

Get fit in Florida

Joanna Booth discovers a slimmed-down side to the Sunshine State



I'll admit, when I was invited to get 'fit' in Florida, I wondered if there had been a spelling error. With its larger-than-life reputation, I've always associated the Sunshine State with excess, rather than fitness. But when the alarm in my Tampa Bay hotel room chirruped at 6am and I found myself pulling on a sports bra rather than a bikini, I knew there had been no misprint.

URBAN ADVENTURES

As I trotted along the Tampa Bay Riverwalk next to our Go! Running Tours guide, I was glad of that early alarm. The late-September sun in Florida is still relatively fierce, and although Laura was jogging at an easy pace, it wasn't long before I'd worked up a sweat. Our 7km circuit took us through the heart of Downtown and along the Hillsborough River, while Laura kept up a flow of chat, pointing out the Old City Hall, Tampa Theatre and University of Tampa, an unusual building topped with Moorish-style minarets, built as a hotel in the 19th century by a railroad magnate. The tour was a novel way to get a sense of the city's layout and meet a local, and both the novices and more experienced runners in our group enjoyed it.

The river is Tampa's heart, both geographically and socially. This city is youthful, particularly by ➤

EATING OUT

Florida won't let you go home hungry. In Tampa, brunch at super-hip Oxford Exchange is a must. Choose the kale scramble to be healthy, but get a side of the Nutella babka with strawberry cream.

Pick up lunch from the Heights Public Market at Armature Works, where vendors sell everything from cold-pressed juices and burrito bowls to empanadas and craft cocktails. At night, head to Sparkman Wharf, with its alfresco beer hall and a garden where chefs showcase their dishes.

Anna Maria Island specialises in seafood, and when the sun goes down, settings don't come more spectacular than that of The Beach House. We watched dolphins frolic and tucked into oysters, clams and lobster, metres from the sand.

Being out on the water among the skyscrapers, with the wind in our hair, brought home what an outdoorsy city Tampa is



FACING PAGE: Go! Running Tours
LEFT: Yoga in Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park

PICTURES: Tampa Hillsborough EDC

Florida standards – the average age is 34, in a state where nearly a fifth of the population is over 65. These glowing, healthy millennials head to the river to run, cycle – there's a public bike scheme similar to London's, so it's easy for clients to

pick one up for an hour or so – or get out on the water. We wobbled happily upstream on stand-up paddleboards with local operator Urban Kai, starting off on our knees and gradually graduating to our feet. The large boards are relatively easy

to balance on, and being out on the water among the skyscrapers, with the wind in our hair, brought home what an outdoorsy city Tampa is. That evening, we were back by the river, taking part in a free yoga class at Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park,

in the shade of the Tampa Museum of Art's shimmering facade. I was no more likely to master the triangle pose here than at home, but under the perfect blue sky, I didn't care. With its alfresco lifestyle, foodie focus (*Eating Out*, facing page), balmy

climate and friendly charm, living well comes easily in Tampa Bay.

PUT THE BEACH BRAKES ON

As cities go, Tampa is about as laid-back as they come, but drive south for an hour to Anna Maria Island,

and time just about stops. This seven-mile long barrier island is lined with platinum beaches, the speed limit is 35mph, and the sunsets seem to go on forever. If clients are looking to de-stress as well as get fit, they've found nirvana. ➤

GETTING THERE



From March, Norwegian will increase the frequency of its direct Gatwick to Tampa service to three times a week. Flying on Saturdays, Mondays and Wednesdays, fares start from £155 one way and £265 return. Flights are operated by Boeing 787 Dreamliners with premium and economy cabins. norwegian.com/uk

EXPLORE YOUR CUSTOMERS PASSIONS AND INTERESTS WITH INGHAMS

Your passions, your holiday

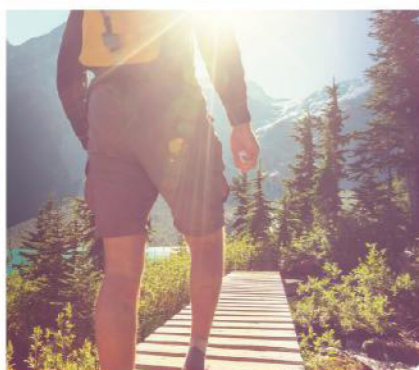


Love the great outdoors?

Spot wildlife in the Canadian Rockies, head to Iceland for whale watching and wild horses or to Lapland for reindeers and huskies.

Grab your boots

Austria was made for walking and the Italian Dolomites offer trails galore. Walk up an appetite along Italy's Cinque Terre coast or why not hike up a volcano in Iceland?



Discover the wonders of Europe

Learn from the experts and join an escorted tour, discover the stunning archaeological sites in Sicily or Venice's fascinating history and uncover the wonders of Rome.

visit Agents.inghams.co.uk email Agency.sales@hotelplan.co.uk

Holidays built around your passions, with local tips and advice



EXPLORE!



Unforgettable small group adventures.

From hold-your-breath experiences, to small and unscripted moments of joy; our small group adventures create stories to tell for a lifetime.



SMALL GROUPS | Average groups of 12



EXPERT LOCAL GUIDES | Chosen for great knowledge of their country, and a passion to make the trip extraordinary



CARBON NEUTRAL TRAVEL | Sustainable travel. Flights, transport, accommodation; all Gold Standard carbon offset

WHY BOOK EXPLORE

NEW TRIPS 2020

HIGHLIGHTS OF EL SALVADOR | 11 days. From £1199

THE FIVE STANS OF THE SILK ROAD | 21 days. From £3999

CYCLE POLAND | 8 days. From £855

ICELAND YURT ADVENTURE | 4 days. From £925

WALKING IN MALLORCA | 8 days. From £850

AZERBAIJAN CAUCASUS WALKING | 9 days. From £999

For more information contact your dedicated Agency Sales Team trade@explore.co.uk

DESTINATIONS

ACTIVE & ADVENTURE | FLORIDA

WHERE TO *stay*

Perched on the edge of Rocky Point, Tampa's newest boutique hotel has expansive views of the bay. The Current is a Marriott Autograph Collection hotel, and has embraced the sub-brand's ethos of going local. The walls are adorned with bright pieces from Tampa artist Alberto Murillo, the coffee is from local roaster Buddy Brew, and the lobby shop is curated by nearby hipster emporium Oxford Exchange. The rooms are sleek and public areas trendy, from the Rox rooftop bar to the monochrome pool deck, where we sipped margaritas. From £157 per night.

On Anna Maria Island, the Waterline (pictured) is perfect for families, with palatial two-bedroom apartments featuring separate living areas and fully equipped kitchens. Overlooking a marina, inside the decor is faintly nautical. Also part of the Autograph Collection, the property embraces the island's wholesome charm, with coolers for beachside picnics and s'mores by the firepit. From £200 per night. marriott.co.uk



top tip

Find out more at visittampabay.com and bradentongulfisland.com



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Tampa Bay Riverwalk, Heights Public Market at Armature Works; dolphin-spotting at Anna Maria Island

PICTURES: Keir Magoulas; Shutterstock

I'd been dubious about how relaxing stand-up paddleboard yoga could be – sometimes it's enough of a challenge not to collapse mid-class on land. But after a tranquil hour with Rachael from Salty Buddha, I was a convert. Our boards anchored in a quiet backwater surrounded by mangroves, we moved through a series of poses adapted to the challenges of being on the water, and by the end, I felt that my mental, as well as my physical, kinks had been ironed out.

Kayak tours with Beach Bums AMI are another easy-going way to get a gentle workout, paddling among the mangroves and keeping an eye open for the ospreys, dolphins and manatees that thrive in the unique ecosystem. More than 150 Atlantic bottlenose dolphins call the waters around Anna Maria Island home, one of only five non-migratory groups in the world. Clients can head out on a dolphin-spotting excursion with Paradise Boat Tours, but these friendly creatures pop up everywhere – we spotted them from jetties and beaches too. We weren't so lucky with the manatees, but on our way to the airport, we dropped into the fascinating Bishop Museum of Science and Nature, just over the bridge in Bradenton, to see two rescued juveniles awaiting release into the wild.

“I was dubious about how relaxing stand-up paddleboarding yoga could be – it's enough of a challenge not to collapse mid-class on land

HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

The latest fitness buzzword is balance, and clients will find it in spades in this laid-back region of Florida's Gulf Coast. Those looking to escape the UK's winter chill will find balmy sunshine perfect for the kind of low-key fitness activities that make a holiday pleasantly active, without turning into a hardcore bootcamp. A break here can team running, cycling and watersports with gourmet dining and beaches to rival any in the world.

Florida's reputation is built with the family market as its bedrock, and Tampa Bay and Anna Maria Island have lots to offer active families, either as a standalone trip or as respite after Orlando's parks. Earmark the area for couples and groups of friends too – the active pursuits, varied dining and lively nightlife make for a winter pick-me-up to chase away the post-Christmas blues. **tw**