

# ajc Living & Arts

## Travel



Road trip Rosemary Beach, Fla.

# A pedestrian paradise

Town by the beach was planned for touring by foot.

By Blake Guthrie  
For the AJC

Book-ended by the condominium high rises of Panama City Beach and Destin in the distance, Rosemary Beach appears as if out of a storybook to travelers along the Emerald Coast of the northwest Florida panhandle. Nothing in this planned community along Scenic Highway 30-A rises over four stories. Development is kept in check along all of 30-A, a 20-mile stretch of county highway that offshoots from the main highway of U.S. 98. Rosemary Beach is the kind of place where you slow down, park the car and don't get back in until it's time to leave. Rent a bike if you want to fit in, or spend all of 10 minutes leisurely strolling from one side of town to the other, thankful for the lack of billboards, gaudy strip malls, go-kart tracks and mini golf courses.

**The town**  
Established in 1995, Rosemary Beach is named after the wild rosemary bushes that still grow naturally in the dunes and in town. Following in the footsteps of nearby Seaside, the town is an example of the New Urbanism movement, designed to meet strident pedestrian-friendly, eco-conscious and mixed-use live-work-play standards. With elements of Dutch-Colonial, Pan-Caribbean and Tuscan styles incorporated into its architecture and design, the streets are narrow and the town is bisected by many sandy footpaths and boardwalks that cross over the protected dune area to the beach. Tourism in the region dropped significantly in the aftermath of the



The dunes of Rosemary Beach, Fla., are protected by wooden crossover walkways. Blake Guthrie Special

up for the holidays, beginning with a tree-lighting ceremony on the town square the day after Thanksgiving. The tree this year will be a 40-foot Norwegian blue spruce. All the permanent trees lining the square will also be lit, making for a spectacle of lights to last throughout the holidays. Breakfast with Santa, the Holiday Market and a bocce ball tournament take place Saturday. Join the Christmas Eve church service on Western Green, a large expanse of lawn next to the dunes. On New Year's Eve, live music and a free midnight champagne toast at Courtyard Wine & Cheese on Main Street will help ring in the new year.

**Offseason recreation**  
With an average winter temperature of 56 degrees, biking and beach-combing are still an op-



One of the lawns extending to the beach. Rosemary Beach was designed to meet pedestrian-friendly standards. Rosemary Beach Cottage Rentals

Sky Pool, is fully enclosed by a retractable roof and even has radiant heating on its deck allowing for comfortable poolside lounging in winter. The Racquet Club is open year round for tennis enthusiasts. Near Rosemary Beach, the coastal dune lakes are a good place for beginners to experience the new water sports trend of stand-up paddle boarding, even in

rentals and has helped popularize the sport to the point that locals along 30-A now refer to it as "yoloing."

**Shopping**  
Main Street and the town square are lined with boutique shops and galleries. Pick up a souvenir and some apparel at the Rosemary Beach Trading Co., beach supplies at Bombora Sun & Surf and ladies shoes, handbags and accessories at Moonpize. Check out experimental art at World Six Gallery and the furnishings and interior design motifs at Tracery Interiors. Stop in at Wild Olives market for a quick bite and/or to get deli-prepared food and bottled beverages to take back to the cottage.

**If you go**  
Rosemary Beach is 300 miles (about a six-hour drive) from Atlanta via I-85, U.S. 331 and U.S. 98. It is at the eastern end of Scenic Highway 30-A (C.R. 30-A) where it meets U.S. 98.

**Stay:** The Pensione: This B&B is one of the more affordable lodging options. Rates start at \$150 in the winter. 78 Main St., Rosemary Beach. 866-348-8952. [www.rosemarybeach.com/pensione-rosemary-beach.aspx](http://www.rosemarybeach.com/pensione-rosemary-beach.aspx)  
Rosemary Beach Cottage Rental Co.: Accommodations range from studios to six-bedroom homes. Rates in winter range from \$172 a night for studios to upward of \$8,000 a week for the largest of homes. 78 N. Barrett Square, Rosemary Beach. 1-888-855-1551. [www.rosemarybeach.com](http://www.rosemarybeach.com)

**Eat:** Cowgirl Kitchen: Southwestern-style breakfast, lunch and dinner served in a fast-casual eatery near the beach. Specialties \$5-\$12. 54 Main St., Rosemary Beach. 850-303-0708. [www.cowgirlkitchen.com](http://www.cowgirlkitchen.com)  
Restaurant Paradis: Fine dining with a changing seasonal menu. Entrees average \$25-\$35. 82 S. Barrett Square, Rosemary Beach. 850-534-0400. [www.restaurantparadis.com](http://www.restaurantparadis.com)

**Tourist Info:** Rosemary Beach, 1-888-855-1551; [www.rosemarybeach.com](http://www.rosemarybeach.com)  
Beaches of South Walton Visitors Center, 25777 U.S. 331 South. 1-800-822-6877. [www.beachesofsouthwalton.com](http://www.beachesofsouthwalton.com)