

SUNNY OASIS

Iconic landmarks add to the allure of South Walton, Florida.

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When my husband announced a business trip to South Walton, Florida, I jumped at the chance to go and reacquaint myself with this area of the Sunshine State, eager to discover even more reasons to love this part of the South.

On day one, I prepared for a full day of walking, starting at Eden Gardens State Park. The parking fee of \$4 (be sure to have exact change) allows you to wander the gorgeous grounds. At the park's heart is the eye-catching 600-year-old Virginia live oak called the Wedding Tree, where couples exchange wedding vows beneath the moss-covered boughs. Nearby stands the historic Wesley House, available for tours, but I was in the mood to stay outdoors, so I headed toward the coast and Grayton Beach State Park along Scenic Highway 30A.

The park is alive with dunes and interesting walking trails. My favorite is the 40-minute Hobbit Hole Trail. Follow the trail from the parking lot and you'll be delighted by the cluster of sand live oaks at the top of the dunes, which creates a gazebo-like tunnel similar to a hobbit hole, offering relief from the sun. Take note of the area's natural flora and fauna.



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The following day I focused on some must-see landmarks in the beach towns dotting 30A. I drove west from Rosemary Beach, where we were staying, pausing to admire the white buttermilk (minaret-shaped structures with historic mosaic murals) that flank the entrance to Alys Beach.

In Seaside, I parked to explore on foot. I was on the hunt to find the Truman House from the movie

The Truman Show starring Jim Carrey, and when I did, I snapped a photo, as had countless other tourists before me.

Needing a break, I ordered a sandwich from Modica Market on the town square before finding a shady bench at the enchanting tree-lined Ruskin Place Park. I love this lush sanctuary for a quiet place to get off my feet and soak up the ambiance. I then visited the



☞ Sunbathers relax on the white sand that lines the South Walton coast.

WESLEY HOUSE: EDITOR/ROBERTY IMAGES; BEACH AND DUNE: VISIT SOUTH WALTON

many interesting shops and galleries that line the park.

Eventually I pulled myself away for the 20-minute drive back to Rosemary Beach, where my husband joined me for a leisurely bike ride around town. We locked up our cruisers to get dinner and watch the sun set at Pescado, a rooftop restaurant. It was one of the most breathtaking sunsets we had ever witnessed, capping off a gorgeous time in South Walton. 🌊

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ALONG THE OCEAN BLUE

STAY

The Pearl Hotel in Rosemary Beach anchors Main Street, with views of the ocean. The stunning structure rings distinctively European, whitewashed with charming turrets, black-and-white awnings, and a clock affixed to its tower.

EAT

The Red Bar in Grayton Beach is one of the area's beloved establishments, attracting locals and visitors. Don't miss the fabulous fare or the live bands, most notably The Red Bar Jazz Band, which performs most evenings.



PLAY

After reclining on the beach with a good book, listening to the waves, take a few hours to snorkel. Explore the South Walton Artificial Reef Association's snorkeling collection of artificial reefs in various shapes: a dolphin (Miramar Beach), sea turtle (Grayton Beach State Park), seahorse (Topsail Hill Preserve State Park) and grouper (Inlet Beach).



WHEN YOU GO

- visitsouthwalton.com
- swarareefs.org
- theredbar.com
- thepearlrb.com