

## Best Florida Destinations for Families

Award-winning beaches, spectacular sunsets, wild rides: the sunshine state has it all. Here are our picks for the best family hot spots in Florida.

By Ellen Parlapiano

### Anna Maria Island



#### Why We Love It

The vibe is very old-time Florida on this tiny island 40 miles south of Tampa. No high-rises, big-chain hotels or fast-food restaurants—just vintage bungalows, small-scale condos and mom-and-pop shops. Ditch the car and do like the locals by biking to bay and Gulf beaches (consider Beach Bums rentals, [beachbumsami.com](http://beachbumsami.com)). At the end of the Rod & Reel Pier, fish for your own dinner or order a grouper sandwich from the landmark restaurant. Kayak with retired marine biology teacher Captain Scott to catch a glimpse of dolphins and bird rookeries ([beachbumsami.com](http://beachbumsami.com)). For a splurge, try horse surfing in nearby Bradenton: Ride your new friend along the beach, then perch on his back while he trots into the water ([beachhorses.com](http://beachhorses.com)).

#### Where to Stay

Settle into one of the luxurious condos at Tortuga Inn Beach Resort, just steps from the pool and private beach. Two-bedroom, two-bath units that sleep six start at \$270 per night/\$1,448 per week ([tortugainn.com](http://tortugainn.com)). Or get cozy in one of the cute Anna Maria Beach Cottages (from studios to three-bedrooms), with eat-in kitchens, outdoor decks and the beautiful Gulf beach as backyard; nightly rates start at \$156 for a studio that sleeps four ([annamariabeachcottages.com](http://annamariabeachcottages.com)).

#### Fun Side Trip

Head to Sarasota (a 50-minute drive away), once the Ringling Brothers' winter home, to check out historic big-top memorabilia (trains, posters and miniature three-ring model) at the Ringling Museum of Art Circus Museum ([ringling.org](http://ringling.org)). In nearby Venice, family members can channel their inner acrobats at Tito Gaona's Flying Trapeze Academy, run by a legendary circus performer ([titogaona.com](http://titogaona.com)).

**More Info** at [annamariaisland-longboatkey.com](http://annamariaisland-longboatkey.com)

