



## southern comfort

STEP BACK IN TIME WITH A VISIT TO THIS OLD FLORIDA GEM +  
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**Like so many slivers** of Old Florida sprinkled throughout the state, the Gasparilla Inn & Club was once a winter retreat for wealthy northerners like John D. Rockefeller, whom you can easily picture nestled in a rocking chair on the grand porch. It has undergone several face-lifts since it opened in 1911, most recently in the formal dining room yet has always managed to preserve its luxurious appeal — with a nod to its past. Think of it as Old Florida polished to a mirror-worthy shine.

Gasparilla Inn is the star of Boca Grande, a laid-back, speck of a town on a thin stretch of island jutting into the Gulf just south of Sarasota. The Inn's one- and two-bedrooms and cottages are a reflection of the Inn itself. Its sunny yellow and sparkling white décor immediately puts you in a good mood. Tropical accents and classic but comfy wicker and rattan furnishings remind you that you're on a beach vacation.

**Complete with rocking chairs on its porch, the Gasparilla Inn has the charm and grace of a bygone era.**



There's plenty to do without ever leaving the grounds. Settle down with the morning paper in the main living room. Note the glass reading tables decorated in neat rows of tarpon scales — a salute to the area's abundant tarpon fishing — and the single orchids that adorn almost every pillar.

Early mornings are ideal for shelling, a favorite local pastime. The Gasparilla Inn hosts shelling contests every year, and a hall of fame of past jewels are on display near the main lobby. Grab a bucket and comb through the eight-and-a-half-mile stretch of powdered beaches for cat's paws, conch shells and if you're lucky, black shark teeth.

There's only one place for breakfast: Loons on a Limb, where the locals meet to swap fish stories over classic diner fare. Whatever you order, add a side of the homemade banana nut bread with orange marmalade butter. Your taste buds will thank you.

If shelling isn't your thing, try your hand at croquet on two outdoor courts or play a round on Gasparilla's 18-hole golf course, 16 of which feature island greens.

#### **AROUND TOWN**

At nearby Gasparilla Adventures you can rent bikes for half-days and explore the neighborhoods with their mix of Mediterranean and cracker-style homes. You'll want to wander back and forth on the tunnel-like canopy of beautiful Banyan Road. Later, stroll through any of Boca Grande's funky boutiques. The Palm on Park and the Sun Porch are local favorites, but there's also a variety of hip fishing shops juxtaposed with old-time grocers like Hudson's (look for the pink gas pump out front). The

**A small-town atmosphere complements the charm of the beachy, yet elegant, seaside inn.**



**Walking under shady banyan trees and zipping around in a golf cart are part of the island's fun.**

Temptation Restaurant in town serves classic Old Florida fish sandwiches for lunch.

If you feel like dressing up for dinner, opt for a four-course meal in the Inn's newly renovated dining room. There are endless combinations of classic seafood dishes, but the staff faves are definitely worth a try: green tomato soup with crab and Key lime grouper topped with sweet corn purée, basil and tiny clams. The Pink Elephant down the street offers fresh catch of the day in the ambience of an 18th-century sea captain's dining hall. It's a popular place with both locals and visitors, who enjoy lingering over dinner.

Wind down with a game of billiards in the Pelican Club, which resembles any proud papa's trophy room. Keeping with the tarpon scales theme, the glass trophy cases have etchings where past guests inscribed the size and date of their catch. The oldest one dates to 1913.

Grab a nightcap at the Inn's BZ's Lounge, with its classy, denlike vibe. Here, the liquor bottles stay out of sight, Sinatra croons overhead and the pecky cypress walls are covered with tropical oils and hand-painted murals of marsh scenes. It's like going back in time, which is the whole point.



## FT+L MUSTS boca grande

### STAY

**Gasparilla Inn & Club**  
941.964.4500,  
gasparillainn.com

+ **DO**

**Gasparilla Adventures**  
941.964.4625

+ **SHOP**

**The Palm on Park**  
941.964.4448, the  
palmontpark.com

+ **The Sun Porch**

941.964.2567

+ **EAT**

**Loons on a Limb**  
941.964.0155

**Hudson's** 941.964.2621

**Temptation Restaurant**  
941.964.2610

**The Pink Elephant**  
941.964.0100