Where to Go in Panama City Beach: Top Attractions Worth Visiting

Panama City Beach, Florida, is a popular Gulf Coast destination known for its sugar-white sand, emerald-green waters, outdoor adventures, and family-friendly attractions. Whether you're planning a relaxing beach vacation, a fun-filled family trip, or a weekend exploring nature, this coastal community offers plenty of places worth adding to your itinerary. Beyond its beautiful shoreline, visitors can discover scenic state parks, waterfront shopping areas, wildlife experiences, and entertaining attractions for all ages.

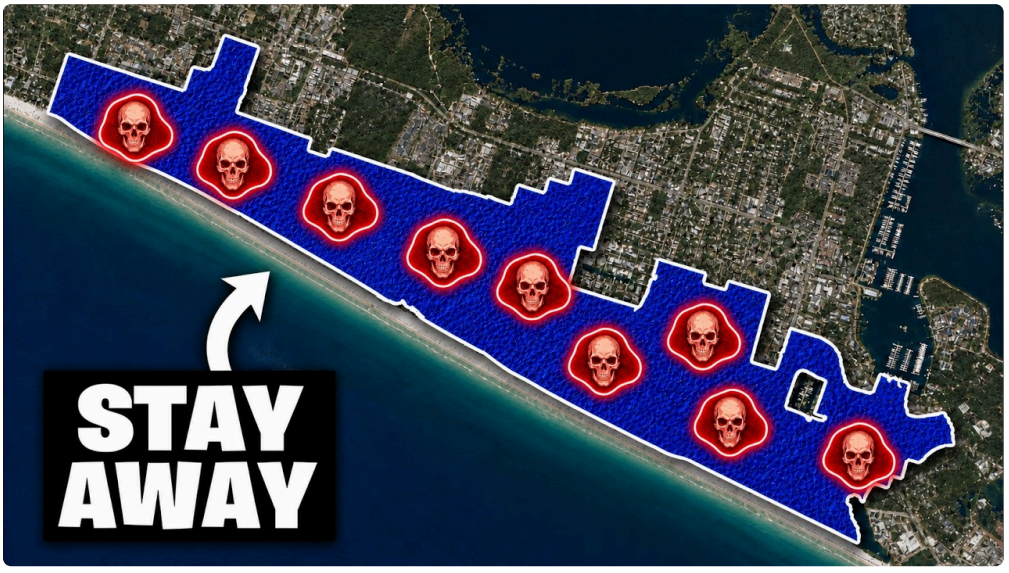
If you're wondering where to go in Panama City Beach, the following destinations offer a useful starting point for discovering the area's coastal scenery, recreation, and local character.

1. Panama City Beach

The beach itself is one of the area's biggest attractions. Its soft, white sand and colorful Gulf waters make it an inviting place to swim, sunbathe, build sandcastles, take photographs, or simply enjoy the coastal atmosphere.

Visitors can choose from numerous public beach access points, making it possible to find a spot for a few hours of relaxation or a full day by the water. Early mornings are ideal for a peaceful walk along the shoreline, while late afternoons offer beautiful light for sunset photography.

Swimming conditions can change, so check local beach warning flags before entering the water.



2. St. Andrews State Park

Nature lovers should make time for St. Andrews State Park, a coastal destination offering beaches, nature trails, fishing opportunities, and excellent scenery. Located on the eastern side of Panama City Beach, the park provides a quieter alternative to some of the busier beachfront areas.

Visitors can enjoy swimming in designated areas, snorkeling near the jetties when conditions permit, birdwatching, or exploring the natural landscape. The park is also a departure point for trips to nearby Shell Island, making it a convenient stop for travelers who want to combine beach time with outdoor adventure.

3. Shell Island

For a more natural coastal experience, Shell Island is worth considering. This undeveloped barrier island is known for its white sandy beaches, clear water, and relatively untouched scenery. It offers a different atmosphere from the developed resort areas of Panama City Beach.

Depending on weather and water conditions, visitors can spend time beachcombing, swimming in suitable areas, taking photographs, or enjoying a boat excursion. Access typically involves a shuttle, ferry, or private watercraft, so planning transportation ahead of time is important.

Because the island has limited facilities, bring drinking water, sun protection, and any supplies you may need. Remember to take your rubbish with you and respect the island's wildlife and natural environment.

4. Pier Park

Pier Park is a lively shopping and entertainment destination that offers a change of pace from the beach. The outdoor complex features retail stores, restaurants, entertainment venues, and places to relax between activities.

It's a practical choice for groups with different interests. Some visitors can browse the shops while others enjoy a meal or explore nearby attractions. The area is also close to Russell-Fields Pier, allowing travelers to combine shopping with coastal sightseeing.

Consider visiting later in the afternoon and staying into the evening to enjoy the area's dining and entertainment options.

5. Russell-Fields Pier

Russell-Fields Pier is a popular landmark for visitors who want expansive views of the Gulf. Extending over the water near Pier Park, it provides a scenic place to stroll, watch the waves, take photographs, or try fishing where permitted.

The pier is particularly appealing to travelers who enjoy coastal scenery without committing to a full day of organized activities. Anglers may appreciate the opportunity to fish from the structure, while other visitors can simply enjoy the views and observe the shoreline from a different perspective.

Its proximity to restaurants and shopping also makes it easy to incorporate into a broader sightseeing itinerary. Check current access fees and fishing requirements before visiting.

6. Camp Helen State Park

Camp Helen State Park is an excellent destination for travelers who appreciate peaceful scenery, coastal ecosystems, and outdoor exploration. Situated near the western end of Panama City Beach, the park lies between the Gulf shoreline and Lake Powell, a coastal dune lake that contributes to the area's distinctive natural landscape.

Visitors can enjoy short nature walks, observe wildlife, photograph the surrounding scenery, and spend time away from the busier commercial areas. Its combination of coastal habitats and historical interest makes it appealing to travelers looking for something beyond conventional beach activities.

Bring comfortable walking shoes, drinking water, and sun protection. Before your visit, check park access and any restrictions that may affect swimming or other activities.

Panama City Beach apartments with resort-style amenities

7. Panama City Beach Conservation Park

For a quieter outdoor excursion, Panama City Beach Conservation Park offers an extensive network of walking, hiking, and biking trails through wetlands, pine forests, and other natural habitats. The park covers approximately 2,900 acres, providing plenty of space for visitors to appreciate the area's ecological diversity.

Boardwalk sections allow visitors to explore wetland environments, while the broader trail network accommodates different activity levels and interests. Birdwatchers, nature photographers, and travelers seeking a break from the crowded beachfront will find this destination particularly appealing.

Plan your route before setting out, wear suitable footwear, and bring water. Wildlife sightings are never guaranteed, but taking time to observe the natural surroundings can be a rewarding part of your visit.

8. WonderWorks Panama City Beach

WonderWorks is a distinctive indoor attraction recognizable by its unusual upside-down building. Inside, visitors can explore interactive exhibits that combine science, technology, physical challenges, and entertainment.

The attraction is a good option for families with children, curious travelers, and anyone looking for an activity away from the sun. Interactive displays provide opportunities to experiment, learn, and participate rather than simply observe exhibits.

WonderWorks can also be a useful addition to a rainy-day itinerary. Check the current admission options and any height or participation restrictions for individual activities before planning your visit.

9. Shipwreck Island Waterpark

Shipwreck Island Waterpark is a popular option for visitors seeking a full day of water-based entertainment. The tropical-themed park features water slides, a lazy river, a wave pool, and attractions designed for different ages and comfort levels.

Families can spend the day moving between rides and relaxing areas, while thrill-seekers can look for slides that provide a more adventurous experience. Younger visitors also have options suited to their needs, although age and height restrictions may apply.

Since this is a seasonal outdoor attraction, confirm the operating calendar before your trip. Bringing appropriate swimwear, sunscreen, and a change of clothes can help make the day more comfortable.

10. Coconut Creek Family Fun Park

Coconut Creek Family Fun Park is a worthwhile stop for visitors who enjoy lighthearted competition and outdoor activities. The attraction is known for its tropical-themed miniature golf courses and large maze, providing entertainment for families, couples, and groups of friends.

Miniature golf offers a relaxed way to spend time together, while the maze adds an extra challenge for those who enjoy solving puzzles and navigating unfamiliar routes. The activities are easy to incorporate into a sightseeing day without requiring extensive planning.

Consider visiting during a cooler part of the day, particularly in summer, and check current operating hours before arriving.

11. M.B. Miller County Pier

M.B. Miller County Pier is another attractive destination for coastal views and fishing. Extending into the Gulf, it provides a vantage point for watching the surf, observing fishing activity, and appreciating the scale of Panama City Beach's shoreline.

The pier can be a relaxing stop for photographers and visitors who prefer scenic experiences over busy amusement attractions. Fishing enthusiasts can also explore the available fishing opportunities, subject to current access rules and regulations.

For a particularly memorable visit, consider arriving in the late afternoon when the changing light creates excellent photography opportunities. Check admission arrangements, pier facilities, and fishing requirements before you go.

12. Frank Brown Park

Frank Brown Park offers a different perspective on the area's recreational attractions. Rather than focusing on the shoreline, this large community park provides sports facilities, walking trails, playgrounds, picnic areas, and aquatic amenities.

It's a practical destination for families who want room for children to play, travelers looking for outdoor exercise, and visitors interested in local recreational facilities. Depending on the schedule, the park may also host sports tournaments and community events.

If you're traveling with a group, check whether any scheduled activities or facilities match your interests. Specific amenities and programs may have separate operating hours or fees.

13. ZooWorld Zoological Park

ZooWorld Zoological Park provides an animal-focused outing for families and wildlife enthusiasts. The attraction features a range of animals and opportunities to learn about different species in a setting that offers an alternative to beach and water activities.

Visitors can explore the exhibits at their own pace, observe animals, and learn about their characteristics and habitats. Depending on availability, additional animal encounters may also be offered.

This destination can work particularly well for families seeking variety in their vacation schedule. Review the park's current animal encounter policies, admission details, and opening hours before visiting.

14. Ripley's Believe It or Not!

Ripley's Believe It or Not! offers an unusual indoor experience filled with curious objects, optical illusions, interactive displays, and exhibits about extraordinary people and phenomena.

The attraction appeals to visitors who enjoy the unexpected and want something different from traditional sightseeing. Its indoor setting also makes it a convenient alternative during periods of rain or intense heat.

Allow enough time to explore the displays rather than rushing through them. If you're visiting with children or a group of friends, the unusual exhibits can provide plenty of conversation starters and entertaining photo opportunities. Check current admission options and opening times before your visit.

15. Sea Screamer

A dolphin-watching cruise is another experience worth considering during a Panama City Beach vacation. Sea Screamer offers sightseeing excursions that allow passengers to enjoy the coastal landscape from the water, with opportunities to spot dolphins in their natural environment.

Beyond wildlife watching, a boat excursion offers a different perspective of the shoreline and surrounding waterways. It's a suitable choice for visitors who want to add a guided experience to their beach itinerary without committing to a full-day tour.

Dolphin sightings depend on natural conditions, so they cannot be guaranteed. Check departure times, weather conditions, trip duration, and booking requirements before making plans.

Tips for Planning Your Panama City Beach Visit

A little preparation can help you make the most of your time in Panama City Beach. Consider these practical suggestions when deciding which attractions to visit.

- **Choose attractions by interest.** Beachgoers may prefer the shoreline, Shell Island, and St. Andrews State Park, while families may enjoy WonderWorks, Shipwreck Island Waterpark, or Coconut Creek Family Fun Park.
- **Group nearby destinations together.** Pier Park and Russell-Fields Pier are close to each other, making them convenient to combine into one outing.
- **Check seasonal schedules.** Outdoor attractions, waterparks, boat excursions, and special events may operate on different schedules throughout the year.
- **Prepare for the weather.** Florida sunshine can be intense, so pack sunscreen, water, comfortable footwear, and weather-appropriate clothing.
- **Check beach safety conditions.** Follow posted signs and local beach warning flags, and avoid entering the water when conditions are unsafe.
- **Allow time for relaxation.** You don't need to visit every attraction in one trip. Leaving room for an unplanned beach walk or a leisurely meal can make your vacation more enjoyable.

For additional planning information, consult the Visit Panama City Beach attractions guide and the City of Panama City Beach visitor information page.

Final Thoughts

Panama City Beach offers far more than a beautiful stretch of sand. From the natural landscapes of St. Andrews State Park and Camp Helen State Park to the shopping and entertainment at Pier Park, the area provides a variety of experiences for different interests and travel styles.

Visitors can spend their mornings exploring nature, their afternoons enjoying family attractions, and their evenings watching the sun set over the Gulf. Whether you're visiting for a short getaway or a longer vacation, choosing a mix of outdoor destinations, entertainment venues, and scenic coastal spots can help you experience the best of Panama City Beach.

The most rewarding itinerary is one that matches your interests and leaves enough time to enjoy the destination at your own pace. With its blend of coastal beauty, outdoor recreation, and family-friendly attractions, Panama City Beach is a destination with plenty of places worth discovering.