

# St. George Island, Fla. offers great beaches, lighthouse, local seafood

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Journal Gazette & Times-Courier, Illinois



[Submitted photo](#)

This photo provided by the St. George Lighthouse Association shows the Keeper's House Museum in the foreground and the reconstructed lighthouse in the background.

My family and I recently trekked south to Florida's St. George Island, where we relaxed on one of the top U.S. beaches, visited a beautiful lighthouse, and tried flavorful local seafood.

We were drawn to this barrier island in the Florida panhandle by St. George Island State Park ranking third in the nation on Dr. Beach's Top 10 Beaches for 2014. This list is created by professor Stephen Leatherman, director of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at Florida International University. He evaluates beaches based on sand and water quality, among many other factors.

St. George's beach lived up to its top three ranking. We drove to the state park at the island's east end and then got our first good look at the beach there after we took a walking path through well-preserved dunes.

Our eyes were greeted by the sight of powdery, white sand alongside gentle waves from the Gulf of Mexico. The nearest other beach-goers were a quarter mile away, so we had this peaceful area almost entirely to ourselves.

We spent the day alternating between playing in the surf and relaxing under the shade of an umbrella. We saw a pod of dolphins swim by the beach during this time, plus a long-legged heron and a crab that crossed the sand surprisingly close to our blanket.

Outside of the state park, the rest of St. George proved to be scenic as well. The ribbon-like Bryant Grady Patton Bridge takes motorists from the mainland across Apalachicola Bay to the island. As motorists arrive on the island, the St. George Lighthouse comes into view and is framed by two long rows of palm trees.

The lighthouse was reconstructed in the middle of St. George six years ago after the 1852 lighthouse on the west end of the island collapsed in 2005. The lighthouse and its Keeper's House Museum are open to the public.

My wife, Beckie, and our 8-year-old daughter, Hannah, climbed up the lighthouse's 92 staircase steps and eight ladder steps to check out the sweeping view from the enclosed top. Meanwhile, I stayed at ground level with our 3-year-old son, Owen, as he tried out the Lighthouse Park playground.

The Lighthouse Park provides public access to a beach that we visited on our first day on the island. This lively beach is located within walking distance of restaurants and many of the colorful rental homes that line the gulf shoreline.

Our children enjoyed visiting the beaches and the Apalachicola Estuary Nature Center across the bridge at Eastpoint. The center's exhibits include three 1,000-gallon, walk-around aquariums that house a variety of native plant and aquatic life. An adjacent boardwalk takes visitors through the woods to an observation deck on the bay.

After each day full of activities, we relaxed in our room at the St. George Inn. This old Southern-style inn has wraparound porches on the first two floors and individual room balconies on the top floor. The interior lobby is well appointed with cozy furniture. Our top-floor room provided a home away from home with a bedroom, living room, small pantry, and full bathroom.

The room was a great place to unwind and eat takeout at the end of the day. Some of our favorites foods were the shrimp and cheesy grits, grouper reuben, and coffee-marinated rib-eye from Harry A's Restaurant; soft shell crab po boy from Blue Parrot Oceanfront Cafe; and wraps and crispy french fries from The Grub Hut food stand.

Although we enjoyed lazing around at the beach, one of the most relaxing moments was sharing an evening meal on our balcony while listening to one of the regular outdoor acoustic shows at nearby Eddy Teach's Raw Bar. As we savored good food and music, we watched the sunlight slowly dim over the bay. This was the perfect end to a fun and scenic day at St. George Island.

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Original article: [http://jg-tc.com/lifestyles/st-george-island-fla-offers-great-beaches-lighthouse-local-seafood/article\\_7f3a6f4f-befc-5210-8d0f-ed1c6e61e07e.html](http://jg-tc.com/lifestyles/st-george-island-fla-offers-great-beaches-lighthouse-local-seafood/article_7f3a6f4f-befc-5210-8d0f-ed1c6e61e07e.html)