



ABOVE, LEFT: Bridge Street Pier, marked by its picturesque clock tower, anchors some of the island's best shopping. ABOVE, RIGHT: The colorful Ginny's & Jane E's At the Old IGA, a local favorite for breakfast and lunch, also sells antiques, gift items, and fresh flowers. (Sleeping husbands are not for sale.)

**Richly Textured, Not Ritzy** Accommodations can be as upscale or as casual as you like. Once again, a no cookie-cutter mentality reigns here. On the south end of the island I discovered Tortuga Inn Beach Resort, tucked amid palm trees and garden oases and the perfect image of my dreams. Although many mom-and-pop lodgings dot the island, Tortuga's feel is more modern resort, although cozier and with greater character than many contemporary, sprawling complexes. While staying here, I walked just across the road to the resort's private Gulf beach, where it seemed the sea and sand were all mine to enjoy. I had the choice of studio, apartment, or more standard hotel room; I picked the apartment. This proved perfect, with plenty of room to enjoy a morning cup of coffee after waking up to a water view in a tropical garden setting. The kitchen, living, and dining areas added so much to the experience. I also luxuriated in a fountain-fed heated pool. Free Internet brought in the real world (but I learned to ignore it).

**Local Flavors, Free Sunsets** A girl's gotta stop for food (thank goodness). My favorite was Rod & Reel Pier Restaurant at the end of the pier. I learned to go early to beat the crowds, which consist of locals and visitors. While I dined on fresh grouper just pulled from the Gulf, I watched a stunning sunset, along with a grand view of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, festively alight at night. My evening entertainment was a more serene version of Vegas acrobatics, consisting of manatees and dolphins putting on a show, while people fished off the pier, pulling in redfish and mackerel.

**Boutique Shopping** No malls here. But I found delightful buys in dozens of spots dotting the island. My favorite shopping area is Bridge Street on Bradenton Beach (the southernmost city on the island). There's another pier here and a shopping street with Bridge Street Jewelers (I didn't resist the

Village of the Arts, just off the island in Bradenton, fills 1920s bungalows with local artists and their work.

## BEST OF ANNA MARIA ISLAND

**Favorite Lodgings:** Tortuga Inn Beach Resort. 1325 Gulf Drive North, Bradenton Beach; [www.tortugainn.com](http://www.tortugainn.com) or (941) 778-6611. Rates start at \$170.

**Best Shopping Cluster:** Art Attack, The Sailor's Knot, Bridge Street Jewelers, Bridge Street Bazaar. All located on Bridge Street.

**Best Convenience Shopping:** Pine Avenue General Store. 307 Pine Avenue; (941) 779-9200. Buy groceries, sunscreen, and deli items, just down from Beach Bums and City Jail.

**Best Bike/Kayak Rental:** Beach Bums. 427 Pine Avenue; (941) 778-3316. Bike rentals start at \$5 per hour or \$14 per day.

**Best Cottage Rescued From Tampa Bay:** Belle Haven Historical Cottage. It was built on City Pier in 1920 and fell into Tampa Bay in 1926. Rescued, reclaimed, and renovated, it looks none the worse for wear and sits alongside the Anna Maria Island Historical Museum. 402 Pine Avenue; (941) 778-0492.

