



{take the kids}

HAPPY DAYS

••••• BY RONA GINDIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMY MIKLER •••••





In the family-friendly Atlantic-coast town of Daytona Beach, racecars are just the beginning



You can plan your trip around the Daytona 500 or Bike Week, but this Florida city's seasonal headliners have nothing on its permanent draws: a long, wide swath of beach (23 miles, from end to end), pleasant year-round temps (between 60 and 80 degrees, on average) and an endless supply of activities for every age. In recent years, new and renovated attractions have sprung up alongside Daytona's historical spots, further boosting its multigenerational appeal. You'll also find year-round racing-related activities that regular folks—yup, even Grandpa—can do. Rev up.

BEACH AND BEYOND

At the heart of Daytona's busy beachfront lies the **Main Street Pier**, an 85-year-old, 745-foot-long wooden walkway near the intersection of Atlantic Avenue (aka A1A) and International Speedway Boulevard. Walk or drive beneath the arched sign that reads "World's Most Famous Beach" (you be the judge of that one), then pick your pastime: To the right await seven miles of auto-friendly sand; to the left, a stretch of car-free beach with rentable lounge chairs and vendors hawking everything from parasailing and surfing lessons to bike rentals and boat rides.

BEACH BUMS: Surfers ready to catch a wave at Daytona Beach. Opposite: Riding the Ferris wheel on the town's boardwalk.





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SIMPLE PLEASURES: (clockwise from above) At surf school on the beach; the boardwalk and Ferris wheel at dusk; the signature chili dog at Stinky Dogs Diner.

Need a break from the beach? Check out the boardwalk's new fairground-style amusements (the Tilt-O-Whirl is a hit with the Justin Bieber set) or venture into **Daytona Lagoon**, a nearby water-park with 60-foot-high slides and a wave pool. Then head to **Cow Lick's** down on the main drag for 30 flavors of ice cream (2624 S. Atlantic Ave.; 386-761-1316).

CAST OFF

Water taxis, sailing lessons, deep-sea fishing—there's no shortage of boating options in the Daytona region. But if you want to get a real feel for Volusia County's waterways, opt for a scenic ride aboard a small cruiser like *The Manatee* (800-881-2628; manateecruise.com; adults \$25). The 25-passenger vessel runs two-hour tours down the Intracoastal Waterway from Ponce Inlet, pumping out patriotic tunes and classic rock as it goes. You'll stop to check out dolphins, manatees (in season), nesting pelicans and majestic waterfront homes, while a knowledgeable guide shares intriguing historical tidbits—like how Rattlesnake Island got its name.

FUEL UP

A short 12-mile drive south of Daytona Beach is the **Lighthouse Landing Restaurant & Bar** (4940 S. Peninsula Dr.; 386-761-9271). This laid-back spot on Ponce Inlet dishes up fresh local

seafood, grilled, fried or broiled. Choose a table on the deck or on the boat docked outside. Sports fans gravitate to **Vince Carter's**, owned by the Orlando Magic basketball player and his mother, for flatbread pizzas, steaks, pastas and a huge wall of televisions showing all the day's games (2150 LPGa Blvd.; 386-274-0015).

HISTORY HOPPING

Once Daytona's main drag, South Beach Street is now known as the Daytona Beach Historic District. Among the Beaux Arts-style buildings and faux gas lamps, you'll find the **Angell & Phelps Chocolate Factory**, which dates to 1925 (154 S. Beach St.; 386-252-6531; angellandphelps.com). Take a free tour (Monday-Friday) of the chocolate-studded conveyor belts and learn about tempering, cooling and molding chocolate. The tour ends, of course, with a tasting. Chocolate-covered potato chips, anyone?

Next stop: **Daytona Magic**, a must-see for those intrigued by sleight of hand (136 S. Beach St.; 386-252-6767; daytonamagic.com). Owners Harry Allen and Irv Cook have been magic mavens for more than 40 years. Their 12,000 tricks run the gamut from practical jokes the kids can buy with pocket change to sophisticated equipment for top professionals.

Across the street sits the **Jackie Robinson Ballpark**, listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Built in 1914, the park is now home to Minor League Baseball's Daytona Cubs, and pays tribute to its namesake player with a free outdoor exhibit that offers long-jumping, basketball, baseball and other sports.

The name alone will make the boys want to try **Stinky Dogs Diner**, a tiny spot just off the northern end of Beach Street (108 Bay St.; 386-254-6040). Located in a historic shotgun-style house, the diner serves up salads, sandwiches and all-beef franks.

Your history outing ends at the **Museum of Arts & Sciences** (352 S. Nova Rd.; 386-255-0285; moas.org; adults \$13). Its kid-friendly displays include vintage Coke machines, Nigerian masks, the skeleton of a 16-foot-long ground sloth and a collection of guns and swords from medieval times through the 19th century. All generations will get a kick out of the Newcomer Drugs exhibit, an apothecary shop where bottles sport cryptic labels like "Tinct.Myrrhae."



IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT: Future drag racers circle the track on go-karts at Daytona Beach's Speed Park Motorsports.

Development Program, which allows four drivers to compete on a virtual track via a simulator and LCD screen. For a bigger thrill, pay an extra \$5 for Acceleration Alley. Two of you sit in what looks like a real stock car (it's 20 percent smaller) and drive a simulator at speeds over 200 mph. Calm your nerves with a tour of the museum; you'll see a 1935 Bluebird, a 1960s Mini Cooper and signed hand and foot imprints of Dale Earnhardt and other Speedway legends.

Nearby **Speed Park Motorsports** (201 Fentress Blvd.; 386-253-3278; speedparkdaytona.com) has three go-kart tracks plus the ultimate racecar attraction—dragsters. These sleek, propane-fueled vehicles can rocket from zero to 75 mph in a mind-boggling three seconds. Racers must be 58 inches or taller to compete in Nitro Alley, where you motor 196 feet on a rail, hitting the gas pedal and switching gears when necessary.

In 2011, expect the reopening of the **Richard Petty Racing Experience** (drivepetty.com). You'll be able to ride Daytona's track with a pro—or take the wheel yourself, Daytona style. 🏁

The Cuban section displays artwork from the last three centuries; many of its 200 pieces belonged to one-time Cuban president Fulgencio Batista, who vacationed regularly in Daytona.

STEP ON IT

Even if you don't time your trip for a big race, you can still find plenty of family-friendly dragster fun. Case

in point: the **Daytona 500 Experience**, part museum and part arcade, right next to the city's legendary track (1801 W. International Speedway Blvd.; 386-681-6800; daytona500experience.com). Kick off your visit with a 3-D IMAX movie on the history of auto racing, then take a half-hour tram tour of the actual 2½-mile speedway. Kids can get behind the wheel at the ARCA Driver

stay

RCI-affiliated resorts in and around Daytona Beach include:

WYNDHAM OCEAN WALK

Miniature golf, indoor and outdoor pools and waterslides, right on the main strip. 300 N. Atlantic Ave.

Member Reviews:

"Our favorite beach in Florida."
"Night life is right up the street on Seabreeze Blvd."

TROPIC SHORES

Oceanfront balconies and full kitchens in all units, plus a renovated pool. 3111 S. Atlantic Ave.

Member Reviews:

"We biked down A1A to the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse."
"Many good golf courses nearby."

SEA CLUB IV

Take a dip in the heated outdoor pool at this laid-back beachside resort. 3229 S. Atlantic Ave.

Member Review:

"Nicely furnished, spacious, fabulous kitchens and balconies overlooking the beach and pool."

DAYTONA SEABREEZE

In a quiet, family-friendly area of southern Daytona Shores. 3125 S. Atlantic Ave.

Member Reviews:

"Gas barbecues and a firepit to sit around in the evening."
"Total peace and quiet."

PLANTATION ISLAND

This traditional Florida resort is just 12 miles north of Daytona Beach. 187 S. Atlantic Ave., Ormond Beach

Member Reviews:

"Everyone we talked to said they've been coming back year after year."
"Free Wi-Fi in the activity room was a nice amenity."

ISLANDER BEACH RESORT

Studios and one-bedroom units with a heated pool and hot tubs, 17 miles south of Daytona Beach. 1601 S. Atlantic Ave., New Smyrna Beach

Member Reviews:

"If you are looking to park your car and chill for a week or so, this may well be the place for you."

"Many planned activities for kids."

"New Smyrna Beach reminded us of a smaller version of Key West."

For more information, including complete member reviews (as member reviews have been condensed), visit RCI.com or call 800-338-7777 (Weeks) or 877-968-7476 (Points).

Club Members, please call your specific Club or RCI telephone number.

NON-RCI-AFFILIATED RESORTS:

THE SHORES RESORT & SPA

2637 S. Atlantic Ave.; 386-767-7350; shoresresort.com; doubles from \$109 per night

TROPICAL MANOR

2237 S. Atlantic Ave.; 800-253-4920; tropicalmanor.com; doubles from \$75 per night

ATLANTIC OCEAN PALM INN

3247 S. Atlantic Ave.; 800-634-0098; atlanticoceanpalm.com; doubles from \$50 per night

EMERALD SHORES HOTEL

2613 S. Atlantic Ave.; 386-872-4500; emeraldshoreshotel.com; doubles from \$59 per night

RIVERVIEW HOTEL & SPA

103 Flagler Ave., New Smyrna Beach; 800-945-7416; riverviewhotel.com; doubles from \$125 per night

NUNS & ROSES

213 Washington St., New Smyrna Beach; 888-655-2025; nunsandroses.com; doubles from \$115 per night