

Best Breakfasts

Take a tour of three of Florida's tastiest B&Bs



The Cypress (above) is conveniently located to downtown Sarasota's great dining scene. (Below) Fresh strawberries and mangoes on a gild-rimmed English china plate serve as the first course of the Cypress' three-course breakfast.

by Chelle Koster Walton

I judge a B&B by its breakfast. Not by its bed cover. In fact, I couldn't tell you what the duvet looked like on the B&B bed where I slept two nights ago at The Cypress in Sarasota. I remember in minute detail, however, what I had for breakfast the next morning.

It started with juicy fresh strawberries and papaya on a delicate plate of gild-rimmed English china painted with roses. The matching cup held freshly brewed coffee with a soupçon of hazelnut. Second course was a pretty, pink, four-berry muffin studded with strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries. Then came the headliner: ta-da, a crustless Italian egg pie with chunks of fresh tomato and herbs from the B&B's own garden, with a side of bacon.

Is your mouth watering yet? Below are three of the most memorable, mouthwatering breakfasts—including the one at The Cypress—I've dug into at Florida's bounty of B&Bs.

The Cypress, Sarasota

"I got in late, but I made sure I got up for breakfast," guest William Sleator, a man after my own palate and author of fiction for young adults, told me in The Cypress' window-surround breakfast room. I like that the cheery room is fitted with individual tables, close enough to each other for conversation, but separate enough so you don't feel as though you must talk. (Ask my husband: I don't talk in the morning.) Centerpiece of the room, which overlooks Sarasota Bay



(Above) Innkeepers Vicki Hadley (left) and Nina Belott (right) display their signature four-berry breakfast muffins. (Below) Breakfast is served in a cozy antique-furnished dining room at Inn on Charlotte.

through a filter of oak and mahogany tree branches, is an antique ice cream table with swivel-out stools.

Details make a bed-and-breakfast inn, and The Cypress' attention to special touches, flourishes, and minutiae place it among the top in its genre. Notice the fireplace, vintage Edison phonograph, and piano in the living room, along with the exquisite crown molding throughout, fresh flowers in every room, and the complimentary cocktail and hors d'oeuvres at happy hour. In short, the three innkeepers—Vicki Hadley and Robert and Nina Belott—spoil their guests. This trio of talent took a 1940s home that the original owner's daughter refused to sell out to encroaching condos. That leaves The Cypress—named for its sturdy building material—a flower in the shadow of high-rises. Still, the location is quite enviable. Downtown's district of galleries, acclaimed restaurants, specialty shops, and high-brow Burns Court Cinema is a short stroll away.

With a dozen mango trees on the property, the cooks-innkeepers find as

many ways as possible to use the fruit during season, including a mango dip Vicki made for noshes the night I stayed, but most notably in their mango muffins. Other breakfast specialties include mocha cherry chocolate muffins; ricotta orange pancakes; artichoke and pancetta panini with arugula; and egg, tomato, bacon, and avocado croissant topped with Mornay mushroom sauce. A cookbook of The Cypress' recipes was due out in summer.

Inn on Charlotte, St. Augustine

St. Augustine has set the standards for the rest of the state as far as charm and good eats at its nearly 30 B&Bs in the Old City.

At Inn on Charlotte, I love the personal attention from the one-woman operation. Lynne Fairfield recently took over the 20-year-old inn, a vernacular-style home built in 1918, and she personally makes and serves a hearty gourmet breakfast starting with fresh fruit and climaxing with hot delights around a dark-wood antique table in a dining room just off the sitting room, where a coquina rock fireplace brings a bit of St. Augustine history inside. During the two nights I stayed with Lynne, I relished oatmeal pancakes topped with peaches one morn-



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(Right) Lynne Fairfield's baked eggs benedict soufflé at Inn on Charlotte in St. Augustine. (Center) Custardy sapotes are a rare treat in Homestead, especially the vanilla variety grown at Grove Inn, the courtyard and gardens of which are shown below.



ing and, the next, baked eggs benedict soufflés with hollandaise sauce. A recent addition to the menu, breakfast enchiladas are getting raves these days, Fairfield says.

I stayed in the cozy Allamanda Room, which comes with a one-person Jacuzzi and access to a balcony overlooking cobbled Charlotte Street, off the main tourist path but mere steps away from St. George Street's

pedestrian way, shops, and eateries. Each of the inn's eight rooms has its own personality, such as the ground-floor Southern Royal room, with a parlor and draped Jacuzzi, or the second floor Verandah, romantic with a four-poster bed, fireplace, and access also to the balcony. Impeccably clean and deeply comfortable, the inn exudes a sachet scent that pervades even the fluffy bath towels.

Grove Inn Guesthouse, Homestead

Grove Inn has been the most unusual Florida B&B in my experience in many ways, but let's begin with breakfast. Co-owner Paul Mulhern serves fruit fresh from the famed tropical groves of Redland, Homestead's agricultural region named for the color of the red, high-mineral soil. This he follows with a hot and hearty entrée country-style, such as sausage and biscuits, scrambled eggs



PHOTOS BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON

and ham, or a custom cheese omelet, which is what I hungrily tucked into one morning. To top it all off, his signature homemade coconut coffee cake gives the meal a final tropical twist. The morning I feasted in the small, antique-furnished dining room, Paul, a former showman, regaled me with a remake of a song about the Everglades, "Seminole Wind" by John Anderson, that he will be releasing.

Paul is a most attentive host. Since his inn—unlike most B&Bs, which tend to be central in walkable destinations—is out in the "boonies," he makes himself available to guests for insider tours of local plant nurseries. His property is something of a nursery in and of itself. Come in summer and fall and help yourself to pummelo, guava, mangoes, vanilla sapote, loquats, Australian plums, and other exotic fruits that grow around the one-story inn and its pool. The innkeepers turned a rundown old roadside motel into a tropical haven with antique-decorated rooms, some including kitchens. For a culinary final touch, guests receive a jar of guanabana (soursop) preserves upon check-out.

Now, every time I spread my preserves, it brings back sweet memories of my country stay, and especially that tropical breakfast. It just goes to show: You may be able to judge a bed by its cover, but when it comes to breakfast, it's all about substance. 🌴

Cuisine & Travel Editor Chelle Koster Walton always manages to blend good food into her travel experiences.

If You Go

The Cypress, 941-955-4683,
www.cypressbb.com

Grove Inn Guesthouse,
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www.groveinn.com

Inn on Charlotte, 800-355-5508,
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