

## Saturday Morning Magazine for Saturday April 20

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### Beach Time & Fun Time on Anna Maria Island

I'm on Anna Maria Island at a local eatery, glad to get inside just ahead of a downpour.

"Hey check this out!" said a diner who arrived after me. He slid onto a counter seat two down from me and turned his camera around so the waitress behind the counter could see the screen.

"Wow! A waterspout!" she exclaimed. "Yep, just took these," He said, pleased. He was a regular, used to sharing his photos. She leaned in to see them all as he scrolled through the photos.

A few minutes later the waterspout appeared on the television screen overhead as a meteorologist explained the event.

"Oh, bummer, somebody beat you to the TV people," the waitress said.

The diner shrugged. Hey, it happens.

"Did you hear about the sinkhole?" she asked him.

"No, where?"

"Up on Marina Drive in the middle of the street, last week."

Welcome to Minnie's Beach Café on Gulf Drive in Holmes Beach, Florida. Regulars head for the counter or the round table in the back. News of the day,

like waterspouts and sinkholes, make the rounds. Everybody gets involved with comments.

Tourists are charmed by the no frills atmosphere and the humongous portions served for breakfast and lunch. Be forewarned – Minnie's only accepts cash.

Minnie's is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Holmes Beach is one of three towns on [Anna Maria Island](#) – it sits in the middle. Bradenton Beach, with a strong beach tourist vibe, is on the south end and Anna Maria, sporting award-winning restaurants and funky boutiques, holds the north end of the island.

All three towns have a large inventory of ice cream shops – it seems there is one in the middle of every block.

Cortez Bridge and Manatee Bridge connect Anna Maria Island to the mainland. As the crow flies, Anna Maria Island is about nine miles from downtown [Bradenton](#). Another bridge on the south end connects Anna Maria Island to Longboat Key.

The biggest attraction in Bradenton Beach is the beach.

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Coquina Gulfside Beach Park, a long narrow beach on Gulf Drive South, starts next to the bridge going to Longboat Key. Hours are 6 a.m. to 12 a.m.

Lifeguards are on duty 365 days a year. Parking is ample but during season you will do the loop de loop around the parking lots, hoping for a place. Think parking karma. You need it here.

A Coquina Beach Trail, paved, eight feet wide, runs parallel to the beach and goes the entire length of the park. This trail is popular with walkers and bikers.

[Coquina Beach](#) comes loaded with amenities besides white sand and putting your toes in the Gulf of Mexico.

In alphabetical order: beach, benches, bike racks, changing stations, concessions (including a café), games table, gift shop grills, multi purpose trail (wheelchair accessible), pavilions, picnic tables, playgrounds, recycle containers, restrooms showers, volleyball, water.

There is a trolley stop at Coquina Beach. In fact the trolley stops at beaches in all three towns.

Beach regulars arrive in their cars equipped with wagons to carry their gear. They load up beach chairs, umbrellas and coolers. This is the kind of beach where you come to stay for a while.

A few No Nos: no dogs, no alcohol, no grills and no, do not feed the wildlife.



If that isn't enough – add in a [Beach Market](#), tents in the parking lot, on Wednesdays (10 a.m. to 2 p.m. December through May) and Sundays (10 a.m. to 4 p.m. from November through July). Exclude some holidays.

Manatee Public Beach in Holmes Beach is open from sunrise to 10 p.m. Many amenities all clustered together near the beach entrance at the end of State Road 64 (also known as Manatee Avenue). The Anna Maria Island Beach Café is a popular destination.

Anna Maria Bayfront Park on the northern tip of Anna Maria Island offers great views of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge and Egmont Key. The Anna Maria City Pier, located here, doesn't exist right now. Being rebuilt after storm damage. So many people stop and take pictures of the pile drivers at work.

Perhaps like me they are not seeing the present and the pilings but the past. This pier is where I learned to throw a cast net. And sometimes helped others untangle fishing lines from a pelican's beak.



The projected date to reopen the pier is December 2019.

All that beach time in all three cities makes for a desire for break time, to be inside. Visit the old IGA store in Anna Maria, now [Ginny & Jane E's](#) bakery, café and coastal store – try the grouper Rueben, sit at one of the funky tables. Good café vibe here. Read the paper, use your computer, wander the aisles packed with consignment and retail fun stuff you've never seen before – ninety percent is local art.



When they wrap ceramics, like the fish dishes I bought, the purchase goes into a big wad of tissue paper. They are used to tourists who want to take their treasures home unbroken.

Of course every other building on Anna Maria Island, all three towns, has a shingle out front advertising places to stay. As you know it is pricey staying on the [beach](#), meaning rates all start in the triple digits.

One suggestion – look at the mainland nearby. I opted for Air B&Bs in Bradenton, which was great fun and quite reasonable, and then just an easy ride to spend the day on Ann Maria Island.

As a foodie with down home comfort food tastes, I consider it imperative to try clam chowder wherever I go. My test run was at the Ugly Grouper in Holmes Beach, famous for their grouper sandwich.

Oh yes, the clam chowder was full of clams- my kind of place. I'll be back.

The post [Beach Time & Fun Time on Anna Maria Island](#) appeared first on [Lucy Tobias](#).

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