

Pier Pleasure

For great food with lots of salty atmosphere, look no further than your local pier

St. Petersburg Pier juts into Tampa Bay and features a five-story inverted pyramid with shops, restaurants, its own aquarium, live music, and even boat docks.

by Chelle Koster Walton

I like a town anchored by a fishing pier, like a rib cage that guards the heart of the community and tethers it to the sea. It feeds the soul. I like even better when I can feed my stomach on a fishing pier, sitting down to fresh seafood and drinking in views of fishermen, pelican squadrons, surfers, sails, and sea.

Like long banquet tables, Florida piers have come to mean eats for me, and I've sampled pier restaurants, cafés, and food stands from Pensacola to Lake Worth, from rustic and simple to slick and top-shelf. So grab your fork and sunglasses (binoculars if you've got 'em) for this on-the-water dine-around.

THE GULF COAST

Let's begin closest to home, where pier food may be in shorter supply but long on flavor. Plus, there's the added bonus of sunset views.

Rod & Reel Fishing Pier, Anna Maria Island

The pier: A privately owned wooden

pier, bait shop, \$2 fishing fee

Restaurant: Rod & Reel Pier Restaurant

Atmosphere: At the pier's very end, shanty and water-surrounded with indoor and outdoor seating

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner

Best for: Breakfast

The menu: Inexpensive seafood and sandwiches; full bar

Don't miss: Seafood omelet and coconut milk-dipped French toast
What's fun: Hobnobbing with the local fishing folk

The 411: 941-778-1885

Venice Fishing Pier

The pier: 740-foot old-fashioned wooden pier with bait shop, rod-and-reel rentals, showers, restrooms, free admission

Restaurant: Sharky's on the Pier

Atmosphere: Indoor seating in a nautical setting; outdoor seating around a tiki bar

Meals: Lunch and dinner

Best for: Lunch or sunset dinner

The menu: Seafood salads, pasta-and-seafood dishes, wrap sandwiches, seafood dinners; full bar

Don't miss: Seafood specialties such as sea bass in sweet potato crusting, homemade key lime pie

What's fun: Live entertainment outdoors on weekends; shark's teeth collecting



Welcome to the Rod & Reel Pier, Anna Maria's best spot for breakfast.

on the beach

The 411: 941-488-1456, www.sharkysonthe pier.com

St. Petersburg Pier

The pier: A futuristic glass structure in the shape of an upside-down pyramid at the end of a long concrete wharf downtown on Tampa Bay; four floors



Named for Venice's shark's teeth reputation, Sharky's brings good food and live entertainment to the fishing pier experience.

of stores, restaurants, attractions, and catwalk fishing

Restaurants: Columbia Restaurant, ChaCha Coconuts, Captain Al's, Fresco's Waterfront Bistro, and a food court

Atmosphere: Overall festive and relaxed, with incomparable bay views

Meals: Lunch and dinner

Best for: Lunch

The menu: Find anything from New York pizza in the food court to Caribbean-style in ChaCha Coconuts, Spanish-Cuban in Columbia, American seafood at Captain Al's, and creative fare at Fresco's

Don't miss: Voodoo ribs with guava barbecue sauce at ChaCha

What's fun: Surrey rentals and carriage hire for rides along the wharf; two museums at the landside end

The 411: 727-821-6443, www.stpete-pier.com

THE PANHANDLE
Okaloosa Island Fishing Pier, Fort Walton Beach

The pier: An elevated boardwalk connects to the 1,262-foot pier, complete with bait shop and equipment rentals; fishing admission is \$4-\$7, walk-ons pay \$1. Shops, restaurants, and clubs huddle around the boardwalk.

Restaurants: The Crab Trap, Angler's

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CUISINE



(Top) In Lake Worth, Benny's on the Beach serves pier eats with a Greek twist. (Bottom) The Flagler Beach Pier anchors the laid-back little town to the sea.

Beachside Bar & Grill

Atmosphere: Seriously folks, this cluster is more about partying than dining. Angler's is good for families, overlooking a playground on the beach.

Meals: Brunch, lunch, and dinner

Best for: Lunch

The menu: New Orleans-influenced seafood and sandwiches at both restaurants

Don't miss: Fresh-off-the-pier fish of the day or po' boy at Angler's.

What's fun: Volleyball on the beach, partying at The Swamp, and the Gulfarium next door

The 411: 850-244-1023, www.okaloosa.islandpier.com

Atmosphere: Indoor air-conditioned, screened porch, or plain air. Seated outdoors, you hear the breakers crash beneath through the wood boards.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Best for: Breakfast

The menu: Good value for salads, burgers, dogs, seafood, and Greek specialties; beer and wine

Don't miss: Crab cake Benedict with cayenne hollandaise

What's fun: This pier is about serious fishing.

The 411: 561-582-9001

ATLANTIC COAST

Here, in the spirit of Atlantic Seaboard boardwalks and city beaches, you'll find most of Florida's dine-upon piers. Because the piers also provide wave break, the Atlantic offers the added attraction of surfers. If you're an early riser, watch the sun rise over breakfast.

William O. Lockhart Municipal Pier, Lake Worth

The pier: Reopened in 2007 after being ravaged by 2004's storm, the 960-foot pier juts into the Gulf Stream and is known for its sailfish catches.

Restaurant: Benny's on the Beach

Cocoa Beach Pier

The pier: More famous for its surfing than fishing, it holds a number of shops and restaurants and is the center of beaching activity, \$3 to fish.

Restaurants: Atlantic Ocean Grille, Marlins Good Times Bar & Grill, Oh Shucks Seafood Bar, Ricky's Ice Cream

Atmosphere: Pure youthful beach abandon; Atlantic Ocean Grille is slightly more "grown-up" than the other spots.

Meals: Lunch and dinner; Sunday brunch at Atlantic Ocean Grille

Best for: Early dinner (less crowded than lunchtime and no parking fees after 5 p.m.)

The menu: Find inexpensive snacks and munchies to affordable Florida seafood specialties.

Don't miss: Grilled alligator with barbe-



PHOTOS BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON

cue sauce appetizer and key lime shrimp kabob at Atlantic Ocean Grille
What's fun: Mai Tiki Bar at the end of the pier and surfing competition on Easter weekend
The 411: 321-783-7549, www.cocoa.beachpier.com

Flagler Beach Pier

The pier: Wooden pier with an A-frame structure at its entrance advertising FLAGLER BEACH in big, white block letters; bait and tackle shop, \$6.50 fishing admission, \$1.50 to walk on
Restaurant: Pier Restaurant
Atmosphere: Large pane and small porthole windows overlooking the beach and pier, decorated nautical style with an aquarium and faux wood-veneered tables
Meals: Breakfast, lunch, and dinner
Best for: Breakfast
The menu: Inexpensive seafood platters, sandwiches, and burgers; full bar
Don't miss: Shrimp and lobster omelet
What's fun: This is smack-dab center of town—a good departure point for exploring its quiet, old Florida demeanor.
The 411: 386-439-3891

Daytona Beach Pier

The pier: First opened in 1900 and made of palmetto logs, it was rebuilt 1,000 feet long in 1925 and has been renovated often because of storm damage; bait and other shops, \$5 fishing admission, \$1 for walk-ons
Restaurant: The Daytona Beach Pier Restaurant
Atmosphere: Casual indoor windowed seating
Meals: Lunch and dinner
Best for: The all-day menu is good for families
The menu: Sandwiches, pasta, and fried seafood; full bar
Don't miss: Fish 'n' chips
What's fun: Hitting the Boardwalk and doing the Midway rides around the pier—but get there quick, a renovation movement is afoot
The 411: 386-238-1212

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