

2019/2020

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Take refuge in the small-town charms of Seaside, Florida

BY KATHRYN STREETER



Long ago, vacationers heading to the beach would rent bungalows with porches showcasing swings, a natural gathering point where breezes blew freely, and conversation flowed easily. Where the local grocery, ice cream shop and café were a short stroll away. Where kids left on bikes, and parents didn't worry, to fearlessly explore the family-friendly town. In many beach destinations today it's hard to find these simple but significant characteristics.

Robert Davis, founder of Seaside, Florida, hoped to recreate these nostalgic elements, similar to those he remembered fondly from his own family's yearly treks to the beach when he was a child in the late '40s. There are plenty of destinations with high-rise condos dotting the beach, but he correctly guessed that others would be attracted to a throw-back town like

he envisioned. His vision was tree-lined streets with bungalows featuring front porches neatly laid out in a pattern such that all residents enjoy easy access to main street services.

In 1981 Seaside was founded, now home to 1,228 including dogs and cats, according to the official town sign welcoming you to town.

Find your perfect rental bungalow with Cottage Rental Agency (CRA), located right behind Town Center just off of 30A. They have the largest listing of cottages ranging in size from studios to six bedrooms and are conveniently open seven days a week to meet any need and allow easy check-in and check-out services. They'll answer questions, from finding babysitting to chartering a fishing excursion, among other things. Cottage rentals allow free access to the fitness center, the three community pools and come with a tote-bag filled with Seaside-orient-

ed gifts, a bottle of wine and two complimentary cruiser bikes. Golfers will be interested to know that when renting through CRA, a second round of golf is free at the Sandestin Golf & Resort Club after buying your first.

One cottage you probably won't be able to book is 31 Natchez Street, the picturesque white-picket-fence setting for the movie "The Truman Show" featuring Jim Carrey. The 1998 comedy-drama follows Truman through his idyllic life, which, unbeknownst to him, is contrived. After watching the movie, wander through town and take a minute to walk down this street.

The sun-washed beach will beckon but it's best to reserve an umbrella and chairs in advance before heading to the beach. At Cabana Man, servicing Seaside for 30 years, you can select the dates of your visit, pay in advance and expect things to be waiting when you arrive at



the beach. They've got your back in other areas, as well, offering kayak, paddleboard and boogie board rentals.

A fun day at the beach generally requires a lot of gear—sunscreen, towels, drinks, snacks and reading material, sometimes far more than you can carry. Consider renting a mini trailer through Seaside Transit Authority and they'll attach it to your cruiser bike for free. Note, the prices go down for renting over multiple days. For a 4-day holiday rental, for example, you'll pay \$30.60 US compared to \$15.30 US per day.

Besides dreamily gazing at ocean views and splashing about on a paddleboard, perfect your hand at building sandcastles by reserving a two-hour class with Sand Castle Lessons. This workshop is equally popular with adults as with kids. The experts will arrive at the beach to conduct "class" which starts at

\$220 (US up to 5 people). There are no age restrictions and kids age 4 and under participate free with a paying adult.

Another must-not-miss ocean-side experience in Seaside is an evening bonfire through Live Well 30A. The basic package (\$495 US) includes a table and eight chairs, tiki torches and a bonfire attendant for three hours. Choose to bring your own picnic or opt for catering. If you've rented your cottage through CRA, you'll get complimentary s'mores.

Escape the sun and drop into Sundog Books, established 33 years ago. Check their calendar of events for book talks/discussions and if kids or grandkids are along, look for story-time, face-painting and arts and crafts hosted by Christine Via on the veranda out front. Browse in the art galleries and shops clustered in the heart of the town and don't miss the boutique toy-store-and-

more Duckies Shop of Fun. You'll find more rubber duckies than you've ever seen, from whimsical to wacky along with plenty of toys and kids' clothing.

Seaside's Repertory Theatre offers live acts, plays and musical shows and feature movies, hand-picked for a general audience, such as *The Secret Life of Bees* and *Free Solo*. In advance of your trip, check the schedule as you plan your itinerary. The weekly Farmer's Market happens each Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. helping motivate you to rise, shine and stroll to the town center for freshly baked breakfast pastries. Their Facebook page provides up-to-date and engaging information on what to expect.

A good holiday requires wonderful food and drink, and Seaside has many eateries of all types to choose from. I found that Modica Market was always hopping, serving homey breakfast and



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café fare, with many vegetarian options. With tables scattered about outdoors, it's a cheery setting for food, snacks and drinks. They rotate craft beers and have specials worth knowing about. If live music appeals, wander by late Friday afternoons.

Nestled on the opposite side of the town's circle, stop for your cup of joe at Amavida Coffeeshop, an organic fair-trade coffee roaster. I took my delicious latte to-go down to the beach to sip while I strolled.

For a memorable Sunday brunch, visit The Great Southern Café for their Crab Cake and Fried Green Tomato Benedict courtesy of chef and owner, Jim Shirley. If you opt to sit at the bar, find veteran bartender Kristina Peele who mixes amazing drinks and will be happy to chat with you about the surrounding area.

Bud and Alley's Roof Deck Bar is an easy-going rooftop bar for casual food and drink. The menu covers everything—from classic soups, salads, burgers and sandwiches to the catch of the day. It's got a cool vibe as well as an amazing ocean view I couldn't get enough of. Pizza Bar + Trattoria offers innovative wood-fired pizza. Choose between red or white pies (4 slices), like the Roasted Fennel Sausage (\$17 US) or Clam Pie (\$18 US).

Pickle's is all about serving you great burgers and shakes. It's worth trying their signature shake, orange crush. And when you're exploring the town and craving something refreshing, stop by Frost Bites, a permanent vintage food truck in the centre of town (among others) which offers Homemade Frozen Custard and Freshly Squeezed Lemonade.

The laid-back beach town of Seaside is the kind of place where travelers will feel an authentic welcome and naturally be folded into the community. With the variety of things going on, there's always something to do and visitors will find they've gotten far more from their winter getaway than just warm sunshine and open beaches.

To learn more about Florida's Seaside, visit seasidefl.com ■

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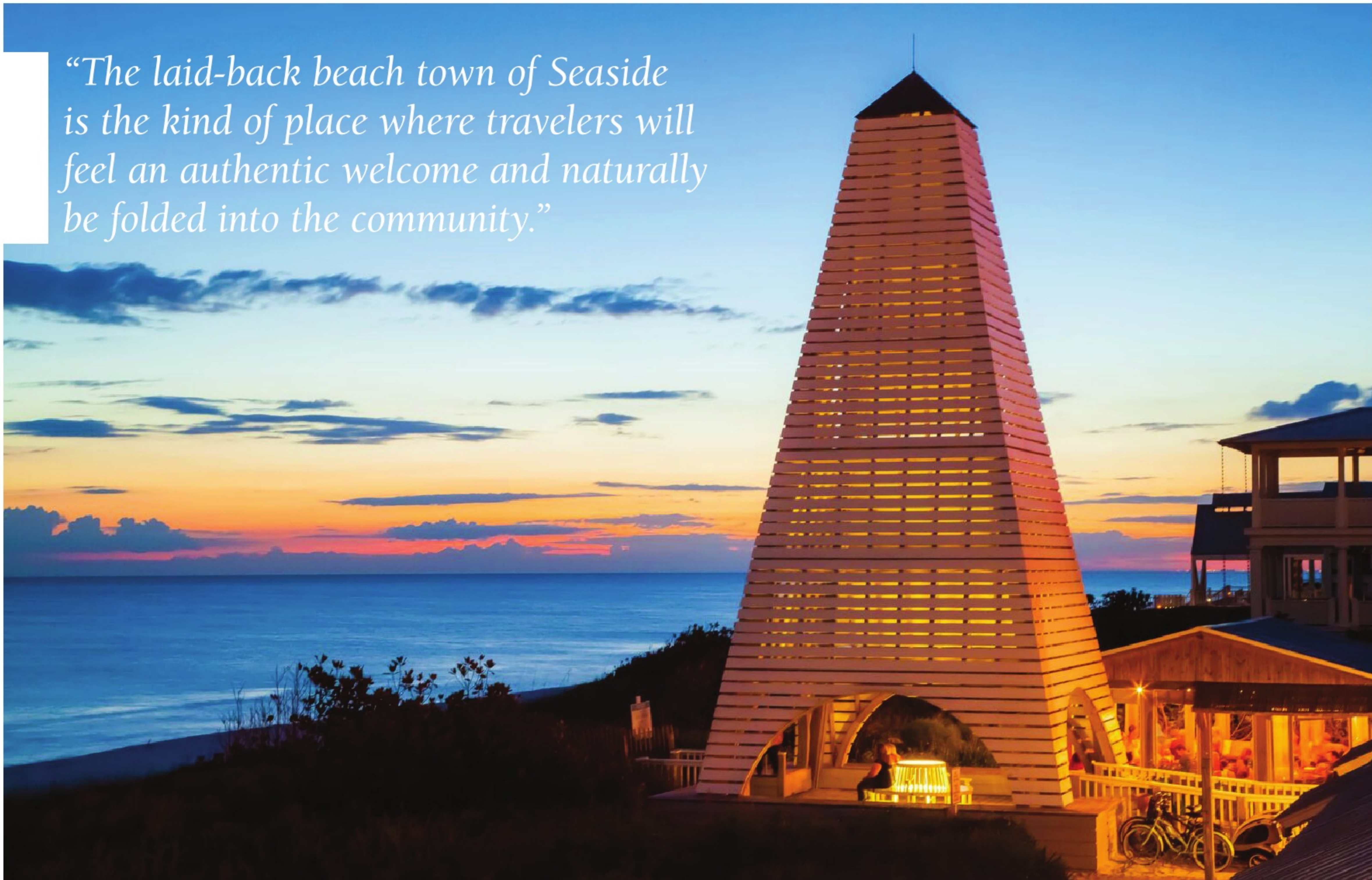


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