

EXPLORE

LOCALLY

FEATURED DESTINATION

*Compass Resort at
Margaritaville*





I've lived up and down the Gulf Coast for more than 30 years now. I've been to all the islands—from Marco on north. But until now I never thought of a staycation on Perico Island.

Perico Island?

That's right—it's that area on State Road 64 on the right-hand side just before you get to the bridge to Anna Maria Island. Cognitive dissonance: "The state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs or attitudes."

In this situation, it felt counter-intuitive to pack for a trip to go to a hotel where you never knew there was a hotel!

Years ago, there was nothing more than a seafood restaurant and a convenience store there. Now there is MUCH more.

Discovering the Compass Hotel by Margaritaville



Erin and I checked in on a Friday afternoon and couldn't believe our eyes. An upbeat energetic fun atmosphere overlooking Anna Maria Sound.

They call it "laidback luxury" and I can see why. The hotel is run by France Langan who personifies flip-flop cool.

Jimmy Buffett would love this guy! France—who says he's actually Irish—brings a lifetime of nationwide big city hospitality management to Perico Island. We stayed in a beautiful room on the 6th floor with a balcony overlooking the marina and intracoastal. There are 123-room with comfortable bedding, smart TVs, high-speed Wi-Fi and there are water views from every room. The bathrooms feature rainfall showers which is a luxury for those of us who are 6'2". After we unpacked, we headed back outside to explore the area. Directly across the street is the Neal Preserve. We had a nice walk among the plants and trees and decided it was time to change into our swimsuits and head to the pool.

It was the first time either of us went in the pool in several years, but the view, the music and the waitress selling Margaritas conspired against us—or for us. We lounged around the pool and met another couple that was here from Ft. Lauderdale. They said they had read good reviews about the Compass Hotel and wanted to check it out.

Refreshed by our swim and our spontaneous Happy Hour (the hotel gives you a \$10 gift card toward your first round!), we changed and went to dinner. It wasn't a long commute: We went back downstairs and walked to the other side of the pool to enjoy a meal at Floridays Woodfire Grill & Bar. ("Floridays"—not coincidentally is the name of the developer.)

We got lucky and found a couple spots at the bar which we both always find more interesting. Erin and I both like to meet new people—and there were plenty of people to meet at this active restaurant.

Erin had the “Fish & Grits” (\$22.99) which included cornmeal batter, friend flounder, creamy cheddar stone ground grits, house collard greens with bacon and hot sauce. She enjoyed it very much—as did I enjoy the “Shrimp & Scallops Skewers (\$24.99). I had rice and French fries as my two sides. Great meal!

We went back into the lobby on the way back to our room and stopped and browsed in the gift shop— as well as a “Living Lounge” which includes books, board games, cards and other table games.

Waking up to a view of the adjacent marina and intracoastal was heavenly—but not quite as decadent as going downstairs for a free hot breakfast! And we’re not just talking about a box of oatmeal. This was eggs,bacon, sausage, cereal, muffins—you get the idea.

The hotel even employs a full-time “Director of Contagious Enthusiasm” and they could not have found a better choice than Susanne Arbanas. Susanne has worked around the world as a flight attendant and lives on Anna Maria Island. Her enthusiasm IS contagious. We monopolized her time for half an hour after breakfast and it was one of the highlights of the weekend.

We packed up and headed back south to Downtown Sarasota, home in less than half an hour—even though we felt like we were hundreds of miles away in a new resort. RAY COLLINS

www.compassannamaria.com





The Beauty of Barcelona

Barcelona is the capital and largest city of Catalonia and Spain's second largest city, with a population of over one and half million people (over five million in the whole province). This city, located directly on the northeastern Mediterranean coast of Spain, has a rich history, having been under Roman, then Frank law before declaring its independence.

