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Panhandle Paradise

Rosemary Beach reinvents the beach vacation

by Paula Felps





The architectural charm of New Orleans, Charleston and the West Indies is captured in the design of the homes that combine with the quaint environment of Rosemary Beach.

*Tucked away on the eastern end of Scenic Route 30A
- arguably Florida's most picturesque highway - the community
of Rosemary Beach has created what just might be the perfect
world. Or, at the very least, the world's most perfect vacation spot.*

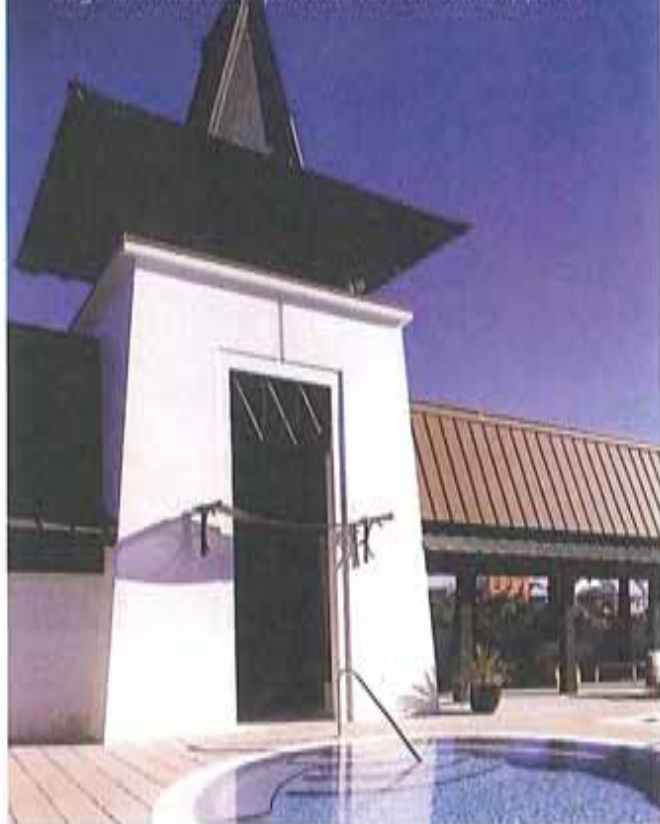
While some areas of Florida have built their reputation on non-stop activities and sensory overload, Rosemary Beach thrives on serenity. It's the kind of place where you can unplug and recharge at the same time; a place where the streets are more populated with bicycles and foot traffic than with automobiles. Offering a combination of high-end amenities and natural assets, it has become the kind of vacation spot that visitors often adopt as a second home.

Much of the charm that has been infused into Rosemary Beach can be credited to its developers, but credit also belongs to the natural offerings such as the white sugar-sand beaches that stretch for miles along Florida's gulf coast and the abundance of rosemary that grows wild and gave the town its name. Building upon this utopian setting, developers have carefully crafted a town that has a depth of soul that belies its newness.



Rosemary Beach is named for the wild rosemary plants that are found in abundance throughout the area.

The Barbados Pool on Rosemary Beach's western edge is an absolute paradise for sun-worshippers.



The Spirit of Nostalgia

When Rosemary Beach was established – just 13 years ago – its goal was to revive the classic notions of community and neighborhood. Inspired by other thriving beach towns, town founders embraced the principles of New Urbanism and traditional neighborhood development, and set out to create a place where the pace was unhurried and where nothing was ever more than a five-minute walk away.

As part of the Beaches of South Walton – a conglomeration of individual communities between Panama City and Destin – Rosemary Beach adds its own distinctive personality to the mix. Relying on a blend of architecture that channels the charm of New Orleans, Charleston and the West Indies, the homes of Rosemary Beach are each unique, yet they carry a definite sense of community. The natural colors of the homes – including dune gray, sage green, fall straw and terra cotta – borrow from the area's landscape to create a subtle, natural feel. It's all part of the laid-back, back-to-nature vibe that greets visitors the moment they arrive.

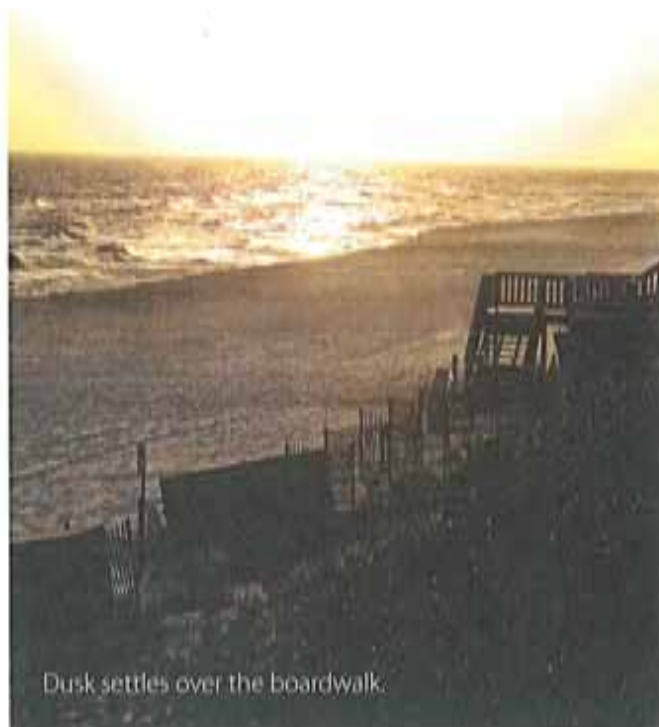
The 12 different types of abodes – which range from cozy 450-square-foot flats to spacious 6,000-square-foot courtyard homes – embrace the beach town ambience. Many of these flats, lofts and cottages are available for rental, and since every owner worked with a select team to individually design their home, each rental experience in Rosemary Beach is unique. (Visitors will receive a new luxury lodging option in 2009, with the opening of the 53-room Hotel Saba.)

Everything about this town is unhurried and relaxed, giving off a near-utopian sense of sanctuary. Old-fashioned boardwalks intersect the grid of footpaths, and following any of these boardwalks will lead visitors to the beach. Along the way, they'll most likely discover either the Western Green or the Eastern Green – two large, meticulously manicured green spaces that serve as sites for weddings, social gatherings, community events or just families wanting to play a few games of bocce ball. (Which, by the way, is pretty much the town's unofficial sport. It doesn't matter whether or not visitors have ever played a game before visiting Rosemary Beach; they will most likely leave with a newfound interest in the game and, quite possibly, a couple of tricks for knocking out the competition.)

With more than a dozen "pocket parks," it's obvious that green spaces were a priority in planning the community. They include the aptly named Playground Park, Fountain Park and Butterfly Park, which was carefully planted with native and non-native plants to help attract butterflies. Butterfly Park is filled with signage to educate visitors on the different species, their life cycles and the value of preserving their natural habitat.

Finding Your Happy Place

One of the first stops for most guests is the Bamboo Bicycle Company, where they can pick up the most popular mode of transportation the town offers. Although easily accessible by foot, the

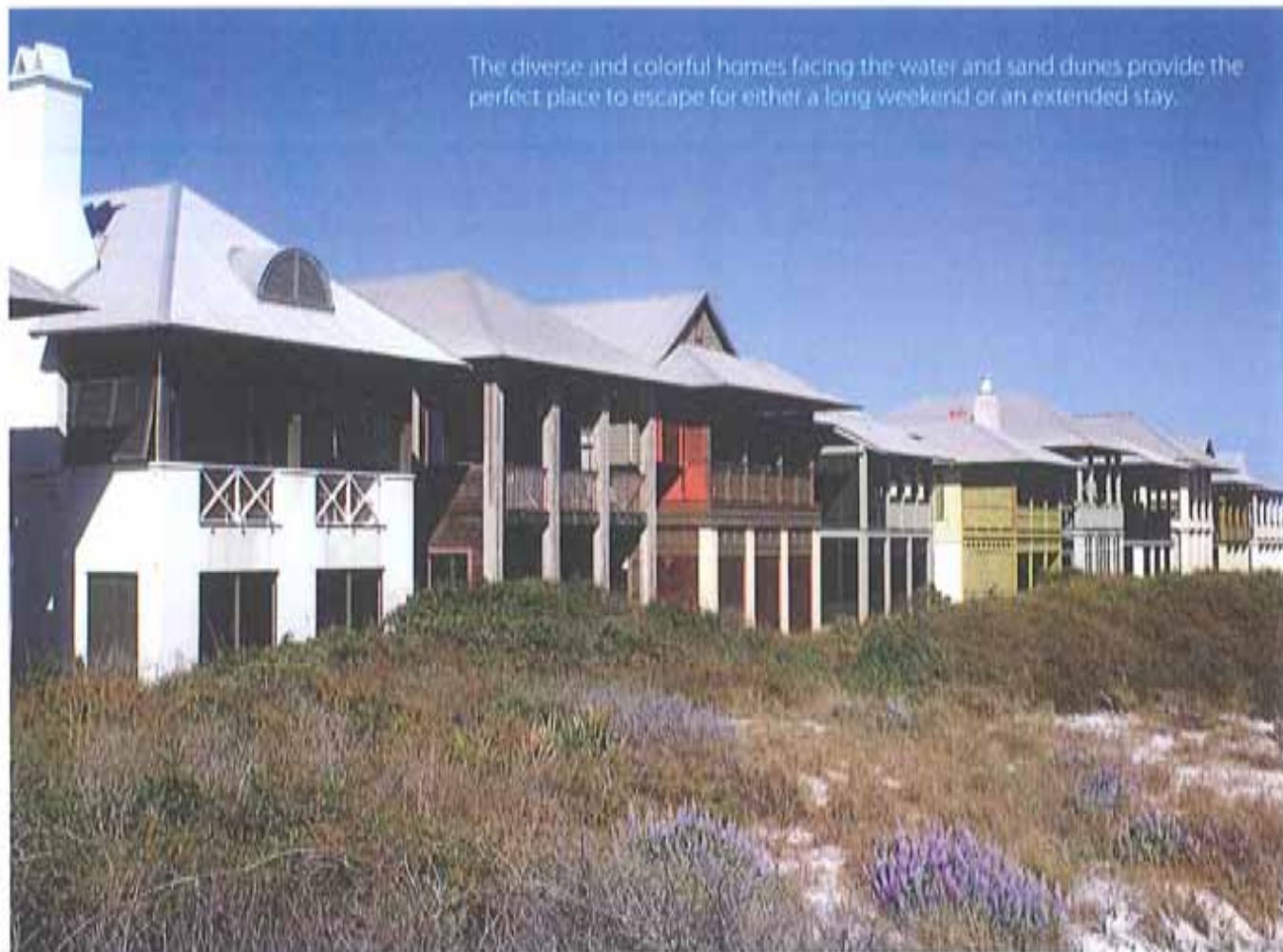


Dusk settles over the boardwalk.



Old-fashioned boardwalks lead guests to the beach.

The diverse and colorful homes facing the water and sand dunes provide the perfect place to escape for either a long weekend or an extended stay.



community is designed to be user-friendly; bikes (which can be rented by the day or the week) let visitors explore everything from the beach to the town center to the scenic 30A bike trail at a pace significantly faster than one's feet can travel! Families will find tandem bikes, kids' trailers, wagons and baby joggers to make sure that the whole gang stays together.

As the town's name implies, a huge draw is, of course, the beach. Every day, the white, powdery sand is filled with escapees from the rat race, who relish that great escape under one of the giant eight-foot umbrellas available on the beach. More active types will forego the hammocks and chairs, and spend their time with a surfboard, Hobie Cat or kayak in the clear emerald waters of the gulf.

Those whose idea of relaxation involves more pool time and less sand are in luck, too. With four beautifully designed swimming pools, guests are never more than a few minutes away from poolside relaxation. And to add to the "ahhh" factor, Solace Day Spa is a full-service relaxation retreat that offers makeup, hair and salon services in addition to massage therapy.

For the fitness-minded, the Rosemary Beach Racquet Club offers fast-dry clay tennis courts, while a 2.3-mile fitness trail offers

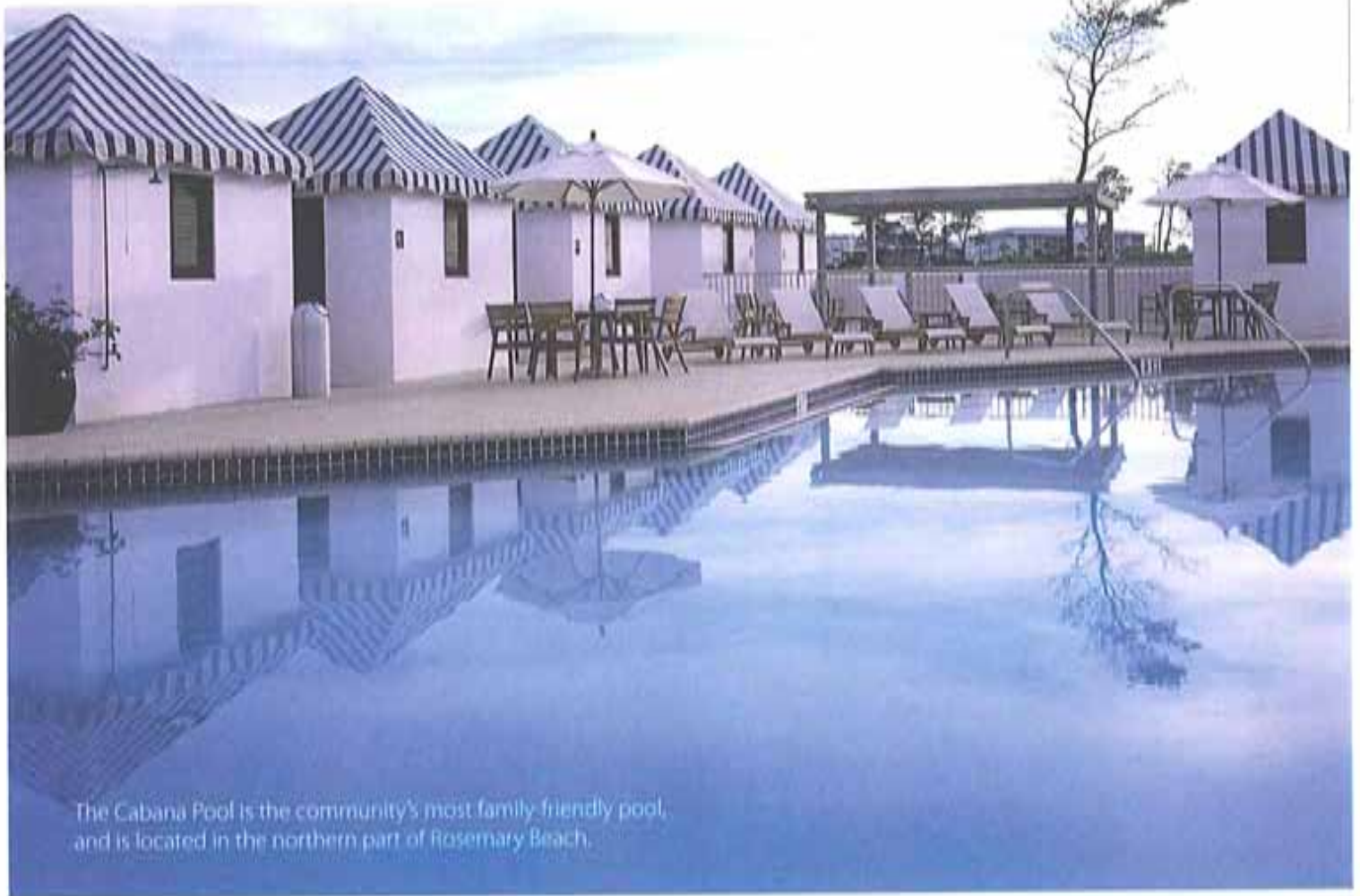
exercise stations for a little cross-training. At the Rosemary Beach Fitness Center, there's a full range of state-of-the-art workout equipment as well as Pilates, yoga and water aerobics classes.

Of course, one can never rule out the benefits of retail therapy, and Rosemary Beach offers some terrific non-touristy options. One of the hottest shopping spots is Rosemary Beach Trading Company, which, in addition to the souvenir T-shirts and post cards, is well stocked with unique gifts, books and home accessories.

At Dunes, guests can stock up on island-themed apparel from names like Tommy Bahama and Lacoste; at Tropez there's a more international flavor with brands like Dolce and Gabana, Casal of Sweden and Rayure of Paris. Trendy fashions can also be spotted at Beach Buzz, which carries Juicy Couture, Miss Me and Paul Frank. In addition, a host of stores offering toys, designer shoes, handbags and jewelry, and interior designs all offer guests ways to spend more than just time.

Great Tastes

The cuisine at Rosemary Beach is mostly casual; for a slightly more upscale dining experience, explore one of the neighboring com-



The Cabana Pool is the community's most family-friendly pool, and is located in the northern part of Rosemary Beach.

munities – but keep in mind that the dress code in all of these communities leans toward resort casual, so it's not a bad idea to leave the heels at home.

The Summer Kitchen at Rosemary Beach is a hotspot for breakfast and lunch, and at night it becomes Blue By Night – and a popular dinner spot. The requisite Starbucks offers a place to pick up that morning fuel, and, for those craving a bit of Italian/Tuscany flavor, Onana serves it up in a casual environment overlooking the Western Green. Lighter fare can be found at Wild Olives, a fantastic not-so-little market/bakery/deli that has an impressive stash of retail gourmet foods along with its olive bar, salads, breads, meats and cheeses. And cheese gets an even bigger fanfare down the street at Courtyard Wine and Cheese, where there are also about 50 wines served by the glass to pair up with their menu of gourmet cheeses.

More upscale than the average beach vacation experience, and as relaxing as a glass of merlot served on the beach at sunset, Rosemary Beach is a slice of paradise that's easy to access from Dallas; the hard part is finding a way to leave.

If you would like more more information, visit www.rosemary-beach.com or call 850-278-2100.

