



Seaside sojourn

Sun, surf + sugar-white sand in Florida's panhandle

Most Eastern Canadians heading to the southern US for a sun vacation choose Southern Florida, Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale and environs. But there is another part of Florida that is fairly untouched by Canuck footsteps and yet has a lot to offer those of us who seek the sun.

On the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in Northwestern Florida there is a "traditional neighbourhood development" town called

ing the atmosphere one of beauty, luxury and fun.

First and foremost I loved the beautiful beaches. It had been a long, cold, snowy Toronto winter and my Seasonal Afflicted Deprivation Syndrome (S.A.D.S) was shrieking out for some sun. It was mid-April and I ran to the beach, dipped my pale-white toes into the soft sand and sat myself down by the water. My senses awakened—heat on my skin, wind blowing on my face and the sound of the small waves crashing next to me. All around me were incredible colours of the ocean and blue sky. I could feel my Vitamin D level rising.

Rosemary Beach is one of 14 eclectic beach communities that dot the 26 miles of clean sugar-white, fine powdery-soft sand called the Beaches of South Walton. The sands are composed of fine pure quartz crystal that were once part of the Appalachian Mountains, washed over millions of years into riverbeds and transported by rivers to the ocean.

The ocean is emerald green and crystal clear. Though it was cold and only small children dared to dart in and out, I rented a sea kayak from Sea Oats Beach Service and bobbed and drifted on the waters of the Gulf. This was my first time soloing on the ocean in a kayak—it was hard work and I was a bit nauseous. I was relieved to still be in one piece as I paddled my way back to shore. It sure was a lot different from lily paddling in my kayak in Muskoka! Although not someone who loves to swim in ice water, I had worked up quite a sweat kayaking and so I dove in and swam in the choppy waves. I felt courageous and eventually the water felt warm.

Huge dunes line the beaches, which have been officially certified as clean, healthy and environmentally well managed. There are 17 fresh and salt-water coastal dune lakes found throughout with unique flora and fauna. The next day I rented a bike from the Bamboo Bicycle Company and rode the four miles along scenic Highway 30A past the many beach

communities to Deer Lake State Park. Deer Lake is famous for the huge sand-dune ecosystem that spreads out from the beach. There is also an unmarked bicycle trail that meanders through some 1,700 acres of native vegetation. Take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints.

What makes Rosemary Beach so special is the thoughtful attention to detail that was designed to bring back the notions of community, neighbourhood and convenience. Every home in Rosemary Beach is architecturally unique and is custom designed and built to reflect each owner's tastes and lifestyle. A rich palette of colours in subtle, natural tones distinguishes the houses. There is a network of pedestrian footpaths, boardwalks and secret pathways that lead to all public areas, including the beach, Town Square, tennis courts, four swimming pools and other town amenities. Nothing is more than a five-minute walk. People walk and bike everywhere. At night the lights are low intensity so you get a chance to see the expansive sky.

Rosemary Beach is accessible via Delta Airlines to Panama City Airport. I left Toronto in the morning and was on the beach catching the rays by early afternoon. The best time to visit is in the spring and fall because the place is usually packed in the summer. There are a number of quaint restaurants and specialty shops. Sample the cuisine at the Wild Olives Deli and Summer Kitchen Cafe and sip wine in the Courtyard Wine and Cheese Bar. Or buy food at the local supermarket and cook your meals in your own kitchen. Golf is, of course, nearby.

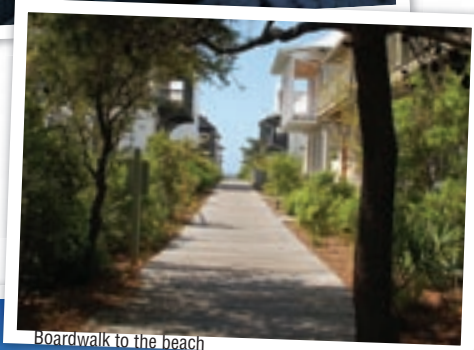
So if you want a quiet, safe, sunny, elegant accommodation with a beautiful beach then I recommend trying Rosemary Beach where "reality transcends dreams." ●

For more information: Bamboo Bicycle Company, 850-231-0770; Rosemary Beach Cottage Rental Company, rosemarybeach.com, 1-888-855-1551

*Dr. Mel Borins is a family physician and freelance writer. He is author of the books *Go Away Just for the Health of It* and *Photos and Songs of a Pronoic Physician*. Visit melborins.com.*



Sunset at Rosemary Beach



Boardwalk to the beach



Sugar-white sand of Rosemary Beach

Rosemary Beach, a perfect example of new urbanism. As soon as I settled into my elegant Carriage House rental unit, I felt like a part of the community and appreciated the thoughtful planning that went into mak-