

# 48 HOURS

## TAMPA

Take some time out from action-packed Orlando with our top things to do in Tampa, writes Tamara Hinson

**T**ampa might be just a 45-minute drive from Florida's Walt Disney World Resort, but it's a fantastic destination in its own right.

Recent additions include the expansion of the Tampa Bay History Centre and the development of the Riverwalk, a pedestrian and bike-friendly trail that links Tampa's top attractions.

Although the city's got a fantastic range of high-end hotels, it hasn't yet got one with five stars. But not for long, as a five-star JW Marriott will open in 2020 - a year before it's Tampa's turn to host the Super Bowl.

Add to this a \$971 million makeover of Tampa International airport (the first phase of which was completed in February) and it's easy to see why visitor numbers are rocketing.

### ▶ DAY ONE

**09.00:** Start your day with breakfast at the Oxford Exchange, a restaurant, bookstore, boutique and bar rolled into one. The greenhouse-like restaurant is famous for its pancakes, which are given seasonal twists throughout the year. The building, a former stable dating back to 1891, is packed full of original features. Drop by the Commerce Club

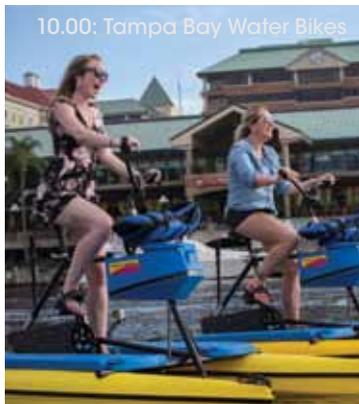




**Travel 2** offers seven nights' room-only at Tampa's four-star Westshore Grand for £899 per person, including flights from Gatwick with American Airlines. The price is valid for travel between May 7 and June 12. [travel2.com](http://travel2.com)

**North America Travel Service** features a six-night stay at Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay, for £1,045, flying on November 1. The price includes British Airways flights from Gatwick to Tampa. [northamericatravelservice.co.uk](http://northamericatravelservice.co.uk)

**Funway Holidays** offers a seven-night holiday at the Rodeway Inn Tampa, from £940, based on two adults sharing. The price includes flights from Gatwick with United Airlines on July 3. [funway4agents.co.uk](http://funway4agents.co.uk)



10.00: Tampa Bay Water Bikes



11.00: Riverwalk



11.00: Tampa Museum of Art



12.00: Hemingway's Modern Cuban Cuisine

PICTURES: BRIAN ADAMS PHOTO; PEDRO CASTELLANO

co-working space to see horseshoes unearthed during the renovation. [oxfordexchange.com](http://oxfordexchange.com)

**10.00:** Since the construction of the Riverwalk, Tampa's residents have been saddling up in droves, and you can now cycle along the river - literally. Head to riverfront Franklin Street and hop on a Tampa Bay Water Bike. A 90-minute session costs £21. You'll gain a unique perspective on the city and might just spot a manatee or dolphin. [tampawaterbikes.com](http://tampawaterbikes.com)

**11.00:** Time for some cycling on dry land. The Riverwalk is a cyclist's paradise - a flat trail that hugs the banks of the river. And in Tampa, you'll never be far from a Coast Bike Share bicycle stand. The bikes are cheap and wonderfully easy to use - simply unlock them using your phone. A pedal along the Riverwalk is a great way to check out the city's finest public art, including Laura with Bun, a huge iron sculpture of a woman's head by Spanish artist Jaume Plensa. You'll



**You can now cycle along the river - literally - and you might spot a manatee or dolphin**

find it outside the Tampa Museum of Art. Speaking of which, pass the museum at night and you'll see the spectacular light installation adorning its exterior walls.

[coastbikeshare.com](http://coastbikeshare.com)

**12.00:** Finish your ride at the Heights Public Market, which opened this year. This achingly hip food hall has every type of cuisine, ranging from flash-frozen (courtesy of liquid nitrogen) ice cream at Astro Ice Cream Co, to Cuban sandwiches at Hemingway's Modern Cuban Cuisine. The sandwiches are made with Cuban bread, ham, salami and mustard - just

like the originals, created in the late 1800s to feed cigar factory workers. Authentic versions use mustard not mayonnaise because until the early 1900s, refrigerators were a rarity, so mayo was, too.

[armatureworks.com/heights-market](http://armatureworks.com/heights-market)

**13.00:** Flag down a yellow Pirate Water Taxi, which is a cheap (\$20 for adult day passes, \$10 for children) and fun way to get around. Crew members have names such as Salty Sam, while the captain wears a huge pirate hat. [piratewatertaxi.com](http://piratewatertaxi.com)

**14.00:** Hop off at the recently expanded Tampa Bay History Center, a sprawling tribute to 12,000 years of Florida history. Work your way upwards from the spectacular lobby, starting with the second level, with its galleries focusing on Florida's first people and Tampa's connections with cigar production. The third level takes a closer look at those who shaped the state, while the fourth is home to the Treasure Seekers gallery, filled

ASK THE EXPERTS



**Brendan MacDonagh**, agency sales team leader, North America Travel Service

“One of my favourite things about Tampa is that it’s a great place to explore by bike. There are cycle routes everywhere, so it’s a safe and fun way to get around. I especially love cycling along the waterfront.”

**Malcolm Davies**, product destination manager, Funway Holidays

“Tampa is a vibrant city filled with fantastic attractions, including the Florida Aquarium in downtown Tampa and, slightly further out from the city centre, Busch Gardens. I also love Tampa’s culture and history – the revitalised historic district and the brilliant museums.”



14.00: Tampa Bay History Center



16.00: Florida Aquarium



16.30: Ybor City

PICTURES: KEIR MAGOULAS/VISIT TAMPA BAY

with interactive exhibits – a must for budding Jack Sparrows keen to learn about the conquistadors and pirates who roamed Florida’s waters.

**16.00:** Head over to the Florida Aquarium – it’s just a two-minute walk away, and if you’ve got a Tampa Bay CityPASS, entry will be free. Here, you’ll find 7,000 animals and plants, including sharks, turtles and sea lions. The aquarium also offers wild-dolphin cruises, and if you’re feeling brave, you can swim in a tank filled with sharks, stingrays and barracudas. Don’t miss the wonderfully weird No Bone Zone, where you can see (and touch) sea anemones and starfish.

**19.00:** Time for dinner at Anise Global Gastrobar. The menu pays a hearty nod to southeast Asian cuisine. Highlights include the famous ‘sticky bunz’, a savoury dish that harks back to the restaurant’s food-truck origins, when it was the most popular dish. Equally popular are the Thai and Korean dogs, but don’t panic – these are the ‘hot’ versions, rather than the barking ones.

[aniseglobal.com](http://aniseglobal.com)



**Tampa Bay History Center is a must for budding Jack Sparrows keen to learn about the pirates who roamed Florida’s waters**

DAY TWO

**09.00:** Enjoy breakfast at Bizou Brasserie, part of the Le Méridien hotel. You’ll find it inside the former courthouse – note the original jurors’ bench on the second floor and the witness stand in the restaurant. The crab benedict is to die for, as are the salted-caramel mocha cappuccinos.

**11.00:** It’s time to get an adrenaline fix at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. If you’re feeling brave, test your mettle on the theme park’s newest ride, Cobra’s Curse, a spinning rollercoaster. And if you’re visiting in late summer, check out Bier Fest. Previously held only at the Williamsburg park, Busch Gardens’ Oktoberfest will also take place at

Tampa Bay this year, every weekend between August 25 and September 16.

**16.00:** Hop on the streetcar (free at weekends) to Ybor City, a Cuban neighbourhood famous for its connections with cigars. Between 1890 and the 1930s, hundreds of millions of cigars were produced here every year.

**16.30:** Get your bearings with a wander down the cigar shop-filled 7th Avenue. Keep your eyes peeled for the statue of Vicente Martinez-Ybor, the Spanish industrialist and cigar manufacturer regarded as Ybor City’s founder. After sunset, the area takes on a Key West feel – many bars are open-air (if only to help cigar smoke disperse) and both tourists and locals flock here for live music and cheap buckets of Corona.

**19.30:** Columbia Restaurant has been owned by the same family for more than 110 years. The flamenco dinner shows (there are multiple performances every evening, barring Sundays) are an explosion of foot-stomping, finger-snapping fun, just a few feet from your table. Olé! [columbiarestaurant.com](http://columbiarestaurant.com)