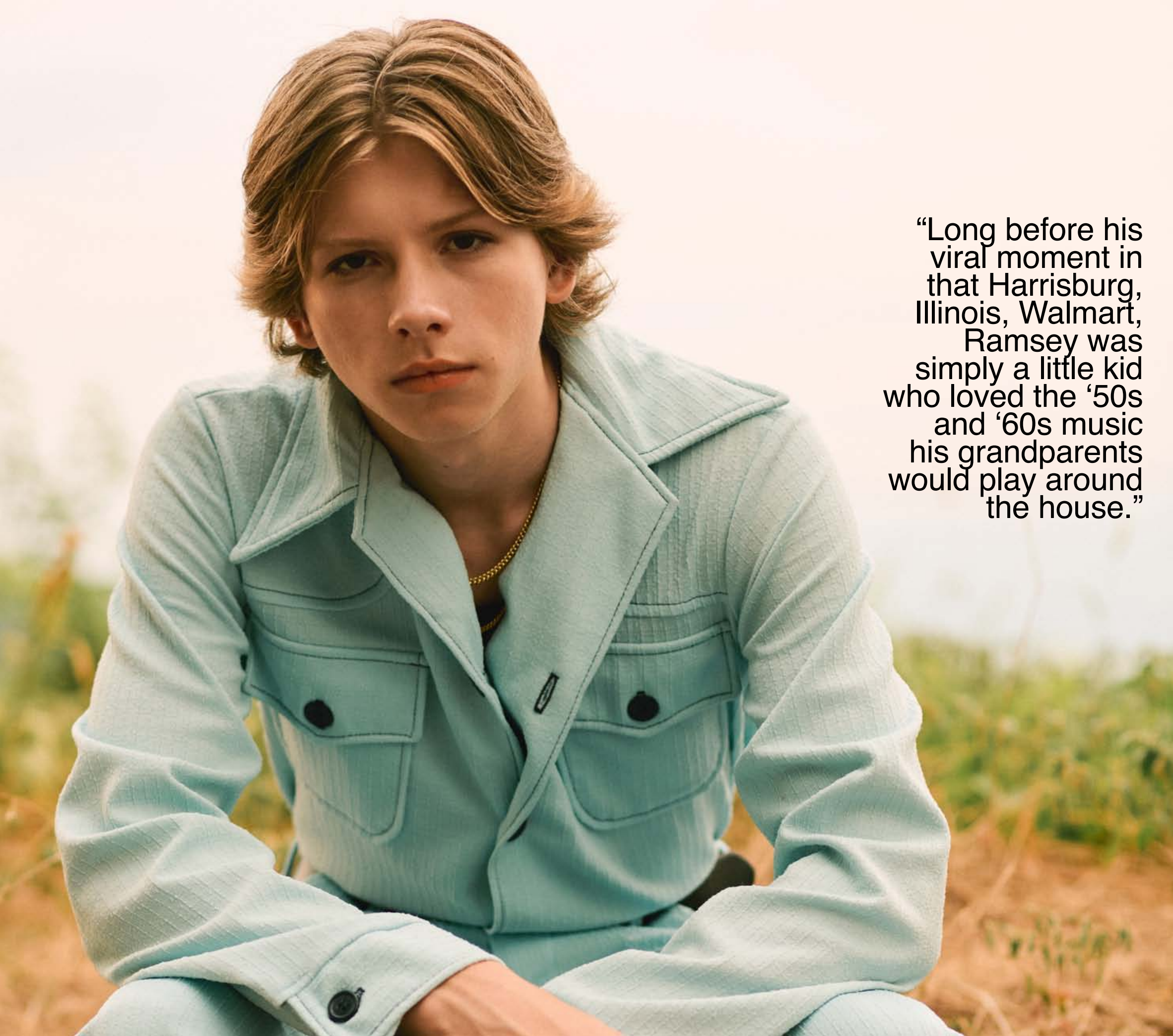
Despite the attention since the video went viral, Ramsey remains unfazed by the fact that this is his first full-length record. He seems to be enjoying this moment in his life.

"No, I don't really feel any pressure," he admitted. "It's just an exciting moment for me because it's my debut album, and I have more excitement than I do pressure."

While he is known for his incredible voice, Ramsey has become a gifted songwriter as well, constantly jotting song lyrics and ideas down, which come when he's sleeping or working on his '68 Chevy pickup.

"I write all the time," he said. "I'll be working on my truck and something





“Long before his viral moment in that Harrisburg, Illinois, Walmart, Ramsey was simply a little kid who loved the ‘50s and ‘60s music his grandparents would play around the house.”

will pop in my head, and I take it into the studio with me and be like, ‘I came up with this really cool idea.’ And then my producer, Dan Fernandez, will play something on the piano or guitar and we’ll build from there.”

This is how the name of the album (and its title track) originated. Ramsey said it is one of his favorite songs on the new album, but it also felt like a message to his fans, in a way.

“My producer started playing something on the piano, and we didn’t know what to call it,” he recalled. “But I really liked ‘I’ll See You in My Dreams’—I felt like that would be pretty cool because I see my fans in my dreams.”

Like the ‘50s and ‘60s artists he grew up with, *I’ll See You in My Dreams* is reminiscent of country and pop music from a bygone era when romance ruled the airwaves. This 14-song album demonstrates a voice and maturity that stretch far beyond his 17 years, making the prospect of future music even more exciting. Like Lana Del Rey who he sang with, listening to Ramsey, he sounds like he was born in the wrong decade. His vocals wouldn’t sound out of place in a 1957 Las Vegas diner jukebox.

From the nostalgic album opener, “All I Need Is You,” to the romantic closer, “I’ll See You In My Dreams,” Ramsey’s debut record is a memorable ride down more sentimental times and memories. The album includes snapshots like “The Woman From Havana” and the uplifting following track, “Joy,” both of which employ horns in different, powerful ways. The haunting, beautiful “Blue Over You,” which he sang with Del Rey is also included, showcasing the incredible control and range Ramsey’s voice has developed over the years.

However, long before his viral moment in that Harrisburg, Illinois, Walmart, Ramsey was simply a little kid who loved the ‘50s and ‘60s music his grandparents would play around the house. In addition to Hank Williams, his musical idols include Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Donny Hathaway, Elvis, Ricky Nelson, and Buddy Holly, whom he discovered when he was six.

“I loved Buddy Holly too,” he said. “But I was raised on Hank Williams because my grandpa would always listen to that music in the house, in the garage...wherever he was, he was always listening to it. This was ever since I was one or two...so really since I was born.”

And as a sign of things to come, Ramsey began picking up and singing these songs at just two-and-a-half years old, already developing his own unique voice. Part of that unique voice is finding ways to connect with his audience such as through intimate VIP events and performances where he’ll meet and talk to fans. He also connects through his open, accessible lyrics such as the poignant track, “Family Pictures,” which he wrote about his personal experiences as well as the listener’s circumstances and perspective.

“It’s about my grandparents and my life, but it’s also about other people who don’t have families,” he said about where he gets his inspiration. “I try to write about other people as well.”

But it's playing live, on the stage in front of people, where Ramsey says he feels a real unique connection and bond with the audience.

"I love it when fans get to see me live just because, honestly, they get to see the real me on stage," he said. "That's really exciting for me."

"I engage with the audience...the audience engages with me and it goes like that and I love it," he said of this relationship. "Even the people in the back, I try to connect with them too."

Ramsey has an empathy and desire to write from other perspectives and themes that are much more mature than his 17 years. His strong work ethic and grounded attitude have helped him maintain a work-life balance.

With his work intensifying and becoming busier and busier, how does he manage a successful music career with schoolwork and normal life?

"Very carefully," he laughed. "It's not the easiest thing to do and you have to work in between things—in between shows and my schedule. I've been touring pretty non-stop this year, but I've been keeping on it and doing my schoolwork."

In addition to Del Rey, his talent has attracted the attention of many names including the Grand Ole Opry and Ellen DeGeneres, who hosted him on their popular shows. He was also included on one of Lil Nas X's remixes for his massive hit, "Old Town Road" with Billy Ray Cyrus and Young Thug. He also joined Lil Nas X to perform the song at the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards.

"It was a magical moment for me," he said about his Boston performance with Del Rey. "I had never been to Fenway Park."

He says that when he's on stage, he experiences a magic where the words and melodies take control of his body.

"Being on stage is like having an out-of-body experience," he said. "From start to finish, I just let the music take over and focus on giving fans a great experience."



With the rest of 2024 packed with exciting plans as well as any other surprises his burgeoning career will bring, Ramsey said that between trying to graduate from high school and tour as a successful musician, there isn't much time to relax. But when he does have downtime, it's pretty simple.

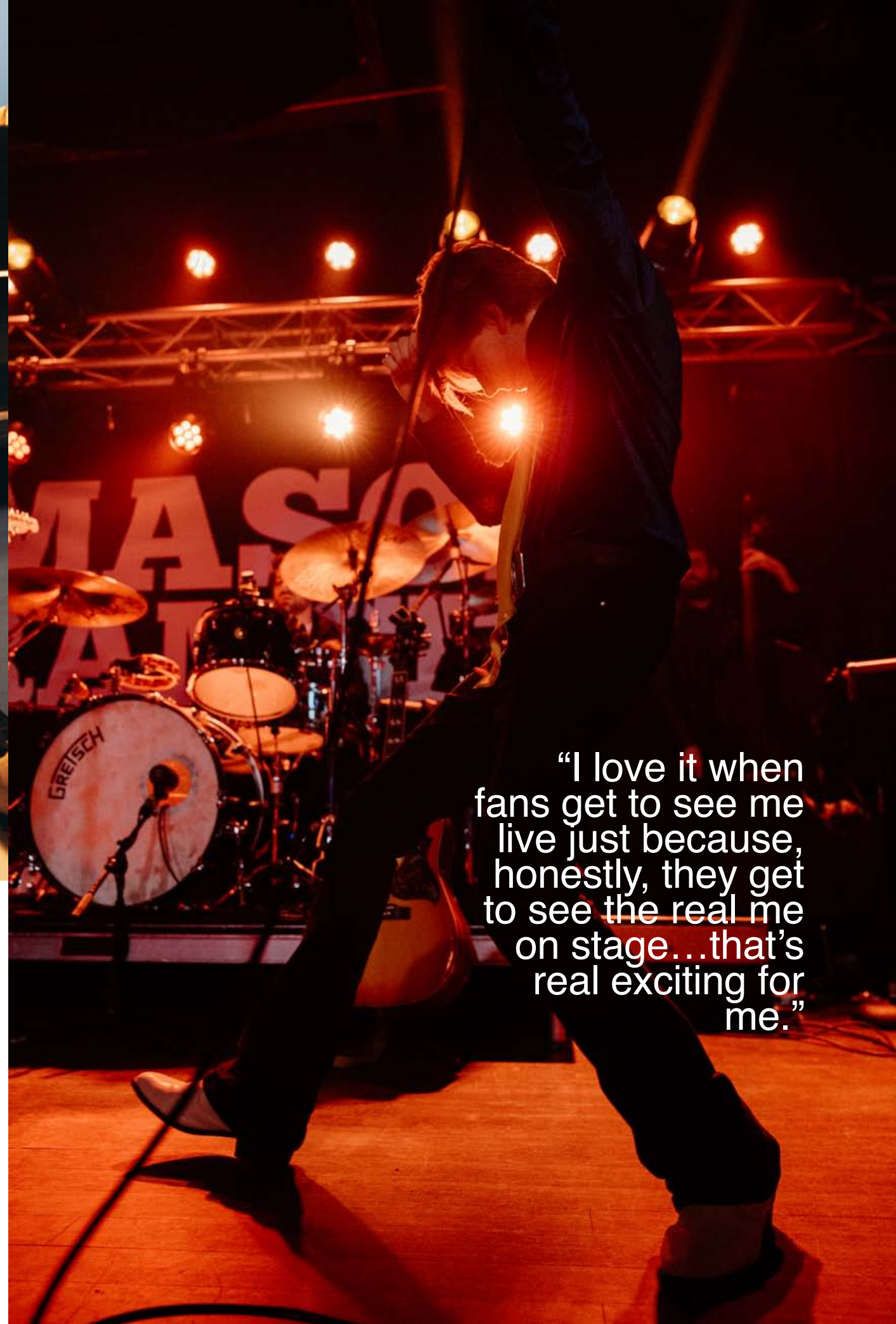
"I work on my vehicles, and I sleep and I take my vitamins and that's about it," he laughed. "That's all I want and need, really."

For the latest updates and to explore more of Mason Ramsey's music, visit masonramsey.com and follow him on Instagram (@masonramsey).



Mason performing live on stage with Lana Del Rey at Fenway Park in Boston.

PHOTO: FAITH NGUYEN



"I love it when fans get to see me live just because, honestly, they get to see the real me on stage...that's real exciting for me."

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Exploring the Dynamic Interplay of Water and Sand Through the Lens of Jonah Allen

Jonah Allen is a world-class artist whose photography masterfully captures the movement and essence of the ocean. A passionate surfer, musician, and photographer, Jonah's deep connection to rhythm, combined with his discerning eye for coastal hues, has made his artwork a defining feature of the beachside communities in Northwest Florida. His pieces are cherished not just locally, but have also found their way across the country and around the globe, each one evoking the familiar sensations of sand beneath your feet and the soothing call of the surf. Jonah's images are more than just photographs—they are expressions of ease and tranquility, borne from an artist's deep commitment to, and understanding of, his coastal subjects.

For Jonah, sharing the experience of nature is the heartbeat of his work. His purpose is twofold: to create a divine connection through his art and to inspire others to immerse themselves in the natural world. His photography encapsulates the emotions that have drawn countless visitors and lifelong residents to the Florida Gulf Coast. Each evocative photograph, crafted with extraordinary skill and a deep reverence for the environment, becomes an essential expression of the serenity that only those who have truly experienced the ocean's embrace can fully understand.

Explore more of Jonah Allen's coastal art at jonahallengallery.com, and stay updated by following him on Facebook (@jonah.allen.studio) and Instagram (@jonahallenstudio).

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illustrating the
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cresting moment.



Yin & Yang, Celestial Cathedral No. 1
“Yin and Yang” captures a rare moment of natural symmetry, where a puddle perfectly mirrors a cloud, symbolizing the unity of earth and sky in a striking, harmonious composition.

Veins of Sand No. 14
A compelling part of the “Receded Time Series,” this image showcases a sinuous sand pattern formed by the ebbing tide, capturing the quiet beauty of nature’s transient moments.





Sea Study No. 44
Shot at sunrise,
this 2024 favorite
uses long
exposure to
render the wave's
motion like brush
strokes on a
canvas, capturing
the fleeting
beauty of dawn.



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*COMING SOON TO A NEW LOCATION IN THE DELLA.

CELEBRATING SPACES THAT CONNECT US

TOWN CENTER, THE HEART BEAT OF ALYS BEACH, NEARING COMPLETION.



THE DELLA AT ALYS BEACH

As Alys Beach continues to bring its New Urbanist master-planned vision to life, active common spaces and a curated cast of merchants not only enhance but are vital to the balance of life within. Over the last several years, Alys Beach has moved rapidly towards the completion of these civic offerings, including the common spaces, amenities, and Town Center.

The Town Center, easily accessed on foot or by bicycle, continues to grow around the Alys Beach Amphitheatre, and features a thoughtful collection of shops, restaurants, and a market. Here, residents and guests experience the heart beat of the town, often through a robust, vibrant collection of events celebrating the arts, culture and performance, and the luxury of food, drink, sport, holidays, family, and friends.

The Della, a mixed-use condominium at the north end of the Amphitheatre with commercial spaces on the ground level and residences above, has completed construction. Residences have been occupied and the restaurant and retail spaces are currently in interior build-out to accommodate exciting new merchants.

O-Ku Alys Beach is scheduled for an early fall 2024 opening and will bring modern, authentic Japanese cuisine celebrating innovative ingredients prepared with traditional technique, presented with sophistication and warm hospitality. O-Ku is part of the renowned Indigo Road Hospitality Group and will feature a unique, location-inspired menu of sushi, sashimi, nigiri, and savory dishes prepared on the robata. O-Ku will complement the coastal elegance of Alys Beach with a dining atmosphere designed by David Thompson Architect of, Charleston, SC.

Also coming to The Della, the cherished Alys Shoppe is scheduled to fully reopen in spring 2025, taking its permanent location on the building's east end. With minimal, refined interiors designed by Hart Howerton Architects, the Alys Shoppe will continue to outfit residents and guests with logo apparel and accessories as well as a thoughtfully distilled collection of designer offerings. This fall, the Alys Shoppe will continue to pop-up in The Della's west-end courtyard, with hours of operation reflected on the Shoppe's website: AlysShoppe.com.

Between The Della and The May, along the northeast corner of Town Center, construction of The Dannelly & Varian is well underway on the designs from Michael G. Imber Architects of San Antonio, TX. These mixed-use condominiums will feature thoughtfully cast restaurant and retail merchants, offering Alys Beach residents, guests and neighbors a rounded variety of shopping and dining experiences.

Life in Alys Beach is defined as much by the spaces that comprise the common realm, the civic spaces, as it is by the life happening within its walls, within homes. These shared private amenities, pocket parks and pedestrian paths, and the commercial Town Center are integral to the life of the town – spaces for play and relaxation, revitalization and wellness, spaces that connect us to each other and foster community, architecturally significant spaces and spaces that simply frame the natural landscape.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT SALES@ALYSBEACH.COM

FALLIN' FOR THE BEACH

MUST-HAVE GEAR FOR AN AUTUMN COASTAL ESCAPE

As fall rolls in with its cozy bonfire nights and dreamy sunset walks, it's the perfect time to refresh your beach gear. We've rounded up a perfect mix of stylish, comfy, and eco-friendly essentials to keep you in sync with that laid-back coastal vibe. Whether you're planning a relaxed day by the shore or gearing up for some fall beach adventures, these picks will have you covered. Dive in and discover your new seasonal favorites.

2

CORKCICLE BEVERAGE BUCKET BAG

No party fouls with this Corkcicle Beverage Bucket Bag. This cooler bag is your new BFF for beach picnics. It's stylish and super functional, keeping your drinks cold on the go and transforming into a chic ice bucket when you get there. Plus, it's made from 100% recycled materials, so you're doing your part for the planet while enjoying those crisp beach days.

corkcicle.com
\$180

1

30A LOGO COMFORT WASH CREWNECK SWEATSHIRT

Nothing says fall quite like a cozy sweatshirt, and this 30A Logo Comfort Wash Crewneck is a must-have for any beach lover. Whether you're enjoying a bonfire or just need something cozy for a beachside stroll, this bestseller brings the laid-back 30A vibe straight to your wardrobe. It's classic, comfy, and available in sizes L through XXXL—perfect for layering as the temperature dips.

30Agear.com
\$65



3

LIQUID I.V. HYDRATION MULTIPLIER

Lounge on the beach for any amount of time, and you'll soon find yourself parched. Enter Liquid I.V. Hydration Multiplier®. This powdered hydration solution is a game-changer, with 3x the electrolytes of sports drinks. Plus, it comes in refreshing true-to-fruit flavors that'll keep you sipping happily all day. Oh, and did we mention it's packed with glucose and amino acids to help your body absorb water more efficiently? Hydration has never tasted so good.

liquid-iv.com
From \$24.99



4

SALTIE BY 30A DEEP MOISTURE VITAMIN MASQUE

Fall can be rough on your hair, but this Saltie Deep Moisture Vitamin Masque is like a beach vacation for your locks. Loaded with marine botanicals and organic coconut oil, it's your go-to for that smooth, frizz-free shine. And the best part? Saltie's commitment to the planet—each product is packaged in 100% post-recycled plastic, keeping our oceans just a little bit cleaner. Your hair (and the earth) will thank you.

saltiebeauty.com
\$21.99

5

30A X STANLEY QUENCHER H2.O FLOWSTATE™ TUMBLER

Meet the 30A X Stanley Quencher H2.O FlowState™ Tumbler—the ultimate on-trend accessory for sustainable sippers. Crafted from 90% recycled stainless steel, this 40oz tumbler keeps your drinks ice-cold for up to eleven hours (or two days with ice). Featuring Stanley's advanced FlowState™ lid with three positions and an ergonomic handle for easy carrying, this tumbler is ready for anything, whether it's a beach day, a road trip, or a cozy bonfire by the coast. Dish-washer safe and built to last, this collab is a win for you and the planet.

30Agear.com
\$55

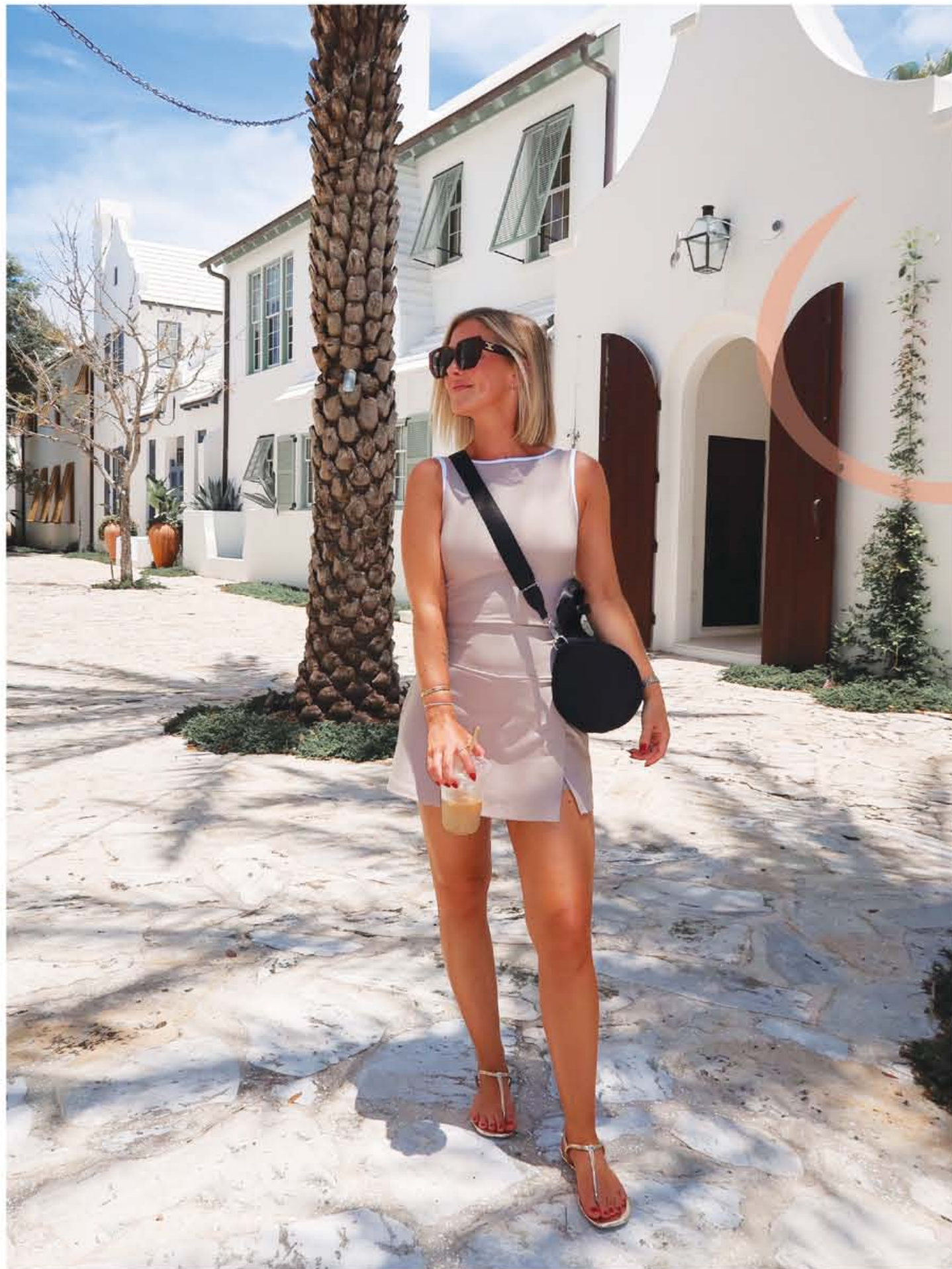
6

SUPergoop! UNSEEN SUNSCREEN SPF 40

Fall sun? Still potent. That's where Supergoop! Unseen Sunscreen SPF 40 comes in. This sunscreen is a total game-changer—completely invisible, weightless, and scentless. Whether you're catching some waves or just basking in the rays, it's water and sweat-resistant, keeping you covered all day. And since it's unisex, it's perfect for everyone in the crew.

30Agear.com
\$38





Styled *for Success*

Amanda West's Transformation from Homemaker to Digital Icon

By Lauren Sage Reinlie

Eleven years ago, 28-year-old Amanda West found herself deeply immersed in the joys and challenges of raising her toddler while her husband's work frequently took him away from home. Despite the demands of motherhood, Amanda's love for her daughter was all-consuming, and she dedicated herself fully to nurturing her child. "My entire life revolved around this tiny human," West shared from her home in Batesville, Indiana.

Amanda embraced her role as a stay-at-home mom with pride, understanding that her presence was vital to her daughter's early years. She believed in the importance of being fully present, both for herself and her child—an outlook that would eventually inspire countless others.

West was no stranger to hard work. She had held a job since she was 13 years old and was accustomed to waking up early, dressing up, and showing up to get things done. Even as a child, she often wore her mother's lipstick around the house, with a purse draped over her arm (often containing nothing more than a couple of dollars for the church collection plate).

However, at home with only her daughter as an audience, Amanda realized it didn't matter whether she wore lipstick or yesterday's mashed potatoes. She stopped bothering with getting dressed, fixing her hair, or buying new clothes.



PHOTO: MEG FLORENCE CREATIVE



In her spare moments, Amanda would scroll through Instagram, where she discovered a few women who posted their outfits every morning. She felt a spark of inspiration. She began putting herself together again—doing her hair, applying makeup, and coordinating outfits.

“It motivated me, as a stay-at-home mom, to get up and get myself ready every single day,” West said. “I feel like when I look good, I actually tend to get more accomplished in a day. I just feel better about myself.”

She decided to use Instagram to post pictures of her own outfits, thinking it might inspire other moms to remember how good it feels to show up for the day, even if only the tiniest of humans are there to notice it.



From these modest beginnings, Almost Ready Blog was born.

‘The happiest accident’

Today, West’s @Almost_ReadyBlog Instagram account has around 750,000 followers. She posts daily outfits with links to buy each piece, like a personal stylist for her audience, along with lifestyle content such as recipes, travel tips, and make-up or skincare she enjoys.

“My followers are everyday people who want to put together outfits that make them feel good without the hassle of searching and piecing things together themselves,” West said. “Many of them are teachers, full-time workers, or stay-at-home moms. They’re busy, and this way of shopping makes their lives easier.”

When she started posting her outfits for inspiration over a decade ago, she never imagined it would one day become a full-time business. “It was probably the happiest accident that’s ever happened,” she said.

Back then, the job of a social media influencer didn’t exist. Other women were finding her profile and following her, drawn to her style and upbeat tone, and she started to wonder if she had stumbled across something. She worked hard to get onto the fledgling platform called LiketoKnow.it (now

a multi-billion-dollar influencer marketing company called LTK) and was one of the early creators to join the exclusive cohort. Once the platform started catching on, West’s audience grew exponentially.

“It took off like wildfire,” she recalled.

Today, West works with brands she has supported over the years and new brands that fit her audience. West said she remains passionate about her work, even though it has grown beyond just a hobby. Her business supports her family; her husband no longer travels for work but instead helps with the backend of the company. And the work has given her the opportunity to build a business while doing what she loves most.

“I truly cannot imagine any other job or career that allows this kind of flexibility on a daily basis, that I can still be the stay-at-home mom,” she said. “I cook all the meals. I make lunches and take my daughter to and from school. I’ve never missed a sporting event. But also, I’m working full time and building a business that I own myself.”

West’s family lives in Batesville, Indiana, a small town “with a great public school system” about 30 minutes from Cincinnati, where she grew up. Her daughter, now 14, is into sports, so the family is often busy ferrying



“I truly cannot imagine any other job or career that allows this kind of flexibility on a daily basis, that I can still be the stay-at-home mom.”

her to sports practices or catching Cincinnati Reds games. But mostly, they live a quiet country life, spending time outside and with their extended family nearby. Quite often, the family is also busy planning their next trip to the beach.

‘Our thing’

Those trips have become permanent fixtures in the family’s life in the past two years. In the spring of 2022, they bought a second home on the west end of Scenic Highway 30A near the pristine Gulf of Mexico coastline in Northwest Florida.

When West was growing up, her family spent vacations nearby in Destin and other spots along the gulf. “Road trips to Florida were just our thing,” she said. She kept it going with her own family.

Several years ago, she discovered the 30A area on a work trip to Seaside. Soon after, she brought her family back to visit Rosemary Beach. Then they started visiting as often as possible, staying in every nook and cranny along the 20 miles of Scenic Highway 30A.

It didn’t take long to start dreaming of buying a house there for extended stays with their two dogs. After more than a year of searching, they were about to give up when they finally discovered the perfect home. Now, entire summers are spent at the beach from when her daughter gets out of school until she returns.

“There’s no more relaxing place than being on a beach,” West said. “It doesn’t matter the time of day or the activity, whether it be swimming, walking, or just sitting and looking at the wildlife, it’s serene. I always feel good when I’m down there.”

West has traveled to beaches all over the world but hasn’t visited anywhere as much as she has the gulf in Florida. “Not only is the beach absolutely incredible, but the water in that part of Florida is as clear as pool water.” West noted that the 30A area offers an abundance of activities. There is something for everyone in the family (whether it’s a casual beach day or a fancy dinner date at Alys Beach) at every age and stage. Each time they return, her growing and changing daughter finds a new interest to explore or a new restaurant to try.

When West is on 30A, she posts beach content, often for people planning beach trips and looking for bathing suits or outfits for hot and humid weather. (Tip #1: One-piece outfits like breezy dresses or rompers help to pack light. Tip #2: Bring powerhouse pieces such as an oversized button-down shirt that can be a swimsuit cover-up but then washed and worn again as part of a night-out outfit.)

Over the past decade, as her business has grown, West has stayed true to what originally inspired her first post.

“Getting up and putting yourself together gives you this little motivation for your day no matter what you might be doing,” she said. “I’ve come to realize this about myself, and I think a lot of people feel that way. I think that’s why this has taken off the way it has because when people see other people doing it, they’re like, ‘Okay, I want to get myself together,’ and it’s just a simple way to help yourself feel good.”

Follow Amanda’s fashion journey and daily style tips at AlmostReadyBlog.com and on Instagram (@Almost_ReadyBlog).

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BEACH BARS



SABA ROCK A SECLUDED PARADISE IN BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

By Lauren Sage Reinlie

Visitors arrive on their boats or on rented catamarans. Some arrive by a small ferry from nearby land. Others arrive by yacht or even helicopter, but nobody ever arrives by car.

Patrons seeking a drink at the bar at Saba Rock, a secluded paradise nestled in the North Sound of Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands, must travel by water. Whether arriving by boat, yacht, or even helicopter, visitors from all over the world find their way to this tiny island for its unique charm and stunning surroundings.

“If you can make it there, you can drink there,” said Melissa Strelkauskas, an American patron who names Saba Rock among her favorite drinking holes in the world.

The Saba Rock bar is on a one-acre island with a small resort of the same name. It has a helicopter landing pad and docking space for boats of all kinds, from yachts to small sailboats.

The crowd is a mix of locals, sailors, and tourists drawn to the incredible selection of drinks, stunning 360-degree views of the blue ocean and harbor, and the welcoming, inclusive vibe.



WHERE JIMMY BUFFETT MEETS HEMINGWAY

Strelkauskas described the experience of drinking at Saba Rock as a cross between a Jimmy Buffett song and a Hemingway novel, with an atmosphere that captures the laid-back island charm reminiscent of Margaritaville but with a unique sophistication.

“The fun of it is people from all different backgrounds at a bar,” Strelkauskas said. “When we were just there for a visit, former NFL players came off a yacht, and then we were just normal people who came off a rented sailboat. Everyone was treated the same, and we are all just hanging out in one place, drinking and watching the sunset.”



“The laid-back yet luxurious vibe attracts both backpackers looking for an island-hopping experience and high-end travelers seeking an exclusive getaway,” said Marta Garraus, a spokesperson for Saba Rock. “The crowd is typically social and adventurous, with a love for the ocean and outdoor activities like diving, snorkeling, and sailing.”

The upper-level bar has a more casual atmosphere than the main restaurant and bar downstairs,

offering stunning views of the sunset and the surrounding crystal-clear waters. The bar also has pool tables and games like Jenga, swinging chairs, and a variety of lounge areas great for taking in the beautiful scenery.

THE STORIED PAST OF SABA ROCK

Bert Kilbride, legendary SCUBA diver and shipwreck hunter, first settled the then-uninhabited island in the 1960s when he was in his late 40s and early 50s.

Kilbride, an International SCUBA Hall of Fame inductee, is known for developing a novice SCUBA education course for resort guests, which is still used today as the beginners’ SCUBA class. More infamously, the government of the BVIs dubbed him a pirate at one point for withholding the location of shipwrecks he had discovered in the area.

Kilbride initially used the spot as an outpost for diving and treasure hunting. He opened a small retreat there for others to do the same. Over the years, it became a haven for boaters, sailors, kiteboarders, and others who were drawn to adventures on the water.

The retreat was destroyed by Hurricane Irma in 2017. It was rebuilt and reopened in 2021, emerging as a vibrant, revitalized destination. Saba Rock now has nine rooms and suites, a restaurant, two bars, a dive shop, a retail store, a spa room, and a full-service marina. It remains an intimate location, staying connected to its storied history as an adventurers’ retreat.

Saba Rock shares the North Sound with other small, scarcely populated islands, some privately owned, like Sir Richard Branson’s Necker Island. (The beaches in the British Virgin



Islands, however, are all public, so anyone can anchor and enjoy the shoreline, even on private islands.)

BEST TIME TO EXPERIENCE SABA ROCK

The high season in the BVIs is December through April. “This is when the weather is at its best—sunny and dry with comfortable temperatures—and many people from colder climates flock to the Caribbean for a winter escape,” Garraus said. This is also when the winds are ideal for sailing, drawing yachters and boaters from around the world.

While patrons stop in the Saba Rock bar throughout the day, the late afternoon and evening are the most popular. People come for happy hour from 4 to 6 p.m. and often stay through sunset. “The bar and restaurant offer a great spot to wind down after a day of sailing or water activities, and the sunset creates the perfect backdrop for cocktails and socializing,” Garraus said.

Though this may be the busy season, Strelkauskas said the bar never feels crowded. It maintains a sense of intimacy and closeness.

Also popular is the daily 5 p.m. tarpon feeding. The tarpons, known for their impressive size and agility, gather by the dock and put on a show, leaping and splashing in the clear water to the delight of adults and children alike.

SIGNATURE DRINKS TO SAVOR

The bar has an impressive, massive selection of liquor, including high-end, hard-to-find tequilas, rums, and bourbons.

The bar is known for its tropical cocktails, especially those made with local rum. One such cocktail is the Painkiller, the unofficial drink of the BVIs. It’s made with rum, pineapple juice, orange juice, cream of coconut, and a sprinkle of nutmeg.

Other rum drinks include the fruity Rum Punch and the Bushwhacker, a creamy, frozen combination of rum, coffee liquor, and coconut.

“From refreshing cocktails to rare, top-shelf liquors, the Saba Rock bar is the perfect spot to unwind, enjoy stunning views, and savor the best in spirits,” Garraus said. “Our skilled mixologists are ready to impress.”

A NAUTICAL PARADISE FOR SAILORS

For people who love adventure on the water, Saba Rock and the British Virgin Islands, in general, are perfect matches.

Strelkauskas said the BVIs are her favorite place to sail. “I think I like it because the BVIs really cater to the yachts and the sailors first,” she said. “And Saba Rock is a perfect example of that. It really is such a cool, special spot.” 🍹

To learn more about this secluded paradise, visit [sabarock.com](https://www.sabarock.com) or stay connected with their latest updates on Facebook and Instagram (@sabarockresort).

5 Things Beach Property Owners Wish They Had Known Before Buying

By Jimmy Burgess

Have you ever dreamed of owning a home or condo at the beach?

Wondering how it would feel to make a last-minute decision on a random Thursday to spend a weekend at your place on the coast? Or maybe share family memories during an extended vacation at a property you own?

Over the past thirty years, I've helped hundreds of individuals and families make that dream a reality along Highway 30A, Destin, and Panama City Beach. In this article, I'll share the five things I've found most owners wish they had known or realized before buying.

1 The Power of Proximity

There's something special about a morning walk to the local coffee shop or an afternoon stroll down to the beach to watch the sunset. Proximity to amenities like the beach, restaurants, entertainment, and shopping is critically important when it comes to the level of enjoyment a beach property can provide.

When selecting a property, think about your favorite places to spend time when you are there. Whatever they are, the ability to walk or ride a bike easily to these locations will exponentially enhance your enjoyment of the property. One of the biggest mistakes beach property owners wish they had avoided was not being patient enough in finding the right property in the right location to maximize their proximity to the community amenities they love.

2 The Value of the Property's Amenities

Although the amenities around the property are important, the specific amenities of the property are just as valuable. Even while staying at the beach, many people enjoy the ability to avoid the crowds and just lounge around their own pool.

An outdoor kitchen where people gather in the afternoon to grill burgers, steaks, or locally caught fish can add to the memories of time spent with friends and family as well. A large dining room table where meals are shared or games are played is an important focal point of the property for those who love sharing their place with others.

Think back to your favorite times when vacationing in an area. What were the parts of the rental you stayed in that brought you the most joy or that led to the most memorable moments? Prioritizing these amenities in the property you purchase is a wise choice many buyers often wish they had focused on more during the buying process.

4 The Value of Local Resources

At some point, you are likely to need a handyman, a cleaning company, a pool cleaner, or any number of other local service providers. This is when who you know becomes as important as what you know. You may know how to fix that leaky faucet, but if you live somewhere else, knowing someone who can help you get a plumber to the house to fix it is important.

Buying a home is one thing, and any real estate agent can help you do that, but the true professionals will act like concierges, introducing you to trusted, local service providers. They know the best property managers, the best new local restaurant you really should check out, and any other connections you might need. A great local agent makes their list of trusted resources available to you, so that you don't have to try and figure it out for yourself.

Find someone, whether it be a real estate agent, property manager, or concierge service that can be that local resource for you. The peace of mind that comes from finding someone locally that you know you can count on is another thing most coastal property owners wish they had realized the value of before they bought.

Jimmy Burgess is a seasoned real estate agent with thirty years experience, currently serving clients in the 30A, Destin, and Panama City Beach areas with Real Brokerage. For more details on Jimmy or the 30A area, visit his website at 30aluxurypropertiesgroup.com.

3 The Mental Health Benefits of Ownership

Research has shown that spending time near water can lead to increased relaxation, improved social interactions, better brain health, enhanced physical activity, and relief from stress. The mental health benefits of spending a long weekend or week in a rental property near the beach are one thing, but there is a different level of peace that comes with knowing you have access to your own place whenever you want it.

That peace and comfort of always having the next trip on your calendar keeps owners excited about their future. Weathering the tough weeks at work is easier knowing a trip to their place on the coast is right around the corner or available if they need a quick getaway for some rest and relaxation.

5 The Three Types of Investment ROIs

Investments typically have one of two primary goals: growth or income. Some real estate investments focus on income, or in other words, positive cash flow (rental income exceeding the expenses of owning the property), while others focus more on long-term valuation growth as prices go up over time.

But there is a third type of ROI that most people overlook. It is the non-financial ROI a coastal property has the potential to produce for an individual or family. Think back to your favorite childhood or adult memories. Odds are it was a family trip, more than likely at a beach somewhere. You'll remember that place, with those people, for the rest of your life. Those memories have a value that money can't buy.

Owning a beach property is more than just positive cash flow or even capital appreciation. It's about time spent with your children, grandchildren, family, or friends. It's about owning a place that gives you and your beach property the ability to be a part of those favorite, lifelong memories with those closest to you.

The right place may have positive cash flow and long-term capital appreciation, but it will be the memories made that bring an ROI that can only be explained as priceless. That's the ROI that makes all the difference and many beach property owners don't realize it until they own their place at the beach.

So, what's holding you back? Time is continuing to move forward, and memories are available for the making. When the time is right and you find your place, walk in with the confidence that you're making a decision that goes beyond just financial. You're making a decision that can create generational memories for your family and friends.



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PROVIDENCE

By Sean Dietrich



Sean Dietrich, nicknamed Sean of the South, chronicles life in the American South. Find him online at seandietrich.com.

The old timers in my childhood used a word I never understood. The word was “Providence.” The old timers couldn’t give me an exact definition of this word. Probably because it had more than two syllables.

To be fair, Providence truly is a difficult word to define. Even now, when researching this column I couldn’t find a concrete definition.

One dictionary called the word “archaic.” Which is true. Today the term is so outdated that, if you’re a younger reader, I’ve probably already lost you.

So I’ll explain Providence by telling you how the word was invoked by the rural people of my youth.

Okay. Let’s say there was no rain, the world was dry, farmers were losing money. It wasn’t “bad luck.” It was Providence. And when the rain finally began to fall; also Providence.

When two people fell in love? Providence. If someone got cancer and died, people prayed for the family to receive solace in Providence.

Job promotion? Providence. Finding \$20 in your coat pocket? Big-time Providence.

My people, you see, did not believe in good luck, coincidences, or even flashy miracles. There were no mistakes. There were no accidents. It was all Providence.

To my people, life was a trapeze act. Mankind was always swinging recklessly from trapezes, back and forth. Sometimes man fell, sometimes he didn’t. Either way, there was a divine reason for everything—good and bad. You weren’t supposed to know the reason. That’s Providence.

The thing is, nothing makes sense in life. Not a single thing. I’ve been trying to figure the world out since I was a kid but I’ve never been able to.

I went through a period of sad living, when I believed this universe was against me. I lost faith in everything: in people, in goodness, in miracles. For a while I quit believing in God. I told him this often.

But the big merciful sky was patient with me. Heaven gave me time to grow up. And over time something happened. Something changed inside me. I can’t pinpoint when this took place. I don’t remember how it happened.

I started noticing little sacred occurrences in daily life. They came in the form of coincidences. Big ones. Little ones. Medium-sized ones. These events happened every day. Every few seconds. Every moment, a microscopic miracle. Nano-wonders of the natural world. Small glimmers of something “other.”

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been spared when I should have died. I can’t tell you how many times something beautiful happened when I didn’t deserve it. I can’t tell you how often destiny has stepped in and changed my future.

Slowly, year by year, I came to believe that I was wrong about this world, and my humble ancestors were right.

Life really is like swinging between trapezes, making sudden, dangerous movements midair. All you can do is pray the next trapeze is there when you need it. But most times it’s not.

So, I don’t know where I was going with all this except to say that even though you can’t understand what’s going on right now; even though you have nothing left to believe in; even though you feel like you’ve missed your next trapeze; even though you’re stuck in a freefall, just remember this:

There is a giant net beneath you, waiting to catch you.

It’s called Providence. 🍻



MANATEE

Magic

Photo courtesy of Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Experience the Best of Crystal River with Tips for Spotting and Swimming

By Andrea Stehle

Imagine a place where crystal-clear waters reflect the morning sun and life abounds in every corner of the landscape. In Crystal River, a hidden gem in Florida, you can come face-to-face with one of nature's most gentle giants: the manatee. Whether you're seeking adventure or simply a serene escape, this destination promises an unforgettable experience.

Visiting Crystal River is more than just an adventure or nature trip—it's a journey into a sanctuary where nature thrives in its most untouched and pristine form. The springs here are a haven for manatees, especially during the cooler months. There's no better way to experience these magnificent creatures than in their natural habitat. For the best chance to see them at their most active, plan your visit for early mornings or midweek, when the crowds are light and the manatees are most playful.

The peak season for observing manatees runs from November through March, with the largest gatherings occurring between December and February. While manatees can be spotted in Crystal River year-round, their numbers are significantly smaller during the summer.

But there's more than just spotting manatees. Crystal River is the only place in the U.S. where you can legally swim with these incredible creatures in their natural environment. In fact, the area boasts the largest concentration of manatees in the world. Fortunately, several companies offer tours that let you swim alongside these gentle giants.

One such company is Hunter Springs Kayaks. Their expert guides have mastered the art of locating these amazing creatures in the consistently warm, 72-degree waters. They offer manatee snorkel tours that last up to three hours. The only question is: Are you ready to meet a manatee?

Another reputable option is the Crystal River Kayak Company, located just a ten-minute paddle from Three Sisters Springs. In addition to manatee tours, they offer kayak, pontoon, and dive tours during the off-season. If you plan to swim, either to enter the springs or to see the manatees underwater, you'll need to wear a wetsuit. Don't worry if you don't have one—they've got you covered with rentals. In fact, they provide everything you need to fully enjoy your encounter with these awe-inspiring animals.



Fun 2 Dive is another excellent choice—a five-star tour company that’s been offering manatee encounter snorkel tours since 1995. With over twenty-five years of experience, they’ve been a leader in bringing visitors face-to-face with these fascinating creatures. Their tours are all-inclusive, providing all the snorkeling gear you’ll need. Plus, there are no extra fees or hidden charges for parking, gear, fuel, or other essentials.

If sustainability is important to you, you’ll be glad to know that Fun 2 Dive Manatee Tours operates with full permits from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), granting access to the National Wildlife Refuge waters for swimming with manatees. Their commitment to sustainable ecotourism ensures that tours are conducted responsibly, respecting the ecosystem and minimizing the impact on manatees and their habitat. As part of their approach, they keep tour groups small to minimize visitor impact and ensure a comfortable, relaxing experience with plenty of room to enjoy your time on the water.

Every tour includes a guide who stays with you from arrival to departure. Throughout your tour, your professional guide will capture the moment with photos, typically leaving you with fifty to a hundred images to choose from by the end of your trip. Once you return, you can view and purchase your photos. The most popular option is the Classic Manatee Swim, priced at \$65.95 per person, with a maximum of twelve participants. For a more intimate experience with your closest friends and family, a private tour is available for \$600. Alternatively, a semi-private tour, limited to

no more than six guests per boat, starts at \$84.95 per person.

The Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge at Kings Bay is another must-see destination. Established in 1983 specifically to protect the West Indian Manatee, the refuge plays a critical role in manatee conservation efforts. This first-magnitude Florida Springs Complex features over seventy springs, pumping out 600 million gallons of freshwater per day from the Florida aquifer. Key springs include King Spring, Tarpon Spring, Three Sisters Springs, and Hunter Spring. The refuge comprises twenty islands scattered around Kings Bay and is maintained by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The USFWS enforces strict guidelines for manatee interactions to ensure their safety and well-being, making it a critical sanctuary during the winter months when up to 1,000 manatees can be found in and around Kings Bay. The warm water springs are essential for their survival, as manatees are susceptible to cold stress.

“When visiting Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service encourages visitors to practice passive observation, which means not initiating contact with manatees and calmly observing them from a distance and at the surface,” said Wildlife Refuge Specialist Alex Arrow. Manatees have high site fidelity, meaning they often return to the same locations, so habitat conservation in areas like the refuge is crucial for their survival. 🐬

Ready to experience the magic of Crystal River? For more information, visit discovercrystalriverfl.com.



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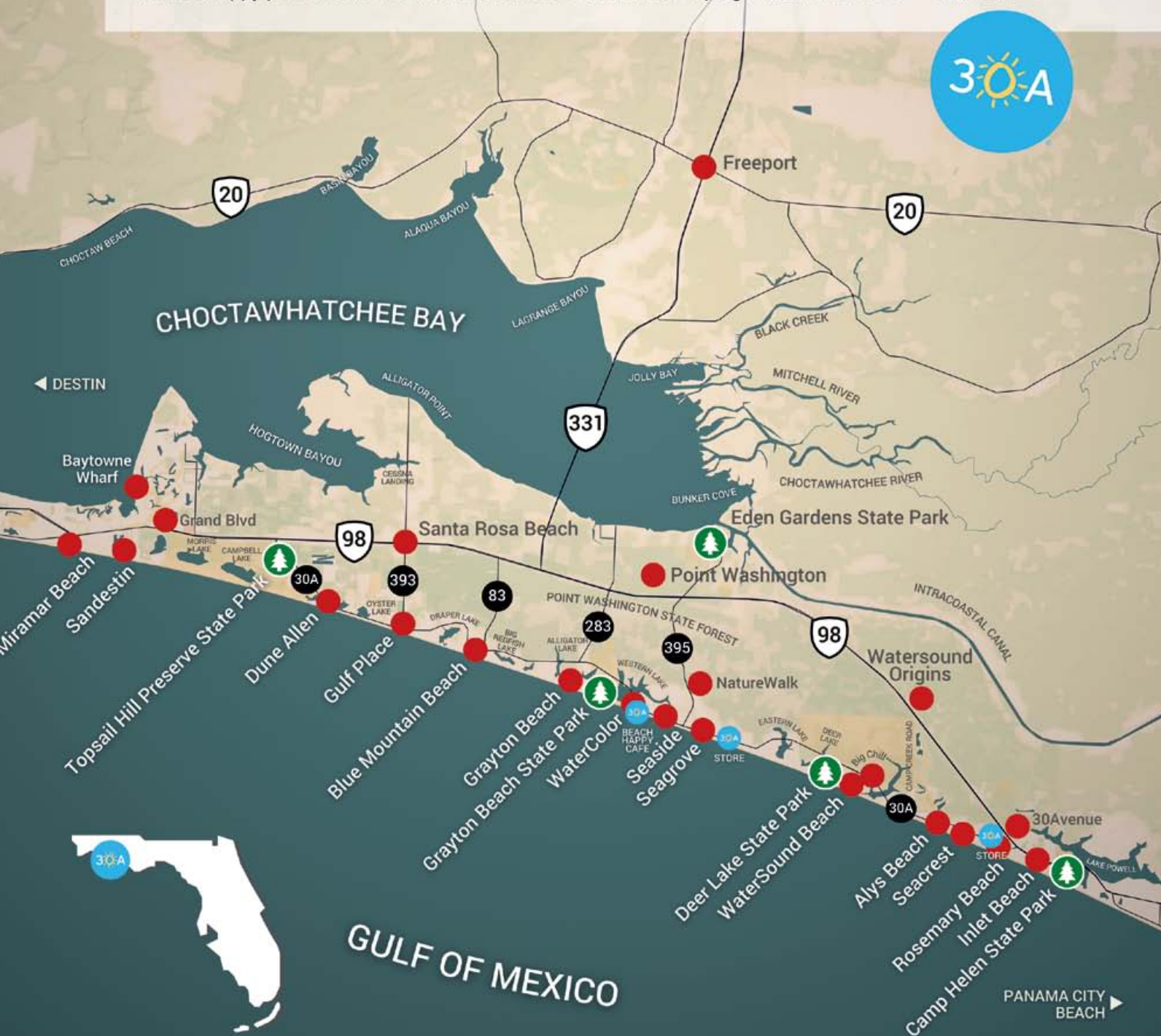


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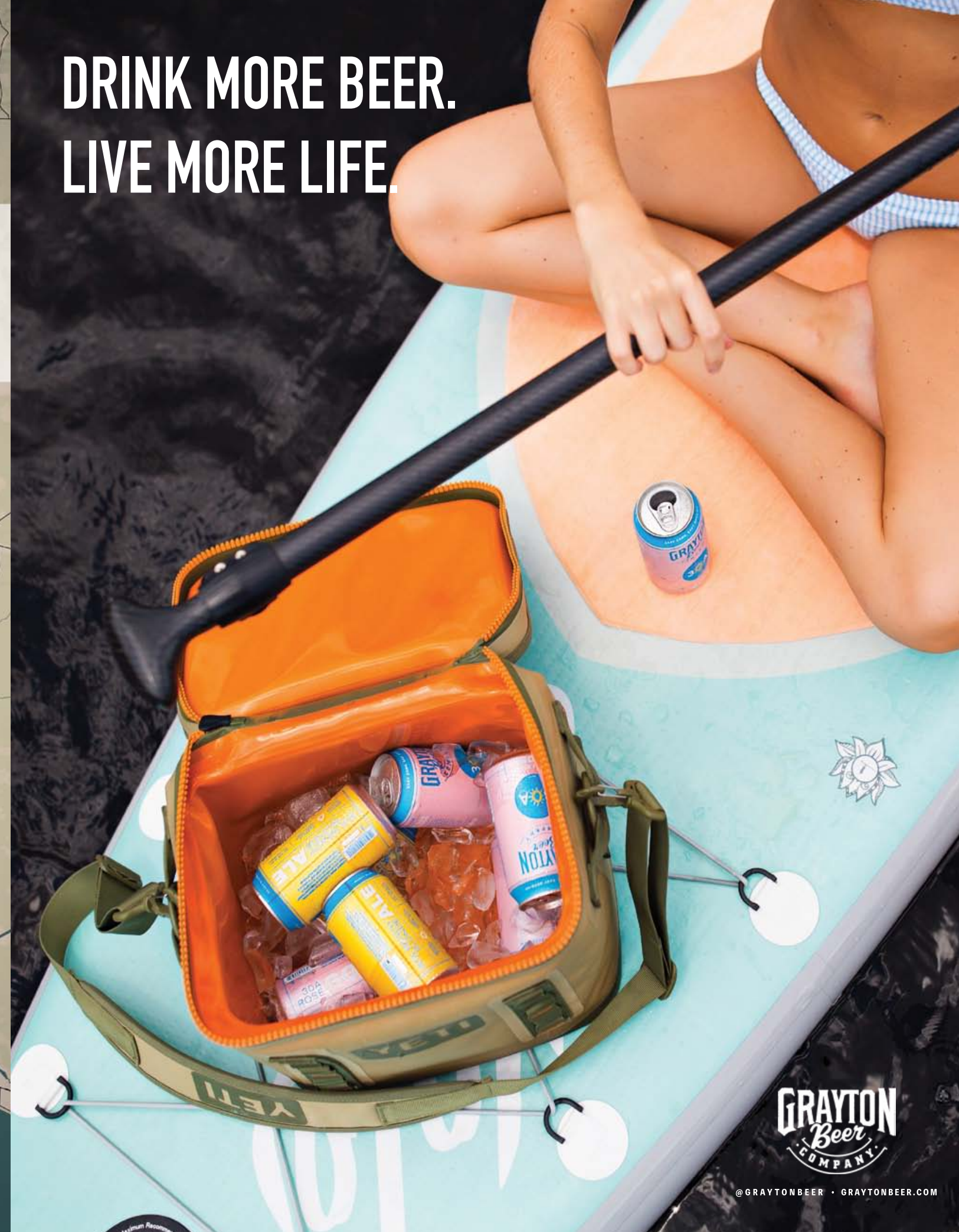
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