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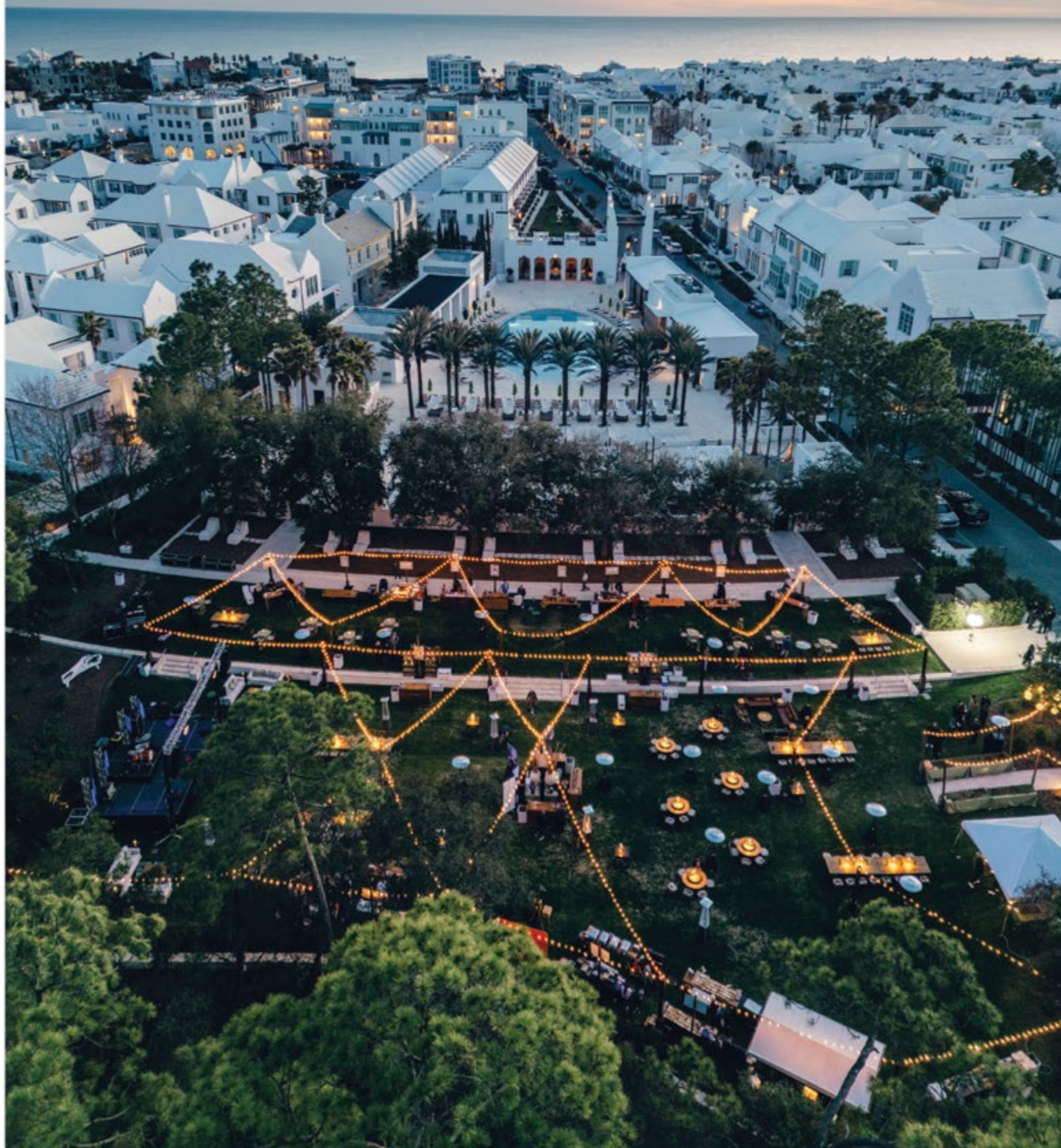
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STILL SALTY, SLIGHTLY COOLER

Let's be honest—fall doesn't exactly slam into Florida the way it does up North.

No crunch of leaves underfoot. No flannel-lined jacket season. No pumpkin patch photo ops that don't involve sweating through your shirt by noon.

But here's what we do get: Sunsets that feel a little slower. Mornings that finally let us breathe. A coastline that sheds its summer frenzy like a well-earned exhale.

Our version of fall doesn't drift in with falling leaves. It rolls in with the tide. The rhythms change, not with frosty air but with quieter beaches, gentler breezes, and the soft squeak of sugar sand under bare feet instead of boots.

Fall here isn't about endings. It's a coastal reset, a chance to recalibrate, reconnect, and maybe check your screen time once in a while.

That's the spirit running through this issue of *Beach Happy*.

This season, the beach takes center stage on our cover, and rightfully so. It's more than a postcard view. It's a tribute to the sand we stand on, the water that defines us, and the quiet power of the coast that grounds us.

We start at your feet. Literally. Our cover story explores the ancient origins of 30A's sugar sand along Florida's Gulf Coast. (Spoiler: It took a few million years to get here.) It's a geology lesson, yes, but it's also a reminder that the beach isn't just a backdrop. It's the main character.



We meet people building beautiful things in unexpected ways. Like Laurie Hood, who turned one dog, one backyard, and one unshakable sense of justice into Alaqua Animal Refuge,

one of the country's most inspiring no-kill sanctuaries. Or the South Walton lifeguards, who train like athletes and show up every day ready to protect this place we love.

Sometimes, the surprises come from the sky. Just north of Choctawhatchee Bay, Eglin Air Force Base is one of the largest military installations in the world, shaping the future of defense while protecting ecosystems in our backyard. That's fighter jets and salamander conservation, all in the same story.

We zoom out to the bigger picture, too. On Florida's southeast coast, Dr. Jennifer Jurado is reshaping how we protect our beaches. Her work with reef restoration and sand replenishment isn't just smart science; it's a blueprint for future generations who deserve to know this coastline the way we do.

We slow down in Yelapa, Mexico, where there are no cars, no roads, and where a woman sells legendary homemade pie from a Tupperware container on the beach. We follow the lens of Elston Webster, whose photography captures the coast, not just as a place but as a presence.

And yes, we took a moment to feature you. In Postcards from Paradise, we highlight a few snapshots from our community—beautiful reminders that Beach Happy isn't a logo or a hashtag. It's a way of being. Whether you're here for a weekend or a lifetime, that feeling stays with you...like sand that refuses to wash off.

So no, fall doesn't hit like a Hallmark movie around here. And that's exactly the point.

It doesn't need costumes or clichés. It just needs a coastline. It's not about sweater weather. It's about soul weather. A change in pace, not personality.

This is our version of fall. Still salty, slightly cooler.

Beach happy, my friends.


Founder,  The 30A Company

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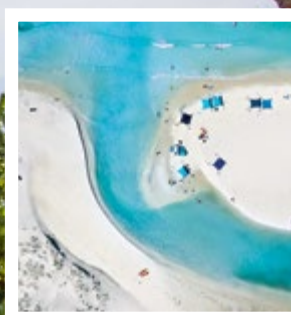
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Cover image credit: Joe Frank
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BEACH HAPPY Team



I've lived along 30A for more than 25 years and built my life around the coastal lifestyle I love. With a strong background in the apparel business, I bring both style and entrepreneurial experience to our brand. I'm passionate about all things outdoors—especially fly fishing, golf, and a lively game of pickleball. I live in the area with my wife, Kajsa Larsson, and together we share a deep love for the Gulf Coast community.

JoAnn Ribauda
CEO & Co-Owner



For over 14 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



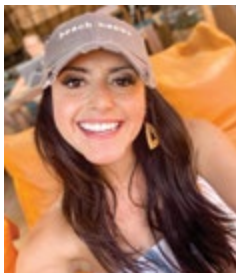
Hailing from the vibrant city of New Orleans and now residing in North East Alabama, my fondest memories involve vacationing on Florida's Gulf Coast beaches. Embarking on my design journey quite some time ago, I've been privileged to work across a spectrum of genres and platforms. With time, my expertise 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



I grew up vacationing on 30A and fell in love with the beauty and charm of this area at a young age. As the Marketing Coordinator, I wear many hats—from curating content on social media to assisting with features for *Beach Happy* magazine. My focus is creating content that captures the Beach Happy lifestyle and highlights the natural beauty of this special place. It's incredibly rewarding to share a location that means so much to me with others and show them why 30A is truly a one-of-a-kind destination!

Emma Miner
Marketing Coordinator



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



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

A detailed photograph of a dining table. In the foreground, a wooden tray holds a baked dish in a skillet and a large piece of grilled meat garnished with onions. Next to it is a bowl of fresh green salad with orange segments. A glass of iced amber-colored drink sits nearby. The table is set with patterned placemats, a folded striped napkin, and silverware. A small vase with pink and white flowers is in the background.

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RESERVATIONS

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1



2

1 SUSAN GUNN

is an Atlanta native and retired paramedic who made Florida her permanent home in 2014. She is a nationally published freelance writer and photographer specializing in night sky, storm, and lightning photography. In her spare time she can be found in the Gulf or exploring the natural world around her. You can follow her photography and writing on Instagram (@sgunnphotography) or visit her online gallery at susangunnphotography.com.

2 CARRIE HONAKER

is a Florida-based freelance writer who is not sure where she will land next, but it will involve messy eating, a spicy Tempranillo and finding the local dive bar. Her work has been featured in *Wine Enthusiast*, *Bon Appétit*, and others. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram (@writeonhonaker).



3



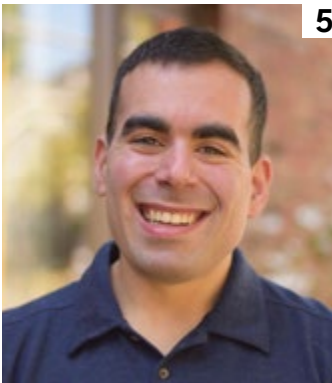
4

3 MARTIN LIPTROT

is British but has lived along Scenic Highway 30A since 2004. After a global career in advertising, he made Northwest Florida his home and runs a local PR and Marketing Agency (98RepublicPR.com). Martin's passions include soccer, cricket, rugby, Formula One and horse racing. He is a fan of craft beers and fine wines and enjoys good company and long, lazy lunches in any of the spectacular restaurants along 30A.

4 LAUREN SAGE REINLIE

is an award-winning freelance journalist currently living in Freeport, Florida. Her work has taken her across the South, where she has covered topics ranging from the wily ways of politicians at the Texas state capitol to the storied land of sunshine and swamp sharks (a.k.a. gators) in Florida.



5



6

5 GEOFF NUDELMAN

is a journalist and copywriter focused on making the world a better place through compelling copy. His writing often covers the intersection of business and culture with a focus on environmental and social issues. He was inspired to contribute to *Beach Happy* following a summer 2024 drive down 30A, exploring each of the towns along the way. You can check out more of his work at geoffnudelman.com.

6 EMILIANO NERI

is a design contributor with deep roots in Italy's family advertising legacy. He ventured to New York City in the early 1990s, immersing himself in the prestigious world of fashion publishing. Over the past three decades, he has distinguished himself as a Creative Director, with contributions to iconic titles such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Glamour*. His aesthetic blends Old World refinement with New World innovation, shaped by collaborations with industry leaders and driven by an enduring commitment to creative excellence.



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INSIDE THE WORLD OF SOUTH WALTON'S ELITE LIFEGUARDS



TRAINED FOR CHAOS, DRIVEN BY DUTY

By Susan Gunn

When people think of beach lifeguards, they may have a stereotypical image of the cool kid in shades up on the stand swinging a whistle, or maybe they imagine a girl in a red swimsuit running down the beach. These generationally projected (and sometimes historically accurate) images might still exist today, but there's so much more at work than meets the eye. Beach safety has become a multi-faceted, serious business.

Here in Northwest Florida, Santa Rosa Beach serves as headquarters to the South Walton Fire District. The SWFD, established in 1983, serves eighty-four square miles and is governed by its own Board of Fire Commissioners, independent of Walton County. Prior to 2006, there was no formal beach lifeguard program or professional beach safety standard in place here. All that changed in 2003 on a warm Sunday in June, when the beaches were heavily populated with tourists and locals on what is now remembered as "Black Sunday."

"It was a warm day, so people were getting in the water," said SWFD Public Information Officer (PIO) Mackenzie McClintock. "The coastline from



Pensacola to Panama City was experiencing extremely significant surf conditions, which resulted in multiple water-related emergencies, and many drowning fatalities. It was a pretty horrific day for the Emerald Coast.”

As a result of that tragic day, local municipalities came together to determine how beach safety would be implemented across the region. “They developed professional beach safety on the Emerald Coast,” said McClintock.

In 2006, SWFD officially launched its Beach Safety Division, funded by tourism development taxes through a contractual agreement with the Walton County Tourism Department.

The Beach Safety Division protects twenty-six miles of coastline, operating from eighteen lifeguard towers from 10 am to 6 pm daily from March through October, and it welcomes applications year-round from individuals aged

seventeen and older to work seasonally as lifeguards in South Walton. The hiring process is not for the faint of heart, nor is the job.

“Beach lifeguards have historically been considered to have easy or laidback jobs, but that’s far from the case,” said McClintock. To qualify, candidates must complete a 500-meter swim in under ten minutes and a 1.2-mile run in under twelve minutes. They must also pass a drug screening and a background check.

David Vaughan has served as Beach Safety Division Director since May 2015. “The 500-meter swim is what eliminates most candidates. It’s a hard test for those without a swimming background,” he said. Candidates who make it through this initial phase attend a training academy, where they learn how to respond to medical calls on the beach, receive ATV training, and become open-water lifesavers under the guidelines of the United States Lifesaving Association (USLA).

“We work in a dynamic environment with emergency response, so standard operating guidelines (SOGs) are useful to set a baseline standard for behavior and a critical-thinking framework to handle both predictable and unforeseeable situations,” Vaughan said. Some of his duties and qualifications include an EMT-Basic license as well as numerous certificates from the American Safety and Health Institute (ASHI) and the Volunteer Firemen’s Insurance Services (VFIS). He is also responsible for overseeing personnel management, operations, and delegation, as well as public and stakeholder addressing.

There are approximately thirty full-time Beach Safety staff members, twenty full-time lifeguards, and an additional 30 to 40 seasonal lifeguards. Luke Turner is one of four Beach Safety lieutenants reporting to Vaughan. Turner is originally from Australia’s Sunshine Coast in Queensland where beach guards are regarded as everyday heroes.

“Growing up in Mooloolaba, the lifeguards were idolized,” said Turner. “I knew I wanted to be the guy that everyone relied on during heavy surf conditions that occurred almost weekly.” At fourteen, he began volunteering with the Mooloolaba Surf Life Saving Club, and by eighteen, he had become a professional ocean lifeguard for the Sunshine Coast Regional Council.

Turner holds a Florida firefighter/EMT certificate and is a Basic Life Support (BLS) instructor, EMR instructor, and USLA personal watercraft rescue operator instructor, among other qualifications.

In addition to his duties as lieutenant, Turner is prepared to take over frontline lifeguarding responsibilities at any time, as needed. Jobs in this division might appear mundane from a layperson’s perspective, but in reality, these guards are among the most elite in their field.

“Our days can involve monotonous routine and then devolve into organized chaos,” Turner said. Lifeguards begin their day on the beach marking rip current locations and performing equipment checks, followed by one hour of physical training (PT). After PT is complete, they call ‘on duty’ and notify SWFD Dispatch of the day’s flag conditions. We continuously scan the surface line for any signs of distress and remain in a constant state of heightened awareness.”

Vaughan and Turner both express strong feelings when it comes to the beach flag warning system. “It’s important that the public understands hazards exist even with smaller wave sizes. We have an entirely different beach—and underwater topography—than the West or East Coast,” Vaughan said.

The flag warning system is used by open-water lifeguarding agencies across the United States to inform the public of surf conditions. It is sometimes overlooked or disregarded—to the detriment of both the public and the rescuers.



“
WE TRAIN
ALL LIFEGUARDS
TO BE QUALIFIED TO ENTER
JUST ABOUT ANY SURF
CONDITIONS ENCOUNTERED
IN THE GULF.
”





The Double Red Flag warning was codified by Walton County ordinance after rescuers from neighboring counties lost their lives attempting to save civilians who ignored the flag warning system. Vaughan and his team want people to know that the system is in place not only for their safety, but also for the safety of the responders. Local law enforcement may issue a \$500 citation—or even a criminal charge—to those who enter the water under Double Red Flags.

Additionally, under hurricane conditions, responders are encouraged to prioritize scene safety, and the decision to enter the water is ultimately left to the individual lifeguard.

“We train all lifeguards to be qualified to enter just about any surf conditions encountered in the Gulf. But there are extreme situations—such as during a hurricane—when we will not attempt a rescue for the safety of our personnel. Fortunately, we haven’t had to invoke that in reality, but it’s always a distinct possibility due to where we live and the environment in which we work,” Vaughan said.

The SWFD and the SWFD Beach Safety Division care deeply about the well-being of those they serve and protect. Part of their mission is to be interactive with the public to educate and inform them, but they also have a vested interest in the outcomes of those individuals who may ultimately become patients. Following up with these patients provides positive reinforcement and reminds these responders that what they do is invaluable. Peer support systems are also in place within the district to assist staff and officers with mental and emotional well-being following critical incidents.

One such day occurred on June 7, 2024. In an extremely rare event, three swimmers in South Walton were injured by what was identified as a bull shark near shore. Elisabeth Foley, visiting from Virginia with her family, was among those critically injured.

Foley spoke with us and shared her experience. She recalled a beautiful, happy day and noticed a man and his son playing in the surf as she entered the water. Her next memory was looking up to see the face of the



same man as he valiantly pulled her free during the attack. Her husband then dragged her to shore, where bystanders were waiting to help.

Foley had been on a private beach with no lifeguard stand at the time of her encounter. Despite the logistical challenges, responders arrived in time. She stated that despite her life-threatening injuries, she remained conscious as she lay on the sand. She closed her eyes—but not before seeing and hearing a young lifeguard she remembers only as “Michael—in red swim trunks,” rendering aid and quietly comforting her.

She said she remains amazed that he and the other responders managed to perform their duties with such calmness amid the chaos. Foley credits her survival to God, the SWFD responders, the Beach Safety lifeguards, and the citizens who rushed to help.

She emphasized that she holds no ill will toward sharks but wants people to always be aware of their surroundings—have fun, but understand there are hazards, and choose to swim near a guarded beach. Despite severe injuries to her groin area and the loss of her hand, Foley is making a resilient recovery. She has since met with her rescuers, a cathartic moment for all involved.

“We cannot live in fear,” she said, and she has already been back in the water since the encounter. PIO McClintock stated that because of that day, four additional guard stands have since been added where there once were none.

SWFD operates in an evolving time, one in which contact with the public is often associated with education, support, and positivity, rather than crisis. McClintock added that social media has allowed public safety agencies and citizens to connect in meaningful ways, promoting education, awareness, and investment in the future of the Beach Safety Division.

Each summer, SWFD offers a six-week Junior Lifeguard Program for participants ages 9 to 16, giving them a hands-on look into the world of surf rescue. The program builds confidence and teaches essential skills in drowning prevention, CPR, running, paddling, and swimming, ultimately fostering the next generation of professional beach lifeguards.

SWFD Beach Safety wants all locals and visitors to enjoy their time on the beach. Director Vaughan emphasized that citizens can help by respecting the beaches, the flag system, the lifeguards, and one another. He continues to urge the public to swim near a lifeguard stand whenever entering the water.

South Walton, and the Emerald Coast as a whole, remains a happy and beautiful place to enjoy the Gulf waters, thanks largely to the dedication and diligence of these professional beach lifeguards. 🏖️

To learn more about South Walton Fire District's beach safety efforts, visit their official website at www.swfd.org. You can also follow them on Instagram (@swfdinfo) for updates and behind-the-scenes insights. For details on the Junior Lifeguard Program, check out the SWFD Juniors Facebook Page (@SWFDJuniors).

PLANNING A TRIP TO 30A? SCAN FOR LIVE SURF AND BEACH FLAG CONDITIONS OR DOWNLOAD THE 30A APP.



KNOW THE FLAGS BEFORE YOU SWIM

The beach flag warning system is used by open-water lifeguarding agencies across the US to inform beachgoers of surf and safety conditions. These flags aren't just suggestions—they're lifesaving alerts. In Florida, the system is even established by state statute to ensure consistency and public safety across all beaches.



GREEN FLAG

LOW HAZARD

All clear for a swim but always exercise caution.



YELLOW FLAG

MEDIUM HAZARD

Be extra careful, as there may be moderate surf or currents.



RED FLAG

HIGH HAZARD

Think twice before taking a dip, as the surf is rough or currents are strong.



DOUBLE RED FLAG

WATER CLOSED

No swimming allowed due to dangerous conditions.



PURPLE FLAG

DANGEROUS MARINE LIFE

Keep an eye out for jellyfish, sharks, or other critters.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Visit usla.org/page/beach-warning-flags

SUGAR SANDS



Photo: Ragan Smith

How Mountains, Time, and Tide Created Northwest Florida's Spectacularly White Sand

By Lauren Sage Reinlie
Photos: Elston Webster





Both sets of my grandparents lived in Northwest Florida, so I grew up visiting the beach every summer. I remember big family breakfast cookouts at the state parks, catching waves with my cousins, and riding home in my grandmother’s car with the windows down and the sea breeze blowing through my sandy hair. My mother taught me to build drizzle sandcastles, letting soupy sand slip through my fingers to form intricate structures. Some of my happiest childhood memories were made in the white sand and crystal-clear Gulf water.

Even then, I knew this sand was different — whiter, softer, almost like sugar.

When I returned to the area as an adult over 15 years ago, the beach was a driving force that made me stay. The sand was soft beneath my feet, and the Gulf reflected every shade of blue and green imaginable. The vast sea stretched out, connecting to all the other oceans in the world. I was hooked.

Before moving back, I had lived in Texas. Texas beaches, though sharing the same Gulf waters, are quite different from those in Northwest Florida. The tan sand is bumpy with pieces of rock and shell. I’d seen beaches on the Atlantic and the Pacific, and while stunning in their own right, none carried the same feel as the ones I grew up on. Even later, when I visited Caribbean islands, the sand—gorgeous and special, with an island magic all its own—still wasn’t as beautiful as the sand I grew up playing in.

There’s a reason for this, rooted in a very specific combination of natural processes.

Northwest Florida’s sand was not born here. Its story begins 250 million years ago, when the Appalachian Mountains were towering giants as tall as the Himalayas. Over millions of years, the mountains were weathered, breaking massive rock into smaller and smaller pieces that rivers carried downhill.

During that time, Florida was not part of North America, but instead a carbonate platform, essentially a giant coral reef island, much like the Bahamas today. A wide channel separated the platform from the rest of North America.

Then, about 30 million years ago, a big shift occurred when global sea levels dropped, and Florida surfaced.

These many waterways carried pieces of weathered rock on a thousand-mile journey — slow, warm, wet, and meandering — to the coast. The rocks collided with one another and with other materials, breaking into even finer fragments of uniform size. All other chemical elements were stripped away, leaving behind only the crystal-white quartz, which collected like tiny beads of glass along Florida’s newly exposed coast.

“The reason we end up with primarily the white stuff here is that the quartz—the silica component, which is basically glass under a microscope—is all that’s left,” said Josh Breithaupt, a research scientist at Florida State University’s Coastal and Marine Laboratory. “Weathering alone won’t do that. It’s the combination of time, temperature, and moisture working together that creates what we see today.”

The process that creates Northwest Florida’s sand is unique. In the Himalayas, for example, it’s hot and humid, like it is near Florida, but runoff flows into one massive, fast-flowing river, preventing the slower, wandering journey that strips away all the other elements and forms uniform grains of sand. In California, the sand is formed in a warm climate, but it is not nearly as humid as it is in the Southeast. More of the chemical compounds remain in the sand in addition to the quartz, so the sand has more color.

Elsewhere, beaches around the world often contain additional materials mixed into the sand. Miami Beach and the Florida Keys also have white-sand beaches, but their sand is different. As Breithaupt explained, it’s composed

“
The story of
Northwest
Florida’s sand
is still being
written.
”



of broken shells rather than mineral glass, and under close inspection, the pieces lack the uniformity found further up the coast.

Although the process of creating Northwest Florida’s distinctive sand continues today, it has been significantly altered by dams along many of the rivers, leading to beach renourishment in some areas. The ancient sand itself is also constantly in motion, pushed along by waves that reshape the coastline. While the sand of my childhood memories remains, natural and human forces are always at work, shifting it and reshaping our beaches.

The story of Northwest Florida’s sand is still being written.

“Humans tend to think in terms of our own lifetimes, or at most our parents’ lifetimes,” Breithaupt said. In Florida, where intergenerational roots are harder to find, memories can be especially short.

“It’s interesting to think about how things change over time, and how our lives adapt—sometimes without us even noticing,” Breithaupt said. He explained that dunes shift up and down the beach in response to sea levels and seasonal weather, while the shoreline itself moves laterally under the slow force of waves. “The sand under our feet is always moving,” he added. “On a long timescale, it never stays put. The ocean is a dynamic place.”

The quartz sand beneath our feet does more than shape our beaches; it also creates the dazzling colors of the Gulf itself. Pure water is actually crystal clear, but when sunlight passes through it, certain wavelengths are absorbed while others are scattered back. In shallow areas along Northwest Florida, the bright white quartz acts like a reflective canvas, bouncing sunlight upward. This enhances the scattering of shorter blue and green wavelengths while absorbing reds and yellows, making the water appear brilliantly turquoise or emerald. On calm, sunny days around midday, when the sun is directly overhead, the effect is especially vivid. The gradient of color you see as you move farther from shore, from pale, clear shallows to bright emerald to deep navy, comes from the combination of white sand, varying water depth, and the presence of microscopic plankton that add a hint of natural green pigment. This unique interplay of geology, biology, and light is why our coastline has earned the nickname “Florida’s Emerald Coast.”

Every grain underfoot reminds us that Florida’s sugar sand is more than scenery—it’s the story of deep time still unfolding. Next time you walk barefoot here, pause to savor the rare, ancient journey beneath your toes. 🌊

BEACH SHOWDOWN

Global Sands vs. Florida’s Quartz Paradise

Beaches across the globe tell their own geologic stories, yet Northwest Florida’s quartz sand stands apart as a rare, cool, and uniform marvel.



Northwest Florida

Made of: Nearly pure quartz, carried down from the Appalachian Mountains.

Look/Feel: Brilliant, snow-like white: so bright it can dazzle the eyes at midday. Soft, fine, and squeaky—like walking on powdered sugar—it stays cool even in summer because its bright color reflects sunlight, reducing heat absorption.

Why It’s Unique: Few places on Earth contain quartz this pure and uniform. It’s a geological rarity that produces sand so white and sugar-fine.

Waikīkī Beach – Hawai‘i

Made of: Volcanic grains, coral, and imported sand.

Look/Feel: Golden-tan, slightly gritty, and heavier in texture. It warms quickly in the sun and feels dense underfoot.

Contrast with NW Florida: Hawai‘i’s sand is firmer, darker, and warmer, while Florida’s quartz is lighter, squeakier, and stays cool even on the hottest days.

Turks & Caicos – Caribbean

Made of: Coral fragments, foraminifera, and shell bits.

Look/Feel: Silky and fine, with occasional shell flecks. Bright white with hints of pink or cream, it compacts easily when wet, creating a smooth surface.

Contrast with NW Florida: Turks & Caicos sand is luminous and tropical, but lacks the squeaky, silky-soft feel of Florida’s sugar-quartz grains.

Maldives – Indian Ocean

Made of: Coral and shell.

Look/Feel: Brilliantly white, almost glowing in sunlight. Grains are generally soft and bright, though some beaches may contain coarser coral bits compared to quartz.

Contrast with NW Florida: Maldives sand rivals Florida in color but feels less uniform — a blend of powdery coral dust and chunky shell bits. While Maldives sand is ultra-soft, Florida’s quartz offers a squeaky, polished feel due to its uniform mineral makeup.

Cancún – Mexico

Made of: Coral and shell.

Look/Feel: Bright white with a cream or tan tint, often uneven with larger shell fragments mixed in.

Contrast with NW Florida: Cancún’s sand shines under tropical sun but feels rougher and less uniform, missing the cool, powdery softness of Florida’s quartz.



No Animal Left Behind

By Lauren Sage Reinlie
Photos courtesy of Alaqua Animal Refuge



How Laurie Hood Turned One Childhood Petition Into Alaqua Animal Refuge, an Internationally Recognized Haven for Animals

When Laurie Hood was about eight years old, she discovered that some kids in her Louisiana neighborhood were shooting songbirds with their BB guns.

“I was just horrified,” she recalled.

So, she did what any compassionate, animal-loving elementary school kid would: She wrote a petition and went door-to-door, asking her neighbors to sign it.

“I took it to the kids’ parents and told them the neighborhood didn’t want the songbirds being killed.”

Hood, now 58, shared the story with amusement at her 100-acre, one-of-a-kind, no-kill animal refuge in Freeport, Florida. “It cracks me up that I did that.”

Alaqua Animal Refuge began on an eight-acre plot across the street from Hood’s house. Now, at

its new location, it houses up to 450 animals at a time, including dogs, cats, horses, tortoises, goats, emus, pigs, and parrots. The facility includes a visitor center, hospital, space for field trips and birthday parties, and a covered arena for special events such as dog training, farmers’ markets, and concerts. There is even a bird aviary set to open soon.

More than 45 people, including a full-time veterinarian and an animal trainer, are employed here, with another 400 serving as volunteers. Its operating budget, funded exclusively through donations, has reached \$350,000 a month, primarily for animal care.

“When I hit \$10,000 a month at the beginning, I thought, oh my God, what am I going to do? And now look. It’s just crazy.”



The Dirty Secret Behind the Bayou

Alaqua's modest beginnings stemmed from an unexpected turn of events. During both of her pregnancies, which were about 16 months apart, Hood was on complete bed rest, meaning she wasn't even supposed to walk. To prevent early labor, she took medication through an IV every four hours and threw up every four hours, even in her sleep. "I was stir crazy, to say the least," she said. After her second son was born and she could move again, she strapped one kid to her back, one to her front, and began working her small farm.

It was during this time, around 2007, that she befriended her nanny's dog, a Border Collie, who would accompany her and her boys to work on the farm. When the dog was tragically hit by a car on a nearby highway, Hood decided to look for another she could rescue from a shelter. She found a county website with some fuzzy pet photos, one of which resembled the dog she wanted. She called repeatedly, but got no answer.

When she finally got someone on the line, they told her that lost or abandoned animals were taken to a private facility in another county. She asked if she could visit the facility.

What she found was shocking.

The "facility" was an old chicken coop in someone's backyard. Animals from seven counties were sent there, held for three to five days as required by state law, then euthanized. "We were living in this area with all that wealth and prosperity along 30A, and the dirty little secret was that we had a 100 percent euthanasia rate for seven counties. That's just insane. When you find something like that out, you can't unknow it."

She found the Border Collie, along with her eight puppies, in a cage marked for euthanasia and asked how she could take them home. She was told the facility wasn't open to the public, but if she worked with a rescue group, she could take any animals she wanted.

So Hood did what any animal-loving woman in her thirties would do. She went home that night, got on her computer, started Alaqua Animal Refuge, a non-profit named after her little farm.

"And I brought the paperwork into the place. They laughed at me and said, 'Take whatever you want.'"

Hood took 34 animals home that day. The Border Collie mother, named Sugar, passed away recently.

Hood had no experience building, but



Over the years,
they've taken in more than 200 dogs
from a single hoarding case, 21 starving
horses in one rescue, and many severely
neglected farm animals.



with her sons by her side and help from her nanny, she hammered together pens for the animals using chicken wire and wooden boards.

“And my husband couldn’t tell me no because I’d just been in bed for three years,” she joked.

From Rescue to Reform

As word spread about the little shelter on Alaqua Bayou, sheriff’s deputies began reaching out to Hood when they encountered neglected animals during a call. She began seeing animals that had been dragged behind cars, shot, or severely abused. “And I started thinking, What’s happening to the people who did this?”

That’s when she learned that not a single animal cruelty case had ever been prosecuted in Walton County or in any of the surrounding counties.

At the state attorney’s office, she learned that sheriff’s deputies had no training in handling animal cruelty evidence. So, Hood developed a training program and offered it free of charge to sheriff’s offices across five counties. The program was later offered statewide.

Today, Hood’s team can accompany the sheriff’s department to assist with hoarding or animal cruelty cases. They document evidence and provide medical exams at no cost. When officers encounter animal cruelty or neglect, they now know exactly who to call.

“I have all the deputies on speed dial,” Hood said.

The Alaqua team has become the local expert on animal cruelty. They provide shelter and care for some



of the worst cases of neglect and abuse in Northwest Florida. They sometimes come across starving goats or dying pigs, cases of severe neglect that go beyond typical pet abuse. “You can’t leave those animals behind,” Hood said. “We quickly learned how to take in all species.”

If there’s a need, Hood and the Alaqua team will do everything they can to find a way. Over the years, they’ve taken in more than 200 dogs from a single hoarding case, 21 starving horses, and numerous dying pigs. When no one else in the state stepped up during Hurricane Milton, Alaqua became the staging ground for hundreds of shelter animals that had to be evacuated from the storm’s potential path.

And this is how Hood’s effort to rescue abandoned pets from euthanasia evolved into an operation with a monthly budget of hundreds of thousands of dollars. It’s costly work that also requires significant space.

In 2013, the late conservation philanthropist M.C. Davis and his wife Stella—who had become close friends of Hood—donated the land for Alaqua’s current location, expanding its footprint tenfold.

Last year, the refuge completed the rigorous process of becoming one of the few animal sanctuaries internationally recognized by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries. The prestigious honor is a testament to the care and dedication the team has invested in developing the center.

Beyond the Refuge: Hood’s Vision

Today, Hood’s work has expanded beyond the refuge. She is a board

member of the Florida Wildlife Federation and the state director for the federal lobbying group Animal Wellness Action. Her sons have both left for college, but she is far from an empty nester. She has about 100 animals of her own.

With her vision, the refuge is expected to continue to grow for many years as funding becomes available. Currently, only half of the 100 acres is under development, but Hood already has plans for the back half. She hopes to create a sanctuary for native species that cannot return to the wild. Other plans include an educational center, public events, and a restaurant. Ultimately, she envisions drawing enough visitors to charge admission and become self-sustaining.

Hood said she has never seen anything else like what Alaqua is building.

“I know when you’re visiting now, it’s really cool, but in my mind, the vision I have, it’s not there yet; not even close,” she said. “I see this as an alternative to a zoo. An animal refuge theme park. That’s what I call it, for lack of a better term.”

Hood and the team at Alaqua are striving to do the best they can for the animals under their care. Still, the need is greater. She said they receive more than 100 requests every day to take in animals that they cannot accommodate. She hopes to build something that others can look to as an example.

“I figured this is the way we can really do more. We can show people what we’ve learned the hard way. We can empower others to do the work we’re doing and, in turn, help even more animals and people.” 🐾



How a Sticker Became a Lifeline



Sometimes the simplest ideas make the biggest difference. Years ago, the team at The 30A Company started giving away their now-famous round blue stickers, little badges promoting the Beach Happy® life, at local businesses. They were free for the taking, but beside each stack, they placed a donation box for Alaqua Animal Refuge, Walton County’s beloved no-kill shelter.

It didn’t take long for the idea to catch on. Visitors grabbed a sticker as a keepsake of their

time at the beach. Locals proudly displayed them on cars, coolers, and paddleboards. And in the process, donations began to pour in. Volunteers often found the boxes filled to the brim—a powerful show of generosity from both tourists and the local community.

“It’s partnerships like these that prove simple ideas can have a huge impact,” said Laurie Hood, founder of Alaqua. “We are forever grateful for the kindness and generosity that has allowed us to help so many animals over the years.”

Since that time, 30A stickers have been spotted atop Mount Everest, on Chris Stapleton’s guitar case at the Country Music Hall of Fame, and at landmarks like the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum, and the Cliffs of Moher. They’ve traveled to the Sahara Desert, Rainbow Mountain in Peru, and even U.S. military bases around the world. And of course, you’ll see them proudly displayed on cars across the country—a sunny little reminder of

the beach and the good that comes from giving back.

For Alaqua, the contributions have helped provide food, medical care, and rehabilitation for hundreds of homeless, abused, and neglected animals every year.

“At 30A, we’re proud to support Alaqua Animal Refuge and the incredible work they do right here in Walton County,” said JoAnn Ribaud, CEO of The 30A Company. “The refuge holds a special place in my heart. Our beloved dog Fenway was a foster fail from Alaqua, who became part of our family for 13 wonderful years. Through our 30A sticker sales, we’re honored to help raise funds that continue to fuel Alaqua’s mission of rescue, compassion, and second chances.”

To date, the 30A sticker donation box program has raised \$435,689.56 for Alaqua.

If you’d like to support Alaqua Animal Refuge, visit alaqua.org.

FALL ON THE COAST

By Geoff Nudelman

It's that time of year when the sun begins to set sooner and the sparkle of bonfires dotting the shoreline becomes more commonplace. That also means it's time to switch out the strictly summer gear for items that are a bit cozier and can serve dual purposes. Fun-filled beach days don't need to end when temps cool off; they just require a bit of planning to ensure you have the right gear.

These items are great for the last streaks of summer, and they will fit right in line as the skies darken earlier.

SUNNYLIFE TAKE ANYWHERE FOLDING BEACH CHAIR

This ultra-portable chair is perfect for long days that quickly turn into bonfire evenings without warning. The 300D polyester fabric is tough, easy to clean, and treated with a stain- and water-resistant finish. When you're done reclining, the chair folds flat to double as seating for a friend or two. The earth-tone colors reflect current trends with muted, subtle hues.

SUNNYLIFE.COM
\$80



30A® WORDMARK LOGO CHARLES RIVER CORDED CREW SWEATSHIRT

Cozy up on chilly beach nights with this ultra-comfy crewneck, perfect for gathering around a crackling bonfire. Featuring a classic corded texture and the iconic 30A logo, this sweatshirt is a must-have for beach lovers. Whether you're watching the sunset or swapping fireside stories, it's the ideal layer for staying warm with laid-back style.

30AGEAR.COM
\$82

MARK & GRAHAM PORTABLE BEACH PICNIC TABLE

This nifty table solves the age-old problem of finding enough sand-free space for essentials and food during a long beach day. It comes with a single stake that anchors securely in the sand and includes slots for stemmed glasses. The durable bamboo makes for easy cleaning, and the optional laser monogramming is a nice, classy touch.

MARKANDGRAHAM.COM
\$39



NESTOUT PORTABLE OUTDOOR FAN

With its largest battery option, this powerful yet compact fan delivers up to 15 hours of run time. It keeps you cool during the day, and its steady airflow also helps keep bugs at bay when you're gathered around the bonfire after dark. An integrated hook makes it easy to mount on a tent, chair, or wherever you need it most.

NESTOUT.COM
\$65



BUG BITE THING SUCTION TOOL

Sometimes, you can lather on bug spray and cover up with clothing but still end up with pesky bug bites. When that happens, reach for this inexpensive (and effective!) tool. It's ingeniously simple: Place the suction over the bite and pull up as directed. The suction draws out much of the irritation, reducing the itch and speeding up the recovery. It's a great way to keep the fall bugs from ruining your beachy evenings.

BUGBITETHING.COM
\$10



STEELE CANVAS STEELETX BEACH TOTE

Several small, well-thought-out touches make this tote a winner. First, the sturdy vinyl is wipeable and easy to rinse after a beach day. Next, the elongated handles are comfortable to sling over your shoulder and help distribute weight more evenly. Lastly, it looks great, and we're fans of this forest green with canvas handles.

STEELECANVAS.COM
\$90



30A10K THANKSGIVING DAY RACES 10K, 5K & 1 Mile

11.27.25

This Thanksgiving, start your day making a difference. Join the 30A 10K in Rosemary Beach on Scenic Highway 30A and support local nonprofits with every mile you run. All proceeds benefit our incredible local charity partners!

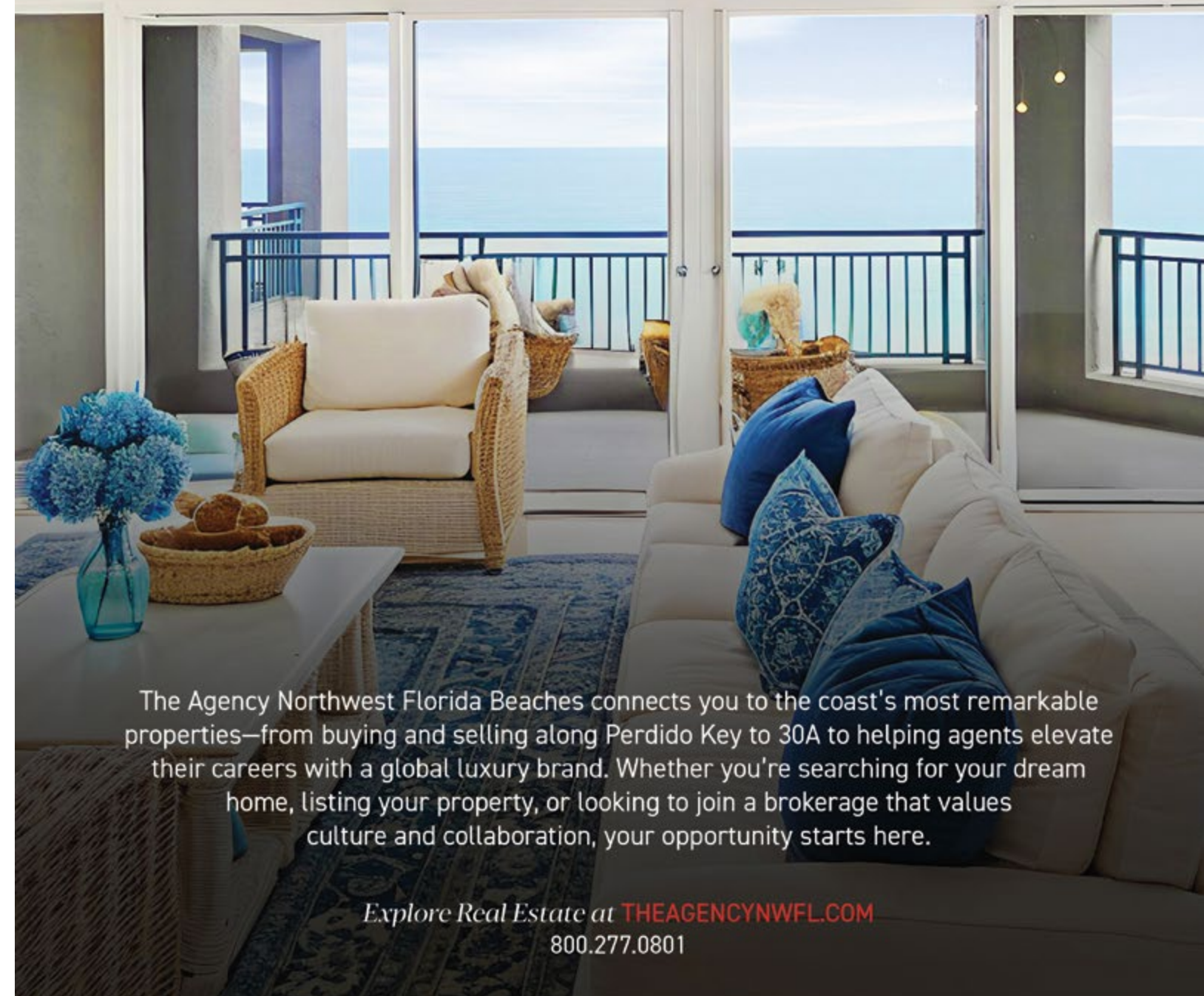


The 30A 10K Thanksgiving Day Races are back for another stellar event! Join us in Rosemary Beach, FL on Thursday, November 27th, 2025. Register Today! www.30A10K.com


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LUXURY

WITH PURPOSE

By Carrie Honaker

Photo courtesy of JOALI Maldives

Eco-Stays Redefined Through RESTORATION, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

From remote Pacific coastlines to turquoise atolls, a new wave of eco-stays is proving that luxury and conservation can thrive together. These destinations invite travelers not only to experience the beauty of the beach but also to help protect it.



Photos courtesy of Playa Viva

PLAYA VIVA Guerrero, Mexico

The sun hasn't quite risen, but I'm already wandering through hibiscus fields atop a lush mountain that overlooks an undeveloped beach in Guerrero, Mexico. Scarlet blooms perfume the air as women from a local cooperative move with practiced grace, harvesting bright fruit that bursts with a rhubarb-like flavor when I sneak a taste. Their hands turn the harvest into powders, teas, and tinctures that not only fuel Playa Viva's kitchen but also travel far beyond this stretch of coast. The cooperative started as small gatherings in local homes, but it has blossomed into a vibrant hub of generational knowledge and shared economic opportunity.

As I meander around the eco-resort, the connection between guest and place feels tangible. Solar panels shimmer on the roofs, powering the entire property off the grid. Compost bins hum, turning scraps into rich earth. Water flows through a self-sustaining hydrology system. Juan, a turtle sanctuary volunteer and former poacher, shares his transformation with me as we walk along the shore. "Fourteen years ago, turtles covered this beach, so many they bumped into each other," he said, eyes shining. "We hunted them to survive. But then I saw the numbers drop, and I couldn't be part of their end. Now, I help with the recovery. I want my children to experience this."

His words linger as we crouch on the nutmeg-colored sand in front of the turtle sanctuary. Volunteers have gathered hundreds of baby sea turtles, ready to be released. The sanctuary's adopt-a-nest program invites guests to join the night patrols, sharing the responsibility and the wonder. With a shard of coconut husk, I gently scoop one baby turtle out and place it just past the line drawn in the sand. It pauses, then, driven by instinct, flaps its flippers furiously, making its way toward the crashing waves.

Beyond the beach, the Juluchuca watershed pulses with new life thanks to the ReSiMar regeneration project, which weaves environmental restoration, economic opportunity, and cultural pride into one vibrant tapestry. Playa Viva also asks guests for a small commitment — a two percent Regenerative Trust fee that directly funds community projects and environmental initiatives. It's a model of stewardship that turns travel into a force for good. And Playa Viva isn't alone.

From Florida to Fiji, resorts champion reef restoration and cultural preservation, inviting travelers to share in protecting the places they love.

playaviva.com





Photo: Karla Cifuentes

CAREYES Costalegre, Mexico

At dawn, the salty breeze mingles with the scent of wild sage along Mexico’s rugged Pacific Coast. In the village of Emiliano Zapata, the Careyes Foundation’s impact is evident. At the Community Center, teenagers tackle robotics projects while the community choir’s vibrant voices fill the air, creating spaces for learning and belonging. Contemporary artists like Mexican sculptor Carlos Amorales work alongside local children to build large-scale beach sculptures inspired by coral reefs.

Nearby, the Sea Turtle Protection and Conservation Center hums with life, having released over 2.6 million hatchlings since 1983. Guests can join the volunteers as they guide baby turtles toward the waves, adding to the legacy of community-driven conservation. The foundation also strengthens resilience through programs that focus on disaster preparedness. A new tour guide certification program empowers locals to share their stories sustainably. Careyes is famous for its stunning beauty and architecture, but the foundation’s work reminds visitors that true luxury comes from belonging and stewardship.

careyes.com



Photos courtesy of Careyes Foundation



JOALI Maldives

Beneath the Maldives’ turquoise waters, vibrant coral gardens flourish, restored by guests and staff who plant tiny coral fragments in nurseries before transplanting them onto the reef. Beach cleanups and underwater dives clear ghost nets and plastic debris, with over 478 pounds of ocean plastic recycled through partnerships such as Parley Maldives. At the Raa Atoll Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Centre, marine biologists nurse injured turtles back to health, involving guests in educational programs such as “Trash to Treasure” and “Turtle Identification Games.”

Smart villa controls and solar pilot projects reduce the islands’ carbon footprint, while water management systems harvest and recycle rainwater. Nearly 40,000 glass water bottles were produced on site in 2023 alone, replacing plastics entirely. Here, every coral planted, beach cleanup, and turtle released is a step in protecting the ocean’s beauty for generations to come.

joali.com

Photos courtesy of JOALI, Maldives





Photos courtesy of Jean-Michel Cousteau Resort



JEAN-MICHEL COUSTEAU RESORT

Vanua Levu, Fiji

Tucked between the coral-rich waters of Savusavu Bay and a flourishing 17-acre coconut plantation, this eco-conscious retreat takes a full-circle approach to sustainability. Guests can wander through the resort's organic gardens, where more than 20 percent of the produce served is grown steps from the kitchen. Here, worm farms, aquaponic beds teeming with tilapia, and fungi-inoculated soil quietly power the harvest. Compost brewed from seaweed, kitchen scraps, and fish hydrolysate nourishes beds of edible and medicinal plants. Bees from four on-site hives pollinate the flowering trees while storing sweetness in their combs. Biochar enhances soil structure, while carbon-sequestering mahogany and teak trees tower above, drawing carbon from the air and anchoring the resort's reforestation mission.

The connection to the ocean is just as vital. Guests can help replant endangered corals or raise giant clams in the protected reef nursery, part of a multi-species repopulation project. Mangrove replanting offers hands-on education in coastal protection, and reef walks transform vacationers into citizen scientists. Children harvest herbs in the coral-floored aquaponics beds. By supporting the Savusavu Community Foundation, the resort helps reforest the island with 20,000 native trees. At this resort, the Fijian notion of vanua, the inseparable bond between people and place, isn't just honored. It's lived.

fijiresort.com



Photos courtesy of Mandarin Oriental



MANDARIN ORIENTAL Canouan

At this hotel, the Circularity Lab turns discarded materials into valuable resources, embodying a shift from linear consumption to true regeneration. Electric golf carts glide silently along palm-lined paths, reflecting the property's push toward carbon reduction. Partnerships with local recycling firms and a commitment to the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative amplify the resort's plastic elimination goals, and the in-house water bottling plant eliminated over 41,000 single-use plastic bottles in 2024 alone.

When Hurricane Beryl swept through in 2024, the team's swift disaster relief efforts included medical aid, food and water distribution, and the launch of the Canouan Resilience Fund, which dedicates 10% of every guest's stay to bolstering island infrastructure and community well-being. Luxury has become a shared responsibility and a commitment to protect this island paradise and its people.

mandarinoriental.com/en/canouan/caribbean



Photos courtesy of Salterra

SALTERRA South Caicos

On the remote, largely undeveloped island of South Caicos, where wild horses still roam and visitors are far outnumbered by locals, this hotel is proving that true luxury doesn't just coexist with nature; it nurtures it. Through a ground-breaking partnership with the South Caicos Coral Reef Consortium, which includes the School for Field Studies, The Reef Institute, and the TC Reef Fund, Salterra is helping revive the island's vital coral reefs. Over 400 coral fragments have already been outplanted across five sites, aided by an investment of over \$250,000 in a state-of-the-art coral lab that now welcomes guests behind the scenes.

Travelers don't just stay here; they engage. From snorkeling through underwater nurseries to hands-on restoration work, Salterra offers rare access to science in action. Two "Sea Day" events have reached more than 200 local students, building pride and pathways in marine conservation. Far from the crowds, Salterra offers a quietly elegant experience shaped by place, purpose, and stewardship.

salterra.com





Photos courtesy of The Palms Hotel & Spa



THE PALMS HOTEL AND SPA Miami

Along Miami’s sun-kissed coastline, this hotel helps keep beaches pristine with cleanups and fundraisers through partnerships with organizations such as the Surfrider Foundation Miami Chapter. The hotel’s “Do Good, Feel Good” package donates unused spa credits to nonprofits such as the Coral Restoration Foundation, Save The Manatee Club, and Blue Scholars’ Initiative, a group that empowers young people through hands-on marine science education.

Guests can dive deeper into environmental awareness with curated experiences such as “The Wild Side” package, which includes guided visits to Everglades National Park and cultural

encounters with the Miccosukee Tribe, all while supporting the Everglades Foundation’s vital restoration work. Guests are invited to join staff at coastal cleanup events, where each bucket of beach trash filled earns a refreshing gelato, with donations flowing to local conservation efforts during World Ocean Month. Here, tropical luxury thrives in harmony with giving back to the community and the planet, ensuring a better future for Miami’s shores.

thepalmshotel.com

PAWS

In Paradise

By Martin Liptrot

The World's Best Beaches for You and Your Furry Friend

Crystal-clear water, miles of open sand, and a gentle, shallow slope for splashing and paddling are the key components of any perfect beach day.

This list of must-haves holds just as true if you are a dog lover who wants to share a day at the beach with your furry friend. For dog owners, few things rival the joy of watching your pup sprint across a sandy shoreline, ears flapping, tail wagging.

In our coastal paradise along Florida's Scenic Highway 30A, dogs are welcome on the beach with a permit, and allowed only during designated hours, so be sure to check the rules before heading out.

Not all dog-friendly beaches are created equal, and there are, understandably, rules in place to ensure everyone enjoys their day at the beach: pups, owners, and even those who might not be as enamored with your sand-covered, wet-nosed buddy.

In our search to find the best dog-friendly beaches, we spoke to New York City doggy daycare expert Sophie Fleur about what she looks for in a beach location for the pampered pooches she looks after.

"Most of my clients are in the city," said Sophie, "But occasionally they're out in the Hamptons, down in Florida, or on the West Coast and want me to help them find the best beaches for them and their dogs."

"People imagine dog-friendly beaches are all the same—one size fits all—but there's actually a wide range of options to consider," she said. "Some beaches offer off-leash freedom, others require tethers of a specific length, and all public spaces rightly demand a bit of etiquette to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone. It's always best to know the rules."

"I tell clients to look for beaches that offer the amenities they want for themselves, whether that's easy access to parking, nearby restaurants, bars, beach clubs, or plenty of shade," she said. "Then we'll find the facilities their furry friends need, which often includes a place to rinse off after a day rolling in the sand, splashing in the surf, and chasing birds, balls, and other dogs."

So, wherever you are, whether you're planning a beach vacation or looking for a new beachside home for you and your doggy pals, here's your guide to the best beaches for your furry friend.



JUPITER DOG BEACH

Florida, USA

It will come as no surprise that one of the world's best beaches for you and your dog is on Florida's Sunshine Coast. This Atlantic Coast gem is popular among locals and visitors alike. Jupiter Dog Beach is a 2.5-mile stretch of beautiful East Coast shoreline where your four-legged friends can stretch their legs and frolic in the waves. Of all the dog-friendly Florida beaches, this is a fan favorite for both pups and pup parents. If your dog is well-behaved, well-socialized, and under voice control, feel free to go leash-free. The facilities are top-notch, including ample free public parking with restrooms and a shower area for a quick rinse after a day in the sand. A waste station, with free dog poop bags provided by Friends of Jupiter Beach, a local nonprofit, makes it easy to help keep the beach clean and open to all.

MONTROSE DOG BEACH

Chicago, USA

Next up, located on Lake Michigan in Chicago, is Montrose Dog Beach, a fenced-in, off-leash haven with dog showers and even a seasonal dog food truck. Run by the city's Parks Department, this lakeside beach is open to all from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., but dogs must have a \$5 tag available from local veterinarians who will confirm if your pup is healthy, immunized, and vaccinated. If you find yourself in Chicago with your furry friend, reach out to Montrose Dog Owners Group (MonDog.com) to see when their next event is, including morning beach cleanups and community days.

LEIGHTON DOG BEACH

Perth, Australia

On the other side of the world, Aussie dogs get to enjoy the beach too. With soft white sand and clear waters, Leighton Dog Beach sits between the Port of Fremantle and Perth's southern suburbs. It offers a two-kilometer stretch where dogs can run free. A grassy bank behind the beach, dotted with gazebos, offers respite from the Western Australian sun, making it a cool spot for pups and their humans.

DEL MAR DOG BEACH

California, USA

Just north of San Diego on Southern California's fabled coastal Highway 101 lies Del Mar Dog Beach. This sandy stretch of coast is a canine paradise, where your puppy pal can run free. From Labor Day to June 15, dogs are allowed off-leash, and the half-mile stretch of open sand is perfect for a game of fetch or a sunset stroll.

While drinking fountains for both you and your pup are available, as well as waste bags, there are no on-site cleaning facilities. But all is not lost. Nearby Solana Beach is home to Dirty Dogs, a pet grooming spot where your pooch can get cleaned up before you head to one of the two dozen local cafés and bars that welcome furry friends.

“Some beaches offer off-leash freedom, others require tethers of a specific length... It's always best to know the rules.”

Photo: Els Bax

Few things rival the joy
of watching your pup sprint
across a sandy shoreline, ears flapping,
tail wagging.

Noordwijk Beach
Photo: Els Bax



LOEWS CORONADO BAY RESORT
California, USA

If you and your pet appreciate the finer things and are ready to indulge, Loews Coronado Bay Resort deserves a look. Situated on a 15-acre peninsula surrounded by bay waters, the resort offers curated pet-friendly amenities. Through its “Loews Loves Pets” program and campaigns like “Paws in Paradise,” it provides pet packages (amenities, waived or discounted fees) to ensure both you and your companion travel in style.

The Paws in Paradise program proves that traveling with pets doesn’t need to be complicated. The hotel aims to make your stay a breeze for you and your furry companion with pet amenities and thoughtful conveniences. Your furry friend will receive treats, bowls, and placemats upon check-in as well as five-star perks like gourmet room service menus for dogs (crafted

by the chef), and home comforts including specialized bedding, collars, leashes, toys, and more.

The luxury continues outside where you and your canine companion can soak up the sun on the hotel’s private beach or enjoy walks through the lush grounds.

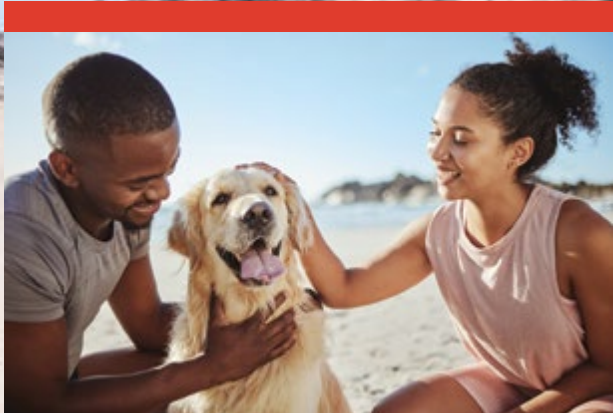
Whether you’re sipping cocktails in California or tossing tennis balls in Australia, the world offers plenty of sandy playgrounds for you and your dog. Just remember, with freedom comes responsibility. By respecting leash laws, practicing good etiquette, and planning ahead, you’ll ensure that dog beaches are safe and welcoming for all. nities, waived or discounted fees) to ensure both you and your companion travel in style.

NOORDWIJK BEACH
Netherlands, Europe

If you ever find yourself traveling with pets in Europe, head to Noordwijk Beach in the south of The Netherlands. Here, pets aren’t just allowed on the beach—they’re warmly welcomed nearly everywhere in the small town, as long as they’re well-behaved.

The town’s friendly attitude has earned praise from *National Geographic* and has plenty of dog-friendly restaurants where you and your faithful four-legged friend can enjoy delicious local treats. You can also find scenic walking maps for dog owners, strolling along the dunes, winding through the forests, and splashing in the North Sea surf with both on- and off-leash options.

Noordwijk is also one of The Netherlands’ major flower-growing regions and in late August and early September, the fields erupt in vibrant blooms during a series of local festivals, so if you fancy staying longer, you’ll find no shortage of hotels, guest houses, campsites, and rentals that are happy to host you and your pup.



Beach Tips from a Dog Expert

Sophie Fleur, a New York City-based doggy daycare specialist and consultant, regularly advises clients on how to keep their pets safe and happy at the beach. Here, she shares a few of her top tips:

- ✦ Give your dog a shady spot and plenty of fresh water. Never let your dog drink saltwater.
- ✦ Watch for sunburn. Dogs can burn, especially those with short hair, white fur, or pink skin. Limit sun exposure and apply pet-safe sunscreen to their ears and nose about 30 minutes before heading outside.
- ✦ Protect their paws. Hot sand or asphalt can burn sensitive paws. Test surfaces with your hand before walking long distances.
- ✦ Check water conditions. Dogs are vulnerable to sea lice, jellyfish, and other marine irritants. Pay attention to local advisories.
- ✦ Rinse after ocean play. Salt and minerals in seawater can irritate or damage your dog’s coat and skin, so be sure to rinse them well at the end of the day.
- ✦ Stay close. Be aware of strong tides or rip currents, and never leave your dog unattended in the water.



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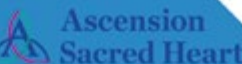
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EGLIN:

THE GIANT NEXT DOOR

Hidden just beyond the sugar-white sands of Florida's Gulf Coast, Eglin Air Force Base is shaping the future of warfare while protecting the ecosystems in its path.

By Lauren Sage Reinlie

Photo: Tech. Sgt. John McRell, courtesy of Eglin Air Force Base

The beaches along Scenic Highway 30A in the Northwest Florida Panhandle are filled with marvels: dolphins leaping from the waves, dune lakes rupturing into the Gulf, and waters shifting through dazzling shades of blue and green. But none are quite as unexpected as fighter jets slicing across the sky or combat helicopters thundering down the coast.

The occasional roar of aircraft here is as much a part of the soundtrack as the surf. Most of the aircraft come from Eglin Air Force Base, one of the largest military installations in the world. It stretches from just north of Choctawhatchee Bay in Walton County west past Fort Walton Beach towards Navarre.

Spanning 724 square miles and 120,000 miles of over-water airspace, Eglin is unmatched in scale and strategic importance. Over 19,000 people work

at Eglin. Many of them live and play along the beaches of 30A. That is when they aren't flying sleek aircraft, developing weapons of the future, or training for special ops missions around the world.

WIDE-RANGING MISSIONS

Because of its size, Eglin is the primary site for testing air armament, including fighter jets, drones, missiles, and bombs. Most are conducted far off the beaten path, but loud booms can, on occasion, rattle windowpanes.

While the Air Force is the largest branch operating out of Eglin, all other branches of the U.S. military have missions here as well, including:

— The final phase of Army Ranger School is held deep in the woods north of Fort Walton Beach.

Photo: Samuel King Jr., courtesy of Eglin Air Force Base/ U.S. Air Force

— The Naval School Explosive Ordnance Disposal is staffed by skilled instructors from the Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy. They train all military branches to locate, defuse, and dispose of surface and underwater explosives.

— Since 2011, Eglin has also been home to the Army’s 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The Green Berets are highly skilled special operations soldiers trained in unconventional warfare (helping partner countries overthrow hostile forces), counterinsurgency, strikes and raids, reconnaissance, and more. These elite soldiers were heavily deployed to operations in the Middle East and regularly travel to Central and South America to train special forces there.

— The Space Force Squadron at Eglin tracks manmade objects in Earth’s orbit from the size of a softball 4,000 miles away to the size of a basketball 25,000 miles away.

EGLIN’S STORIED PAST

Eglin, which first opened in the 1930s, has a long, storied history. What started as a relatively small aircraft testing base grew exponentially when the U.S. Forestry Service handed over 384,000 acres to the War Department during the early years of World War II, so the military could develop new aircraft and train fighter pilots and bomb crews.

One of those early missions was the now-famous, then-top-secret Doolittle Raid against Tokyo, Japan, in 1942. Hidden in the forests, the team worked in secret to modify B-25 bombers to take off from very short runways on aircraft carriers in the middle of the ocean—something that had never been done before—to strike the Japanese mainland. Volunteer crews trained tirelessly for only a few weeks. Most didn’t even

know the mission details until they deployed. The Raiders completed the mission, launching 200 miles farther from shore than planned. Even though physical damage was minimal, the raid—the first strike against Japan after Pearl Harbor—was a significant morale boost for the United States and proved Japan was vulnerable.

In 1946, long before “drone” became a household word, crews at Eglin began testing the first pilotless aircraft. Unlike some of the drones of today, which measure less than three feet and can be launched by hand, these pilotless aircraft were massive 36,000-pound B-17 bombers and took a crew of about a dozen just to get them off the ground. (A far cry from today, when pilots work in basements controlling drones halfway across the world.) Airmen working to get the planes flying “nullo,” as they called it, reported some accidents and plenty of near-misses with the new technology, which was especially perilous for the ground crew. The unit received national attention when they successfully flew a bomber drone without a pilot from Eglin to Washington, DC, in 1947. The drone planes were later used during atomic bomb tests to gather information from the mushroom cloud.

In 1950, after the start of the Korean War, the Air Force created a top-of-the-line Gulf Test Range at Eglin, used to develop and test some of the world’s first long-range missile systems, including the BOMARC.

During the Vietnam War, Eglin served as a training and planning site for the Green Berets’ infamous raid on the Son Tay prisoner-of-war camp in North Vietnam. While no prisoners were rescued (they had been moved months earlier), the joint operation between the Army and Air Force was executed flawlessly. It was considered a success for demonstrating that



Photo: Courtesy of U.S. Army/ Eglin Air Force Base

“YOUR NEIGHBOR ON THE SAND COULD VERY WELL BE A GREEN BERET, A FIGHTER PILOT, OR AN INNOVATIVE SCIENTIST SHAPING THE FUTURE OF DEFENSE.”

Americans could strike deep inside North Vietnam, boosting the morale of prisoners of war, and influencing modern-day special operations forces like Delta Force and the Navy SEALs.

In November 2002, during the run-up to the war in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld requested the fast-paced development of a massive smart bomb, larger than anything the country had created before. A team at Eglin worked two ten-hour shifts a day to get the weapon designed, built, and then tested in record time. The 21,600-pound Massive Ordnance Air Blast Bomb, the MOAB or “mother of all bombs” as it came to be known, was successfully tested the following April on Eglin property. At the time, it was the largest non-nuclear weapon ever used by the United States. The explosion sent up a mushroom cloud that could be seen from 20 miles away. The success was widely broadcast as a deterrent for then-Iraqi president Saddam Hussein and resistance fighters in Iraq, but was never used there. The United States first used it to strike ISIS in Afghanistan in 2017.

In the mid-to-late 2000s, Eglin helped develop another ground-breaking weapon—in more ways than one. The Massive Ordnance Penetrator, or MOP (GBU-57), is a 30,000-plus-pound precision-guided bunker-buster bomb, designed to drive deep into the ground to attack nuclear weapons buried in hardened underground bunkers. Two of these bombs were used to do just that when the United States attacked Iran’s heavily fortified, deep-underground nuclear sites in June 2025.

The Air Force Armament Museum, free to the public and just a short drive from the beach, offers an easy way to experience this history firsthand. The museum houses aircraft from World War II to today and features more than 100 pieces of armament.

WEATHERING STORMS AND SAVING SALAMANDERS

Eglin continues to be the leading facility for the development and testing of aircraft and weapons,

including the latest fighter jets, F-15EXs; stealth fighter jets, F-35s; the new special operations OA-1K Sky Raider; and numerous state-of-the-art pilotless aircraft.

The largest environmental testing chamber in the world is located at Eglin. The McKinley Climatic Lab can simulate extreme weather of all types. Inside, crews, aircraft, and equipment are tested to see how they respond to conditions from 120-degree heat to 60-degree cold, high humidity to thick fog, torrential rain and powerful wind to dust and sandstorms.

Eglin is also home to the world’s largest remaining contiguous acreage of longleaf pine, which once covered about 80 million acres of the Southeastern United States. (Today, those trees cover less than 2 million acres, about 250,000 of which are located at Eglin.) Much of this land is open to the public for recreation but protected from development. Eglin’s mission includes helping to protect and restore endangered habitats, for which it has received numerous awards and accolades in recent years.

The base’s property includes 34 distinct ecosystems and is home to about 100 rare or endangered species. Among them are gopher tortoises, indigo snakes, and the critically endangered reticulated flatwoods salamanders. The red-cockaded woodpecker, a species once in danger of extinction, is now flourishing thanks to joint efforts with Eglin staff.

The turquoise waters and sugar-white sands may be the main draw to Northwest Florida’s beaches, but they aren’t the whole story. Just down the road is a living piece of history, a hub of innovation, and a community of people whose work impacts the world. Your neighbor on the sand could very well be a Green Beret, a fighter pilot, or an innovative scientist shaping the future of defense. Eglin isn’t just the giant next door—it’s woven into the very fabric of life along Florida’s Scenic Highway 30A. 🌊

Explore Eglin’s missions, history, and innovation at eglin.af.mil.



BEACHES ABROAD

Yelapa, Mexico

Yelapa Unplugged

No roads, no rush. Just jungle trails, fresh pie, and the salty joy of getting lost.

By Carrie Honaker

The boat slows, anchoring in 15 feet of ink-blue water just off Mexico's Pacific coast, about 45 minutes south of Puerto Vallarta. Only small skiffs make the final, sometimes perilous journey to the beach, so we transfer to one helmed by a local using a long pole to guide the boat. After a slightly harrowing jump into the belly of the skiff and a few minutes of cruising, we pull onto the sand and wade through the shallows to the awaiting beach.

Yelapa feels like another world. Founded about 150 years ago by four families—and still owned, inhabited, and cared for by their descendants—this tiny fishing village is one of the rare places with no cars, no roads, and no ATMs. Home to roughly 1,500 residents and located along the Costalegre in the municipality of Cabo Corrientes, it's accessible only by boat.

Small skiffs moor at Yelapa Beach, waiting to ferry riders to and from the jungle paradise.



A stone path leads from the beach up into town towards the waterfalls.

Why Go?

Yelapa offers a slowed-down, unplugged pace of life where visitors can fully immerse themselves in nature. The main beach is a golden crescent backed by jungle and lined with palapa-shaded restaurants. A few vendors wander the sand with jewelry and cold beer, while pelicans dive for fish just offshore. For adventure, hike to the nearby Cola de Caballo waterfall, just 15 minutes from the beach, or trek 90 minutes inland to a smaller, hidden set of falls. The latter offers a secluded swimming hole and can also be reached on horseback with local guides.

The Museo de Historia, Arte & Cultura de Yelapa shares the story of the village through historic photos, pottery, and oral histories, including its time as a coconut oil trading hub. Water lovers can rent kayaks to explore hidden coves or join snorkeling trips that often include stops at Los Arcos Marine Park. Wellness seekers will find yoga studios scattered around town, many with open-air decks overlooking the water. Animal lovers can meet the famously friendly beach dogs, many cared for by locals with the Yelapa Animal Project, which helps transport dogs to the mainland for adoption.

Yelapa greeted us with lush jungle trails, colorful murals, and the smell of woodsmoke from open grills. Our guide, Tatiana PV Meneses Sánchez, a local with México Real Tours Privados, arranged our boat tour, a stop for snorkeling at Los Arcos, and, once settled in Yelapa, led us on a 2.5-mile hike to a waterfall. Along the trail, we passed mule owners offering rides, fruit trees heavy with mangoes and papayas, and houses painted in bright blues and yellows. Making our way back into town along the labyrinthine streets, filled with tile mosaics and wandering iguanas, Sánchez led us to Micheladas Vicky to sip raicilla, an agave spirit rooted in island tradition, with a fourth-generation brewer. Just up the hill, we dipped into the Museo Yelapa to browse historic artifacts and ended the afternoon on the beach at Domingo's, where octopus zarandeado—an ancient method of grilling over coals—tasted of sea, fire, and history.

As lunch wrapped up, I looked out over the crystalline water to the brightly colored cliffside homes rising to the right, and spotted a woman in a tan sunhat walking the beach. In her arms, she carried a green Tupperware bowl with a milky white lid, the kind my great-grandmother used to bring macaroni salad to family picnics. I'd tried and failed to meet her four times. But here she was, walking the beach.

Chely Rodriguez, the Pie Lady of Yelapa, has been baking and selling pies on the beach for 40 years. She started at eight years old, trailing after her mother, the original pie lady, who learned from her mother before that. "My father didn't want me to make pie, but I had a fire for baking, and I love to walk on the sand. I had wealthy suitors, but money was never important to me, and even though he didn't want me to follow my mother, my father taught me to work hard and stick to my values," she said. Her only child, a son and NASA engineer, won't be taking over the family business, but her nieces have joined her in the kitchen, learning the recipes, and hoping to keep the tradition of the Pie Lady of Yelapa alive.

I eagerly approached her, cash in hand. Inside the Tupperware, she had slices of guava, coconut, corn, and apple pie. I bought a slice of each, the flaky crust and tender fillings promising a perfect finish to lunch for my family.

Wading through the warm shallows toward the skiff that would ferry me back to our boat, I knew I'd find my way to Yelapa again.



Top to bottom:
Welcome sign greeting guests,
Chely Rodriguez, the current Pie Lady of Yelapa,
Tiled mosaic line street walls





Santuario Yelapa's geodesic domes provide an eco-friendly retreat for travelers.



Where Should I Stay?

Accommodations range from simple beachside rooms to design-forward retreats hidden in the jungle. Casas García, run by a local family, offers fully equipped villas with kitchens and sweeping ocean views. Centrally located within walking distance of restaurants, shops, and the beach, they make a comfortable, affordable base.

Right on the sand, Casa Berita is one of the most recognizable buildings in town. Its spacious suites open onto balconies with postcard-worthy views, and in-room kitchens make it easy to prepare your own meals, which is ideal for extended stays.

For something more secluded, Verana is an adults-only hideaway carved into the hillside. Individually designed open-air houses feature private plunge pools, colorful tilework, and vintage furnishings. Guests wake to fresh

bread, birdsong, and may even spot whales from the cliffside.

Santuario Yelapa offers an eco-minded escape deeper in the jungle. Geodesic domes powered by solar energy blend into the canopy, meals are sourced locally, and the entire property is designed for sustainability and mindfulness.

Prefer to base in Puerto Vallarta and visit Yelapa by day? The Garza Blanca Preserve Resort & Spa and the adults-only Hotel Mousai sit on the city's south coast, combining luxury with easy pier access.

Where Should I Eat?

Café Bahía is my breakfast go-to, serving strong coffee, homemade granola, and crisp chilaquiles on a patio overlooking the bay. For a midday bite, Tacos Los Abuelos serves the best fish tacos on handmade blue corn tortillas,

and burritos generously stuffed with shrimp, steak, or al pastor. Pollo Bollo, a modest roadside spot, grills chicken and fish until smoky and tender, serving them with fresh salsas and tortillas.

Above the river, El Manguito pairs icy beer with just-caught seafood and Micheladas Vicky takes the classic michelada to new heights—tangy, spicy, and (pro tip!) get it topped with fresh shrimp for a meal in a glass. Dinner at Domingo's is toes-in-the-sand dining at its finest: coconut shrimp, the day's catch grilled to perfection, and margaritas that might make you forget you have a flight home. For dessert, track down the Pie Lady—Chely Rodríguez's guava, coconut, corn, and apple pies are as much a part of Yelapa's identity as the beach.

How Do I Get There?

Reaching Yelapa requires a boat, which is part of its magic. From Puerto Vallarta, water taxis depart the Los Muertos Pier in

the Zona Romántica three to four times daily for the 45-minute ride, offering sweeping views of the Bay of Banderas. A more frequent option departs from Boca de Tomatlán, a fishing village about 16 kilometers south of downtown Puerto Vallarta. Boats depart hourly from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. You don't need to buy tickets in advance—just walk to the end of the pier and look for the covered boats marked “Water Taxi.”

Private charters like the one I took can be arranged for a more flexible schedule, often combining the trip with snorkeling at Los Arcos or stops at other hidden beaches along the Costalegre coast. Contact Tatiana PV Meneses Sánchez with México Real Tours Privados (mexicoreal.by.tatiana@gmail.com) for a truly local view of this slice of paradise.

Wherever you depart from, bring cash (there are no ATMs in Yelapa), sunscreen, sturdy shoes for walking, insect repellent, and a readiness to slow down. ☺



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Aerial view of the sand bypass area, part of Broward County's shoreline protection project. Photo courtesy of Broward County.

Shifting SANDS

Along Florida's southeast coast, Broward County is spearheading a bold initiative to restore beaches and safeguard what matters most.

By Geoff Nudelman

Although Dr. Von D. Mizell-Eula Johnson State Park is considered an undeveloped area, it quietly thrives in the shadow of surrounding industry. Each year, more than 400,000 are drawn to its natural beauty. To the north, the park brushes up against Port Everglades, one of the busiest cruise and shipping hubs in North America. Nearby, the Navy and Coast Guard maintain key infrastructure, underscoring the area's strategic importance. Remarkably, the park is home to more than 10,000 sea turtle hatchlings annually, sharing the shoreline with an array of shorebirds. Just inland, the hum of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport serves as a reminder of the balance between nature and progress.



Aerial view of sand dunes at Dr. Von D. Mizell-Eula Johnson State Park in Dania Beach. Photo courtesy of Broward County.



Dr. Jennifer Jurado

This beloved, bustling stretch of shoreline is part of Broward County, Florida's second-largest county by population, home to just under two million residents. The area operates in symphony as part of the Miami-Dade metropolitan region, where nearly 6.5 million people live across a vibrant 100-mile coastal stretch. This corner of Florida continues to grow rapidly, echoing the state's overall momentum. At the same time, shifting weather patterns and natural forces are reshaping Florida's Atlantic coastline, sparking local creativity and innovation aimed at preserving the beaches we all love for generations to come.

Sand is vital to the health of any shoreline, but it plays an especially big role along heavily populated coasts like Broward County. In natural cycles, winds and water carry sand from north to south, nourishing the beaches immediately south of the Port Everglades Inlet, and gradually replenishing shorelines

further down Florida's Atlantic coast. Consistent sand levels help maintain protective dunes and support important coastal habitats. A healthy beach can also serve as a natural first line of defense against storm surge and Atlantic flooding.

"When there isn't a predictable source of sand that will compensate on the south side, you have a much more stable beach to the north," said Dr. Jennifer Jurado, Broward County's Chief Resilience Officer. "But because of that sand starvation, we're basically obligated to build large beach nourishment projects every ten years." Jurado has held the role for over a decade and has worked with the county for more than 20 years. Much of her work involves partnering with communities across South Florida to protect the region's natural beauty and finding smart, collaborative ways to manage changing coastal conditions. Her efforts help ensure South Florida's beaches stay healthy, welcoming both wildlife and visitors for years to come. Like many public-facing leaders, Jurado is tasked with doing a lot with limited resources.

"We started seeing the signs of coastal change more than a decade ago," she said, noting that Broward County began experiencing more frequent flooding as early as 2012. "We have fewer tools to work with, and resources are tight right now."

The region as a whole is invested in her work, not only to protect infrastructure, but to help preserve the natural places that draw visitors to this iconic stretch of Florida. In March, Broward County released its 2025 Resilience Plan, a framework designed to help communities adapt, recover, and thrive over the next 45 years and beyond. The plan outlines a range of forward-thinking strategies, including efforts to protect

those beloved beaches that locals and visitors treasure alike.

One major initiative set to begin soon will help restore and strengthen the shoreline at Mizell-Johnson State Park. This beloved park is the most exposed segment of Broward's shoreline, and the impacts ripple into neighboring areas. Over time, the park has experienced increased sand loss, reaching a "severe" status, as Jurado puts it. According to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the shoreline is now classified as "critically eroded," a signal that targeted restoration efforts are urgently needed.

"The erosion at the park reflects a larger

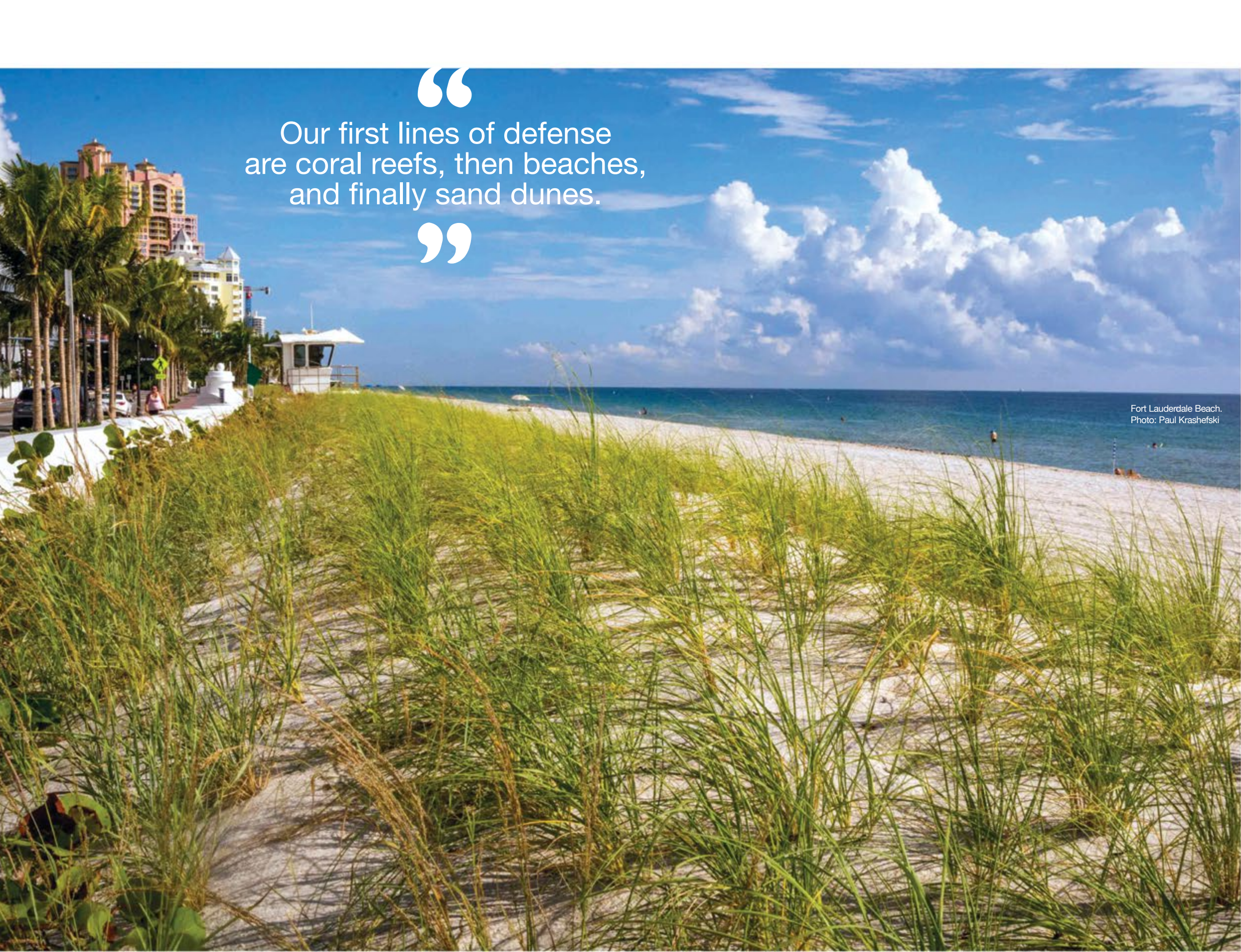
challenge we see along the coast," she said. "If sand can't move naturally from the state park, it limits how much reaches beaches farther south."

To compensate, a coalition of counties and municipalities currently sources sand either from offshore dredging or by trucking it in from inland mines. Both methods are expensive and resource-intensive, and are widely seen as short-term fixes rather than lasting solutions.

After 30 years of planning and coordination, a long-awaited solution is finally taking shape near the north jetty shoreline. Construction begins this fall on a sand trap designed to collect sand along the inlet's northern edge,



Team members at a sand dune restoration site in Lauderdale-By-The-Sea, Broward County. Photo by Paul Krashefski.



“Our first lines of defense
are coral reefs, then beaches,
and finally sand dunes.”

Fort Lauderdale Beach.
Photo: Paul Krashefski

reflecting multiple partnerships between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, FDEP, and local municipalities. A sand trap is essentially a submerged basin that captures drifting sand as it moves through the area, providing a safer and more sustainable way to harvest it when needed.

“It’s a complex project with meaningful benefits for both the environment and for the visitors who love these beaches,” said Stephanie Roche, beach program manager with Broward County’s Resilient Environment Department.

The project will roll out in four stages, with some pre-construction work already underway ahead of initial dredging this fall. The goal is for the project to supply up to half the sand needed for Broward’s southern beaches, reducing the need for more large-scale and costly methods. Upgrades to the north jetty and construction of the sand trap are designed to collect sand for managed southward transport, rather than letting it drift into the inlet or offshore, where it is lost from the system. The project is expected to take about two years, with pauses built in to protect coral spawning during sensitive periods. Once complete, the county estimates that it will be able to harvest sand every two to four years and place it along the beaches south of the inlet. If all goes as planned, the state park will get a much-needed boost in sand replenishment, helping preserve this special place for sea turtles, shorebirds, and the beachgoers who cherish it.

“Our first lines of defense are coral reefs, then beaches, and finally sand dunes,” Jurado said. “Without those natural barriers, wave energy intensifies, increasing the risk of coastal damage during storms.”

As part of the sand bypass project, reef building is also underway north of the Port Everglades Inlet. Meanwhile, Broward County is partnering with municipalities south of the inlet to add dunes to nearly 80% of the shoreline.

“It keeps the new sand where it belongs—on the beach,” said Jurado. 🌊

To learn more about Broward County’s shoreline restoration efforts and the 2025 Resilience Plan, visit Broward.org/Resilience or stop by Dr. Von D. Mizell–Eula Johnson State Park to experience the beauty firsthand.

You shared your Beach
Happy moments.
We couldn't stop smiling.



"What does Beach Happy mean to you?"

This summer, we asked our community to show us — and they did, beautifully. Across our social platforms, we invited beach lovers to share their favorite photo memories from the sugar-white sands of our little paradise along Florida's Scenic Highway 30A.

What we received was more than just snapshots. These were moments of joy and connection, of families barefoot in the sand, of long golden evenings and bright, breezy mornings. We saw bike rides through seaside neighborhoods, spontaneous dances at the shoreline, and the quiet magic that happens when time slows down by the water.

This spread is for all of you — those who know that life feels just a little easier, a little brighter, when you're at the beach. The photos were taken along 30A, but the spirit behind them speaks to something bigger. Because Beach Happy isn't just a place; it's a state of mind.

Soak in the light, the magic, the salt-kissed joy of days well spent. Whether you live here, vacation here, or simply dream of salty air and sun-warmed skin, we hope this collection brings a bit of that feeling to you.

Got your own Beach Happy moment? Tag us on Instagram (@hey30A) and Facebook (@Scenic30A), and use the hashtags #hey30A and #beachhappy for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue!



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Cecily Lee



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Planning to visit 30A? Or just want to explore everything 30A has to offer? Download the official 30A App and ask Hey30A AI anything — from the best beaches and restaurants to insider tips and local happenings.

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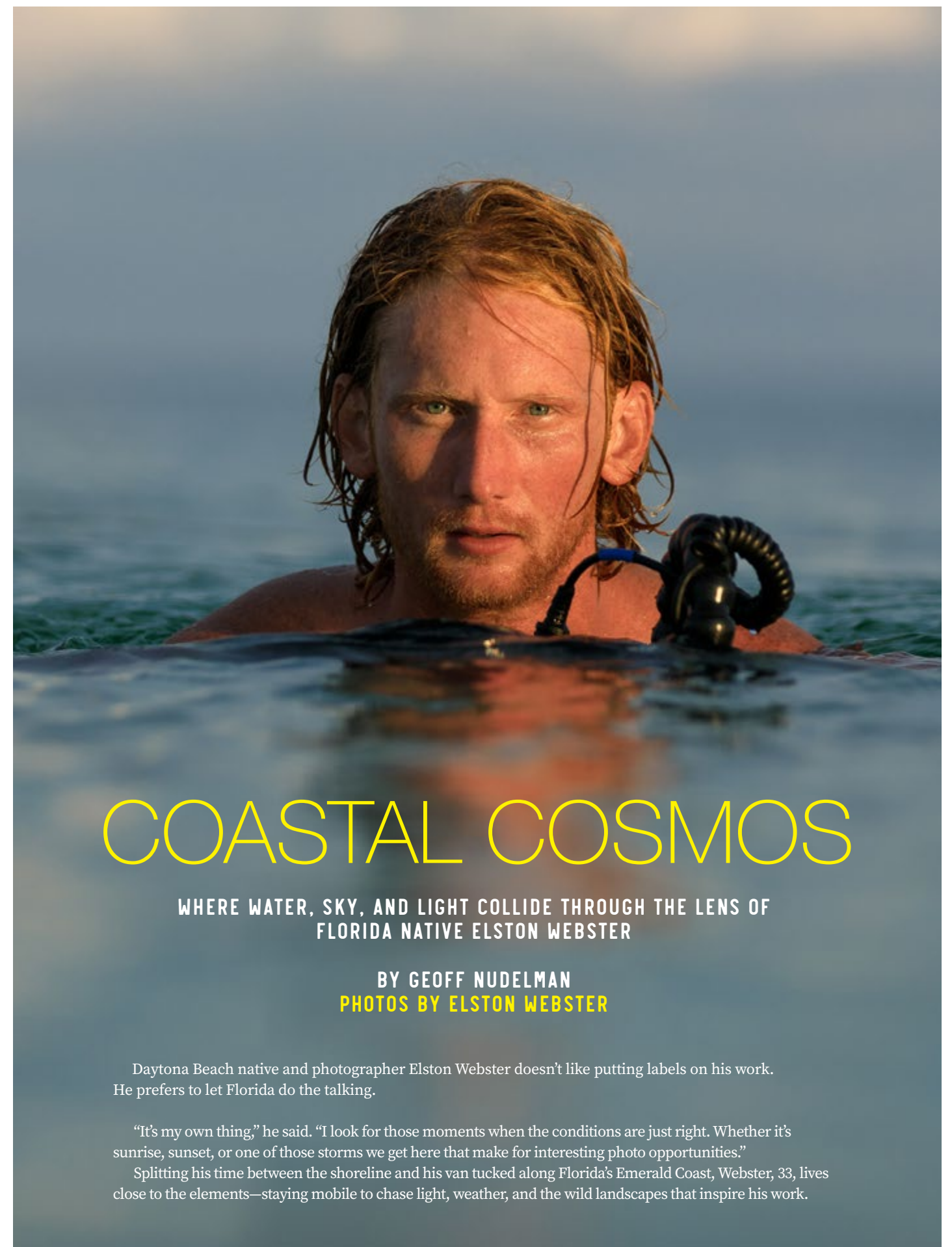


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A lifeguard tower, a sky full of galaxies—and one of those nights Florida feels otherworldly.



COASTAL COSMOS

WHERE WATER, SKY, AND LIGHT COLLIDE THROUGH THE LENS OF
FLORIDA NATIVE ELSTON WEBSTER

BY GEOFF NUDELMAN
PHOTOS BY ELSTON WEBSTER

Daytona Beach native and photographer Elston Webster doesn't like putting labels on his work. He prefers to let Florida do the talking.

"It's my own thing," he said. "I look for those moments when the conditions are just right. Whether it's sunrise, sunset, or one of those storms we get here that make for interesting photo opportunities."

Splitting his time between the shoreline and his van tucked along Florida's Emerald Coast, Webster, 33, lives close to the elements—staying mobile to chase light, weather, and the wild landscapes that inspire his work.



Florida isn't just a landscape;
it's a constellation.
A place where water, sky,
and light intersect
in quiet, cosmic ways.

Waterline: Evening light
spreads wide across the
Gulf, seen from just beneath
the surface.



Quiet Drift: In still water, even the smallest drift feels like a journey.



Starglow in the Dunes: A galaxy above, a quiet path below — Florida at its most surreal.



Under the Surface: The split second before you give in, where power, clarity, and chaos converge.

Now considered a rising name in Florida's growing community of marine and nature photographers, his journey back to the water wasn't a straight line.

Although he spent time near the coast as a baby, much of his childhood was spent away from it. In 2009, he picked up a camera for the first time, filming skateboarding videos and experimenting with still shots of wildlife and landscapes.

At the time, Webster worked in construction and slowly began investing in photography gear. He says he always knew construction wasn't his passion. It took nearly a decade of building confidence before he was ready to fully commit.

"I took a leap of faith with my camera and went all in," he said.

In 2020, a close friend reintroduced him to the coast. He found himself pulled back to the water and inspired by the stillness of natural springs, the challenge of shooting underwater, and the beauty of a night sky far from city lights. He began chasing light in all its forms, from the soft shimmer of fish below the surface to the galaxies that arc overhead.

"This might be a way of reconnecting with my youth," he said. "One of my favorite things is just being out in nature, especially in the water."

Today, Webster captures moments that feel uniquely Florida. A jellyfish drifting just beneath the surface. A lifeguard tower silhouetted against a sky filled with stars. A sailboat stranded in the sand like a relic of a forgotten voyage. Lightning flashing across a distant skyline. Shorebirds caught mid-stride at golden hour. His work reflects a deep understanding of contrast and timing, balancing stillness with motion and intimacy with scale.

Earlier this year, Webster officially transitioned into full-time freelance photography. Alongside his nature work, he shoots real estate for both video and still listings. He says the structure of that work has helped sharpen his technique and expanded his creative perspective.

For the past three years, Webster has also served as an ambassador for iRocker Paddleboards. He uses their boards to explore Florida's natural springs and shoot content out on the water.

Although he's hesitant to talk much about the future, a recent cross-country road trip left a lasting impression. He traveled through much of California, photographing the coastline and gaining a broader view of the world beyond Florida.

"I learned that some roads never end," he said. "There are incredibly beautiful places that many of us never see. I wish more people would get out and experience them."

Back home, the coast continues to call. With each photo, Webster reminds us that Florida isn't just a landscape; it's a constellation. A place where water, sky, and light intersect in quiet, cosmic ways.

Two Worlds Collide: Where ocean meets concrete, and stories are stranded between tides.



"I took a leap of faith with my camera and went all in."

Stillness of Grayton Beach:
Evening light over Grayton
Beach, where everything
feels just a little slower.

*See the coast through Elston Webster's lens. Explore his
real estate photography at elstonwebsterphoto.com and
follow along on Instagram (@elston.webster) for more
moments of wild beauty and coastal wonder.*

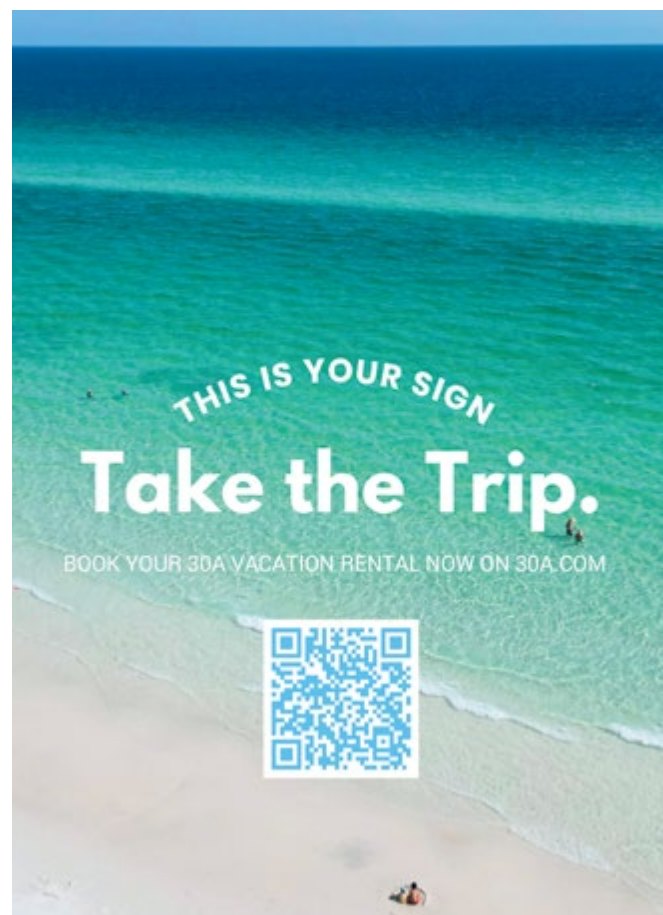





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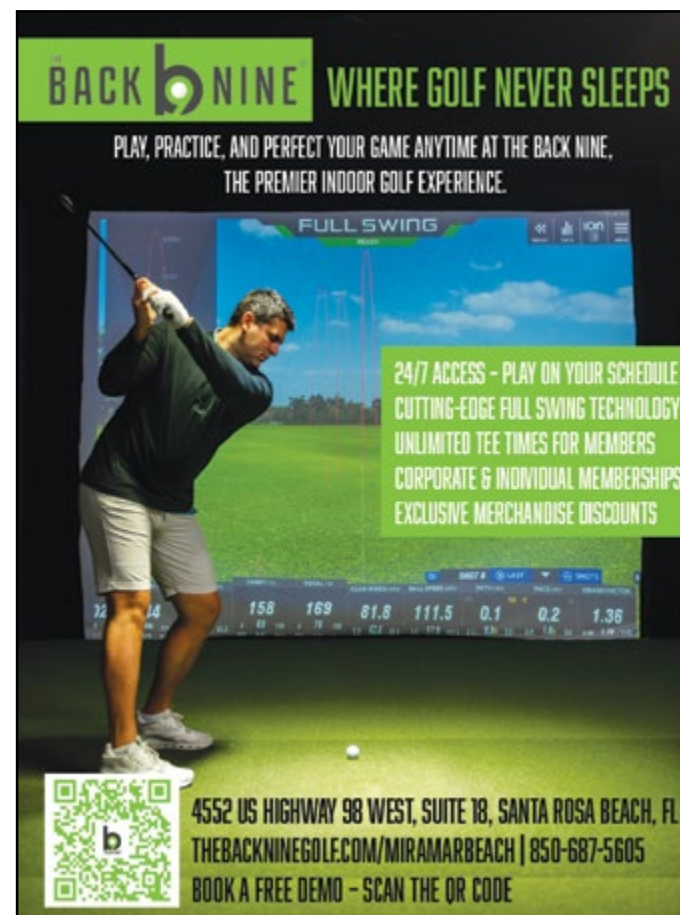


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What Your Money Rents

By Karina Caraballo

As fall arrives on 30A, cooler breezes and golden sunsets set the stage for unforgettable coastal escapes. Whether you're planning a cozy winter retreat, a holiday gathering with family, or a last-minute weekend getaway, this stretch of the Gulf offers an experience defined by sugar-white sand, turquoise waters, and year-round charm.

These premium holiday rentals go beyond beautiful spaces. From rooftop terraces with sweeping Gulf views and private pools to fire pits, golf carts, and bike-friendly communities, every detail is designed for comfort and connection. Local companies like Alys Beach, Oversee Rentals, 30A Escapes, and Vacasa are known for their exceptional service, and offer personalized check-ins, 24/7 guest support, and full concierge services to handle everything from dinner reservations to special requests.

Explore these featured rentals and discover just how many ways there are to experience the magic of 30A this fall and beyond, with all the luxury, ease, and hospitality you deserve.



23 Sea Venture Alley
Alys Beach, FL

3 BED | 4 BATH | SLEEPS 6

This brand-new Alys Beach residence blends refined design with breathtaking Gulf views from multiple levels. Enjoy elegant living spaces, a gourmet kitchen, and serene bedroom suites—each thoughtfully appointed for comfort. The crown jewel is the private rooftop pool and terrace, where sweeping views of the Gulf and iconic white rooftops set the stage for unforgettable sunsets, even in the cooler months.



117 Whalebone Alley
Alys Beach, FL

5 BED | 5.5 BATH | SLEEPS 12

Designed with gatherings in mind, this five-bedroom retreat offers the unique combination of two master suites and expansive indoor-outdoor living. A private courtyard with one of the largest pools in Alys Beach, covered seating, and a fireplace makes it an all-season sanctuary. Just steps from the Caliza Pool Complex, the home also features sunlit living spaces, a gourmet kitchen, and a private balcony with fire pit—perfect for cool evenings along 30A.



Perfectly positioned across from Rosemary Beach’s iconic Western Green, this artist-designed escape blends sophistication with coastal charm. Gulf views, a private carriage house, and a heated rooftop pool elevate the experience, while the courtyard and expansive dining spaces invite effortless gatherings. Steps from boutiques, local eateries, and the sugar-white sand, it’s a true 30A standout.

Gulf and Green Rosemary Beach, FL

5 BED | 4.5 BATH | SLEEPS 12



This newly renovated seven-bedroom Gulf-front home redefines upscale coastal living. Panoramic Gulf views, a private seasonally heated pool, and direct beach access set the stage for effortless relaxation, while a game room, elevator, and stylish interiors cater to both family fun and sophisticated entertaining. Thoughtful touches—from poolside dining to balcony retreats in multiple bedrooms—make every stay a serene and memorable Seacrest getaway.

Sea Star Seacrest Beach, FL

7 BED | 7 BATH | SLEEPS 16



Perched on the edge of Choctawhatchee Bay, this five-bedroom estate defines sophisticated coastal living. Expansive indoor spaces flow seamlessly to a private saltwater pool, spillover spa, and dock, while soaring cypress-beamed ceilings and French oak floors create timeless elegance. With multiple primary suites, a cinema, library, and versatile playroom, every corner is designed for comfort, style, and unforgettable gatherings.

Three Hundred Santa Rosa Beach, FL

5 BED | 6 BATH | SLEEPS 17



Just moments away from the sand, tennis courts, and Coquina Pool, this five-bedroom retreat blends coastal elegance with family-friendly design. Three king suites, kid-friendly bunk rooms, and a serene sleeping porch provide private sanctuaries, while the open-concept kitchen and shared courtyard invite effortless gatherings. Complete with seven adult beach bikes, it’s the perfect base for exploring 30A in comfort and style.

Stairway to Heaven Rosemary Beach, FL

5 BED | 4 BATH | SLEEPS 11





This newly renovated Gulf-front condo offers sophisticated beachfront living with sweeping fourth-floor views. Featuring all-suite bedrooms, a gourmet kitchen, and a sunlit living area, it's designed for seamless family gatherings or serene escapes. Enjoy shared amenities including a lagoon pool with waterfall, pickleball courts, and boardwalk beach access, all just moments away from the vibrant shops and dining of Rosemary and Alys Beach.

Beachy Keen
Inlet Beach, FL

3 BED | 3 BATH | SLEEPS 8



The Odessa
Seagrove Beach, FL

4 BED | 5 BATH | SLEEPS 12

Perched just 61 feet from the Gulf, The Odessa offers the ultimate beachfront escape for up to 12 guests. Relax in the private heated pool, take in sweeping Gulf views from multiple balconies, or gather in the chef's kitchen and elegant living spaces. Thoughtful details—including an elevator, kid-friendly bunk rooms, and six beach bikes—combine with prime Seagrove Beach access for a truly elevated 30A retreat.



Set in Bay County's only gated Gulf-front community, this elegant beachfront home pairs sophisticated design with effortless coastal living. A chef's kitchen, spacious living areas, and balconies with panoramic Gulf views create a perfect backdrop for gatherings, while resort-style amenities—including a sparkling pool, tennis courts, and playground—enhance every stay. Just steps from the sand and minutes from dining, shopping, and scenic trails along 30A, it's a quintessential beach escape.

Beachfront Blessings
Carillon Beach, FL

3 BED | 3 BATH | SLEEPS 12



The Palm House
Seagrove, FL

4 BED | 5 BATH | SLEEPS 12

Nestled in the heart of Old Seagrove and moments from Seaside, this sun-filled two-level home combines stylish interiors with an irresistible outdoor oasis. A private heated pool, spillover spa, summer kitchen, and cozy fireplace create the ultimate space for relaxation and gatherings, while a golf cart and bikes make exploring 30A effortless. Perfect for leisurely afternoons or lively evenings, it's a chic and comfortable escape just minutes from the beach and local dining.



WHAT'S 30A?

30A® is the #1 Guide to Florida's Scenic Highway 30A. Every day, 30A shares Beach Happy® stories and eco-conscious products with 30A's 1.7 million followers on Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, and TikTok. 30A has raised \$4 million for coastal charities, has given away 5.8 million of its famous blue 30A stickers, and has prevented 6.5 million plastic bottles from going into our oceans and landfills through 30A's line of recycled apparel.

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THE BEACH TOWNS OF 30A

This is a map of our little beach community. Old Florida "State Road 30" once started at the Alabama state line and meandered 283 miles east across the panhandle. Several "alternate routes" (hence the "A" in 30A) offered drivers a slower scenic option, usually along the beach. But we don't think of 30A as disjointed miles of soulless asphalt. 30A® is a celebration of small town beach life – the kind that's been enjoyed by families for decades all along the Gulf Coast. 30A isn't just a line on the map. It's a lifestyle; an attitude. It's that happy place we all dream of when we need to unwind, unplug and celebrate life. – 30A.com



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