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**DETAILS**

St. Petersburg, Fla.

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**GETTING THERE:** St. Petersburg has its own airport, St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport in Clearwater, but it's just as easy to fly into Tampa International Airport, a short drive across the Howard Frankland Bridge (Interstate 275). United, Southwest and US Airways offer nonstop service from Washington, with fares running between \$165 and \$200 round trip.

**WHERE TO STAY:** I stayed at the *Pier Hotel* (253 Second Ave. N., 800-735-6607, <http://www.thepierhotel.com/>), an easy walk to lively Central Avenue and the waterfront. Besides its great Southern porch and Old World charm, the hotel has a generous happy hour. Rates from \$128 to \$168 double from January to May, and \$88 to \$188 from May to December.

The landmark *Don CeSar Beach Resort* (3400 Gulf Blvd., 866-728-2206, <http://www.doncesar.com/>) in St. Pete Beach has miles of beach, a spa, a pool and rates that can top \$300 in the winter. (They drop about \$100 in the summer.) For discounts on area properties, check the Web site of the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (see below).

**WHERE TO EAT:** For cheap, casual food in a bohemian setting, swing into the *Globe Coffee Lounge* (532 First Ave. N., 727-898-5282), where you can also get a henna tattoo from Darla Nunnery (\$5-\$25). Specials include lemon feta pasta for \$4 and a portobello parmesan wrap for \$4.50. *Ceviche* (10 Beach Dr. SE, 727-209-2302) serves tasty hot and cold tapas and other Spanish fare; tapas plates are \$5-\$10, and entrees are about twice as much. Go downstairs to hear live flamenco music.

There are lots of dining choices along Central Avenue, including *Bella Brava* (15 Central Ave., 727-895-5515), a two-level trattoria that prepares pastas, risottos, seafood dishes and more. Dinner entrees from \$10, but most are in the \$20 range. For breakfast or lunch, visit the *Saturday Morning Market* (open 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., October to May), on Central Avenue at Second Street. Snack on fresh baked goods, crepes, barbecue and other treats, some of which are free (samples!). The market also has art, clothing and other vendors, as well as live entertainment, sometimes including the mayor on guitar.

**WHAT TO DO:** In addition to the surreal art at the *Salvador Dali Museum* (1000 Third St. S., 727-823-3767, <http://www.salvadordalimuseum.org/>; \$15), the institution holds special events, such as films, \$1 sangria nights and a wine and poetry series. St. Petersburg has 35 miles of white sand beach, and its strands (specifically *Fort DeSoto Park* and *Caladesi*) often get top marks.

On Friday nights at the *St. Petersburg Shuffleboard Club* (559 Mirror Lake Dr. N., 727-822-2083, <http://www.shuffleboardclub.org/>), the free St. Pete Shuffle is anything but your grandmother's game -- unless she likes loud, rocking music. To exercise your mind and body, try *KaYoga*, organized by Tim Ganley of Central Ave. Fitness (727-466-7994, <http://www.centralavefitness.com/>). It starts with kayaking to a barrier island, then an hour of yoga on the beach, followed by a paddle back to the mainland. Cost is \$40 per person for group tours.

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For bands, art shows and other events, check out Creative Loafing online (<http://www.tampa.creativeloafing.com/gyrobase/index>), which covers the Tampa Bay area.

**INFO:** *St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention & Visitors*, 877-352-3224, <http://www.floridasbeach.com/>.

-- *Andrea Sachs*

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