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In Rosemary Beach, cottages line one of the boardwalks leading to the white sand beach.

Picture Perfect

● ESCAPE FROM REALITY IN **ROSEMARY BEACH**, A NEW URBANIST TOWN IN THE PANHANDLE.

"Now we're going to play it our way," Ken Gifford says. Instead of rolling the pallino across the even lawn of the Western Green, he bowls it down an adjacent walkway. The small ball cracks against a planter and slows to a halt.

This is "extreme bocce," a version of the Italian lawn-bowling game, invented by the residents of Rosemary Beach. Gifford, vice president and managing director of Rosemary Beach Cottage Rental Company, brought his own bocce set for our game today. Over "greyhounds" (vodka and grapefruit juice) and "bloodhounds" (vodka, grapefruit juice and blood orange juice), we take turns rolling our bocce balls, seeing which team can get theirs closer to the target. On the hard surface of the pavers, there's no telling how far a pallino will travel, or where it will wind up.

As the sun sets in the distance, casting a rosy glow over the powdery white beach below, a young family is having a wheelbarrow race on the lawn, while a middle-aged couple rides by on a tandem bicycle. They wave in greeting to Ken and wife Linda.

Down Main Street, nearby, gas-fueled lanterns gently illuminate French-Colonial buildings—housing business space on street level and residential units above—featuring design elements like arches, wrought-iron railings and Bahamian shutters. All the structures here and throughout town share a vaguely similar style and the same natural-hued color palette, yet no two are alike.

This social and aesthetic harmony is the ethos of Rosemary Beach, an oceanfront Panhandle town between Destin and Panama City. This Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) was established in 1995 and constructed in the New Urbanism style, which harkens back to pre-suburban-sprawl times and emphasizes deliberate, responsible

FROM BLOCK TO BLOCK AND HOME TO HOME, THE CONSISTENCY AND BEAUTY OF THIS COMMUNITY INSPIRES A SENSE OF COMFORT AND TRANQUILITY.

+ if you go

Rosemary Beach Cottage Rental Company

16B S. Barrett Square, 888/855-1551,
rosemarybeach.com

Bamboo Beach & Bicycle Company

50 N. Barrett Square, 850/231-0770

Sea Oats Beach Service

below the Western Green,
877/207-0460

Blue Sky Kayak Tours

89 Lakeside Drive, Freeport,
850/368-3155

Café 30-A

3899 E. Scenic 30-A, Seagrove Beach,
850/231-2166



town planning. Branching out from a town center, the 107-acre community encourages walking and biking via plentiful pathways and dense construction. Vehicular traffic is

discouraged by minimal parking. Native vegetation is lush and abundant, creeping up the sides of homes and framing public green spaces. All homes conform to a design standard, as defined and regulated by the community aesthetic director.

Although it's still a work in progress (with ongoing construction

in select pockets), Rosemary Beach is near completion, and the planners' strict adherence to New Urbanist guidelines is evident everywhere: From block to block and home to home, the consistency and beauty of this community inspires a sense of comfort and tranquility.

Much of the credit for this urban achievement is due to its sister community, Seaside, about 8 miles east. Founded in 1982 by the same town planners as Rosemary Beach, Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk of Miami, Seaside was the first of about 600 New Urbanist communities nationwide. In fact, the community is so idyllic—with its white-picket fences and Americana design style—that it served as the backdrop for the film "The Truman Show," in which the main character, played by Jim Carrey, discovers that his perfect life is actually a television show.

Of Rosemary Beach's nearly 600 residential units—which include houses, townhomes and condominiums—about 200 are available for rent. The Rosemary Beach Cottage Rental Agency

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acts as liaison between renters and owners. This arrangement provides the convenience of checking into a hotel, while the accommodations themselves offer all the comforts of home. Daily rates range from \$186 to \$1,582 in winter and from \$217 to \$1,954 in summer.

Most rental properties are cottages or their accompanying carriage houses, which are required on every corner lot to anchor each block. Many homes feature shaded courtyards, sleeping porches (which are shuttered to provide privacy but still allow airflow), splash pools, fountains and outdoor showers—all meant to encourage residents to linger outside. Inside, most units boast high ceilings and professional interior design.

Come next fall, out-of-towners will have another lodging option to consider with the opening of downtown's Hotel Saba, offering 55 guestrooms and suites.

After getting settled, any visitor's first stop in Rosemary Beach should be Bamboo Beach & Bicycle Company to rent an old-fashioned-style beach cruiser bike—the preferred means of traversing town for both locals and tourists. Those seeking the town's white-sand beach need look no further than the nine north-south boardwalks, which all lead to the ocean. Sea kayak, Hobie Cat and other beach rentals are available at Sea Oats Beach Service. Guests can also enjoy four public pools, a tennis center and a fitness center, with state-of-the-art equipment and regular classes.

Outdoor enthusiasts will relish the chance to explore a natural phenomenon that only

Getting There

The name of this department is "Worth the Trip," and Rosemary Beach is a case in point. There are currently no direct flights from South Florida to this area of the Panhandle. Whether flying from Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale or Miami, you'll probably have to connect in Orlando or Atlanta and fly into Pensacola or Panama City airports. From there, it's a two- or one-hour drive, respectively. Because of this inconvenience, we recommend staying in Rosemary Beach for a week so that you'll have sufficient time to unwind. Plus, you'll get a discounted rate on your rental property. The new Panama City airport, expected to open in 2010, will likely accommodate direct flights from South Florida.