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**Florida's
West Coast**
VISIT NAPLES,
MARCO ISLAND &
CLEARWATER BEACH

**Three Ways
to Go**
LONDON, PARIS &
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**The Glory
of Egypt**

THE
Travel Issue



Mount Pleasant, South Carolina • Mother's Day Gift Guide • and more

GO WEST!

Florida's west coast is the best coast for an easy, relaxing summer getaway.

The moment you hit Alligator Alley, cutting through the Everglades for Florida's west coast, time begins to slow—and your stress levels immediately diminish. A vacation on the west coast means spending chill beach days frolicking in some of the state's calmest, most beautiful waters, while enjoying Old Florida traditions from shelling to evening s'mores by the fire. Appearances by manatees and dolphins, showing off with water acrobatics or catching waves in boaters' wakes, are every day occurrences; and evenings are designed for celebrating golden sunsets that will be burned into your mind. Here, we've highlighted some of the best ways to stay and play from Naples to Marco Island and Clearwater Beach—plus, the best spots for a "sunset selfie."

By [Angela Caraway-Carlton](#)





Naples Grande Beach Resort

NAPLES

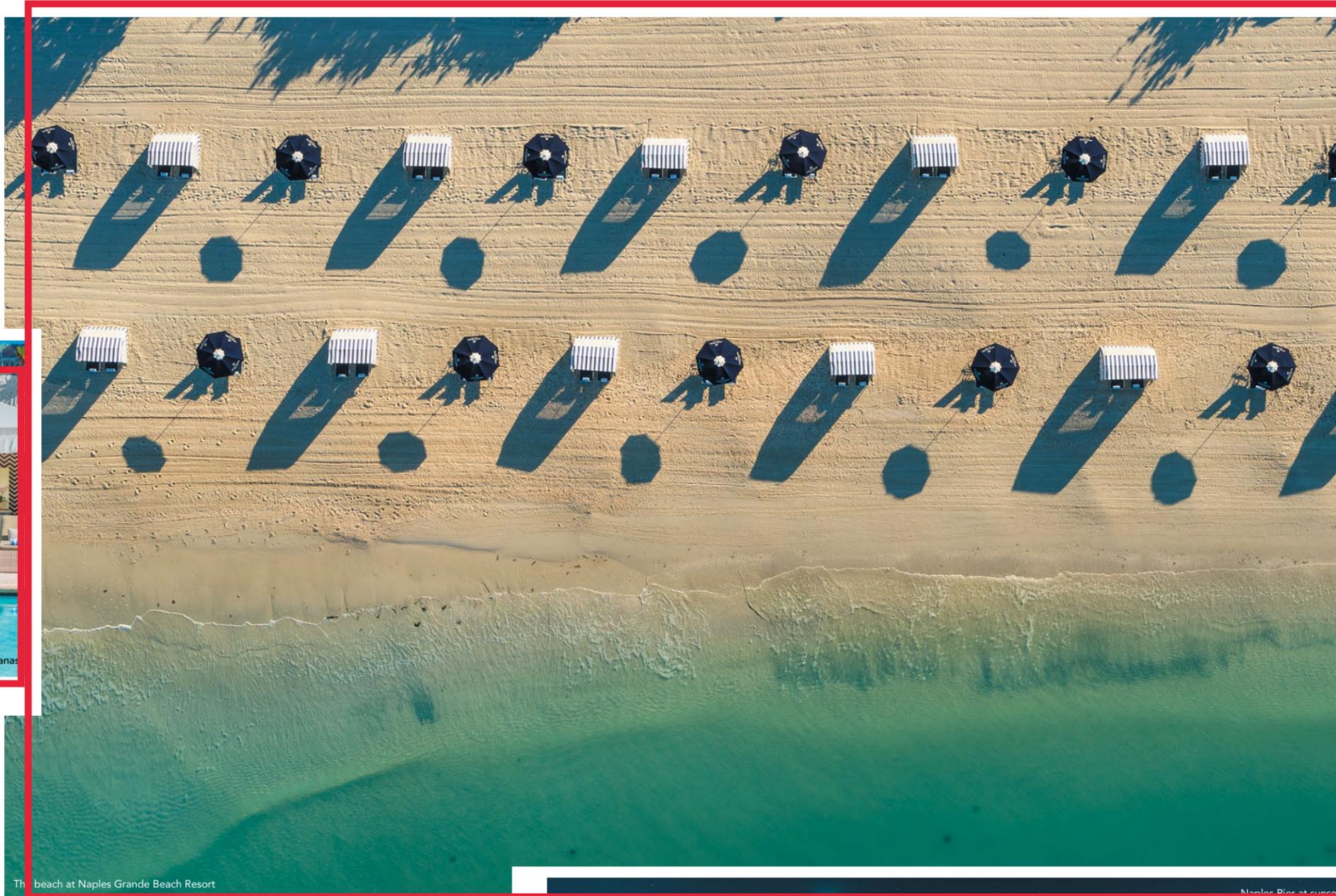
A quick, two-hour drive from Miami, Naples is known for its pristine beaches along the Gulf of Mexico, fancy resorts and mega-mansions with well-manicured yards. With a vibrant downtown offering shopping at high-end boutiques and art galleries and endless dining options — there's plenty to do — as long as that means being in bed before midnight. Here, lounging at the beach until sunset or meeting for a lively happy hour, is the daily routine.

STAY: Decked out in calming blues and beige colors reminiscent of the sand and sea, the newly renovated and refreshed **Naples Grande Beach Resort** (naplesgrande.com) offers a luxe vacation with spacious rooms and tower suites with balconies boasting panoramic views of the Gulf. For a different kind of stay (and extra privacy), choose the low-rise Garden Villa Suites tucked away in a lushly landscaped village, overlooking a peaceful reflecting pool. During the day, children can shoot down a 100-foot twisting waterslide at the Mangrove Pool, while those without kids can retreat to the serenity of the adults-only Palm Terrace Pool lined with cabanas that come with butler service. While it's easy to stay busy on the 23-acre property — from exploring the blue-green water on a paddle board to mastering your swing at the resort's nearby 18-hole golf course — don't miss a day at **The Spa at Naples Grande** which offers a unique indoor-outdoor experience that includes lounging by the tranquility pool before or after a treatment.



Palm Terrace Cabanas

INDULGE: With seven bars/restaurants on property, guests of the Naples Grande can find any type of cuisine they desire from Pan Asian dishes like banh mi sandwiches and build-your-own ramen bowls at the sleek, new **Mantra** restaurant to local snapper or grouper prepared your way at **The Catch of the Pelican**. Insider tip: Every Friday, head to Sunset Veranda for the Veuve Clicquot Happy Hour to sip flutes of bubbly priced by the hour (\$5 at 5 p.m.-\$8 at 8 p.m.). Naples is experiencing a burgeoning culinary scene, with new seafood-centric restaurants such as **The Claw Bar** (theclawbar.com) located inside the Bellasera Resort, along with **Sails** restaurant (sailsrestaurants.com). You'll want to hold court on the beautiful patio of **The Continental** (damicoscontinental.com), which has a South Beach feel, for expertly crafted cocktails and a fancy steak dinner paired with their coveted gratin potatoes and warm cinnamon sugar doughnuts for dessert. Don't miss the Early Dining Special that



The beach at Naples Grande Beach Resort

lets you feast on steak and lobster for \$32 from 5 p.m.-6 p.m. Locals-in-the-know also pack **Jimmy P's Charred** (jimmypyscharred.com), a butcher shop and restaurant tucked away in a strip center, for their Summer Special, a three-course meal at a discounted price. Favorites include the stuffed marrow bones, wagyu beef truffle carpaccio, jumbo scallops and the Real Cowboy, a gigantic tomahawk ribeye with confit young potatoes.

MUST-DO: Stroll the **Naples Pier** (naplesgov.com), especially at sunset or early in the morning when there's a

good chance you'll catch a glimpse of resident dolphins patrolling the waters. Set your credit card on fire on swanky Fifth Avenue South or Third Street South, both of which are dotted with a bevy of restaurants, galleries bars and shops; and on Saturday mornings join the locals at the **Third Street Farmer's Market** for fresh produce, homemade goods and music.

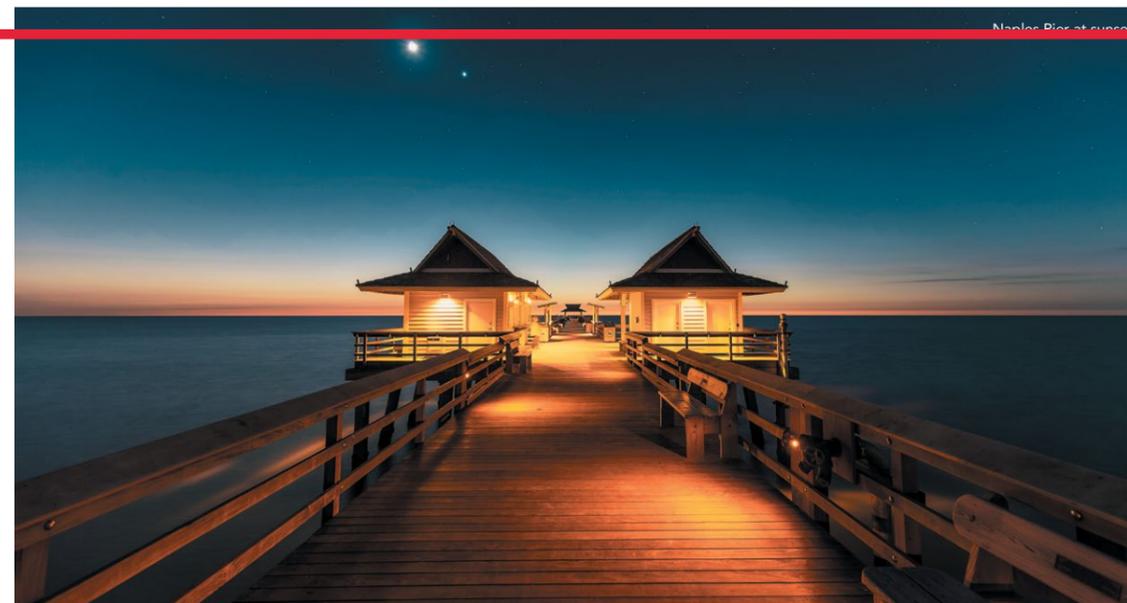
SUNSET SELFIE: If you're staying at the Naples Grande, board the tram to their private beach where sunset means a beach party with live music.

MARCO ISLAND

Twenty miles south of Naples, Marco Island is Naples' even quieter sibling and a nature lovers' haven. Days are spent with your toes in the powder-soft sand, or cruising the pristine waters teeming with wildlife. As part of Florida's Ten Thousand Islands area, a labyrinth of water and mangroves, eco-tours and boat tours are popular, offering visitors the chance for close encounters with manatees, local bottlenose dolphins and wading birds. While Sanibel might get all the street-cred as a shelling mecca — Marco's shores offer prized treasures to discover at low tide.

STAY: Following a three-year, \$320 million renovation, the Balinese-style **JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort** (jwmarco.com) lays claim to a finely combed, three-mile stretch of private beach on the Gulf. With 810 rooms and suites, four pools, Spa by JW, 13 dining venues and two private 18-hole championship golf courses, the sprawling hotel makes it easy to never leave the property. The resort's star (and totally new to the Marriott brand) is the adults-only Lanai Tower, a 94-room tower with a rooftop pool and sun deck, gourmet restaurant and huge entertainment center. Guests there receive a techie bracelet that grants them access to a section of beach reserved exclusively for their use, along with other upscale amenities like off-menu food items and cocktails.

INDULGE: Don't miss the island gem **Little Bar** (littlebarrestaurant.com) located in nearby Goodland—it's been around



Beachside seating at Kane Tiki Bar & Grill



Searching for shells

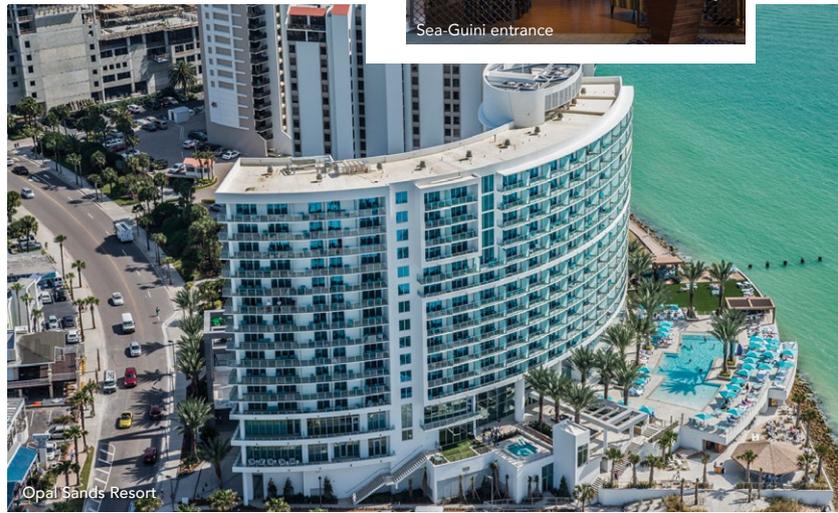
The pristine beach of JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort



Sea-Guini entrance



JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort pool



Opal Sands Resort

for 40 years and run by a sister-brother team who pride themselves on serving fresh seafood (it arrives every day), like grouper balls with homemade jalapeño sauce and broiled sea scallops encrusted in cracker crumbs. Don't leave without tasting the peanut butter pie. **The Deck at 560** (hiltonmarcoisland.com) at the newly revamped Hilton Marco Island Beach Resort & Spa boasts over 200 Gulf-view seats and focuses on locally sourced seafood and fresh produce; order the smoked wahoo fish dip with fermented root-veggie chips and the grouper sandwich. Bonus: Happy hour pretty much runs all day, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

■ **MUST-DO:** Jet off from the JW's beach on an exhilarating wave runner tour with **Marco Island Water Sports** (marcoislandwatersports.com). This is not your regular buzz-through-the-water-at-top-speeds tour; these knowledgeable

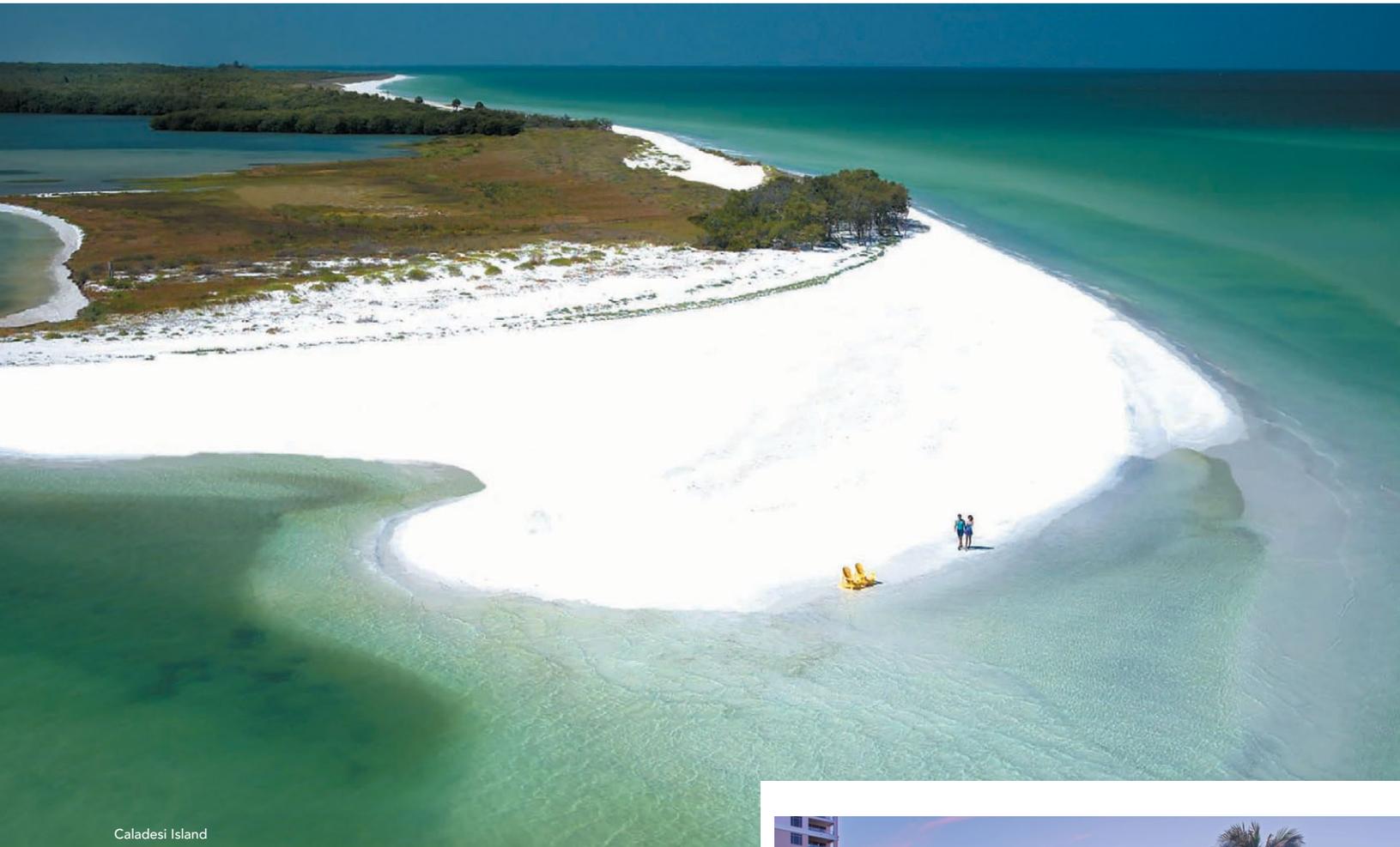
guides will lead you on a smooth cruise through the turquoise water pointing out marine life while showing off the area's most interesting sights, including a stop at the abandoned dome home in Cape Romano. Those in search of seashells and an educational lesson on the area's thriving eco-system should book the Dolphin, Birding and Shelling Tour with **Marco Island Boat Tours** (marcoisland-boattours.com), during which a Florida Master Naturalist will search the waterways looking for dolphins, sea turtles and majestic birds like bald eagles and great blue heron and take you to less traveled beaches to search for and load up on rare pristine shells.

■ **SUNSET SELFIE:** The JW offers a front-row seat to all the sunset action; grab a towel and a glass of bubbly to watch the sun slip into the ocean, then catch the resort's nightly fire dancer show.

CLEARWATER BEACH

With its soft-as-cotton sand, clear, calm emerald waters, unforgettable sunsets and family-friendly vibe, Clearwater Beach is consistently voted one of the best beaches in Florida—and it's worth the four-hour drive from Miami. Beach days resemble a Gray Malin photo with endless rows of colorful umbrellas and towels in the sand, and the water is always packed with wave runners, paddle boarders and parasailers floating above. Bustling Mandalay Avenue is a popular spot for shopping and dining, and nearby Clearwater Marina is where you'll embark on water adventures.

■ **STAY:** Families flock to **Sandpearl Resort** (sandpearl.com), an expansive luxury property situated on a 700-foot stretch of sand on the Gulf, where traditions include ringing the bell at sunset and campfire s'mores on the beach. Guests are greeted in the Living Room (lobby) with a beverage cart for a welcome drink and treated to coastal-chic designs like shimmering shell chandeliers and impressive art work. Days are spent bouncing between the lagoon pool and the beach and then being pampered at the spa with an 80-minute customized massage. Couples looking for more privacy (i.e., fewer kids) should stay at



Caladesi Island

the Sandpearl's modern sister property **Opal Sands Resort** (opalsands.com), which feels like a private beach palace in the sky and also features a zero entry, Gulf-side pool and full-service spa. With 230 plush rooms, you'll enjoy picture-perfect Gulf views thanks to floor-to-ceiling windows and spacious balconies fitted with rocking chairs — splurge on the luxurious two-bedroom Opal Suite with a wraparound balcony and all the amenities of home.

■ **INDULGE:** With sought-after water views, **Caretta on the Gulf**, Clearwater's only AAA Four-Diamond restaurant, offers some of the best and inventive sushi rolls in town (like the Surf and Turf roll with truffle); standout fish dishes such as the Black Grouper with butternut squash risotto; and a Champagne Sunday Brunch with endless seafood and sushi, carving stations and breakfast dishes. At Opal Sands' **Sea-Guini**, eat like you're on vacation with Italian house-made pastas from lobster pappardelle to rigatoni

Bolognese and Neapolitan pizzas made with your favorite toppings.

■ **MUST-DO:** The true gem of Clearwater is **Caladesi Island**, a secluded beach with powdery sand and aquamarine water that's only accessible by boat, ferry or a long hike through the sand. Look for the "shell trees" where visitors hang their shells for an always-evolving piece of art. Families will want to visit **Clearwater Marine Aquarium** (seewinter.com) to see Winter, the star of the popular *Dolphin Tale* movies and hear about their noble rescue, rehabilitation and release efforts. If you didn't see enough dolphins, book an authentic tugboat ride with **Little Toot Dolphin Adventure** (littletoot.us) where you're assured a dolphin sighting—get your cameras ready: They love to jump in the boats' wake.

■ **SUNSET SELFIE:** Join the masses at iconic **Pier 60** for a lively sunset celebration that includes performances and vendors selling their wares. **FA**



Caretta on the Gulf



Sandpearl Resort