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CABBAGE KEY By Susan B. Barnes

A remote island accessible only by boat.



Each time I hear about a remote island accessible only by boat, the *Gilligan's Island* theme song pops into my mind, along with images of the fated three-hour tour. Though the premise of the show was that the passengers were stranded, I think all of us occasionally dream of being deserted on an island, away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Fortunately for us in the Tampa Bay area, we can desert ourselves on an island just about two-and-a-half hours south, on Cabbage Key outside of Fort Myers. Accessible only by boat—your own, a charter, or scheduled water taxi—Cabbage Key is a true oasis.

Originally settled by the Caloosa Indians, the Rinehart family found their way to Cabbage Key in the mid-1930s and it reflects their influences to this day. The island's 100 acres remains filled with tropical vegetation and boasts panoramic views of Pine Island Sound. There aren't any cars on Cabbage Key, only winding nature trails and ample opportunity for relaxation.

The Rineharts built many of the buildings that are still in use today, including the caretaker's house, which now houses the island's restaurant; and The Dollhouse Cottage, a one-bedroom cottage built as a life-size dollhouse for their daughters that is now used as overnight accommodations. The Stults family took over the is-

land from 1944–1969 and opened the island as a resort to the public. Today, the Wells family continues the tradition of welcoming guests, both day and overnight, to the tropical getaway.

Fishing has been and continues to be a big draw at Cabbage Key. If you enjoy fishing—from tarpon to speckled sea trout, redfish, snook, shark to the magnificent silver king—this is the island for you. Ken Wells, manager of Cabbage Key, does suggest that you have a boat of your own to explore the waters around the island; charters are available at nearby marinas.

The majority of the island's guests are day trippers who come to Cabbage Key for a few hours to enjoy the nature trails and have lunch. During the height of the season, the restaurant on Cabbage Key sees between 550 and 750 for lunch.


"The beauty of the island is that our clients are like a melting pot of all different types of people—the guy that pulls up in a kayak or canoe to grab a sandwich while out fishing, or someone who's docking his multi-million dollar yacht," says Ken. "That's probably the most unique aspect of Cabbage Key—everyone comes together and you just don't know who's who."

"Another incredible aspect of the island is that you can stay here during the



height of the season, eat breakfast, go fishing or out on the water, come back at day's end and not even know that there were 550 people on the island," says Ken. "We're open for all three meals every day of the year."

Ken defines the island's overnight guests as eco-friendly, and into eco-tourism and fishing. Though the island is said to hold the oldest liquor license in the county, it's typically very tranquil.

"Those who stay overnight find that it's very quiet, a true getaway. Some of our rooms don't even have TVs in them," says Ken. "We're a very rustic place; it's kind of like going back in time." 



When you go:

Simply drive south on I-75, and turn west when you get to Fort Myers and make your way to Pine Island, about 20 miles northwest of Fort Myers. Water taxis are available at Pineland Marina, and should be reserved in advance.



Cabbage Key
(239) 283-2278
www.cabbagekey.com

Island Girl Charters
(239) 633-8142
www.northcaptivaislandgirl.com

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