

# **Palm Island – Islandgoers Destination Report**

As I reflect on my latest island adventure I think about what a wonderful life I have that allows me to visit some of the most beautiful places in the world. I have been to tropical island getaways that can only truly be appreciated by seeing them firsthand. However, these experiences have jaded me in some ways. When I hear of a new island getaway of course I approach any of these reports with a, "Yeah, been there done that" attitude I know is not healthy. But thoughts like that can mean missing out on new and wonderful experiences in the most unlikely places. One place that stopped me in my islandgoing tracks was Palm Island Resort. Located along the Intracoastal Waterway on Florida's Southwest Gulf Coast, this family friendly island getaway had everything to write home about.

I first learned of Palm Island when my brother returned from a recent business trip. This report was summed up as, " You have to check this place out. No, really, it's real thing. The people are great and the resort gets you into island time real quick."

Now for me I generally gauge my island experiences by the amount of effort needed to get there. How light do I need to pack, how many planes/boats/taxis/rental cars and rutted paths will it take to escape into paradise. I was responsible for planning our wedding anniversary getaway, and travel hassles are not conducive to moments of romantic reflection and marital bliss. All that was required of our trip to Palm Island Resort was one call to a very friendly staff member at Palm Island Resort and a tank of gas.

Our retreat from the rest of the world began when we were instructed to drive our car onto a small ferry that took us over to Palm Island. Within minutes we arrived onto the small island of Palm Island which, is approximately seven miles long and comprised of Knight, Don Pedro, and Gasparilla islands. From the ferry you make the very short drive to the parking area for Palm Island Resort. There we said goodbye to our car and all of our mainland worries because from that point on the staff at Palm Island had thought of everything else (and there are no cars allowed on the resort property).

They say that first impressions are lasting and what has lasted with me about our trip to Palm Island was the wonderful and caring resort staff. You feel as if you are part of the family right away, and they are genuinely glad to have you as their guests. From the attendants in the parking area who receive your bags to the waiter at the resort's fine restaurant, we began first name bases with everyone shortly after we arrived. We became one of the locals very quickly.

As we checked in and were shown to our well-appointed villa rental by Steve, we felt the pressures of the daily grind shed from our thoughts as the quiet surroundings pulled us into island time. With no cars and the issues that follow cars, we realized just how quiet a retreat we had entered. Only the sound of the gulf breezes rustling the palms, and the smell of the salt air interrupted our thoughts as we listened to the casual conversation by the resort staff. Full of useful information about the resort and surrounding area, Steve

typified the easy-going attitude and yet the attention to detail you'll find throughout Palm Island Resort.

Our Villa was one of 160 condominium/villas and 24 quarter ownership and private home available. The condos are situated in low-rise two-story buildings. Units are arranged in four to eight unit sets. Use of vegetation and smart design make for an uncluttered and uncrowded feel and look to the whole resort. No matter the size of your party, Palm Island can accommodate you with well-appointed island retreats. Don't worry about feeling a part of the crowd because they have gone to great lengths to develop a low impact, environmentally friendly, island resort. You never feel as if you are crowded into a resort compound. Palm Island's owners Gar and Dean Beckstead have created a place where you can escape the cookie cutter monoliths of some over developed "resort destination". Instead you find yourself slowing your golf cart to allow wildlife to pass and appreciating the fact that your Gulf view includes wild dunes and natural habitat. The beaches are pristine and quiet. The sunsets are spectacular and the water aquamarine and warm. We hadn't even unpacked yet!

Palm Island is a resort for all types of groups. We appreciated the low-key atmosphere and feeling of privacy. Families will love the openness and long list of activities for the entire family. Activities include the obvious swims in the warm water of the Gulf of Mexico but there are also four heated swimming pools. If it happens on or in the water, Palm Island is set up to meet your needs. Available for rental are every type of water toy like, waterbikes, rafts, and canoes. Even larger motorboats are available for rental through the resort. Fishing is one of the most popular water sports, and this part of coastal Florida offers a wide variety of fishing from angling the waterways for snook and redfish to the deeper water of the gulf for grouper and tarpon. Palm Island even sponsors its own charity fishing event for lady anglers.

Palm Island's land based activities range from the nature hunts, golf, and bicycle nature tours to sand castle contest. The Kid's Club on Palm Island lists a wide range of activities for kids from ages 5-10 years old. (Been there and done that!) Those with children can relax and allow their children the freedom to wander and discover the natural treasures of Palm Island. A vacation to Palm Island Resort will leave families with a lifetime of memories.

So you've spent the day chasing sand crabs and building castles in the sand. You listened to stories from the resident Pirate Red Beard and fished for the record breaker off shore. You're hungry, and on an island. What do you do? Well, at Palm Island Resort, we were only steps away from some of the finest coastal cuisine in Florida. The Rum Bay Restaurant menu featured local specialties served in an open-air atmosphere. The style of presentation was traditional American fare with a Caribbean twist. Again, the service was always with a smile, prices were reasonable, and the food nicely prepared and delicious.

You can let Palm Island Resort handle every detail or pack your own and use the well-appointed kitchens in your villas. It was nice having the option to cook our own

catch of the day and enjoy sitting on our own veranda watching the sunsets. Forgot something? Kimmer Manner at the Rum Bay General Store will take care of you. From videos to resort wear. From ice for the coolers to ice cream for the late night munchies, the Rum Bay store has what you need and a few things you just gotta have. So relax, enjoy your stay, count the shooting stars, play a few sets of tennis, or even get married. At Palm Island Resort you're not one of the crowd, you're one of the family.

Having grown up in Florida and watched with a heavy heart as the natural beauty slowly fell to the developers and bulldozers, it's nice to find a true Florida gem on the tropical waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Palm Island Resort and staff have created a special place for those looking for a memorable island getaway.

Our 18th wedding anniversary was a success. We enjoyed the romantic sunsets, had quality time alone on pristine beaches, we ate well with our new friends at Palm Island. OK, so there weren't long customs lines to go through, passports and paperwork to fumble with, gear and luggage to drag around. I guess my formula for perfect island getaways will have to be reworked thanks to the splendid effort of those at Palm Island Resort.

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