

# EDIBLE ESCAPES

From pizza in Lantana to frog legs  
in Everglades City, five Florida  
getaways worth the drive ▶▶

Take an old-fashioned carriage  
ride down historic Centre Street  
in Amelia Island for a look at the  
Victorian-era architecture and  
seaside charm.

## AMELIA ISLAND

**WHY GO:** A true resort town, this skinny barrier island has 13 continuous miles of gorgeous beaches framed by dunes and a charming historic district complete with a Victorian main street. Two state parks offer quiet beaches, plentiful wildlife and excursions from horseback riding to kayaking to fishing.

**THE BASICS:** Accommodations on the island range from historic inns and bed-and-breakfasts to luxurious resorts, including the AAA four-diamond **Omni Amelia Island Plantation**, which recently underwent an \$85 million renovation. It's ideal for a family getaway—every room has an oceanfront view; there are two pools with a splash park and Camp Amelia, for kids ages 4 to 12, offers daylong activities just for little ones. The resort's nature center offers a series of tours and events for all ages with activities like old-fashioned crabbing, sea turtle discovery (seasonally), moonlight kayaking, Segway tours through marsh boardwalks and paddleboarding. Rates start at \$209 off-season; 39 Beach Lagoon, Amelia Island; (904) 261-6161; omnihotels.com/FindAHotel/AmeliaIsland.

Amelia Island's historic city, **Fernandina Beach**, holds claim to the oldest existing lighthouse, the oldest continually operating drinking establishment and the oldest hotel in the state of Florida. They're proud of their history here—Fernandina's downtown is home to more than 400 historic structures on the National Register of Historic Places, including beautifully kept Victorian homes.

**RECOMMENDED EATS:** If you're staying at the Omni, its six restaurants and lounges offer a range of dining options, from locally caught seafood at Verandah restaurant to charcuterie and small plates at Seaglass lounge.

Amelia Island is the birthplace of the modern shrimping industry, and shrimping boats still line the docks. In truth, it's gotten more difficult to find locally caught shrimp on menus here, but there are still spots that offer it. Our favorite is **Tomoti's Seafood Shak**, a laid-back restaurant that actively

supports local farmers, fishermen and breweries. Try the fried shrimp basket, the fresh catch tacos or a fried oyster po'boy. 21 N. 3rd St., Fernandina Beach; (904) 310-6550; timotisfryshak.com.

For something a bit more upscale, **29 South** is a favorite of both locals and visitors, featuring classic cuisine with a Southern twist. The chef partners with local farms and maintains his own organic vegetable and herb garden for the menu, which includes dishes like sweet-tea-brined pork chops, a barbecue Cobb salad and a fig terrine made with local cheese and honey. 29 S. 3rd St., Fernandina Beach; (904) 277-7919; 29southrestaurant.com.

**ETC.:** The weekly **Amelia Island Farmers Market**, held at the Shops of Omni Amelia Island Plantation, has a selection of produce from nearby farms, handmade items like baked goods and preserves, cheeses and local honey; ameliafarmersmarket.com.

Even if you've never cast a line, Lawrence Piper of **The Angler's Mark** will make you feel like an expert in no time. Half- and full-day excursions in the salt marshes and creeks around the island provide a distinctive way to see the wildlife and scenery; (904) 557-1027; theanglersmark.com.

**FUN FACT:** Amelia Island provided the mystical setting for the filming of the 1988 movie *Pippi Longstocking*.

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## TEN THOUSAND ISLANDS, SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

**WHY GO:** Many Floridians have never heard of, let alone visited, Ten Thousand Islands. Hugging the Everglades at the bottom of the state's southwest coast, the area is the largest mangrove forest in North America—an astounding 35,000 acres—and home to more than 400 species of fish and about 200 species of birds. It's not the sort of place visitors go without a guide, as it's easy to get lost in the tangle of islands and mangrove islets with narrow passages, shoals and hidden oyster bars. But it's a paradise for fishing, a rich feeding ground



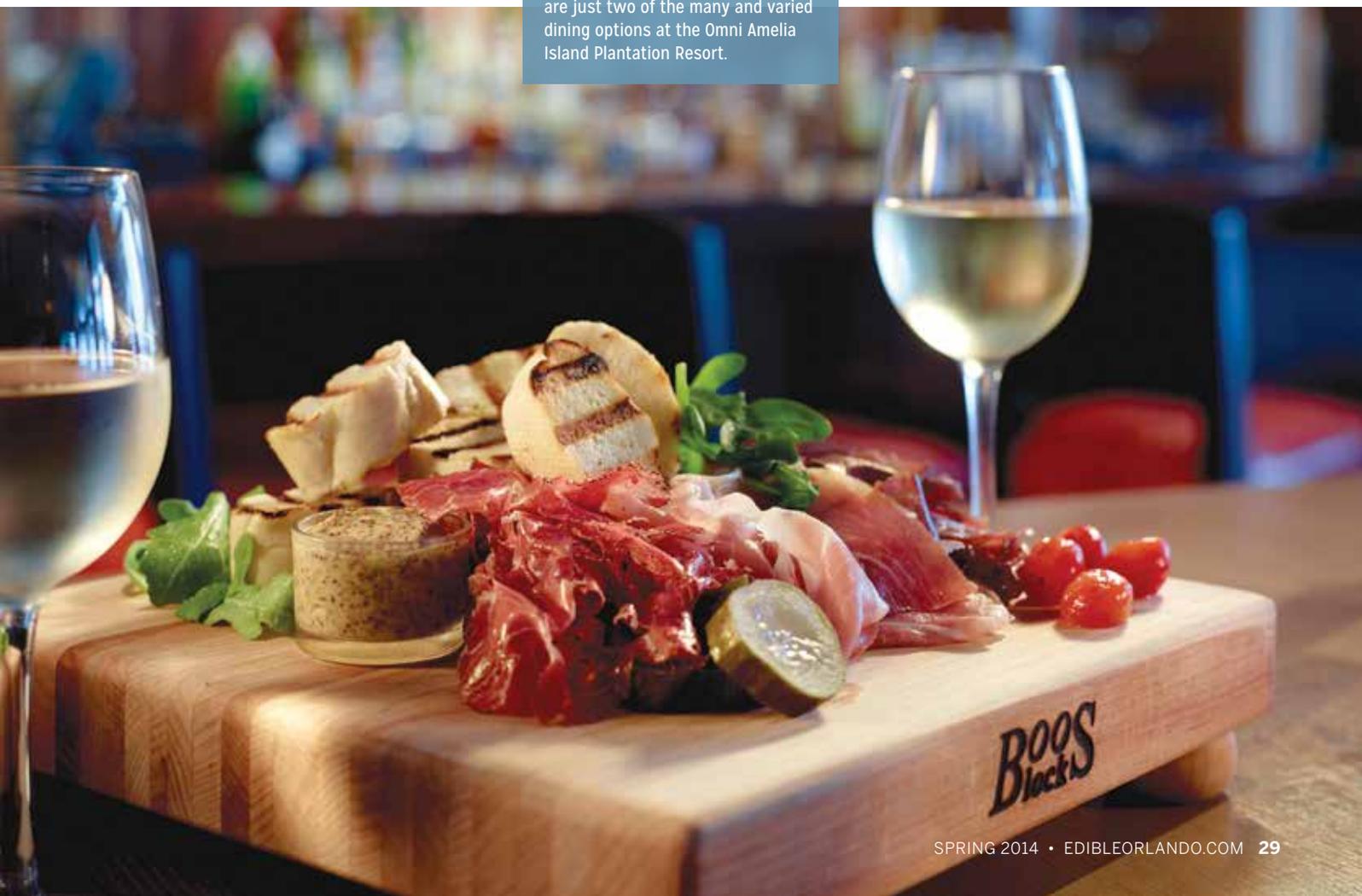
for bass, tarpon, snook, redfish, trout, permit, cobia, shark, grouper, snapper, pompano, sheepshead, triple tail, mackerel and kingfish. The sheer abundance of life is remarkable—visitors often see dolphins, turtles, manatees and alligators.

**THE BASICS:** This is a true wilderness getaway, but not without its comforts. Hotels and restaurants are few and far between, but the historic **Rod & Gun Club** in nearby Everglades City offers five tidy cabins adjacent to the main building. Built in the late 1800s, it was a retreat for anglers and birders along the Barron River. Over the years, Presidents Roosevelt; Truman; Hoover; Eisenhower; Nixon and Bush, Sr., all visited. So did celebrities from Ernest Hemingway to John Wayne and Mick Jagger—seeking beauty and privacy in this last, lonely frontier on the western edge of the Everglades. Today the Bowen family runs the three-story, white clapboard lodge, the only original structure to survive a 1969 fire. Step through the worn back door into another era, lobby walls paneled in dark pecky cypress, decorated with trophy catches of game fish and wildlife, a smoothly worn marble registration desk. Antique mariner maps, rifles and framed newspaper clippings dating back 100 years are reminders of the club's epic history. Rates start at \$95; 200 Riverside Dr., Everglades City; evergladesrodandgun.com; (239) 695-2101.

For a day or two out in Ten Thousand Islands, Capt. Charles Wright at **Everglades Area Tours** knows the islands well and can offer anything from an environmental tour to sport fishing; (239) 695-3633; evergladesareatours.com.



Fried whole fish at the casual Oceanside restaurant and assorted charcuterie at the Seaglass lounge are just two of the many and varied dining options at the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort.



**RECOMMENDED EATS:** It's all about the seafood in this part of Florida. The kitchen at the **Rod & Gun Club**, with its lovely screened dining porch overlooking the Barron River, will cook your catch, and the limited menu often features local fish and seafood. (It's not haute cuisine, so stick with what's in season, simply cooked.) For Cuban flair and fresh seafood, the locals recommend **Havana Café** on Chokoloskee Island—but they close May through September; 191 Smallwood Dr., Chokoloskee; (239) 695-2214; myhavanacafe.com. Another favorite of the locals is **Camellia Street Grill**, right on the Barron River in Everglades City. The menu runs the gamut from gator tail and frog legs to the freshest catch; 202 Camellia St., Everglades City; (239) 695-2003.

**ETC.:** **Everglades National Park** is close by, home to gators and crocodiles (the only place in the world where they co-exist), manatees, dolphins and the elusive Florida panther—take a boat or tram tour with a naturalist; rent a bike, kayak or canoe or just wander out on the meandering boardwalks (take mosquito spray) in the largest subtropical wilderness in the U.S.; npca.org/everglades. Another treat is **Clyde Butcher's Big Cypress Gallery**, showcasing the work of famed Everglades artist/photographer Clyde Butcher on 13 acres smack in the middle of the Everglades; 52388 Tamiami Tr., Ochopee; (239) 695-2428; clydebutchersbigcypressgallery.com.

**FUN FACT:** The Calusa Indians were the first inhabitants, and their shell mounds and bits of pottery shards are still visible along the islands. During the 18th century the area was a hideout for pirates, and stories of the area's notorious history as a smuggler's haven are legendary.

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## PALM BEACH

**WHY GO:** No matter where you hang your hat, it's hard not to feel fancy when you're in Palm Beach. Wealthy folks have flocked to this monument to the Gilded Age since before the city was incorporated in 1911, but its pastel-hued buildings and beautiful beaches are decidedly Florida, and the

menus at several upscale and casual restaurants follow suit. Visit in May when the high season is over (and before school is out) and your passport to the privileged class won't break the bank.

**THE BASICS:** For some, walking into a big and bustling marble hotel lobby signals the start of a splashy vacation. **The Brazilian Court Hotel**, which was built in 1926 and completed a six-year renovation in 2008, offers a quieter kind of chic. This classic Spanish-style building boasts 80 guest rooms connected by warm, warren-like hallways and interspersed with lush courtyards, libraries and places to enjoy a cup of tea or a game of chess. Even at capacity, it's possible to feel wonderfully secluded. Rates start at \$269 off-season; 301 Australian Ave., Palm Beach; (561) 655-7740; thebraziliancourt.com.

**RECOMMENDED EATS:** Enjoy world-class cuisine at **The Brazilian Court Hotel at Café Boulud**. The menu is similar in feel to that of its sister restaurant in Manhattan, but with local twists such as Florida seafood and produce from nearby Swank Farms. With three courses for \$25 during lunch on weekdays, it can be an affordable luxury; cafeboulud.com/palmbeach. Those up for a walk can stroll the two blocks to **Buccan**, an airy, open space with both small and large plates full of fresh, local ingredients and a thoughtful cocktail and wine list; 350 South County Rd., Palm Beach; (561) 833-3450; buccanpalmbeach.com. Take the car but leave your platinum card at home for the short drive to Lantana—it's cash only (and dinner only) at laid-back **Pizzeria Oceano**, and it's cash you'll part with happily. Check the website for each evening's menu, which typically includes a soup, a salad, a pizza or two (no substitutions) and an additional entrée. Look for local produce, sausage and seafood; 201 East Ocean Ave., Lantana; pizzeriaoceano.com.

**ETC.:** If you don't score an invitation to Donald Trump's house during your stay, you can take a peek at Henry Flagler's. The 75-room estate that is now **The Flagler Museum** served as the winter home for Flagler and his wife from 1902 to 1913, effectively establishing the area's winter

season; One Whitehall Way, Palm Beach; (561) 655-2833; flaglermuseum.us.

**FUN FACT:** The chubby lizards scurrying between the bougainvillea and along the sidewalks may look like they own the place, but they are actually a non-native species that was introduced deliberately to Palm Beach in 1940. Expect to see the Bahamian curly-tailed lizards everywhere you go, except, thank goodness, on the menu.

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## CHEECA LODGE & SPA, ISLAMORADA

**WHY GO:** Amid all the kitsch that is the Florida Keys, this family-friendly escape is easy, low-key luxury at Mile Marker 82 in the Upper Keys. Turn down the long driveway and you're worlds away at the rambling resort with a history that stretches over half a century, starting in 1946 when it opened as the Olney Inn with 22 quaint bungalows. (The very first guest was President Harry Truman.)

**RECOMMENDED EATS:** The three restaurants on site mean you don't even have to leave Cheeca Lodge for great dining options. Choose among Atlantic's Edge for seafood and steaks; Limoncello for Italian; and sophisticated Nikai Sushi, one of the best restaurants in the Keys (splurge with the omakase menu). If you're lucky enough to catch a fish, the Atlantic Edge chef will cook it for dinner. Not far from Cheeca: **Chef Michael's** (81761 Overseas Highway, Islamorada; foodtotalkabout.com), open for dinner and Sunday brunch with fresh fish nightly; and **M.E.A.T. Eatery and Tap Room** (88005 Overseas Hwy., Islamorada; meateatery.com), with organic and sustainably farmed wines, microbrewed sodas and craft beers served with everything from burgers to lobster mac 'n' cheese. The owners grind and case their own sausages; smoke their pork and make the bacon, ice cream, pâtés and other goodies.

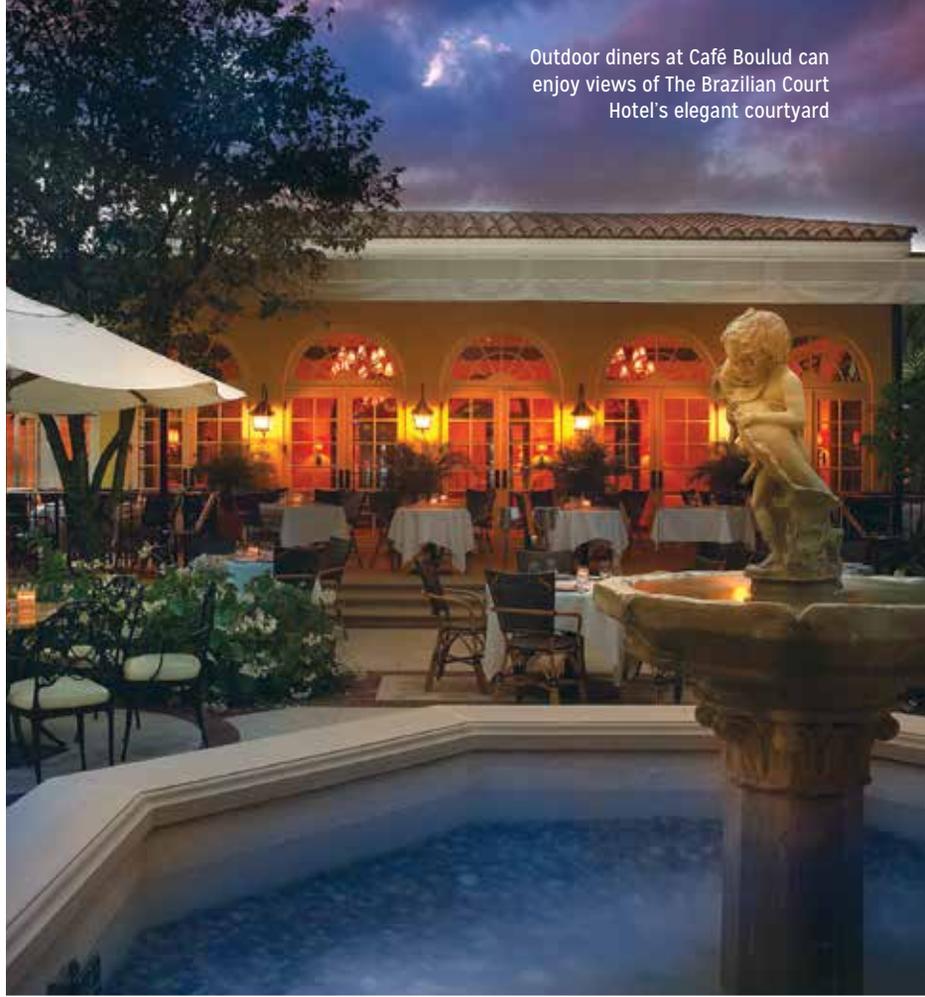
**ETC.:** For mindless fun, head to **Robbie's of Islamorada**. Everyone loves the dock where 50 to 100 tarpon swarm in the waters below. Watch 'em for a buck, feed 'em for \$3.30. Beware, they bite. Robbie's can take



Café Boulud's peekytoe crab salad



House-cured Scottish salmon with beets, fennel and poppy seeds at Café Boulud



Outdoor diners at Café Boulud can enjoy views of The Brazilian Court Hotel's elegant courtyard



Nikai Sushi at Cheeca Lodge, one of the best restaurants in the Florida Keys.

you out to a real deserted island, Lignumvitae State Park, for guided walking tours on weekends with a peek at the abandoned 1919 Matheson House. (Take bug spray to defend against the fierce mosquitoes.) 77522 Overseas Hwy., Islamorada; robbies.com. About 20 miles north at **John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park**, you can jump off the back of a boat and snorkel over living coral reefs in shallow water. 102601 Overseas Hwy., Key Largo; pennekamppark.com. Or swim with dolphins at the **Dolphin Research Center**. 58901 Overseas Hwy., Grassy Key; dolphins.org.

**FUN FACT:** In the 1960s, the Olney Inn was rechristened Cheeca Lodge by its new owners, Cynthia and Carl Twitchell—they took her nickname, “Chee,” and combined it with Carl. Chee raised miniature tarpon and seahorses in aquariums throughout the resort, and “Suzy the Seahorse” remains Cheeca’s logo. Rates start at \$459; 81801 Overseas Hwy., Islamorada; (305) 664-4651; cheeca.com.



Generous spread at Limoncello Italian restaurant at Cheeca Lodge in the Florida Keys.

**RECOMMENDED EATS:** With more than 60 vendors selling everything from local mozzarella to handmade chicken samosas, Saturday’s **Delray GreenMarket** offers plenty to tide you over until dinner or select the makings for a beach picnic, provided you visit October through May; Old School Square Park, Delray Beach; delraygreenmarket.org.

Local items also abound on the menu at nearby **Max’s Harvest**, a sweet farm-to-fork spot for Sunday brunch featuring an interactive bloody Mary bar; 169 NE Second Ave.; (561) 381-9970; maxsharvest.com. The menu changes daily at swanky **32 East**, but is sure to include fresh Florida seafood, often with a black-truffle gravy that the chef makes sure to feature lest he incur the wrath of the restaurant’s regulars. A smart cocktail enjoyed in the deliciously dim dining room would unruffle anyone’s feathers; 32 East Atlantic Ave.; (561) 276-7868; 32east.com.

**ETC.:** The **Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens**

are less than 10 miles from

downtown, but feel worlds apart. Six distinct gardens evoking different periods in Japanese history beg to be strolled through, and regularly scheduled events teach origami and demonstrate traditional tea ceremonies. **The Cornell Café**, which The Food Network tapped as one of the top three museum dining experiences in the United States, offers sushi, bento boxes and other classic Asian fare in a tranquil setting; 4000 Morikami Park Rd.; (561) 495-0233; morikami.org.

**FUN FACT:** In 1896 the first train arrived in Delray (then known as Linton Township) on tracks built by Florida East Coast Railway. The first settlers farmed winter crop fruits and vegetables to ship north on the railroad.

in their service area; (561) 702-8519; delraydowntowner.com.

**THE BASICS:** For a classic South Florida experience, the **Colony Hotel** is right on the money. Though it was built in 1926, the original terrazzo floor and wicker furniture in the lobby and the bold colors and bark-cloth accents in the rooms feel decidedly contemporary. Breakfast is served in the sun-filled lobby each morning, and on Sundays you might hear gentle chanting from the nearly 100 students who attend live-music yoga on site each week. Room rates include breakfast as well as access to the hotel’s private oceanfront **Colony Cabaña Club**, which is just two miles away via the hotel’s free shuttle. Rates start at \$209; 525 East Atlantic Ave.; (561) 276-4123; colonyflorida.com.

## DELRAY BEACH

**WHY GO:** The best part of a road trip is ditching the car once you hit your destination, and pedestrian-friendly **Downtown Delray** is chock-full of things to see, do and taste without ever having to rev up the engine. Restaurants, bars and boutiques line busy Atlantic Avenue—think downtown Winter Park with an ocean breeze—and the adjacent **Pineapple Grove Arts District** boasts galleries, vintage shops, eateries and even the Puppetry Arts Center of the Palm Beaches; 94 NE Second Ave.; puppetcenter.org. If you’d rather cruise than stroll, rent a bike or flag down one of the **four- to six-seat golf carts** operated by Downtowner for a free ride anywhere