

# First Coast Treasures

By Laura Hampton

**W**e're lucky to live in a region tourists flock to from around the world for rest, relaxation and fun. *Family!* has uncovered some of the hottest treasures on the First Coast to entertain, enlighten and thrill the whole gang.

## Catch and Release

By far, the most popular Amelia River Cruise with children, the Eco-Shrimping Tour is a two-hour educational excursion disguised as fun. Captain Kevin McCarthy and marine biologist Andrea Margiotta team up to bring Fernandina's shrimping history, and the ecosystem that creates it, to life.

Shrimp Boats in Fernandina Harbor.  
Photo by Laura Hampton

During the first part of the tour, McCarthy uses the age-old tradition of storytelling to detail Fernandina's history as the birthplace of the modern shrimping industry.

"Most chefs will tell you that the tastiest shrimp in the world is a white shrimp, and 80 percent of the world's wild-caught white shrimp come from the waters around Northeast Florida and Southeast Georgia," McCarthy says. "So, we catch the world's tastiest shrimp!"



Photo by Laura Hampton



Marine Biologist  
Andrea Margiotta  
tells fish stories

As McCarthy spins his tales, the boat heads out to the marshlands of the Tiger Basin. In the natural saltwater marshes, adult aquatic creatures lay their eggs and give birth.

"I call it the little nursery ground," Margiotta says. "It's a place where a lot of the little babies grow. There's an abundance of food; it's nice and protected. They can grow up big and strong, and then they head out to the open ocean."

Once out in the Tiger Basin, captain drops anchor and passengers help lower an Otter Trawl shrimp net into the brackish water. The net is dragged behind the boat for 15 minutes,

and when the captain pulls the net out of the water, the "catch of the day" is dumped into an onboard fish tank.

Margiotta sifts through the creatures in the fish tank, and pulling them out one-by-one, provides both ecological and biological information to guests, young and old, fascinated

and squeamish. All passengers are invited to hold the creatures. Some are willing; some not so much.

Brown shrimp, sea pansies, sea sponges, crabs and flounder are just a few of the fascinating surprises aboard this must-do cruise. [ameliarivercruises.com](http://ameliarivercruises.com)

# Amelia Island

## Family! Favorites

**Amelia Island Museum of History** The museum highlights many stages of the region's history including the Timucuan natives, the Civil War in Nassau County, the Spanish Mission of La Florida and the shrimping industry. \$7 for adults and \$4 for students. [ameliamuseum.org](http://ameliamuseum.org)

**Fort Clinch State Park** In addition to historical significance, the property includes miles of bicycle and walking trails, pristine campgrounds and playgrounds along the river and beach. \$6 fee per vehicle to enter the park and \$2 fee for admission to the fort. [floridastateparks.org/fortclinch](http://floridastateparks.org/fortclinch)

**Ice cream treats on Centre Street.**  
Photo by Laura Hampton



Fort Clinch State Park.  
Photo by Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection



**Posada San Carlos** Now a bed and breakfast, this 18th-Century Victorian charmer was chosen as a stand-in for Villa-Villekulla, the fictional home of Pippi Longstocking in the 1988 film *The New Adventures of Pippi Longstocking*. On the corner of White and Estrada streets.



Photo by Laura Hampton

## Fun

**Centre Street** Art, antiques and local treasures abound on Centre Street. The heart of Fernandina's historic district, visitors can grab a bite to eat at one of the many neighborhood eateries or tour in style with an Old Towne Carriage ride.

**Ride Like the Wind** Imagine riding on horseback along 13 miles of Appalachian quartz sandy beach with the wind whipping through your hair. Happy Trails Walking Horses and Kelly Seahorse Ranch offer one-hour guided tours to bring this fantasy to life.

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Fantastic Fudge. Photo by Laura Hampton

Prices range from \$60 to \$80. Minimum age is 13. [happytrailswalkers.com](http://happytrailswalkers.com) or [kellyranchinc.net](http://kellyranchinc.net)

**Segway** Why walk when you can ride? Perfect for off-road adventures, EcoMotion Tours offers Segway excursions of Fort Clinch State Park and the beaches around Amelia Island. Minimum age is 13. [ecomotiontours.com](http://ecomotiontours.com)

## Flavor

**Fantastic Fudge** Hand-dipped chocolates, fudge and other delectable confections made fresh daily on Centre Street. [fantasticfudge.com](http://fantasticfudge.com)



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# Jacksonville Northside

## Family! Favorites

Kingsley Plantation Sea Island Cotton and Indigo were the major crops grown on this 19th century Southern plantation. Open 7 days a week. Free admission.

[nps.gov/timu/historyculture/kp.htm](http://nps.gov/timu/historyculture/kp.htm)

**Timucuan Preserve Visitor Center**  
Housed in the famed Ribault Club, the "Where the Waters Meet" exhibit illustrates how humans have interacted with the Northeast Florida environment for thousands of years.

[nps.gov/timu](http://nps.gov/timu)

## Fun

**Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park** Perfect for an all day outing, this 450-acre oceanfront park includes extensive trails, picnic pavilions and a children's splash park. \$3 per vehicle. [coj.net](http://coj.net)

**Talbot Island State Parks** Serene tidal creeks, dolphins playing and osprey bobbing for lunch are everyday riches enjoyed at **Big Talbot Island** and **Little Talbot Island**. Hiking trails, camping facilities and plenty of sunbathing available. \$5 per vehicle. [floridastateparks.org](http://floridastateparks.org)

## Flavor

**Boiled Peanuts** A Southern tradition, look for vendors selling boiled peanuts on the side of the road as you travel up Heckscher Drive.



Friendship Fountain Park.  
Photo by Laura Hampton



# Jacksonville Downtown

## Family! Favorites

**Jacksonville Fire Museum** From bucket brigades to modern-day first responders, the museum celebrates more than 150 years of Jacksonville Fire and Rescue history.

[jacksonvillefiremuseum.com](http://jacksonvillefiremuseum.com)

**Jacksonville Maritime Museum** Celebrating Jacksonville's rich nautical history, the museum's displays cover 17th-century warships, destroyers from WWI and WWII, and modern-day aircraft carriers. \$5 adults, \$1 children age 7-13.

[jacksonvillemaritimeheritagecenter.org](http://jacksonvillemaritimeheritagecenter.org)

**Friendship Fountain Park** Located on the west end of the Southbank Riverwalk, the park includes 14 picnic tables and a stunning view of the city's skyline. *1015 Museum Circle*

## Fun

**Jacksonville Walking Tours** Uncover secret underground tunnels and the rich history of Jacksonville in a narrated one-mile walking tour of downtown. \$20 for adults and \$5 for children age 5-12. [facebook.com/jacksonvillewalkingtours](http://facebook.com/jacksonvillewalkingtours)

**Museum of Science and History** Although there's lots to see at the MOSH, young explorers will find plenty to do in the museum's KidSpace and hands-on, interactive exhibit, The Body Within. \$10 for adults and \$8 for children age 3-12. [themosh.org](http://themosh.org)





Three Layers Café.  
Photo by Jacqueline Persandi



Three Layers Café.  
Photo by Jacqueline Persandi

## Flavor

**Three Layers Café** Decadent three-layer cake flavors include red velvet, chocolate espresso, Italian cream, orange sicle, lemon dream and proprietor Jeff Wright's own creation, caramel butter cream.

[threelayersacoffeehouse.com](http://threelayersacoffeehouse.com)



Adventure Landing

## Jacksonville Beaches

### Family! Favorites

**Beaches Museum and History Center** Museum exhibits tell the stories of European explorers, the 1920s boardwalk era, lifeguards and mermaids. \$5 for adults and \$3 for children age 6–17.

**Jacksonville Beach Pier** Walk out into the Atlantic Ocean without getting wet, the quarter-mile-long pier provides a close-up glimpse of the ocean and a spectacular sunrise panorama. \$1 for spectators, \$4 to fish. [jacksonvillebeach.org](http://jacksonvillebeach.org)

### Fun

**Adventure Landing** Zoom around a quarter mile go-kart track, test your marksmanship in pirate-themed laser tag or float down the Lil' St. Johns in the Shipwreck Island Water Park. \$16.99 admission includes three attractions. [adventurelanding.com](http://adventurelanding.com)

**Crazy Fish** More than another seafood joint, the waterfront restaurant offers airboat adventures and guided kayak tours through the Intracoastal Waterway. \$99 for one-hour airboat rides; kayak tours start at \$55. [crazyfishjax.com](http://crazyfishjax.com)

**Bike on the Beach** Great exercise and fun too, tour the Atlantic coast on a comfy beach cruiser equipped with a basket to carry beach gear. \$8 one-hour rental, \$25 per day. [eastcoastsportrentals.info](http://eastcoastsportrentals.info)

### Flavor

**Sun Dog** Take a break from the hot sun and enjoy lunch at this 1950s-style diner. [sundogjax.com](http://sundogjax.com)

Beaches Museum and History Center

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Sun Dog Steak & Seafood.  
Photo by Jacqueline Persandi

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# St. Augustine

## Family! Favorites

**Historical Forts** Together, the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine and Fort Matanzas, 15 miles south, helped the Spanish defend the coastal city until 1819, when Florida was ceded to the United States. Admission to Fort Matanzas is free. Castillo de San Marcos admission is \$7 for adults; free for children age 15 and under. [nps.gov](http://nps.gov)

**St. George Street** On any day, conquistadors, maidens, pirates and wenches roam the streets of St. Augustine's Spanish Quarter providing a glimpse of the village as it might have been in 17th century Florida.

## Fun

**Alligator Farm** Play Indiana Jones for a day at Florida's oldest zoological attraction. Aerial obstacle courses include rope bridges, swinging logs, tightropes and ziplines. \$25 to \$65 above park admission price of \$21.95 for adults and \$10.95 for children age 3-11. [alligatorfarm.com](http://alligatorfarm.com)

**Anastasia Island** More than just beautiful beaches, the island provides a glimpse of untouched Florida just minutes from the bustle of St. Augustine streets. Ocean fun includes

Cannon Firing Reenactment at Castillo de San Marcos. Photo by [FloridasHistoricCoast.com](http://FloridasHistoricCoast.com)



kayaking, boating, diving and surfing, while land lovers enjoy biking, camping, picnicking and two children's playgrounds.

[floridastateparks.org/anastasia](http://floridastateparks.org/anastasia)

**Marineland** Just 15 miles south of the nation's oldest city, Marineland provides a rare opportunity for personal encounters with dolphins. Program options include swimming with these gentle creatures of the sea and taking home a dolphin-painted work of art. Prices range from \$29 to \$209. [marineland.net](http://marineland.net)

**Parasailing** Soar into the azure Florida sky high above St. Augustine. Gentle take offs and landings make this adventure available to all ages. Flights start at \$70. Open seven days a week. [smilehighparasail.com](http://smilehighparasail.com)

## Flavor

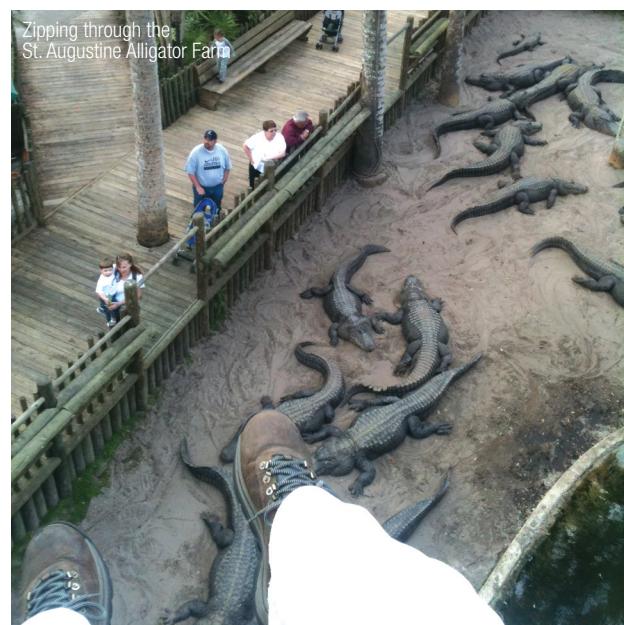
**Café del Hidalgo** Made fresh daily, just looking at the lusciously blended flavors of Italian gelato is a refreshing treat.

35 Hypolita St.

Spanish Quarter, St. George Street.  
Photo by [FloridasHistoricCoast.com](http://FloridasHistoricCoast.com)



Riding High in the Sky.  
Smile High Parasail



Zipping through the  
St. Augustine Alligator Farm