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Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club

Seaside SPLENDOR

Experience true luxury on Jacksonville's shores.

BY ALISSON WEISS ENTREKIN

With Amelia Island to the north and Palm Beach to the south, Jacksonville-area beaches have long played second fiddle to Florida's other seaside draws. But the crystal-blue tides are changing, and today, these beach resorts just outside the largest land-mass city in the continental US are showing the world they are ready to compete with Florida's high-end heavyweights. Of all the hotels and resorts in Florida, fewer than 10 can lay claim to AAA's prestigious Five-Diamond Award, and Ponte Vedra Inn & Club (www.pvrresorts.com; 904-285-1111) is one of them. This sprawling, 300-acre resort offers a boggling array of activities, from golf on its two celebrated courses to Pilates classes in its oceanfront fitness

center to tennis clinics at its world-renowned racquet club. Want to go for a swim? There are four heated pools to dive into. Ready for a bite to eat? Seven restaurants are on the premises, plus four cocktail lounges in which to nibble on appetizers and sip margaritas.

"We are a true resort in every sense of the word," says Andy Radovic, vice president of sales and marketing for Ponte Vedra Inn & Club and its sister property, Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club. "From shopping to spa-going to horseback riding, we offer just about anything you could want to do."

Less than two miles down the road sits Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club (www.pvrresorts.com; 904-273-9500), a stately hotel that offers a subdued alternative to the Inn &

Club's bustling environment. With only 66 rooms, many of them boasting fireplaces and whirlpool tubs, the Lodge & Club is designed for quiet romance, and packages like the champagne-and-chocolate-infused "Stir the Fire" only enhance the mood.

Still, guests who want to play a round of golf or enjoy a hot-stone massage have full access to all of the Inn & Club's amenities, and the Lodge & Club itself offers two restaurants and three swimming pools. "The Lodge & Club is a boutique hotel on the ocean, and its beauty is that its guests can travel a mile and a half down the road and have complete access to resort amenities," Radovic says.

Less than 20 miles east of downtown Jacksonville lies Atlantic Beach, a city that until recently considered sea turtles its biggest attraction. But in May, One Ocean Resort & Spa (www.oneoceanresort.com; 904-247-0365) opened, welcoming a new era of luxury to the sleepy seaside town. One Ocean Resort was designed to bring to mind an elegant gallery, with docents instead of concierges, original Greg Whitaker photography in each of its 193 rooms and an on-site art display in the lobby. Guests can take a photography lesson, capturing their vacation memories while flexing their artistic muscles.

"We take the gallery concept seriously," says Betty Jones, the resort's director of sales and marketing. "For example, just as a docent in an art gallery is very well-versed on the gallery's artwork, our docents are very well-versed on the resort and the surrounding area."

For those who want a bit of schooling in the art of relaxation, One Ocean Resort's spa offers eight treatment rooms, three with views of the crashing waves. Guests revel in the spa's oceanic services, from the seashell massage to the oxygen facial. And if an extra dose of zen is in order, the resort offers yoga and tai chi lessons on its sugar-white beach.

Whether you're eager to awaken your senses in a gallery-like atmosphere, pick up a new hobby at a sprawling resort, or simply relax and soak up rays at an elegant hotel, Jacksonville's beach resorts have what you're seeking. No longer does the area struggle to attract luxury-minded travelers; with its easy accessibility and host of opulent amenities, the choice to vacation on Jacksonville's shores is an easy one. ✕

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Arurus at One Ocean Resort & Spa

DREAM DISHES

Visit a restaurant at each hotel to create the perfect three-course meal.

APPETIZER

Escargot sautéed with ginger, garlic and dill
(Inlet Dining Room at Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club)

ENTRÉE

Sautéed Florida grouper served with grapefruit chutney, mint basil risotto, champagne beurre blanc and thyme sorbet
(The Seahorse Grille at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club)

DESSERT

Crème Brûlée Three Ways—Tahitian vanilla bean, dark chocolate cardamom and guava—served with assorted miniature cookies (Arurus at One Ocean Resort & Spa)

