

DESTIN FORT WALTON BEACH FLORIDA

Fact Sheet

Captivating sugar-white sand beaches and emerald-green waters await visitors in Destin-Fort Walton Beach. Located in Northwest Florida, the destination is not only an ideal place to unwind and experience total relaxation beachside, but to tap into the adventurous side within. The family-friendly locale offers an environment of discovery to play and explore, inviting kids to get on the water and give their adventurous side room to grow. Visitors enjoy abundant watersports, pristine beaches, Gulf-to-Table seafood, championship golf, lively nightlife, and numerous attractions, festivals and events designed to thrill all ages.

History

Affectionately known as “The World’s Luckiest Fishing Village” for decades, Destin has a rich historical heritage. Captain Leonard Destin moved to the region from New London, Connecticut around 1845, pioneering the fishing industry, which continues to be an important part of present-day community. In 1852 after multiple voyages to Florida’s Gulf Coast, Captain Destin established the small fishing village, which continued to grow and thrive.

Fort Walton Beach’s Native American history dates back 14,000 years. The earliest permanent settlers began

arriving not long after Florida became a territory in 1821. During the Civil War, the Walton Guards established an encampment in the area, named Camp Walton after Colonel George Walton, the acting governor of Florida. The area’s population rapidly grew in the decades that followed the war and the charming, small town was officially founded in 1937, shortly after Eglin Airforce Base, the largest airforce base in the world, became operational in 1935.

Sugar-White Sand + Emerald-Green Water

While Florida is well-known for its beautiful beaches, the sugar-white sand and vibrant emerald-green water in Destin-Fort Walton Beach are arguably some of the most beautiful in the world. At the end of the last Ice Age, the world’s temperatures began warming, icecaps began melting and large volumes of water were carried by rivers to the world’s oceans. The rising Apalachicola River, originating in the Appalachian Mountains, carried quartz particles down into the Gulf of Mexico and deposited them along the coast. Over time, the sea level rose, and the quartz sand formed the shoreline. The beautiful white sand remains cool to the touch, even in the heat of summer, and gives the water its trademark emerald color by reflecting sunlight back up through the surf.



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Climate

Average highs reach the 80s in summer months, while winter temperatures are typically in the 60s.

Accommodations

Accommodation options vary to best suit visitor's vacation needs and preferences. Those seeking the convenience of having every vacation detail tended to can book a stay at one of the many resorts and hotels. For larger group getaways, roomy vacation rentals provide a comfortable option, and nature lovers will discover a peaceful, intimate experience at several RV campsites and campgrounds.

Gulf-to-table Cuisine

At any given time, there are more than 20 species of edible fish to be caught off the coast of Destin-Fort Walton Beach, and a fleet of more than 140 vessels that brings in thousands of pounds of seafood daily. The abundance of catch serves as inspiration to the chefs behind the area's unique Gulf-to-Table cuisine. From lunch at a casual dock-and-dine option that is beloved by locals and visitors alike, to dinner with a breathtaking view, menu items reflect what diners have come to expect from a visit to the region, such as snapper, cobia, grouper, and mahi-mahi, and also specialty "catch of the day" selections that will surprise and delight including lionfish.

No visit to the area would be complete without sampling local shrimp, oysters and crab, which are readily available and served fresh off the boat, often times having been brought in the same day. Many local restaurants also offer a "cook your catch" option, a service to mark the end of a successful day spent fishing. Whether smoked, grilled, fried or blackened, restaurants will happily prepare a guest's catch. In addition to seafood, diners can enjoy traditional and contemporary American fare, from burgers and steaks to regional cuisine that's distinctly southern, paired expertly with locally crafted beers and custom cocktails.

Meetings + Groups

Located approximately 10 miles from Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center offers an array of event spaces, services, and amenities to customize events of all sizes and configurations. The professionally staffed facility assists with the planning and execution of all details from audiovisual services to catering, and offers several room options including:

Outdoor: Bayview Plaza, a 30,000 square feet venue with water views and several other terraces that offer covered options for events.

Indoor: The Emerald Grand Ballroom, a column-free, 21,200-square-foot space. Additional indoor spaces



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include eight smaller meeting rooms, ranging from 425 to 1,575 square feet.

Fun Facts

Overview + Cultural Heritage

- The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport has 47 Non-Stop Routes with service from five airlines.
- Destin earned its nickname, “The World’s Luckiest Fishing Village,” after former Florida Governor Leroy Collins visited the area and reeled in 29-pound king mackerel.
- Destin Harbor boasts the nation’s largest and most elaborately equipped commercial charter fishing fleet.
- Eglin Air Force Base’s free Air Force Armament Museum houses military aircrafts from the World War II era to the present day. It is also the only facility in the U.S. dedicated to the display of Air Force armament.
- Destin-Fort Walton beach is home to several educational centers and sites: Destin History & Fishing Museum, The Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park, Indian Temple Mound Museum, and the Emerald Coast Science Center.

Water-based Adventures

- The best way to explore Destin-Fort Walton Beach is on the water, whether off the shores of The Gulf

or in the protected bays and bayous. Visitors of all ages can experience catamaran cruises, sailing charters, watersports, and boating excursions both with the assistance of a captain or guide, or on their own.

- The deep water off the destination’s coast attracts some of the widest arrays of marine life in Florida. Divers can explore artificial reefs, wrecks and a limestone shelf at depths of up to 90 feet spotting underwater species such as flounder, dolphin, sea turtles, and various tropical fish along the way.
- The area’s white sand and crystal-clear water make the perfect background for snorkeling. An extensive artificial reefs project is currently deployed creating a total of four separate snorkel reef sites, and one of the most active reef programs in the state of Florida. The reefs are arranged in different shapes on the Gulf of Mexico floor, in designs that are visible from above including starfish, sea turtles and dolphins.
- Destin-Fort Walton Beach is home to seven sites along the Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail including the Miss Louise, M/V Janet, and Chepanoc.

Fishing

- Destin is home to nearly 200 fishing charters offering



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an opportunity to get out on the water and reel in the catch of a lifetime with an experienced captain and crew.

- The 100-Fathom Curve is located just ten miles offshore (closer than any other location in Florida), providing the fastest access to deep sea fishing on the Gulf of Mexico.
- Destin plays host to the Emerald Coast Open, the world's largest lionfish tournament. The invasive species arrived in the Gulf of Mexico in 2012, and now Northwest Florida has the highest concentration in the world. The goal of the tournament is to raise awareness of the issue, remove the species from the water to lessen the threat to native wildlife, and delight in their surprisingly delectable taste.
- The Destin Fishing Rodeo has taken place since 1948. Held from October 1st through the 31st, the tournament welcomes over 30,000 anglers from around the country, including first timers, expert fisherman, and everyone in between. The all ages tournament welcomes all, and celebrates its youngest participants by awarding them a rod and reel if they reel in a fish over one pound.
- The Captain Kelly Windes Fish Aggregating Device Buoy Network is located 60-80 miles offshore. This extensive network is designed to attract large fish

like mahi-mahi, marlin and tuna making it possible for anglers of all skill levels will be able to consistently access a pelagic fishery without traveling hundreds of miles. The deployment is the first in the continental United States.

Golf

- Destin-Fort Walton Beach is home to 8 championship golf courses. covered options for events.

Eco-Tourism/Nature + Parks

- Nearly 60 percent of the beaches in Destin-Fort Walton Beach are preserved in perpetuity.
- Approximately 40,000 dolphins call The Gulf home, and the best way to spot them is to head out on the water. A number of dolphin cruises run seasonally, to place guests face to face with playful pods and aquatic life.
- Henderson Beach State Park is a 200-acre gem and home to 60 campsites and a winding nature trail that provides a rare view of some of the last remaining endangered coastal scrub communities in Northwest Florida. With 30-foot sand dunes and 6,000 feet of scenic shoreline boarding the Gulf of Mexico, the park is a haven for shore birds, including six listed and protected species and monarch butterflies. The park is also home to rabbits, bobcats, and gopher tortoises that may be seen occasionally.



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- Ideal for all ages, the Norriego Point Tide Pools are formed by rocks and roped off from the open waters of East Pass. This creates ideal conditions for getting into the water, exploring and discovering wildlife.
- Located between Navarre and Fort Walton Beach on the Santa Rosa Sound, Spectre Island is an ideal location to get out on the water with your family and observe the quiet haven for wildlife.
- During sea turtle nesting season (June-October) visitors can learn how the endangered species provides a cornerstone for everything that happens along the shoreline and emerald-green waters – and why protecting them is so important.
- Twelve birding hot spots in the area provide visitors a glimpse of shorebirds, seabirds, songbirds, raptors, and more.

Event Highlights

Spring

- Mac and Cheese Festival (March)
- 25th Annual Concerts in the Village (April)
- Destin Outdoor Expo (April)
- Burning up the Beaches (April)
- Destin Cobia Tournament (April)
- Emerald Coast Open (May)
- Lionfish Restaurant Week (May)
- Blessing of the Fleet (May)

Summer

- Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival (May/June)
- Smoke on the Coast (July)
- Paddle at the Porch (August)

Fall

- Greek Festival (August/September)
- Destin Seafood Festival (October)
- Destin Fishing Rodeo (October)
- Dog Daze (October)
- 25th Annual Mattie Kelly Arts Festival (October)
- Take A Kid Fishing Day | Harbor Docks (November)
- Emerald Coast Classic (November)

Winter

- Holiday on the Harbor/Boat Parade (December)
- Noon Year's Eve at LuLu's (December)
- Pelican Plunge (January)
- Mardi Gras Masquerade (February)
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Getting There

By Car

U.S. Highway 98 edges along the Gulf of Mexico through Destin-Fort Walton Beach. From exit I-10, exit onto Highway 85 south at the Crestview/Fort Walton beach exit and head straight to the beach.

By Air

Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) offers more than 50 flights daily to cities across the nation and around the world. The airport is serviced by Allegiant, American, Delta, Southwest, and Sun Country Airlines.

Please visit flyvps.com for a full flight service overview.

Contact Us

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