

Florida Travel

LIFESTYLES



ESCAMBIA. SANTA ROSA. OKALOOSA.
WALTON. BAY COUNTIES.

THE NORTHWEST COAST OF FLORIDA, commonly referred to as THE "PANHANDLE" offers residents some of the more simple pleasures in life... white sand beaches so brilliant it squeaks between your toes... Gulf of Mexico water with crystal clear visibility... a locale where donning flip flops is encouraged and old-Florida style homes intertwine with modern newly-built structures.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Ferry Pass, one of Pensacola's suburbs, has been ranked as one of the 25 Best Places to Live for affordable homes by CNNMoney. One place behind Rockwall, TX, Ferry Pass sits in the 16th spot, followed by North Ridgeville, OH.

ESCAMBIA COUNTY [Pensacola, Century]

If you live in Escambia County...or you have vacationed along her incomparable beaches, you already know that

this is first and foremost a community rich in history and tradition and a showpiece of nature's wonders.

At work... Offering a median age of 33.5 years, Escambia County provides a diverse and youthful population. Long known for its military training, the region is home to many private sector companies that provide high-tech support for military operations. For the current or prospective business owner, the University of West Florida provides quality

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business and economic development assistance in order to promote growth, expansion, innovation, increased productivity and improved management skills.

At play... Northern Escambia County is considered farm country. Cotton, corn, cattle, and catfish are a few of the crops and livestock that inhabit this land of rolling hills. Forests of pine and oak bound the roadways, and fields are tended by men and women who have devoted their lives to the land.

For those who prefer a more cosmopolitan lifestyle with a small-town atmosphere, you've found an ideal locale. Residents of Escambia county enjoy world class cuisine in restaurants overlooking the water, annual arts, jazz, and folk festivals, little theatre and touring "Broadway" shows, regional artists displaying their works at local galleries, a symphony orchestra, cultural center, and local museums.

SANTA ROSA COUNTY [Milton, Gulf Breeze, Jay]

At work... The Economic Development Council of Santa Rosa County - or Team Santa Rosa, is the area's central facilitator for attracting, retaining, and expanding industry, as well as for recruiting and retaining employees.

In the news! While much of Florida's construction is at a standstill, the Santa Rosa County Board of Commissioners announced in October the approval of a 2,000-bed detention center, which will be privately managed by the GEO Group. The facility, which is expected to employ more than 400 personnel and provide services ranging from administration and education, to healthcare and information, has the potential of generating thousands of jobs over time. Hiring is expected to begin for the facility Spring 2010.

At play... A short drive will take any Santa Rosa County resident far from the traffic jams and hectic pace of the workday life, where they can explore a wealth of recreational opportunities found at the beautiful white sand beaches, or in the county's dense, unspoiled forests, filled with clear, pristine bays, creeks and rivers. The varied natural resources of the area and the subtropical climate provide an atmosphere where residents can choose from an abundance of recreational activities, including water sports, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, tennis and golf.

OKALOOSA COUNTY [Fort Walton Beach, Crestview, Niceville]

At work... Deemed on the **TOP 10 LIST FOR BEST PLACES FOR BUSINESS AND CAREERS** by the Forbes Business Institute,

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Okaloosa County takes its economic role seriously. The Eglin Complex's research and development, and test and evaluation missions draws defense contracting technology and manufacturing firms into the area. As a result, Okaloosa County is the leading technology center in Northwest Florida offering relocation incentives, low taxes and prime locations.

Note... Okaloosa County has been one of the most successful counties in Florida to benefit from the EDTF Grant Program. In the past few years, local companies, on behalf of Okaloosa County and the EDC, have received over \$12,000,000 in EDTF grants.

At play... There is a variety of water and adventure parks for family entertainment and all day fun. Area beaches have been voted "safest in the country" and among the top 10 in the country and the expansive waters of Choctawahatchee Bay, are ideal for residents who don't mind getting wet! For those who prefer their activities on dry land, Okaloosa County is a cultural center with many museums, art galleries, and historical sites.

WALTON COUNTY [DeFuniak Springs, Freeport, Paxton]

At work... according to Florida Trend's Florida Small Business (2008), "Florida's Top Growth Industries from 2007 through 2015 will be administrative and support services, social assistance, ambulatory healthcare services, water transportation, and specialty trade contractors."

Florida's Great Northwest has identified four target industry clusters that match this region's strengths, goals, and assets. These industries will provide a diversified and sustainable regional economy: Aviation, Aerospace, Defense, and National Security; Health Science and Human Performance Enhancement; Renewable Energy and Environment; and Transportation and Logistics Services.

Tourism is the top industry in Walton County and, despite downward trends elsewhere in the country, it remains strong in the summer of 2008. The counties along Florida's Emerald Coast collect "bed" taxes from commercial rentals, and that is one of the principal ways to assess the rate of tourism.

At play... Residents and visitors alike often refer to Walton County as "Paradise." With its mild climate and extraordinary natural beauty, Walton County offers a diverse recreational and cultural environment.

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events as well as outdoor resources and services available in the area.

The sale of single family homes rose in Walton County by 10.6 percent in the fourth quarter of 2007 compared to the fourth quarter of 2006. Home resales increased by 7.1 percent for the same comparison period. *Source: Metro Market Trends, Inc.* In 2006, there were over 40,000 housing units in the county, and the home ownership rate in 2000 was 79 percent.

BAY COUNTY [Panama City, Callaway, Lynn Haven]

At work... Bay County consists of eight incorporated municipal government jurisdictions. Each municipality has a mayor/commission form of government, and the Board of Bay County Commissioners governs all of the unincorporated areas of Bay County.

Local businesses can take advantage of Bay County's ideal locale. Port Panama City, USA/Foreign Trade Zone #65 has 4,200 feet of deepwater berthing space and six berths. With its fixtures, Port Panama City specializes in break bulk cargo and dry bulk products.

Exclusive to the County is Enterprise Bay - a committee of the Bay County Economic Development Alliance whose mission is to establish Bay County as a globally competitive environment to conduct business, encourage economic growth that enhances a standard of living and quality of life, and facilitate the creation of an environment that encourages the expansion of existing business and the location of new business.

At play... It's no secret that Bay County has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. That's why it's also no surprise that an estimated seven million people visit these beaches annually. This translates to: \$163 million in accommodation sales; \$413 million in goods and services; \$1.5 billion into the local economy; and over 14,000 local jobs!

Of the seven million annual visitors, it is estimated that more than four million of them stay overnight. This information is based on the 16,500 total units available for tourists, a conservative occupancy rate of 56 percent, an average of 3.8 guests per accommodation, and an average stay of four days. These figures make tourism one of the biggest industries in Bay County.

The revenue annually generated by tourist taxes assist the local government in paying for costly improvements and services such as beach preservation and renourishment, beach and surf safety patrol, turtle watch, visitor services and information, and many more that would otherwise be the responsibility of the local residents. *



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