

The Best of Florida from \$70 a Day

The moniker “Sunshine State,” does no justice to the state of Florida. It’s just too obvious. You already know to leave the snow boots at home and to pack the sunscreen. It’s also common knowledge that a separate state within the state, known as Disney, attracts throngs of visitors every day. But did you also know that the so-called Sunshine State has castles that aren’t made of sand, an all-psyched town that would even stump *Crossing Over*’s John Edwards, and a restaurant where clothing is optional? There’s a lot more than rays of sun in this delightfully wacky state.

Here you can choose from a wide array of accommodations, from deluxe resorts, chichi boutiques, and theme hotels to down home-away-from-home mom-and-pop motels. You can visit remote little towns like Apalachicola or a megalopolis like Miami. Devour fresh seafood, from amberjack to oysters—and work off those calories by doing whichever activities you like best: bicycling, golfing, kayaking, or—yes, it’s a sport, especially in South Beach—clubbing. Despite overdevelopment in many parts of the state, Floridians have maintained thousands of acres of wilderness areas, from the little respite of Clam Pass County Park in downtown Naples to the magnificent, mysterious, and mystical Everglades National Park, which stretches across the state’s southern tip.

Choosing the “best” of all this is a daunting task, and the selections in this chapter are only a rundown on some of the affordable highlights. You’ll find numerous other outstanding resorts, hotels, destinations, activities, and attractions—all described in the pages of this book. With a bit of serendipity you’ll come up with some bests of your own.

And the real best of Florida: You can see it, do it, and eat it on a budget. Really. We swear. Mouseketeer’s honor.

1 The Best Beaches

Many of Florida’s best beaches are in its state parks and recreation areas. Admission to most of them is \$4 per vehicle with up to eight occupants, \$2 for a vehicle with one occupant, or \$1 per pedestrian or bicyclist. Given the quality of what you’ll see, that’s one of Florida’s best bargains.

- **Virginia Key** (Key Biscayne): The producers of *Survivor* could feasibly shoot their show on this ultra-secluded, picturesque, and deserted

key, where people go purposely not to be found. See p. 122.

- **Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park** (Key Biscayne): The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park radiates serenity with 1¼ miles of sandy beach, nature trails, and even a historic lighthouse that recalls an era before pristine places like this one gave way to avaricious developers and pollutants. See p. 132.

- **Lummus Park Beach** (South Beach): This beach is world renowned, not necessarily for its pristine sands, but for its more common name of **South Beach**, on which seeing, being seen, and, at times, the obscene, go hand in hand with the sunscreen and beach towels. The 12th Street section of this beach is the beach of choice for gay residents and travelers who come to show off just how much time they've spent in the gym and, of course, catch up on the latest gossip and upcoming must-attend parties and events. Oftentimes, this beach is the venue for some of the liveliest parties South Beach has ever seen. See p. 122.
- **Haulover Beach** (Miami Beach): Nestled between the Intracoastal Waterway and the ocean, especially at the north end, is the place to be for that all-over tan: Haulover is the city's only clothing-optional—aka nude—beach. See p. 125.
- **Bahia Honda State Park** (Bahia Honda Key): One of the nicest and most peaceful beaches in Florida, located amidst 635 acres of nature trails and even a portion of Henry Flagler's railroad. See p. 183.
- **John U. Lloyd Beach State Park** (Dania Beach): Unfettered by high-rise condominiums, T-shirt shops, and hotels, this wonderful beach boasts an untouched shoreline surrounded by a canopy of Australian pine to ensure complete seclusion. See p. 233.
- **Lover's Key State Park** (Fort Myers Beach): You'll have to walk or take a tram through a bird-filled forest of mangroves to this gorgeous, unspoiled beach just a few miles south of busy Fort Myers Beach. Although Sanibel Island gets all the accolades, the shelling here is just as good, if not better. See p. 309.
- **Cayo Costa State Park** (off Captiva Island): These days, deserted tropical islands with great beaches are scarce in Florida, but this 2,132-acre barrier strip of sand, pine forests, mangrove swamps, oak hammocks, and grasslands provides a genuine get-away-from-it-all experience. Access is only by boat from nearby Gasparilla, Pine, and Captiva islands. See p. 328.
- **Naples Beach** (Naples): Many Florida cities and towns have beaches, but few are as lovely as the gorgeous strip that runs in front of Naples' famous Millionaires' Row. You don't have to be rich to wander its length, peer at the mansions, and stroll on historic Naples Pier to catch a sunset over the Gulf. See p. 332.
- **Caladesi Island State Park** (Clearwater Beach): Even though 3½-mile-long Caladesi Island is in the heavily developed Tampa Bay area, it has a lovely, relatively secluded beach with soft sand edged in sea grass and palmettos. Dolphins cavort in offshore waters. In the park itself, there's a nature trail, and you might see one of the rattlesnakes, black racers, raccoons, armadillos, or rabbits that live here. The park is accessible only by ferry from Honeymoon Island State Recreation Area off Dunedin. See p. 381.
- **Fort DeSoto Park** (St. Petersburg): Where else can you get a good tan *and* a history lesson? At Fort DeSoto Park, you not only have 1,136 acres of five interconnected islands and 3 miles of unfettered beaches, but a fort, for which the park was named, that's listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nature trails, fishing piers, a 2¼-mile canoe trail,

and spectacular views of Tampa Bay and the Gulf. See p. 382.

- **Canaveral National Seashore** (Cape Canaveral): Midway between the crowded attractions at Daytona Beach and the Kennedy Space Center is a protected stretch of coastline 13 miles long, backed by cabbage palms, sea grapes, and palmettos. See p. 472.
- **Gulf Islands National Seashore** (Pensacola): You could argue that all of Northwest Florida's Gulf shore is one of America's great beaches—an almost-uninterrupted stretch of pure white sand that runs the entire length of the Panhandle, from Perdido Key to St. George Island. The Gulf Islands National Seashore preserves much of this natural wonder in its

undeveloped state. Countless terns, snowy plovers, black skimmers, and other birds nest along the dunes topped with sea oats. East of the national seashore and equally beautiful are **Grayton Beach State Park** near Destin and **St. George Island State Park** off Apalachicola. See p. 528.

- **St. Andrews State Park** (Panama City Beach): With more than 1,000 acres of dazzling white sand and dunes, this preserved wilderness demonstrates what Panama City Beach looked like before motels and condominiums lined its shore, with lacy, golden sea oats swaying in Gulf breezes and fragrant rosemary growing wild. The area is also home to foxes, coyotes, and a herd of deer. See p. 554.

2 The Best Destinations for Low-Cost Vacations

• The Middle & Lower Keys:

With all the hype over Key West, the other keys are often neglected by tourists who race through en route to the wild tip of the continental United States. But that's a good thing. The string of islands that are far enough from Miami to dissuade day-trippers are a virtual treasure trove for active travelers who enjoy biking, boating, fishing, bird-watching, snorkeling, or just plain old relaxing and doing nothing—the cheapest activity of them all. Areas like Conch Key, Grass Key, Marathon, Big Pine Key, and Sugarloaf are dotted with lush parks, simple fish houses, and modest accommodations. There is the National Key Deer Refuge, home to hundreds of nearly extinct miniature golden deer, and Bahia Honda State Park, where Florida's unusual plant and animal life thrive for all to see. And of course, these keys are surrounded by some of the country's most

incredible underwater attractions, including a living reef system that divers flock to from all over the world. See chapter 5.

- **Hollywood:** For about half what you'd spend in trendy South Beach, nearby Hollywood (whose most recent ad campaign strangely promoted itself as "Vintage South Florida") offers wide beaches, plenty of outdoor activities, a few funky nightspots, and some real bargain hotels. Plus, you can drive half an hour in either direction to visit Fort Lauderdale's elegant restaurants and tourist attractions, or head south to Miami Beach to partake in some of its outrageous activity. See "Broward County: Hallandale & Hollywood to Fort Lauderdale" in chapter 7, beginning on p. 229.

- **Lake Okeechobee:** Head inland to Clewiston on Lake Okeechobee for a real feel of Old Florida. This is a popular spot for RVs and anglers. Everything from food to

lodging is reasonably priced. You can stay in the nicest spot in town for about \$40 a person. And while you're on the lake, why not catch your own dinner? See p. 291.

- **Fort Myers Beach:** Just a few miles from trendy Sanibel and Captiva islands and ritzy Naples, Fort Myers Beach offers just as much sun, sand, and shells—and at much less expensive prices—as its more affluent neighbors. Its busy “Times Square” and the rest of Estero Island offer some very comfortable accommodations at reasonable rates, even in the winter high season. And the gorgeous Lovers Key State Park is just across the bridge. See “Fort Myers Beach” in chapter 9.
- **Naples:** For a town with residents possessing industrial-strength money, charming and friendly Naples offers some surprisingly affordable accommodations and dining. And admission to Naples's great beach and historic pier is free. See “Naples” in chapter 9.
- **Anna Maria Island:** Although it sits next door to affluent Sarasota and expensive Longboat Key, Anna Maria Island is down-to-earth in both lifestyle and prices. It has fine beaches and a host of cost-conscious activities—and you only have to drive a few miles south to dine and shop on St. Armands Key, or to enjoy Sarasota's fine performing arts scene. See “Sarasota” in chapter 10.
- **The St. Pete & Clearwater Beaches:** The 20 miles of sand between St. Pete Beach and Clearwater Beach have been a vacation mecca for a century now, and they

attract vacationers across the economic spectrum. Here is one of Florida's finest and most expensive grand old resorts, but you can also choose from many comfortable and inexpensive motels and condos, too. Granted, some four million guests a year can crowd this area at times, but there's a multitude of activities to keep them—and you—busy without breaking the bank. See “St. Pete & Clearwater Beaches” in chapter 10.

- **Daytona Beach:** Like the Panhandle, Daytona Beach attracts a working-class clientele—not to mention stock-car fans and bikers who make pilgrimages to this “World Center of Racing.” Accordingly, you'll find many low-cost places to stay and dine here. In addition to its famous race-track, the area sports a beach so hard-packed that you can drive on it. See “Daytona Beach” in chapter 12.
- **The Beaches of Northwest Florida:** Many visitors to Pensacola Beach, Fort Walton Beach, Destin, and Panama City Beach are working-class families, couples, and singles from Alabama and Georgia. They don't have all the money in the world to spend. As a result, the Panhandle has a multitude of inexpensive accommodations and restaurants. And there's plenty to keep everyone busy here, from touring historic Pensacola to trying your luck in Destin, “The World's Luckiest Fishing Village.” The only problem: The Panhandle can get cold in winter. See chapter 13.

3 The Best Experiences You Can Have for Free (or Almost Free)

- **See the Boys of Spring** (State-wide): Although Florida has the big-league Florida Marlins in

Miami and the Tampa Bay Devil Rays in St. Petersburg, the whole state goes baseball crazy during

spring training from mid-February through March. Great seats close to the action are a bargain compared to what you'll pay when the Boys of Spring get home. See the box, "The Boys of Spring," in chapter 2.

- **Experience Cuba on U.S. Soil** (Miami): Stroll down Little Havana's Calle Ocho, 8th Street, to get a flavor of Hispanic culture. Stop at Versailles, an iconoclastic, gaudy Cuban diner humming with old-timers reminiscing about pre-Castro Cuba, local politicians trying to appease them, and a slew of detached people only there for the fantastically cheap and authentic Cuban fare. Watch expert cigar rollers make handmade stogies at one of the many cigar factories. Overlook the purely American fast-food joints in favor of a much more flavorful Little Havana bodega. See chapter 4.

- **Relish the View from Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park:** You haven't truly seen South Florida until you've checked out the view from the southern point of Key Biscayne. Whether it's the turquoise water or the sight of Stiltsville—seven still-inhabited aquatic cabins dating back to the 1930s, perched smack in the middle of the Biscayne Channel—it may take a little coercing to get you to leave. See "Nature Preserves, Parks & Gardens" in chapter 4.

- **Everglades National Park:** Unfettered by jet skis, cruise ships, and neon thong bikinis, the Everglades are Florida's outback, resplendent in its swampy nature, which is best explored via an airboat that can navigate its way through the most stubborn of saw grass, providing you with an up-close and personal view of the land's inhabitants, from alligators

and manatees to raccoons and Florida panthers. See "A Glimpse of Everglades National Park" in chapter 6.

- **Drive along A1A:** This ocean-front route, which runs north up from Miami Beach, through Sunny Isles and Hollywood, and on along the entire eastern edge of Florida, embodies the essence of the state. Especially in South Florida, where you'll discover time-warped hotels steeped in Art Deco kitsch alongside multi-million-dollar modern high-rises, A1A is one of the most scenic, albeit heavily trafficked, roads in all of Florida.

- **Eye the Estates on Palm Beach:** The winter playground for the *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* set, Palm Beach is lined with jaw-dropping palatial estates, including the biggest one, which belongs to—who else—Donald "You're Fired" Trump. While many of them are hidden behind towering shrubbery, head south on South County Road, from Brazilian Avenue, where you will see some of the most opulent homes ever built. Make sure someone holds the steering wheel if you're driving, because you *will* do a double-take. See "Palm Beach & West Palm Beach" in chapter 7.

- **Catch the "Green Flash" at Sunset** (Key West & the Gulf Coast Beaches): Key West and the beaches of Southwest Florida and the Tampa Bay area face due west, thus providing glorious sunsets over the Gulf of Mexico and a chance to see the elusive "green flash"—a quick burst of green light just as the top of the sun dips below the horizon. It costs not a cent to wander down to the shore and keep a sharp eye peeled. Or for a few bucks, grab a drink from a beachside restaurant or

Gulf-front bar. See chapters 5, 9, and 10.

- **Walk or Ride Along Wildlife Drive** (Sanibel Island): The mangrove swamps, winding waterways, and uplands of Sanibel Island's J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge (☎ 239/472-1100) are great places to see alligators, raccoons, otters, and hundreds of species of birds. You can see many of the creatures from the 5-mile, one-way Wildlife Drive, which costs \$5 per vehicle or \$1 per pedestrian or biker. A naturalist will explain what you're seeing on a 2-hour narrated tram tour—a very good value at \$8 for adults, \$4 for children 12 and under. See "Sanibel & Captiva Islands" in chapter 9.
- **Stoop for Shells** (Sanibel Island): Okay, you'll have to pay a \$3 toll to get here and a small fee to park your car (or lock your bike to a tree for nothing), but you can stroll Sanibel Island's world-famous shelling beaches as long as you want for free. After a few hours hunched over in the "Sanibel stoop," you're sure to go home with a prize find or two. See "Sanibel & Captiva Islands" in chapter 9.
- **Stroll Among the Millionaires** (Naples): Olde Naples residents love to stroll out on their ancient city pier to fish, catch a sunset, or look at Millionaires' Row, a string of magnificent mansions along the town's lovely beach. Now a state historic site, the pier is open 24 hours a day and is free, although it will cost you a few quarters to park in the nearby municipal lots. When you're done ogling the wealthy from the Naples Pier, you can walk among them while window-shopping in the ritzy 3rd Street district nearby. Naples is so Midwestern-friendly that nobody will care if you maxed out your credit cards just to get here. See "Naples" in chapter 9.
- **Walk, Jog, Bike, or Blade Along Bayshore Boulevard** (Tampa): A 7-mile promenade with an unmatched view across the bay to Tampa's downtown skyline, Bayshore Boulevard reputedly has the world's longest continuous sidewalk. It's a favorite for runners, joggers, walkers, and in-line skaters. The route passes stately old homes of Hyde Park, a few high-rise condos, retirement communities, and houses of worship before ending at Ballast Point Park. See "Tampa" in chapter 10.
- **Trip Out in Sideshow and Psychic Towns** (Gibsonton and Cassadaga): Who needs \$10 a minute 1-900 numbers when you can walk around Cassadaga for free and get a look into the past and future? The small town near Orlando is a throwback in time but also a look ahead into your future if you encounter one of the many psychic mediums who live and work in this tiny 'psychic' town. Although private readings with psychics cost big bucks, there's always someone roaming the streets or hanging out in the general store who will be happy to give you a thought or two for free or for a penny. It's all definitely freaky. In Gibsonton, you'll see a freak show of a literal nature, as it's the home to many a retired circus acts and carnies, including the late Lobster Boy, and a living bearded lady or two. See p. 358 and 480 respectively.
- **See What Circus Money Bought** (Sarasota): Adults pay \$9 or \$10 to get in, but you'll have three "rings" to visit at the **FSU Ringling Center for the Cultural Arts** in Sarasota (☎ 941/359-5700, or 941/351-1660 for

recorded information), which houses the phenomenal collections of circus master John Ringling. A pink Italian Renaissance villa is filled with over 500 years of European and American art, including one of the world's most important collections of grand 17th-century baroque paintings. The Ringling's 30-room winter residence displays their personal mementos. And the Circus Galleries are devoted to memorabilia from The Greatest Show on Earth. See p. 395.

- **Visit a Virtual Stepford Town**

(Celebration): There was no need for a remake of the '70s classic, *The Stepford Wives*, especially considering that there's a similarly eerie town in Orlando known as Celebration. A planned community to the max, this pristine, picket fenced in Victorian-style utopian town has rules on everything from proper porch decor to car etiquette. Enter at your own risk. See p. 413.

- **Search for the Fountain of Youth**

(St. Augustine): Ponce de León never found it and some say that today, Botox is the real fountain of youth, but a stroll through the nation's oldest town may give you new perspective on the inevitable and positive effects of aging. You'll have to pay a few dollars to enter sites such as the oldest store and the oldest jail, but you can freely stroll these narrow streets for hours. Poke your head into antiques shops, peer into lush yards surrounding ancient buildings, and watch the boats out on the Matanzas River. See "St. Augustine: America's First City" in chapter 12.

- **Visit a New Breed of National Park**

(Jacksonville): The **Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve** isn't one chunk of land;

instead, it's a vast, intriguing system of sites on both sides of the St. Johns River. The prime attraction is the Fort Carolina National Memorial (☎ 904/641-7155), the site of a 16th-century French Huguenot settlement. It's on the edge of the 600-acre Theodore Roosevelt Area, a beautiful, undisturbed wood- and marshland rich in history and wildlife. On the north side of the river, the Zephaniah Kingsley Plantation (☎ 904/251-3537) was an early 19th-century manse owned by Zephaniah Kingsley, a white man who married one of his slaves and then moved her and his family to Haiti to escape racism at home. Admission is free to all the park's attractions. See "Jacksonville" in chapter 12.

- **Walk the Streets of a Charming Victorian Town**

(Fernandina Beach, Amelia Island): Amelia Island might be an exclusive, money-on-the-hoof kind of place, but you need not a penny to stroll around the gorgeous 50-block area of bayside **Fernandina Beach**. This charming small town is filled with so many Victorian and Queen Anne homes that it's listed in the National Register of Historic Places. See "Amelia Island" in chapter 12.

- **Massage your Feet on a Talcum-Like Beach**

(Northwest Florida): Admission is free to most of 100-plus miles of powdery, snow-white beaches that make the Panhandle special. And just a few bucks will let you into the Gulf Islands National Seashore at Pensacola, the Henderson Beach and Grayton Beach state recreation areas at Destin, the St. Andrews State Recreation Area at Panama City Beach, and St. George Island State Park near Apalachicola. You won't soon forget the time you spend on

these protected sands and dunes, all consistently ranked among the nation's finest beaches. See chapter 13.

- **Imagine Yourself Under Five Flags** (Pensacola): You'll have to pay to go into its homes and museums, but there's no admission to walk the streets of **Historic Pensacola Village** (☎ 850/595-5985). The original part of Pensacola resembles a shady English colonial community, but America's second oldest city saw the flags of five nations fly over its quaint streets. Some of Florida's oldest homes are here, along with charming boutiques and interesting restaurants. During summer, costumed characters go about their daily chores and demonstrate old crafts, and archaeologists unearth the old Spanish commanding officer's compound. See p. 531.
- **Visit the Blue Angels & Top Guns** (Pensacola and Fort Walton Beach): Next to the Smithsonian Institute's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., the next best places to see our nation's warplanes on display are

at the **National Museum of Naval Aviation** in Pensacola (☎ 850/452-3604) and at the **U.S. Air Force Armament Museum** in Fort Walton Beach (☎ 850/882-4062). Admission to both is free. They cost a few dollars, but the naval museum's IMAX films will make you believe you're flying in a Blue Angel's cockpit. See p. 532 and 544 respectively.

- **See Where Johnny Weissmuller Played Tarzan** (Tallahassee): Wakulla Springs, 15 miles south of Tallahassee, is so jungly that some of the 1930s Tarzan movies starring Johnny Weissmuller were filmed here. Today they are within the 2,860 acres of **Edward W. Ball Wakulla Springs State Park** (☎ 850/224-5950), which means you'll have to pay a few dollars to get in. You can also pay \$4.50 for adults, half price for children, to take glass-bottom-boat sightseeing and wildlife-observation tours. You can swim in the lake formed by the springs, but watch for alligators! See "Tallahassee" in chapter 13.

4 The Best Family Attractions

- **Miami Seaquarium** (Key Biscayne; ☎ 305/361-5705): Kids seem to love the splashy and dramatic performances by killer whales and dolphins. Come early and get a very wet look at some of the biggest hams of marine life. See p. 135.
- **Parrot Jungle Island** (Miami): Settled into its new swanky \$47 million digs on Watson Island as of June 2003, Parrot Jungle Island is a revamped version of the original in South Miami. You'll still need to watch your head, however, since flying above are hundreds of parrots, macaws, peacocks,

cockatoos, and flamingos. Continuous suitable but cheesy shows star roller-skating cockatoos, card-playing macaws, and numerous stunt-happy parrots. There are also tortoises, iguanas, and a rare albino alligator on exhibit.

- **Miami Metrozoo** (Miami; ☎ 305/251-0400): This completely cageless (but safe!) zoo offers a horde of animals with much personality all ready for their close-ups. See p. 135.
- **Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Museum** (Key West; ☎ 305/294-2633): Because it's human nature to have somewhat of a morbid

curiosity about disasters and wrecks, this museum full of doubloons, pieces of eight, emeralds, and solid-gold bars has fascinated visitors intrigued with shipwrecks. See p. 193.

- **Key West Aquarium** (Key West; ☎ 305/296-2051): The oldest attraction on the island, this modest but fascinating exhibit is a great place for children who are accustomed to only animals of the animated kind. Touch tanks and feeding exhibitions get kids involved. See p. 192.
- **Playmobil Fun Park** (Palm Beach Gardens; ☎ 800/351-8697): It's the only Playmobil park outside of Germany, it's free, and it's a ball. This indoor fantasy world offers more than 17,000 square feet filled with thousands of toys. *Warning:* All toys are also for sale. See p. 260.
- **Edison and Ford Winter Estates** (Fort Myers; ☎ 239/334-3614): Inventor Thomas Alva Edison and his friend, automobile magnate Henry Ford, built side-by-side winter homes on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River in Fort Myers. Today these Victorian cottages serve as memorials to the two men, and especially to Edison. The museum will show the kids how we got the lightbulb, the phonograph, and hundreds of other Edison inventions. See p. 298.
- **Caribbean Gardens** (Naples; ☎ 239/262-5409): Owned and operated by the family of noted animal trainer Larry Tetzlaff, this zoo features a variety of animals and birds, including a fascinating community of primates living free on their own island. Larry's son, David Tetzlaff, himself a talented trainer, puts lions and tigers through their paces in his Big Cat Show. For kids, there's a Petting Farm, elephant rides, and a

playground. You can easily spend a day here. See p. 335.

- **Busch Gardens Tampa Bay** (Tampa; ☎ 888/800-5447): Although the thrill rides, live entertainment, shops, restaurants, and games get most of the ink at this 335-acre family theme park, Busch Gardens ranks among the top zoos in the country, with several thousand animals living in naturalistic environments. If you can get them off the roller coasters, the kids can find out what all those wild beasts they've seen on the Discovery Channel look like in person. You can save a few bucks off admission by buying your tickets outside the main gate. See p. 349.
- **Florida Aquarium** (Tampa; ☎ 813/273-4000): This major aquarium will introduce you and the kids to more than 5,300 aquatic animals and plants that call Florida home. There's an Explore a Shore playground to educate the kids, a deep-water exhibit, and a tank housing moray eels. See p. 359.
- **MOSI (Museum of Science and Industry)** (Tampa; ☎ 813/987-6100): One of the largest educational science centers in the Southeast, MOSI has more than 450 interactive exhibits in which the kids can experience hurricane-force winds, defy the laws of gravity, cruise the mysterious world of microbes, explore the human body, and much more. They can also watch stunning movies in MOSIMAX, Florida's first IMAX dome theater. Admission includes IMAX movies. See p. 360.
- **The Magic Kingdom & Disney-MGM Studios** (Orlando; ☎ 407/824-4321): Of the four Disney parks, these two are the most fun for families. Young ones will be thrilled to meet and greet the

famed characters, and rides will delight young and old alike. Yes, admission is expensive, but with a little know-how and a lot of planning, you can have a memorable Disney experience without breaking the bank. See chapter 11.

- **Universal Orlando** (Orlando; ☎ 800/837-2273): Even with fast-paced, grown-up rides, Universal still is a ton of fun for kids (there's even a youngster-size roller coaster). And it's a working motion-picture and TV-production studio, so occasionally there's some live filming done in the park, especially at the Nickelodeon soundstage. The little ones can spend the whole day exploring the whimsical Seuss Landing and meeting MGM's cartoon characters such as Woody Woodpecker, Yogi, BooBoo, Scooby Doo, Fred, Barney, Fievel, and Elroy Jetson. See chapter 11.
- **SeaWorld** (Orlando; ☎ 800/327-2424): Beautifully landscaped grounds, centering on a 17-acre lagoon, include flamingo and pelican ponds and a lush tropical rainforest. Shamu, a killer whale, is the star of the park along with his expanding family, which includes several baby whales. The

newest addition is Journey to Atlantis, a flume coaster with plenty of twists and turns. See chapter 11.

- **Daytona USA** (Daytona Beach; ☎ 386/947-6800): Opened in late 1996 on Daytona International Speedway grounds, this huge state-of-the-art interactive attraction is an exciting and fast-paced stop even for non-race fans. Kids can see real stock cars, go-carts, and motorcycles, and even participate in a pit stop on a NASCAR Winston Cup race car. See p. 480.
- **ZooWorld Zoological & Botanical Park** (Panama City Beach; ☎ 850/230-1243): "Mr. Bubba," the largest captive alligator in Florida, lives in a re-created pine forest habitat at this educational and entertaining zoo, an active participant in the Species Survival Plan, which helps protect endangered species with specific breeding and housing programs. Other guests include rare and endangered animals as well as orangutans and other primates, big cats, and more reptiles. Also included are a walk-through aviary, a bat exhibit, and a petting zoo. See p. 556.

5 The Best Golf Courses with Greens Fees That Won't Break Your Budget

- **Crandon Park Golf Course** (Key Biscayne, Miami): Formerly known as the Links of Key Biscayne, this stunning and famous course was ranked the number-one municipal course in the state and one of the top five in the country. Located on a posh residential island, it's one of the few courses remaining in South Florida not surrounded by development. Golfers enjoy pristine vistas of hammocks and stretches

of water, with a glimpse of Miami's dramatic skyline to the north. See "Affordable Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 4.

- **Miami's Biltmore Golf Course, Biltmore Hotel** (Coral Gables): If it's good enough for former President Clinton, it's good enough for those of you who don't travel with a bevy of Secret Service agents. But the real question is: Are *you* good enough for the course? The 6th hole is notoriously difficult,

with distracting water hazards among other difficulties. Nonetheless, it's an excellent course with a picture postcard setting. See "Affordable Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 4.

- **Doral Golf Resort and Spa** (Miami): There are four championship courses here, including the famous Blue Monster, which is the site of the annual Doral-Ryder Open. The Gold Course, recently restored by golf great Raymond Floyd, has water on every hole. Look in the *Miami Herald* sports section for special discounts and coupons or call for twilight specials starting at \$25 per person. See "Affordable Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 4.
- **Haulover Beach Park** (Miami): The longest hole on this par-27 course is 125 yards in a pretty bay-side location. Golfers here are patient with beginners, and greens fees start at a remarkable \$6 per person in winter. See "Affordable Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 4.
- **The Boca Raton Municipal Golf Course** (Boca Raton): This 18-hole, par-72 course covers approximately 6,200 yards. With greens fees starting at \$11 for 9 holes, this is a superior deal. See "Boca Raton & Delray Beach" in chapter 7.
- **Emerald Dunes Golf Course** (West Palm Beach): This beautiful Tom Fazio championship course features 60 acres of water, including a waterfall, and great views of the Atlantic. Prime weekend times are pricey, but it is one of the only great courses open to the public in this area of ritzy resorts. Twilight prices from Monday through Thursday are a mere \$45. See "Palm Beach & West Palm Beach" in chapter 7.
- **"Golf-A-Round"** (Gold Coast): From May to October or November, about a dozen private courses open their greens to visitors staying in Palm Beach County hotels. This "Golf-A-Round" program is free or severely discounted (carts are additional), and reservations can be made through most major hotels. Or contact the **Palm Beach County Convention and Visitors Bureau** (☎ 561/471-3995). See chapter 7.
- **Orangebrook Golf Course** (Hollywood): Built in 1937, this 18-holer is one of the state's oldest courses and one of the area's best bargains. Morning and noon rates range from \$15 to \$20. After 3pm, prices go down to about \$13. See "Broward County: Hallandale & Hollywood to Fort Lauderdale" in chapter 7.
- **Fort Myers Country Club** (Fort Myers; ☎ 239/936-2457): Designed in 1917 by Donald Ross, this municipal course is flat and uninteresting by today's standards, but it's right in town and looks like an exclusive private enclave. Fort Myers's other municipal course, Eastwood Golf Club (☎ 239/275-4848), is more challenging. Greens fees at both range from about \$20 in summer to \$50 during winter. See "Fort Myers" in chapter 9.
- **Babe Zaharias, Rocky Point, & Rogers Park Courses** (Tampa): With three fine municipal courses charging about \$25 to \$40, Tampa is a great place for affordable golf. The Babe Zaharias Municipal Golf Course (☎ 813/631-4374) is the shortest, but small greens and narrow fairways present ample challenges. Water presents obstacles on 12 of the 18 holes at Rocky Point Golf Course

(☎ 813/673-4316). On the Hillsborough River, the Rogers Park Golf Course (☎ 813/673-4396) has a lighted driving and practice range. Lessons and club rentals are available. See “Tampa” in chapter 10.

- **Mangrove Bay Golf Course** (St. Petersburg; ☎ 727/893-7800): One of the nation’s top 50 municipal courses, these 18-hole, par-72 links hug the inlets of Old Tampa Bay. Facilities include a driving range; lessons and golf-club rental are also available. Fees are about \$20, \$30 including a cart in winter, slightly lower off season. The city also operates the challenging, par-3 **Twin Brooks Golf Course**, 3800 22nd Ave. S. (☎ 727/893-7445), charging the same fees. See “St. Petersburg” in chapter 10.

- **Bobby Jones Golf Complex** (Sarasota; ☎ 941/365-4653): Sarasota’s municipal facility has two 18-hole championship layouts—the American (par-71) and British (par-72) courses—and a 9-hole executive course (par-30). Greens fees range from \$5 to \$25, including cart rental, a bargain in this affluent area. See “Sarasota” in chapter 10.

- **Buffalo Creek Golf Course** (Bradenton; ☎ 941/776-2611): Locals love to play this 18-hole, par-72 municipal course on the north side of the Bradenton River. At well over 7,000 yards, it’s the longest in the area, and lots of water and alligators will keep you entertained. Wintertime greens fees are about \$49 with cart, \$39 without. They drop to about \$22 and \$20, respectively, during

summer. See “Sarasota & Bradenton” in chapter 10.

- **Cocoa Beach Country Club** (Cocoa Beach; ☎ 321/868-3351): This fine municipal course has 27 holes of championship golf and 10 lighted tennis courts set on acres of natural woodland, rivers, and lakes. Greens fees are about \$45 in winter, dropping to about \$40 in summer, including cart. Nearby, The Savannahs at Sykes Creek (☎ 321/455-1377) has 18 holes over 6,636 yards bordered by hardwood forests, lakes, and savannahs inhabited by a host of wildlife. You’ll have to hit over a lake to reach the 7th hole. Fees with cart are about \$40 in winter, less in summer. See “Cocoa Beach, Cape Canaveral, the Kennedy Space Center & Melbourne” in chapter 12.

- **Pelican Bay Country Club** (Daytona Beach; ☎ 386/756-0034): The South Course of this semiprivate club is one of the area’s favorites, with fast greens to test your putting skills. With-cart fees are about \$40 in winter, less in summer (no walking allowed). See “Daytona Beach” in chapter 12.

- **The Moors** (Pensacola; ☎ 800/727-1010 or 850/995-4653): Pot bunkers make you think you’re playing in Scotland at this course, which has greeted the Nike Tour and is home to the Emerald Coast Classic, a PGA seniors’ event. Greens fees here are about \$15 to \$30 without cart. The Moors also has a lodge with eight luxury rooms. See “Pensacola” in chapter 13.

6 The Best of Natural Florida

- **National Key Deer Refuge** (Big Pine Key): With lots of patience (bring a book) and a bit of luck you may catch a glimpse of these

delicate creatures in their natural habitat; with the country’s largest herd (only about 300), the tiny, protected island of Big Pine Key is

worth a stop. See “The Lower Keys: Big Pine Key to Coppitt Key” in chapter 5.

- **Exploring the Everglades:** The supermodel of swamps, the Everglades in all its marshy glory is absolutely stunning, full of lush greenery and beautiful wildlife. From egrets and orchids to gators and frogs, these quiet grounds are peaceful and intriguing. See “A Glimpse of Everglades National Park” in chapter 6.
- **Lover’s Key State Park** (Fort Myers Beach; ☎ 239/463-4588): Just south of Fort Myers Beach, this gorgeous state preserve provides respite from the hustle and bustle of its busy neighbor. A highway runs the length of the island, but otherwise Lover’s Key is totally undeveloped. Access through a mangrove forest to a truly fine beach is by foot or by a tractor-pulled tram driven by park rangers, who take a dim view of anyone leaving trash behind. See “Fort Myers Beach” in chapter 9.
- **J. N. (“Ding”) Darling National Wildlife Refuge** (Sanibel Island; ☎ 239/472-1100): Preserving most of the mangrove forests and winding waterways on Sanibel Island’s north side, this famous 5,000-acre refuge is rich in such barrier-island wildlife as roseate spoonbills, ospreys, shorebirds, white pelicans, ducks, loons, and mangrove cuckoos. Visitors can hike, bike, or canoe on their own or be escorted by experts such as former Sanibel Mayor Mark “Bird” Westall. See “Sanibel & Captiva Islands” in chapter 9.
- **Cayo Costa State Park** (off Captiva Island; ☎ 941/964-0375): A huge variety of sea- and shorebirds congregate on this state preserve, which encompasses one of the northernmost of Southwest Florida’s Ten Thousand Islands. This uninhabited island is only accessible via boat. See “Sanibel & Captiva Islands” in chapter 9.
- **Briggs Nature Center** (Marco Island; ☎ 239/775-8569): Operated by The Nature Conservancy and part of the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, this refuge is a pristine example of Florida’s disappearing scrublands, home to the threatened scrub jays and gopher tortoises. There’s a self-guided canoe trail and canoes for rent during winter. You can also canoe through The Conservancy’s smaller Naples Nature Center in Naples. See “Marco Island” in chapter 9.
- **Canaveral National Seashore/Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge** (Cape Canaveral; ☎ 321/867-4077 or 321/867-0677): When the federal government set up the national space center at Cape Canaveral, it bought a lot more land than it needed to shoot rockets at the moon. The unneeded acres are now preserved in Canaveral National Seashore and the adjacent Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The seashore’s undeveloped Playalinda Beach is one of America’s most beautiful stretches of sand. See “Cocoa Beach, Cape Canaveral, the Kennedy Space Center & Melbourne” in chapter 12.
- **St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge** (Apalachicola; ☎ 850/653-8808): There are no facilities whatsoever on this 12,358-acre barrier island, which has been left in its natural state by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The local chamber of commerce will arrange a boat to get you here. Then you can walk through pine forests, marshlands, ponds, dunes, and beaches. In addition to native species like the bald eagle and

alligators, the island is home to a small herd of sambar deer from Southeast Asia, and red wolves are bred here for reintroduction to other wildlife areas. See “Apalachicola” in chapter 13.

- **St. Marks Lighthouse and National Wildlife Refuge** (Tallahassee; ☎ 850/925-6121): On the Gulf, due south of Tallahassee, this 65,000-acre preserve is home

to more species of birds than anywhere else in Florida except the Everglades. Built of limestone blocks 4 feet thick at the base, the 80-foot-tall St. Marks Lighthouse has marked the harbor entrance since 1842. The nearby Apalachicola National Forest is another good spot. See “Tallahassee” in chapter 13.

7 The Best Affordable Accommodations

- **The Lily Leon Hotel** (South Beach, Miami; ☎ 305/673-3767): This classy little hotel in the very hippest part of South Beach is beautifully maintained and fantastically practical. Although there are no fancy grounds or facilities, this has to be one of the best deals on the beach. See p. 91.
- **Aqua** (South Beach, Miami; ☎ 305/538-4361): The Jetsons meet the fabulous '50s at this retro-hip 50-room motel that's very high-tech, very European and, most importantly, a real bargain. See p. 88.
- **The Creek** (South Beach, ☎ 305/538-1951): Part Playboy's Penthouse and part Jetsons, The Creek Hotel is a kitschy, 81-room haven for hipsters who don't feel the need to spend \$400 a night for a hip hotel. Of the three types of rooms—shared, Cabana, and Waterway Standard, the latter is the way to go, with 18 signature rooms designed by local artists and designers. An 8,000-square-foot pool deck with a 40-foot fully stocked bar, outdoor BBQs, Ms. Pacman, pool tables, and theater, The Creek is somewhere you wouldn't mind being stuck with-out a paddle. See p.90.
- **Indian Creek Hotel** (Miami Beach; ☎ 800/491-2772 or 305/531-2727): A charming Key

West-style hotel that's full of character, the Indian Creek Hotel takes you back in time, with period furnishings, attitude-free service, and a quaint pool and garden, completely lacking water slides, Tiki huts, or calypso bands. See p. 92.

- **Conch Key Cottages** (Marathon; ☎ 800/330-1577 or 305/289-1377): This oceanfront hideaway offers rustic but immaculate and well-outfitted cottages that are especially popular with families. Each has a hammock, barbecue grill, and kitchen. See p. 178.
- **The Grand** (Key West; ☎ 888/947-2630): There's no better value than this little hotel that is slightly out of the way, but still within walking distance of Duval Street. All of the clean and quaint rooms have private bathrooms, air-conditioning, and private entrances starting at \$98 during season and \$78 off season. Suites are slightly more expensive but worth it if you want to save some money on food; the large two-room units come with kitchens. See p. 201.
- **Hotel Biba** (West Palm Beach; ☎ 561/832-0094): West Palm Beach's first boutique hotel proves that it's hip to be square with this single-floor, 43-room property that has been renovated and redesigned in a remarkably retro-modern

fashion. An enormous pool, Asian gardens, and requisite hipster bar make Biba a hotspot for those whose budgets aren't necessarily in the rock-star category, even if their tastes are. See p. 263.

- **Palm Beach Hotel** (Palm Beach; ☎ 561/659-7794): The best deal in town for those who want the convenience of a private apartment and don't need all the fancy extras of a full-service resort. A well-outfitted kitchenette means you don't have to rely on overpriced room service; you can always have milk, juice, and snacks on hand. A pool and sun deck, plus a coin laundry, all for less than the price of most Holiday Inns, make this a real steal. See p. 262.
- **Harborfront Inn Bed & Breakfast** (Stuart; ☎ 800/294-1703): Located riverfront and within walking distance of the restaurants and shops of downtown Stuart, this handsome, highly recommended B&B offers private rooms with their own entrances. See p. 279.
- **Island House Motel** (Fort Myers Beach; ☎ 800/951-9975): Sitting on stilts in the Old Florida fashion, but with modern furnishings, this clapboard-sided establishment enjoys a quiet location across the street from the beach and within walking distance of busy Times Square. You'll have screened porches, kitchens, ceiling fans, an open-air lounge with a small library, a small pool and sun-deck area, a guest laundry, beach chairs, and free local calls. See p. 309.
- **Tarpon Tale Inn** (Sanibel Island; ☎ 888/345-0939): The Tarpon Tale Inn tells many stories of great catches on Sanibel's north shore, but the biggest score of them all is the Inn itself, located in Sanibel's Old Town, consisting of five attached, yet completely private, bungalows hidden amidst palms, bougainvillea, hibiscus, ferns, sea grapes, gumbo limbos, and Key limes. See p. 320.
- **Cabbage Key Inn** (Cabbage Key, off Sanibel and Captiva islands; ☎ 239/283-2278): You never know who's going to get off a boat on this 100-acre islet and walk unannounced into the funky, rustic house built in 1938 by the son and daughter-in-law of mystery novelist Mary Roberts Rinehart. Singer and avid yachtie Jimmy Buffett likes Cabbage Key so much that it inspired his hit song "Cheeseburger in Paradise." The inn has six rooms and six cottages, all with original 1920s furnishings, private bathrooms, and air-conditioners. Four of the cottages have kitchens, and one room reputedly has its own ghost. See p. 327.
- **Lighthouse Inn Motel** (Naples; ☎ 239/597-3345): A relic from decades gone by, Judy and Buzz Dugan's no-frills but spotlessly clean motel sits across the street from other more expensive Gulf-side properties on Vanderbilt Beach and within walking distance of The Ritz-Carlton, Naples. The efficiencies and apartments are simple, but you can't beat the proximity to the beach. See p. 338.
- **Best Western All Suites Hotel Near USF Behind Busch Gardens** (Tampa; ☎ 800/786-7446): This all-suite hacienda-style building (each unit can accommodate up to four persons) is the most beachlike vacation venue close to Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. Great for kids, "family suites" have over-and-under bunk beds in addition to a queen-size bed for parents. The three-story complex

surrounds a lush, tropical courtyard with heated pool, hot tub, covered games area, and lively, sports-oriented Tiki bar. You won't have kitchens in your suites (they do have microwave ovens), but you can graze at a complimentary full-breakfast buffet, and the bar serves inexpensive chargrilled ribs, burgers, fish, and chicken for dinner. See p. 364.

- **Beach Haven** (St. Pete Beach; ☎ 727/367-8642): These low-slung, pink-with-white-trim structures were built in the 1950s but were gutted and completely rebuilt. Today they have bright tile floors, vertical blinds, pastel tropical furniture, and many modern amenities, including TVs, VCRs, refrigerators, and coffeemakers. There's an outdoor heated pool surrounded by a white picket fence, plus a sunning deck with lounge furniture by the beach. It's in the heart of the hotel district, so lots of restaurants are just steps away. See p. 384.
- **Island's End Resort** (St. Pete Beach; ☎ 727/360-5023): A wonderful respite from the madding crowd, and a great bargain to boot, this little all-cottage hide-away sits right on the southern tip of St. Pete Beach, smack-dab on Pass-a-Grille, where the Gulf of Mexico meets Tampa Bay. You can step from the six contemporary cottages right onto the beach. One unit even has its own private swimming pool. See p. 384.
- **Captiva Beach Resort** (Siesta Key, Sarasota; ☎ 800/349-4131 or 941/349-4131): Owners Robert and Jane Ispaso have done a terrific job updating this older motel about a half block from the beach on Siesta Key. Every one of their comfortable, sparkling-clean units has cooking facilities, and some

have separate living rooms with sleeper sofas. Units go for \$135 to \$235 single or double in winter, but fall to \$90 to \$160 off season. See p. 400.

- **Disney's All-Star Resorts** (Orlando; ☎ 407/934-7639). There are three All-Star resorts in the Disney complex, with Movie, Sports, and Music themes. The newest addition to these value resorts is the **Pop Century Resort**, which pays homage to pop culture with '50s to '90s kitsch including a giant Play Doh container and Rubik's cube. The rooms may be small, but at \$77 to \$124 a night, it's the least expensive way to take advantage of all the perks of being a Disney resort guest. Food courts serve pizza, pasta, sandwiches, and family dinner platters. There's also a full-size pool. See p. 420.
- **Monterey Inn** (St. Augustine; ☎ 904/824-4482): A great choice for the price, this family-operated, wrought-iron-trimmed motel overlooks the Matanzas Bay from a location in St. Augustine's historic district. Three generations of the Six family have kept the 1960s building and grounds clean and comfortable. A small swimming pool, pleasant staff, and free coffee each morning are just some of the extras. See p. 500.
- **Kenwood Inn** (St. Augustine; ☎ 800/824-8151 or 904/824-2116): Rooms in this Victorian wood-frame house with graceful verandas are larger and more private than most other accommodations in converted single-family homes. Everything from the carpeting to the linens to the china is first-class. There's an outdoor swimming pool, a lushly landscaped sun deck, and a secluded garden courtyard complete with a

fish pond and neat flower bed under a sprawling pecan tree. See p. 500.

- **Florida House Inn** (Amelia Island; ☎ 800/258-3301): Built by a railroad in 1857, this clapboard Victorian building is Florida's oldest operating hotel. You can rock on the gingerbread-trimmed front veranda, from which President Ulysses S. Grant once made a speech. Although modernized, most rooms still have working fireplaces, and some have claw-foot tubs. Rates include breakfast in the boardinghouse-style dining room, which still provides family-style, all-you-can-eat Southern fare. See p. 518.
- **Five Flags Inn** (Pensacola Beach; ☎ 850/932-3586): This friendly motel looks like a jail from the

road, but big picture windows look out to the swimming pool and gorgeous white-sand beach, which comes right up to the property. Although the accommodations are small, the rates are a bargain for well-furnished, Gulf-front rooms. See p. 536.

- **Gibson Inn** (Apalachicola; ☎ 850/653-2191): Built in 1907 as a seaman's hotel, this brilliant, cupola-topped example of Victorian architecture is listed on the National Register of Historic Inns. No two guest rooms are alike—some still have the original sinks in the sleeping area—but all are richly furnished with period reproductions. Grab a drink from the oak bar and relax in one of the high-back rockers on the old-fashioned veranda. See p. 565.

8 The Best Places to Stay on a Shoestring

- **Clay Hotel & International Hostel** (South Beach, Miami; ☎ 800/379-2529 or 305/534-2988): Housed in a gorgeous Mediterranean building at the corner of bustling and historic Española Way, this is South Beach's best budget find. See p. 89.
- **Key West International Hostel** (Key West; ☎ 800/51-HOSTEL): Whether you are renting a bed in one of the supercheap dorm rooms or a pricier, private motel room, if you can get a spot at this well-run hostel you have found one of the best deals in Key West. Motel rooms come with cooking facilities, a real plus in a town where overpriced tourist restaurants dominate the scene. Cheap eats are also prepared on the premises. See p. 202.
- **Sea Downs (and the Bougainvillea)** (Hollywood; ☎ 954/923-4968): On a relatively quiet but convenient stretch of Hollywood

beach, these oceanside properties offer a heated pool, barbecue grills, a picnic area, laundry facilities, a sun deck, and many units with kitchens for very reasonable rates. See p. 240.

- **Clearwater Beach International Hostel** (Clearwater Beach; ☎ 727/443-1211): In a predominantly residential neighborhood a short walk north of Clearwater Beach's busy commercial area, this official youth hostel has a swimming pool, communal kitchen, TV lounge, canoes and other toys to borrow, and bicycles to rent. See p. 385.
- **Days Inn Eastgate** (Kissimmee; ☎ 800/423-3864): Families like the picnic tables and play area on the lawn. The rooms are nicely decorated and range from \$30 to \$89. There's a restaurant (kids eat free), a sports lounge, a video-game room, coin-op washers/dryers, and a gift shop. Guest services sells tickets to the surrounding

theme parks and offers rides to and from them (free for Disney). See p. 424.

- **Pirate Haus Inn & Hostel** (St. Augustine; ☎ 904/808-1999): You won't find a more convenient base for seeing St. Augustine's sites than this youth hostel in the heart

of the historic district. It has five private units (three with their own bathrooms), equipped with either a queen or double bed plus one or two bunk beds. Two other units have dormitory-style bunk beds. See p. 499.

9 The Best Camping

Florida's state parks offer a variety of camping facilities, from primitive sites without even running water to full hookups for RVs. The sites cost between \$10 and \$20 a night, depending on the season, and all state parks accept camping reservations up to 11 months in advance.

- **Everglades National Park:**

Although the National Park Service recently instituted a \$10 fee for backcountry permits, the Everglades still has some of the most affordable and scenic campsites around. Choose from beachfront sites, rough ground sites inland, or *chickee huts*, large wooden platforms built over water. The *chickees*, which have toilets, are the most civilized and unusual. Be prepared for the bugs! See "A Glimpse of Everglades National Park" in chapter 6.

- **Boca Chita Key** (Biscayne National Park): After a thorough cleanup, Boca Chita, the former Gilligan's Island of the monied set, shines in its rustic glory, with somewhat primitive campsites accessible only by boat. Enjoy the calm and quiet with no noisy generators to drown out the gentle sound of waves lapping against the shore. See "Biscayne National Park" in chapter 6.

- **Koreshan State Historic Site** (Fort Myers; ☎ 239/992-0311): The shady sites here are near the

gardens and some of the buildings erected by the Koreshan Unity Movement, a sect that believed that humans lived *inside* the earth and established a self-sufficient settlement on these 300 acres on the narrow Estero River in 1894. Nature and canoe trails (rentals available) wind downriver to Mound Key, an islet made of the shells discarded by the Calusa Indians. See p. 300.

- **Fort DeSoto Park** (St. Pete Beach; ☎ 727/582-2267): The 230 sites in this 900-acre bird, animal, and plant sanctuary sit on an island by themselves, and all have water and electricity hook-ups. The bay-side sites are some of Florida's best, but they're sold out, especially on weekends. There's one major drawback: Unless you get lucky and arrive when there's a vacancy, you must appear *in person* and pay for your site no more than 30 days in advance. See p. 382.

- **Disney's Fort Wilderness Resort & Campground** (Orlando; ☎ 407/934-7639): This woodsy 780-acre camping resort offers real life, not animatronic, fish-filled lakes and streams. It also has a lot of facilities to keep you busy, and you're close to the Magic Kingdom. Secluded campsites offer 110/220-volt outlets, barbecue grills, picnic tables, and children's play areas. See p. 419.

- **Anastasia State Park** (St. Augustine; ☎ 904/461-2033): You'll be near 4 miles of sandy beach bordered by picturesque dunes, as well as a lagoon flanked by tidal marshes, at this urban park. Anastasia is one of Florida's most popular state facilities for camping, with its 139 wooded sites in high demand all year. They have picnic tables, grills, and electricity. Campsite reservations are required. See p. 496.
- **Fort Pickens Area, Gulf Islands National Seashore** (Pensacola; ☎ 800/365-2267): You'll be near one of Florida's finest beaches at

these 200 sites (135 with electricity) in a pine forest beside Santa Rosa Sound. Nature trails lead from the camp through Blackbird Marsh and to the beach. A small store sells provisions. You can make reservations up to 5 months in advance here. See "Pensacola" in chapter 13.

- **St. Andrews State Park** (Panama City Beach; ☎ 800/326-3521): This preserve of dazzling white sand and dunes has RV and tent sites beautifully situated in a pine forest right on the shores of Grand Lagoon. See "Panama City Beach" in chapter 13.

10 The Best Affordable Restaurants

- **Shells** (Statewide): You'll see Shells restaurants all over Florida, but don't confuse it with Red Lobster: this casual, award-winning chain consistently provides excellent value *and* fresh seafood, especially if you have a family to feed. Starting at under \$7, main courses range from the usual fried-seafood platters to pastas and chargrilled shrimp, fish, steaks, and chicken. They all have the same prices and menu, including a children's menu.
- **Grillfish** (South Beach, Miami; ☎ 305/538-9908): A limited menu of only the freshest and simplest seafood is served in a relaxed but upscale atmosphere. It's remained popular in an area where many others have failed because of its excellent food and trendy atmosphere but reasonable prices. See p. 103.
- **Latin American Cafeteria** (Miami; ☎ 305/226-2393): Hands down, this place serves the best Cuban sandwich north of

Havana. Not only cheap, it's so big, you'll have leftovers for a subsequent snack, meal, or craving. See p. 113.

- **Versailles** (Miami; ☎ 305/444-0240): This is the place where Miami's Cuban power brokers meet over *café con leche* and pastries. The homey food is plentiful and cheap, if not always gourmet quality. See p. 116.
- **El Toro Taco Family Restaurant** (Homestead, near Miami; ☎ 305/245-8182): It's worth the price in gas to schlep down to Homestead for the most fantastic, homemade Mexican food in Miami. See p. 121.
- **Tom's Place** (Boca Raton; ☎ 561/997-0920): An institution in otherwise exorbitantly priced Boca Raton, this successful barbecue joint offers expertly grilled meats paired with well-spiced sauces. See p. 253.
- **Alabama Jack's** (Key Largo; ☎ 305/248-8741) The favorite waterfront honky-tonk of locals

and travelers en route to and back from the Keys, Alabama Jack's has killer conch chowder, peel-and-eat shrimp, and other fresh seafood at bargain basement prices. Live entertainment and Harley types are added bonuses. See p. 169.

- **Banana Café** (Key West; ☎ 305/294-7227): For fabulous French food, three meals a day, Banana Café is the place to indulge without breaking the bank. Their crepes are phenomenal. See p. 203.
- **Farmers Market Restaurant** (Fort Myers; ☎ 239/334-1687): The retail Farmers Market next door may be tiny, but the best of the cabbage, okra, green beans, and tomatoes end up here at this simple eatery, frequented by everyone from business executives to truck drivers. The specialties of the house are Southern favorites like smoked ham hocks with a bowl of black-eyed peas. See p. 305.
- **The Fish House** (Fort Myers Beach; ☎ 239/765-6766): You'll find the beach's least-expensive outdoor dining at the dockside tables of this no-frills friendly pub. You'll also see charter-boat skippers slaking their thirst at a large wooden bar occupying about half the open-air but screened dining room. Go for the fried or grilled grouper and other fish the captains have just landed. Sandwiches are available all day, including a tasty grouper version. See p. 312.
- **Hungry Heron** (Sanibel Island; ☎ 239/395-2300): There's something for everyone on the huge, tabloid-size menu at Sanibel's most popular family restaurant—from hot and cold “appiteezers” and overstuffed “seawiches” to pasta and steamed shellfish. And even though this is an affluent island, main courses start at just

\$9. To keep the kids occupied, video cartoons run all the time. An all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet on Saturday and Sunday is an excellent value. See p. 322.

- **Sanibel Café** (Sanibel Island; ☎ 239/472-5323): Be sure to call for preferred seating at Sanibel's most popular breakfast spot, whose tables are museumlike glass cases containing delicate fossilized specimens from the Miocene and Pliocene epochs. Fresh-squeezed orange and grapefruit juice, Danish Havarti omelets, and home-made muffins and biscuits highlight the breakfast menu, while lunch features specialty sandwiches; shrimp, Greek, and chicken-and-grape salads made with a very light, fat-free dressing; and a limited list of main courses such as grilled or blackened chicken breast. See p. 323.
- **R. C. Otter's Island Eats** (Captiva Island; ☎ 239/395-1142): You can spend a fortune at Captiva Island's haute-cuisine restaurants, but not at this friendly, Key West-style cottage a block from the beach. Bare feet and bathing suits are welcome. The wide-ranging menu includes the island's best breakfasts, from bacon-and-eggs to house-smoked salmon. Musicians perform out in the yard every day. See p. 325.
- **Old Naples Pub** (Naples; ☎ 239/649-8200): You would never guess that the person sitting next to you at the bar here is very, very rich, so relaxed is this small, intimate pub. The fare is extraordinarily inexpensive, given the location in the center of Naples's high-end 3rd Street South shopping district. Best bets are the chicken salad with grapes and walnuts and the burgers, steaks, and fish from the grill. There's live entertainment nightly during

winter, Wednesday to Saturday nights off season. See p. 339.

- **First Watch** (Naples; ☎ 239/434-0005; and Sarasota, ☎ 941/954-1395): These little restaurants are everyone's favorite spots for breakfast, late brunch, or a midday meal in Naples and Sarasota. They are anything but diners: You get classical music and widely spaced tables topped with pitchers of lemon-tinged ice water. The identical menus lean heavily on healthy selections, but you can get your cholesterol from a sizzling skillet of fried eggs served over layers of potatoes, vegetables, and melted cheese. Lunch features large salads, sandwiches, and quesadillas. See p. 340.
- **The Dock at Crayton Cove** (Naples; ☎ 239/263-9940): Located right on the City Dock, this locals hangout is the best place in town for a supercasual open-air meal or a cool drink while watching the boats go back and forth across Naples Bay. Servers are friendly and conversational, which, depending on how you look at it, can be a good or not so good thing. The chow ranges from hearty chowders by the mug to seafood with a Floribbean fare, with Jamaican-style jerk shrimp thrown in for spice; main courses are moderately priced. See p. 339.
- **Mel's Hot Dogs** (Tampa; ☎ 813/985-8000): Just outside Busch Gardens, Tampa Bay, this red-and-white cottage offers everything from "bagel-dogs" and corndogs to a bacon/cheddar Reuben. Even the decor is dedicated to wieners: The walls and windows are lined with hot-dog memorabilia. See p. 365.
- **Carmine's Restaurant & Bar** (Tampa; ☎ 813/248-3834): Bright blue poles hold up an

ancient pressed-tin ceiling above this noisy corner cafe. It's not the cleanest joint in town, but a great variety of loyal local patrons gather here for genuine Cuban sandwiches—smoked ham, roast pork, Genoa salami, Swiss cheese, pickles, salad dressing, mustard, lettuce, and tomato on crispy Cuban bread. The combination half-sandwich and choice of black beans and rice or a bowl of Spanish soup made with sausages, potatoes, and garbanzo beans all make a hearty meal for just \$7 at lunch, \$8 at dinner.

- **Fourth Street Shrimp Store** (St. Petersburg; ☎ 727/822-0325): The outside of this place looks like it's covered with graffiti, but it's actually a gigantic drawing of people eating. Inside, murals on two walls seem to look out on an early 19th-century seaport (one painted sailor permanently peers in to see what you're eating). This is the best and certainly the most interesting bargain in St. Petersburg. See p. 377.
- **Yoder's** (Sarasota; ☎ 941/955-7771): It's worth driving about 3 miles east of downtown Sarasota to this award-winning, Amish restaurant evoking the Pennsylvania Dutch country. The simple dining room displays handcrafts, photos, and paintings celebrating the Amish way. You'll get plain, made-from-scratch meatloaf, baked and Southern fried chicken, country-smoked ham, and fried filet of flounder. Burgers, salads, soups, and sandwiches are also available. Leave room for traditional shoofly pie. See p. 402.
- **Gulf Drive Café** (Bradenton Beach; ☎ 941/778-1919): The coral and green dining room of this inexpensive gem opens to a beachside patio with tables shaded by a trellis. The breakfast fare is

led by sweet Belgian waffles, which are available all day. You can also order salads, sandwiches, and burgers anytime here, with quiche du jour, Mediterranean seafood pasta, and regular seafood platters coming on line after 4pm. See p. 406.

- **Le Cellier Steakhouse** (Epcot; ☎ 407/939-3463): Meet what is arguably one of the best menus in the theme parks' moderate class, featuring the usual cuts of beef in the \$15 to \$26 range and a good list of Canadian wine and Canadian beer. See p. 428.
- **Pebbles** (Orlando, Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/827-1111): Pebbles is one of Orlando's most popular restaurants, especially with yuppies. It offers the option of a casual meal, perhaps a cheddar burger on toasted brioche, honey-roasted spare ribs, or a Caesar salad with grilled chicken. See p. 434.

- **The Bunnery Bakery & Café** (St. Augustine; ☎ 904/829-6166): Alluring aromas waft from this bakery and cafe in the heart of St. Augustine's historic district. It's a great spot for breakfast before you start sightseeing, or for a fresh pastry and hot latte, cappuccino, or espresso any time you need a break. Lunch features soup, salads, burgers, panini, and croissants stuffed with walnut-and-pineapple chicken salad. See p. 502.
- **Biscottis** (Jacksonville; ☎ 904/387-2060): This brick-walled little neighborhood gem might have come out of New York's East Village, San Francisco's downtown, or Washington's Georgetown. A young and hip waitstaff is pleasant and well-informed. Daily specials, like pan-seared salmon or pork loin, are always fresh and beautifully presented, and huge and inventive salads are especially good. See p. 511.

11 The Best Deals for Serious Shoppers

- **Prime Outlets at Florida City** (in the Upper Keys; ☎ 305/248-4727): This outlet mall has a manageable 60 or so stores including Nike Factory Store, Bass Co. Store, Levi's, OshKosh B'Gosh, and Izod. Although it is not well publicized, any customer at the mall is welcome to pick up a valuable "Come Back Pack" from the customer service desk. The square red packet contains dozens of coupons good for significant discounts. See p. 177.
- **Half Buck Freddie's** (Key West; ☎ 305/294-2007): Here, they stock out-of-season bargains and "rejected" clothing from the main store. See p. 199.
- **Sawgrass Mills** (Sunrise, Fort Lauderdale; ☎ 800-FL-MILLS): The monster of all outlet malls has more than 300 shops, kiosks, and

restaurants in nearly 2.3 million square feet covering 50 acres. Look for discount coupon books at the information booth. They are good for substantial savings at dozens of mall stores. See p. 238.

- **Fleamasters** (Fort Myers; ☎ 239/334-7001): This is one of the largest of Florida's numerous flea markets. The weekend Fleamasters has more than 800 busy booths offering bargains on antiques, crafts, fashions, and fresh produce. It has snack bars and entertainment, too. See p. 296.
- **Orlando Outlets** (Orlando): **Belz Factory Outlet World**, 5401 W. Oak Ridge Rd. (at the north end of International Dr.; ☎ 407/354-0126), and **Orlando Premium Outlets**, 8200 Vineland Ave. (☎ 407/238-7787), are two of the better outlet malls in the area,

if not the entire state. I've driven up from Miami just to shop here. See p. 462 and p. 462 respectively.

- **Ron Jon Surf Shop** (Cocoa Beach; ☎ 321/799-8888): Hundreds of billboards will lure you to this glaring, 24-hour surf shop, where you'll find a lot more than boards, wax, and everything else you need to look like a surfer. The shelves and racks hold souvenirs of every description and a wide array of beachwear. See p. 474.

- **Silver Sands Factory Stores** (Destin; ☎ 800/510-6255 or 850/864-9771): The third largest designer outlet center in the United States sports the upscale likes of Anne Klein, Donna Karan, J. Crew, Jones New York, Brooks Brothers, Hartman Luggage, Coach leathers, and Bose electronics. There are so many you'll have to drive from one end to the other to spot your favorite brands. See p. 545.

12 The Best Bars & Nightspots Outside of Miami

- **Duval Street** (Key West): The partying-est strip this side of Bourbon Street is home to literally dozens of bars and dance spots. Explore them for yourself. See p. 188.

- **Woody's Saloon and Restaurant** (Islamorada; ☎ 305/664-4335): This raunchy bar has live bands almost every night, but it is the house band you want to see. Big Dick and the Extenders is headed by a 300-pound Native American who does a lewd, rude, and crude routine of jokes and songs guaranteed to offend everyone in the house. Despite a small cover charge, drink specials, contests, and the legendary Big Dick keep this place packed until 4am almost every night. See p. 182.

- **Clematis Street** (West Palm Beach): This newly gentrified area has some of the area's best (and only) nightlife. Just over the bridge from stodgy Palm Beach, this 5-block area, from Flagler Drive to Rosemary Avenue, has everything from late-night bookshops and wine bars to dance clubs and outdoor cafes. See p. 265.

- **O'Hara's** (Hollywood/Fort Lauderdale; ☎ 954/925-2555): Kitty Ryan owns two of South Florida's best spots for live music. On Las

Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale, there is always a crowd enjoying smoking music. The newer Hollywood spot is swinging every night with live jazz and blues and good food, too. See p. 245.

- **Las Olas Boulevard** (Fort Lauderdale): This wide, scenic street, dotted with good clubs and late-night shopping, is especially popular with a more mature local crowd and European visitors. See p. 238.

- **The Leopard Lounge in the Chesterfield Hotel** (Palm Beach; ☎ 561/659-5800): This is a popular hangout, especially for older locals who come for live music, a great happy hour, and no cover charge. A generous spread of hot and cold appetizers, plus two-for-one drink specials, keep the blue-blazer crowd happy every evening starting at 5pm. See p. 266.

- **E. R. Bradley's** (Palm Beach; ☎ 561/833-3520): This big, old bar attracts a fun, loud crowd of young professionals and serious older drinkers. Come for the generous happy-hour buffets. See p. 265.

- **The Dock at Crayton Cove** (Naples; ☎ 239/263-9940): Right on the City Dock, this lively pub is a perfect place for an open-air

meal or a libation while watching the action on Naples Bay. It's the best place in town to meet the locals; in fact, you're almost guaranteed to get into a conversation at the friendly bar. See p. 339.

- **Downtown Disney West Side** (Lake Buena Vista; ☎ 407/824-4321): The happening hotspots here include Bongo's Cuban Café, House of Blues, and Planet Hollywood as part of a district that also includes shops and restaurants. See p. 464.
- **CityWalk** (Orlando; ☎ 407/363-8000): Universal Orlando's nighttime entertainment district showcases several popular clubs, from the more laid-back pace of CityJazz, Motown Café, and Bob Marley—A Tribute to Freedom to the giddy-up and go of the Latin Quarter, the groove, Pat O'Brien's, and a Hard Rock Live concert venue. See p. 464.
- **Ocean Deck Restaurant & Beach Club** (Daytona Beach; ☎ 386/253-5224): Generations of spring breakers, bikers, and other beachgoers know the Ocean Deck as Daytona's best "beach pub." Opening to the sand and surf, the sweaty, noisy downstairs bar is always packed, especially when the reggae bands crank up after 9:30pm nightly. The upstairs dining room can be noisy, too, but both you and the kids can come

here for some very good chow, reasonable prices, and great views out the big window walls facing the ocean. See p. 487.

- **Seville Quarter** (Pensacola; ☎ 850/434-6211): In Pensacola's Seville Historic District, this restored antique brick complex with New Orleans-style wrought-iron balconies contains pubs and restaurants whose names capture the ambience: Rosie O'Grady's Goodtime Emporium; Lili Marlene's Aviator's Pub; Apple Annie's Courtyard; End o' the Alley Bar; Phineas Phogg's Balloon Works (a dance hall, not a balloon shop); and Fast Eddie's Billiard Parlor (which has electronic games for kids, too). Live entertainment ranges from Dixieland jazz to country and western. See p. 538.
- **Flora-Bama Lounge** (Perdido Key, near Pensacola; ☎ 850/492-0611): Billing itself as the last great roadhouse, this slapped-together Gulf-side pub is almost a shrine to country music, with jam sessions from noon until way past midnight on Saturday and Sunday. Flora-Bama is the prime sponsor and a key venue for the Frank Brown International Songwriters' Festival during the first week of November. Take in the great Gulf views from the Deck Bar. See p. 539.