



THE HEART OF FLORIDA'S EMERALD COAST Destin – Fort Walton Beach – Okaloosa Island Fact Sheet

www.emeraldcoastfl.com

Located in Northwest Florida, Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island collectively make up one of America's most favored coastal destinations. Collectively known as the Heart of Florida's Emerald Coast, the area offers some of the world's finest beaches and beach experiences along with legendary fishing and boating, fresh Gulf-to-Table seafood, abundant watersport activities, championship golf, lively nightlife and numerous attractions for all to enjoy.

COMMUNITIES

Destin

Known as "The World's Luckiest Fishing Village," the city of Destin has a rich historical heritage. The city's namesake 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 1984, the City of Destin was born, chartered as a municipality under the laws of the state of Florida. Today, Destin is home to the nation's largest private fishing charter fleet and a wide variety of restaurants, attractions, specialty shops, golf, snorkeling, scuba diving, dolphin cruises and sunset excursions.

Fort Walton Beach/Okaloosa Island

Set against the emerald-green waters and white-sand beaches of the Emerald Coast, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island invite visitors to slow down and enjoy the moment. Downtown Fort Walton Beach is a quaint seaside area with shops and museums chock-full of unique finds and local history. Minutes away from the beaches of Okaloosa Island, this community is home to an antique district, a number of owner-operated boutique-style stores, restaurants (many of which are Gulf-to-Table) and bars. Brew masters – of both coffee and beer – exist here and are local favorites.

The Destin William T. Marler Bridge connects to the eastern end of Okaloosa Island while the Brooks Bridge connects Fort Walton Beach to the island from the west. Okaloosa Island is located just on the other side of the Intracoastal canal. Visitors and residents alike can enjoy both memorable days on the beach as well as some of the areas most celebrated attractions including [The Boardwalk](#), the [Okaloosa Island Fishing Pier](#) and the [Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park](#). Picturesque sand dunes, birding hot spots and the awe-inspiring Gulf Islands National Seashore also call the island home.

HISTORY OF THE EMERALD COAST'S BEACHES

Sugar White Sand & Emerald Green Waters

While Florida is well-known for its beautiful beaches, the sugar-white sand and vibrant emerald-green water in the Emerald Coast are arguably some of the most beautiful in the world. Miles of soft, sugar white sand make up the Heart of the Emerald Coast, providing unique access to wade in the Gulf of Mexico.

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.

This 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.

FUN FACTS

Overview & Accolades

Southern Living Magazine named Destin's beach the third best in the South for 2018's "South's Best" awards.

Home to America's fastest growing airport: Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS).

The sand in Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island really is sugar white – as it contains finely ground quartz crystal.

The 100-Fathom Curve draws closer to Destin than any other spot in Florida, providing the speediest deep-water access on the Gulf of Mexico.

Cultural Heritage

Destin is known as "The World's Luckiest Fishing Village".

Destin Harbor boasts the nation's largest and most elaborately equipped charter fishing fleet.

Emerald Coast restaurants serve fresh, Gulf-to-Table seafood year-round. Many nationally acclaimed chefs and restaurants are located in the region.

Eglin Air Force Base's free [Air Force Armament Museum](#) houses military aircraft 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.

The Emerald Coast features educational activities and historic sites: [Destin History & Fishing Museum](#), [Indian Temple Mound Museum](#) and [Emerald Coast Science Center](#).

Activities & Attractions

Okaloosa County is home to eight championship golf courses.

In addition to great fishing, the Emerald Coast also offers breathtaking diving.

Various snorkel reef clusters can be discovered off the county's shores.

The Emerald Coast offers numerous cruises, sailing charters, water tours and boating excursions, perfect for exploring and embarking on water adventures.

Eco-Tourism / Nature & Parks

Nearly 60 percent of the beach is preserved in perpetuity.

During sea turtle nesting season, [The Emerald Coast CVB](#) offers Nighttime Educational Beach Walks.

Twelve birding hot spots in the area show visitors shorebirds, seabirds, songbirds, raptors and more.

The Emerald Coast is known for spectacular sunrises and sunsets and both can be enjoyed rising and falling over the Gulf of Mexico.

EVENTS

More than 300 festivals and events take place each year. Below is a sampling of what to expect each season.

Spring

- Lionfish Festival and Restaurant Week
- Emerald Coast Volleyball Week
- Kitty Hawk Kites "Fly Into Spring" Festival
- Blessing of the Fleet
- Destin Cobia Tournament

Summer

- Smoke on the Coast
- Rock the Docks Destin Harbor Free Concerts
- Emerald Coast Boat Week/Poker Run

Fall

- Destin Seafood Festival
- Destin Fishing Rodeo
- Mattie Kelly Arts Festival
- Emerald Coast Classic

Winter

- Holiday on the Harbor/Christmas Boat Parade
- Noon Year's Eve at LuLu's
- Pelican Plunge
- Harborwalk Chili Cookoff

GULF-TO-TABLE

For decades, Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island has been home to North America's largest charter fishing fleet. At any given time, there are more than 20 kinds of edible fish to be caught. The charter fleet, comprised of more than 140 vessels, brings in thousands of pounds of fish daily. The abundance of catch has inspired the chefs behind the area's unique Gulf-to-Table cuisine.

Fried, grilled, blackened or steamed, nothing beats the taste of fresh fish caught off the Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa Island coast. There isn't just one catch of the day, there are several. On any given day, you can have your choice of fleet-fresh sea trout, grouper, swordfish, red snapper, flounder, wahoo, scamp, triggerfish and cobia. And, of course, shrimp, oysters, and crab are readily available also.

ACCESSIBILITY

By Car

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

By Air

The Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) is serviced by Allegiant, Delta, United and American Airlines. Direct flights are available from a number of cities. Flight Service Overview:

American Airlines – Non-Stop

- Dallas, TX
- Charlotte, NC
- Washington, DC

Delta Airlines – Non-Stop

- Atlanta, GA

United – Non-Stop

- Houston, TX

Allegiant – Non-Stop

- Austin, TX
- Belleville, IL/St. Louis, MO
- Cincinnati, OH
- Cleveland, OH
- Columbus (Rickenbacker), OH
- Concord, NC
- Des Moines, IA* beginning May 16 (seasonal)
- Evansville, IN
- Huntington, WV * beginning June 6 (seasonal)
- Indianapolis, IN
- Kansas City, MO
- Nashville, TN
- Knoxville, TN
- Lexington, KY
- Little Rock, AR* beginning May 17 (seasonal)
- Louisville, KY
- Memphis, TN
- New York City/Newark, NJ
- Oklahoma City, OK
- Peoria, IL
- Pittsburg, PA
- Raleigh/Durham, NC
- Rockford, IL* beginning June 5 (seasonal)
- Shreveport, LA* beginning May 17 (seasonal)
- Springfield/Branson, MO
- Toledo, OH* beginning June 7 (seasonal)
- Washington, DC/Baltimore, MD
- Wichita, KS* beginning June 5 (seasonal)

Silver Airways

- Orlando, FL* beginning May 17

OFFICIAL TOURISM BUREAU

Emerald Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau

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