

BAREFOOT BEACH FUN



BEACH BLISS IN BRADENTON

It's one of the most beautiful cities in our regions, but often broadly referred to as Anna Maria—which technically is part of that community, but a separate city unto itself.

Our 'staycation' began when we checked into the kind of place you only hope exists somewhere in this world of cookie-cutter formulaic resorts.

Imagine a series of cottages directly on the sand, in direct view of the Gulf of Mexico—close enough to let the wave action lull you to sleep at night as the breeze blows through the screens of your suite.

Gayle Luper's "Bungalow Beach Resort" has been around for decades—on the main road, about half mile north of the Cortez Bridge.

Besides an immaculate bedroom and bathroom area, our bungalow also included a kitchen, a sitting area and three doors to the outside—each with its own porch.

www.bungalowbeach.com

We spent the day relaxing on the beach and cooling off in the pool before showering and walking less than a mile up the road to Historic Bridge Street.



After browsing the dozens of shops and restaurants on this incessantly interesting strip at the epicenter of Bradenton Beach, we walked down to the pier and boarded the 5pm cruise aboard Captain Sherman Baldwin's 'Paradise Boat Tours.'

Our friend from out of town had never seen dolphins up close, and within minutes of leaving the dock that changed.

Captain Andrew and his First Mate Deanna treated us to an informational and exciting tour of Sarasota and Palma Sola Bay. History lessons mixed in among dolphin sightings. Can't beat that variety. www.paradiseboattours.com

The 90-minute tour ended just in time to get back on the dock and walk down the block to dinner. Mixed in among the quaintness of Bridge Street is one place that stands out for its class and fine dining. We sat in the bar of the "Blue Marlin Seafood Restaurant" and had a wonderful time—with each other—and the other friendly patrons who made us feel like regulars.

Max Burke-Phillips is the General Manager, and his professional yet casual hands-on approach keeps everything running smoothly.

I had the 'Blue Marlin Low Country Boil' that included gulf shrimp, lobster tail, Tampa Bay clams, chorizo, corn, potatoes and tomato saffron (\$38)—which turned out to be a great choice. Every bite was special.

My wife enjoyed the 'Guthrie's Southern Style Mahi Mahi with blackening seasoning, roasted red pepper coulis, cheesy grits and collard greens (\$35).

The menu also includes soup, salads, sandwiches, burgers and desserts.

After dinner—get this—we went out the backdoor of the restaurant to sit and enjoy live music right in the backyard of the 'Blue Marlin!' Talk about Old Florida Charm. We took advantage of the outdoor bar and had a nightcap while listening to some great music in the tropical air. www.blumarlinami.com

A great night—made even better by the ability to walk back to our resort ON the sand. No driving, no parking, no problem.

We've been all over the world, but the 'stay-cations' we've taken in our own backyard are just as memorable as any. Enjoy Bradenton Beach. It's on Anna Maria Island. ☺

