

TRAVEL

BY NICOLE LYONS

PARADISE ON EARTH: Resorts & Spas for Couples

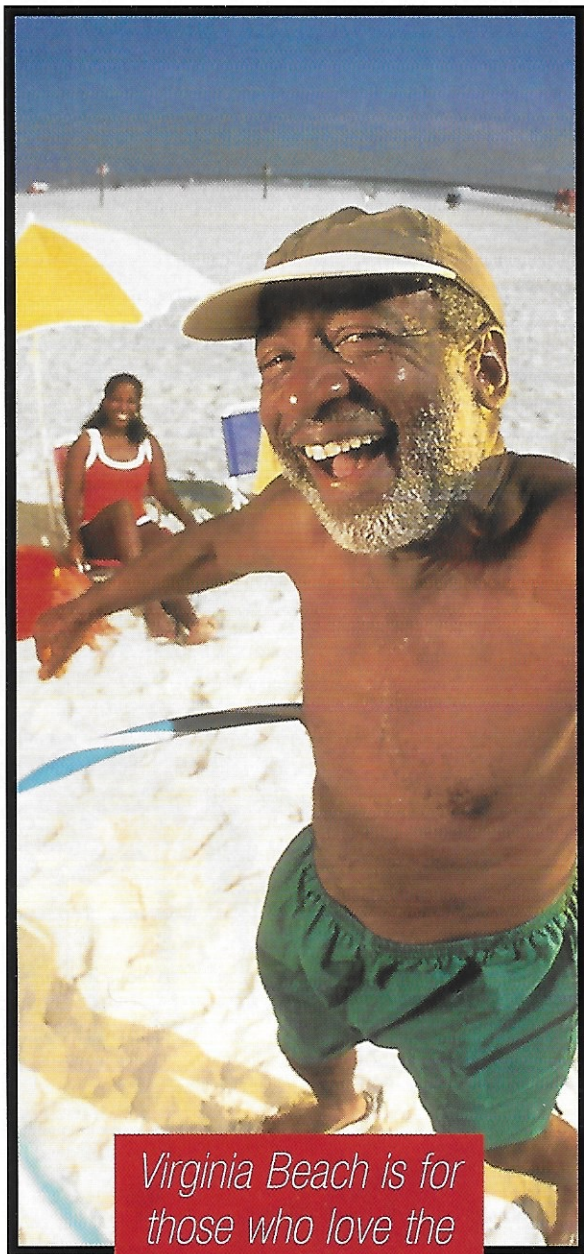


Daytona Beach, Florida


Some say Florida isn't really the South, but we know better—it's just another kind of South—one with bit more fun, at least here. Daytona Beach, known for its Racetrack, "Bike Week (not the pedal kind)," and big "Spring Break" fiestas, offers its 10 million annual visitors a really good time. Car lovers can check out the NASCAR races during Independence Day weekend (July 5, 6), where activities area include concerts, beach parties and July 4th celebrations. (www.daytonaintlspeedway.com). And culture mavens can join the Florida International Festival, from July 11—27, (www.fif-lso.org) where performances by the London Symphony Orchestra [LSO] highlight this two-week festival held biennially. Outside of London, the LSO has performed in Daytona Beach more than anywhere else in the world and lists the area as its "official summer home." Daytona is also alive with heritage relating to African Americans. Visit the childhood home of Dr. Howard Thurman, a mentor of Dr. Martin Luther King, at 614 Whitehall Street, The Museum of Arts and Sciences (www.moas.org) which is home to one of the finest African Art Galleries in the Southeast. Finally, check out the African-American & Caribbean-American Museum of Art at 325 South Clara Avenue, which offers art from Nigeria, Haiti, South America, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Ethiopia and Kenya. In addition to all that variable culture, sea and surf are available in abundance in Daytona. There are 23 miles of beach offering fishing, swimming, sightseeing and more, and best of all, you can drive on the beach here during daylight hours. For a special treat, from May 15 through October 31, the area beaches host an unusual marine visitor—the sea turtle. These magnificent animals emerge from the surf at night to lay their eggs in nests dug into the dry sand, then return to the sea. Two months later, about a hundred baby turtles (hatchlings) emerge from each of these nests and crawl to the ocean. It is an amazing sight to behold. Honorable mentions: Miami Beach, Florida—Just get Jiggy with it! Mississippi Gulf Coast—Check out the flick Mississippi Masala and take a ride on down to Biloxi. NORTH BY NORTHEAST Summer in the Northeast is one of the most delightful experiences known to man and woman. Fireflies are buzzing, flowers are blooming and the world is ablaze with life. Check out these Northeasterly Beaches for their beauty and pizzazz.

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Virginia may be for lovers, but Virginia Beach is for those who love the beach and beach fun. The Guinness Book of World Records names it the "World's Largest Pleasure Beach." Virginia Beach offers more than 35 miles of fantastic wide, clean beaches, lots of family fun, and cool historic places all wrapped into one. First, take a walk along its newly renovated boardwalk, which was recently named one of the top seven Best American Boardwalks by discovery.com. Starting as a five-block promenade in 1888, today's Boardwalk is three miles long and offers views of the Atlantic Ocean that send visitors back in time over 100 years. Next, take the Virginia Legends Walk, located a few short blocks from the oceanfront resort area. The Walk honors 24 famous Virginia natives for their significant contributions to society (727-491-7866). Celebrated Black Virginians include Arthur Ashe, Ella Fitzgerald, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Pearl Bailey and the most recent inductee, Booker T. Washington. Additionally, several 17th and 18th century historic homes commemorate the importance of African Americans through time, including the Francis Land House, Adam Thoroughgood House and Lynnhavenn house. Fish and fowl are also a natural draw here. Check out the Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum. Located in a historically registered and last-remaining Virginia Beach Boardwalk cottage, the museum preserves and promotes wildfowl artifacts and art forms. Virginia Beach also hosts the mid-Atlantic's largest population of bottlenose dolphins. Catch a glimpse from the shoreline, or take a public dolphin-watching boat trip from the Virginia Marine Science Museum (www.vmsm.com). Atlantic City, New Jersey A veritable giant in the resort and casino industry—and known as "America's Favorite Playground"—it is easy to forget that Atlantic City offers 4 miles of beautiful, free, clean and protected beaches, very close to where millions call home. It also boasts 5 miles of world-famous Boardwalk, lined with shops, casinos, restaurants and amusements, including swimming, boating, surfing, fishing, creating sandcastles, shopping and more. And there is plenty for more nature loving among us. For example, visit the Edwin B. Forsythe Wildlife Refuge, just across the bay from Atlantic City, which features 40,000 acres of coastal salt marshes, upland fields, woodlands and tidal waters. Local flora and fauna abound and the refuge is a stopover for more than 200 species of



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“The Grand Strand,” South Carolina.

South Carolina's "Grand Strand,"—a nearly 60-mile long stretch of land between the Intra coastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean offers a blend of beautiful beach, entertainment, and culture. While sometimes meandering to a sliver, the widest stretch is at North Myrtle Beach, a chain of small communities among which Ocean Drive is the center, and at Atlantic Beach, which is exclusively used by African Americans. The land of the "Strand" features blue skies, sun-bleached sand, golden sunshine, breakers and breezes. In fact, the extraordinary natural beauty of this coastline has attracted visitors for nearly a century. The Grand Strand is "Grand" for a reason: the wide strand accommodates people of every type at various activities including swimming, sunbathing, sea-shelling, volleyball playing, sea-dooing, fishing, parasailing, boating and more. Check out Myrtle Beach, predominantly a family resort, which also has its "spring fling" time of year. Fans of crazy golf, water parks, fun fairs and bungee jumping will be in heaven, and the beach itself is lovely. About 15 minutes north of Myrtle Beach and seven minutes south of the North Carolina border, lies the historically Black, Atlantic Beach. The property in this area remains predominately Black-owned and operated. Atlantic Beach consists of narrow islands and many favorite beach-vacation spots. Nearby is Beaufort, a quaint seaport brimming with charm, history, a boardwalk and tree-lined streets. South of Myrtle Beach lies Murrells Inlet, a fishing port with lots of good fish restaurants, and Pawleys Island, a secluded resort once favored by plantation owners, and today retaining a far slower pace than its neighbors. Between the two on Highway-17, the beautifully landscaped Brookgreen Gardens hold a gathering of American figurative sculpture on the grounds of what was once a rice and indigo plantation, used as the setting for many of Julia Peterkin's novels of "Gullah" life.

migratory birds. There are footpaths and a driving trail. (www.forsythe.fws.gov). Also check out Wharton State Forest, which offers 110,000 acres for camping, canoeing, and hiking (www.aclink.org/parks), and John F. Kennedy Park, a great picnic spot and bayfront beach area with an available boat launch (www.aclink.org/parks). Now, on to another kind of good time — and not the casinos either, which are easily accessible but may or may not make you rich. No, what Atlantic City is really rich in is African American heritage including famous (or infamous) nightclubs, and Chicken Bone Beach. That is the Missouri Avenue area, where African Americans who wished to enjoy the Atlantic City Beach during the period from 1900 through the early 1950's were socially restricted. The story is this: As thousands of vacationing Black families flocked to the shore

Zoo," there is nothing like these areas for diversion and to see that sight you never saw before. Check out Muscle Beach, where anyone can lift weights for the entire world to see, for a small fee. Or get active with basketball, tennis, inline skaters (in thong bikinis) and every, and any, other new fad and trend to hit the streets. Venice, California originally was to be a copy of Venice, Italy, canals and all, which are now located in a quaint upscale neighborhood in Venice. Fully restored and remodeled homes make it a postcard scene along the canal shores. For more to do than beach combing and people watching, travel on into Los Angeles, which has a population of 9.8 million, and to merely say it is diverse would be an understatement. This 220-year-old city holds the highest concentration of Mexicans, Iranians, Koreans, Thais, and



with their chicken laden picnic hampers, the strip became affectionately nicknamed "Chicken Bone Beach". The visits of major Black entertainers, such as Sammy Davis Jr., "Moms" Mabley and the Club Harlem Showgirls enhanced a block party atmosphere. To preserve some of that fabulous 40's and 50's glamour, in July and August the city offers the "Sunset Jazz on the Beach" series of free weekly jazz concerts on the Boardwalk at Missouri Avenue (www.chickenbonebeach.org). O.K., about the Casinos—there are 12 dazzling establishments with 24-hour gaming excitement, headline entertainment, gourmet dining and much more. Honorable Mentions: Sag Harbor, New York—The popular weekend and holiday getaway. Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts—Diverse and divine. GO WEST YOUNG BEACH LOVERS Ah, the wild west. Well, the days of shoot-em-up may be long gone, but the West can still seem like a wilderness waiting to be tamed (or tanned). Of course, that might mean the restless natives. Venice & Santa Monica Beaches, California No need to "send in the clowns" to these beaches, which lie up the road from each other along the edge of the greater Los Angeles area. The clowns, costumes and creativity are probably already there as part of the street performance scene—along with magicians, musicians, wannabe's, has-beens and everyone else. Sometimes dubbed "The

Samoans outside their native countries, as well as dozens of other immigrant groups. Los Angeles County is 4,060 square miles of theater, music, art, museums, television, motion pictures, sporting events, and world famous attractions. Los Angeles has two

Chinatowns, a Little Tokyo, Koreatown, and Leimert Park, which is the center of African American art in the city. The Leimert Park Village, bounded by Crenshaw Boulevard, 43rd Street, Leimert Boulevard and Vernon Avenue, is a pedestrian-oriented shopping core offering goods and services with an Afro-centric theme. A haven for artists, poets and musicians, the Leimert Park Village stands as a tribute to the success of businesses owned and operated by African Americans. In the area of cultural enrichment, the Leimert Park Village is unique with art venues, daily music performances, as well as dance and theatre workshops. And back to the beach — don't forget Santa Monica Beach, which, like Venice Beach, offers a mix of things to do, like restaurants ranging from hot dog stands to ritzy eateries and its world-famous funky Pier with rides and other amusements. Honorable Mentions: La Jolla, California—Paradise at the edge of San Diego Big Sur, California—Surf's up! For more information, details, and other ideas on beach travel check out: www.soulofamerica.com www.pathfinderstravel.com. **BE**