

# Charms of the Sunshine State

Ever heard of Pensacola or Perdido Key? Whether you know of it or not, reading this travelogue will certainly have you trying to experience everything I have at the southern tip of the United States of America, and maybe do some exploration of your own.

## PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

Back in August 1559, Spanish explorer Tristán de Luna y Arellano sailed into what would one day be known as Pensacola Bay. A local tribe called the region Panzacola, perhaps meaning 'long-haired people,' as the indigenous inhabitants may have been known.

Pensacola is a waterfront city in the north of the US State of Florida. Its white sand beaches make it a popular holiday destination. The city was one of the earliest European settlements in the USA, and the historic Pensacola Village is a museum complex containing original nineteenth century buildings.

The city's beaches are part of the Gulf Islands National Seashore — a park that offers hiking, fishing and camping facilities, as well as the National Naval Aviation Museum that houses the Blue Angels aerobatic flight squadron, and other vintage aircraft.

## PERDIDO KEY, FLORIDA

Perdido Key is a narrow strip of white sandy beaches with emerald blue water, located in the Northwest Panhandle of Florida, between Pensacola and Orange Beach, Alabama. Discovered by the Spanish in 1693, Perdido Key literally means 'Lost Key.'

No more than a few hundred yards wide, Perdido Key stretches some 26 kilometres from Pensacola to Perdido Pass Bridge near Orange Beach, Alabama. To the south of Perdido Key is the Gulf of Mexico, which offers sand dunes and stunning views of the calm gulf waters on its southern border and abundant wetlands, estuaries, and wildlife to its north. It seamlessly combines natural beauty,



coastal living, and a unique southern charm.

The cities of Perdido Key and Pensacola are only 25 kilometres apart, connected by a beautiful coastal road. We took an 11 hour, 1,055 kilometre road trip from Dallas, Texas to both these destinations. The drive was spectacular as we travelled through Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

We stayed in a beautiful 3-bedroom apartment on the eighth floor, looking right out to the ocean. From the balcony of the apartment — a veranda that can easily contend for the best in the world — the ocean-view was breathtaking.

Every morning at 6.30AM, we sat in the balcony and watched a breathtaking sunrise. In the evenings, we went out to the beach to view the sunset, equally mesmerising.

Walking, bathing, fishing, visiting the historic Pensacola Lighthouse and US Naval Aviation museum, eating seafood and engaging in late-night 'deshi adda' with coffee, tea and games of dominoes; we were indeed in vacation heaven.

Early morning walks down the beaches was an altogether different experience.

Interestingly, we walked every day for an hour and were moving between Florida and Alabama states. We enjoyed our troll in the mornings and evenings on the Pensacola, Perdido Key (Florida) and Orange (Alabama) beaches.

The sand, almost like refined sugar, was something we had never seen before. Along the beaches, there were hotels, apartment complexes, and restaurants serving all kinds of seafood including shrimps, lobsters, bass, snappers, squids, crabs, oysters, etc.

We visited the two most historic places there as well — the Pensacola Lighthouse and Museum, and the National Naval Aviation Museum. We climbed 190 feet to the top of the lighthouse, consisting of 177 stairs, without much difficulty. However, when we first heard that we would need to tackle about 200 steps, it caused some fear in us. Yet, the sight of some senior citizen making the same effort gave us the courage

to continue climbing the stairs.

From the top of the Lighthouse, the views of the beaches, the gulf, the cities and the villages were simply awe-inspiring. The lighthouse was built in 1859 and the tower contains the keeper's quarters; the adjacent area houses a museum and a gift shop.

The Pensacola National Naval Aviation Museum is the world's largest Naval Aviation museum and one of the frequently visited museums in the state of Florida. The history of US Naval Aviation is a chequered one, and the displays within and outside of the museum gave us a glimpse of the aviation-cum-naval history of the countless wars fought since the Wright brothers flew for the first time.

We took a trolley bus tour and the most interesting part was how clearly the guide was narrating the story in a nutshell. We soon learned that he himself is a retired US Navy pilot and his thorough descriptions, coupled with his sense of humour, made the tour an engaging one.

Pointing to a two turbo-prop engine fighter plane, he said, "This was a unique aircraft. If one engine stopped, it could comfortably fly on one engine and the second engine would be good enough to take you to its crash site!"

Suffice to say, the description had had us all laughing out loud.

We dined at a seafood restaurant, 'Sassy Bass,' nicely set up on a two-storeyed wooden structure right on the waterfront. Sitting there, you could feel as if you were on a floating boat. The shrimp, and the white fish with vegetables, were so tasty that we finished every last morsel on our plates.

It was soon time to return to Dallas. On the drive back, we were daydreaming about the serene, charming days spent in the Sunshine State, hoping one day to return.

By Dr Salehuddin Ahmed  
Photo: Collected

## মাদার নতুন নাম



কালার গার্ড



কাপড়ের রঙকে রাখে  
নতুনের মতো ঝকঝকে

মাল্টি বুস্টার



কাপড়ের যে কোন দাগ-  
ময়লাকে নিমিষেই দূর করে



সবচেয়ে ফাস্ট, সবচেয়ে কার্যকরী ..