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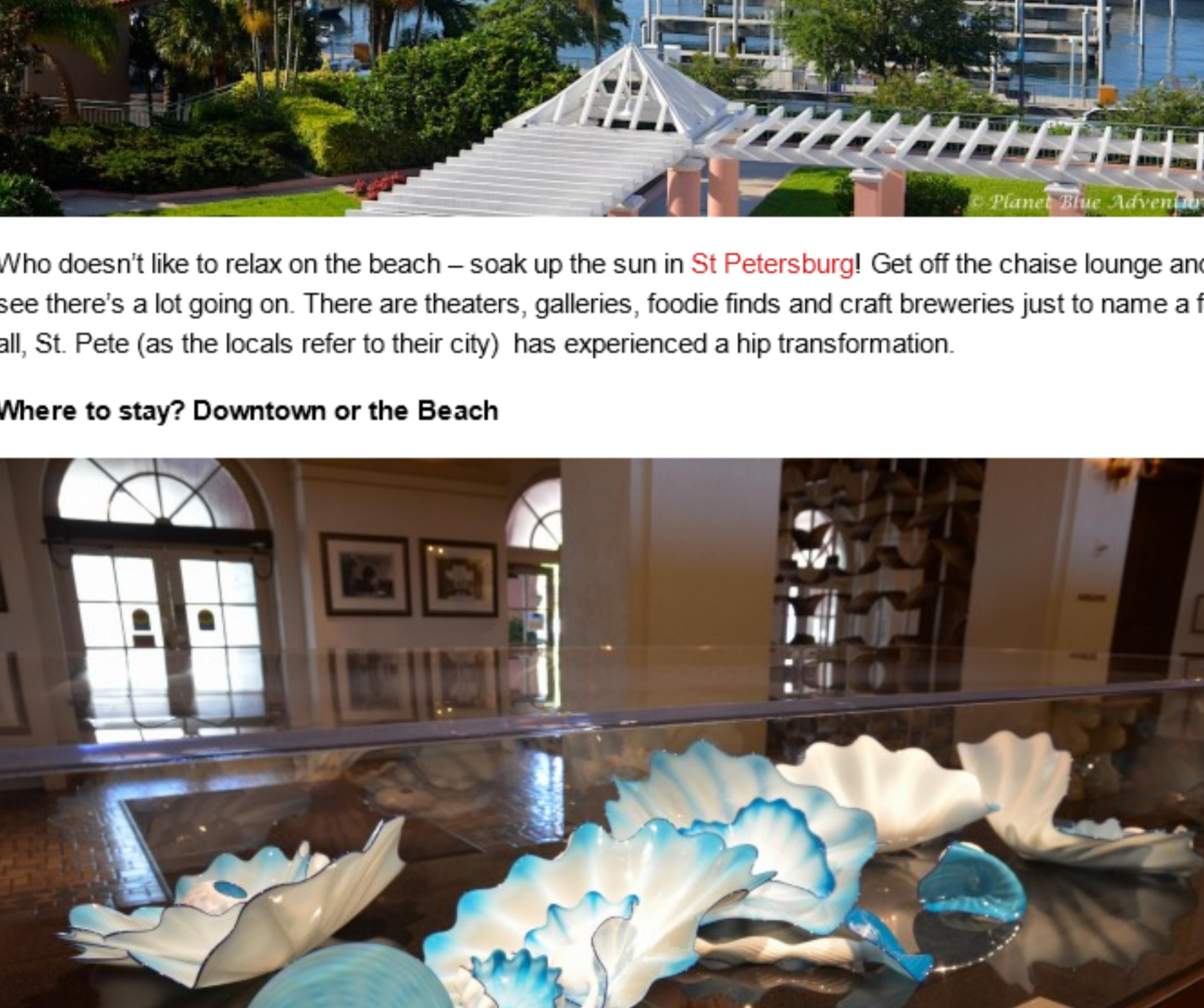
**Parm Parmar** Parm Parmar is a freelance travel and food writer based in Toronto. Connect with her on twitter @parmiep, or via her blog Planet Blue Adventure. [View full author page](#)

### DESTINATIONS

## St. Pete Florida Beyond the Beach

By [Parm Parmar](#) | [Planet Blue Adventure](#) | June 7, 2015

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Who doesn't like to relax on the beach – soak up the sun in **St Petersburg**! Get off the chaise lounge and you'll see there's a lot going on. There are theaters, galleries, foodie finds and craft breweries just to name a few. All in all, St. Pete (as the locals refer to their city) has experienced a hip transformation.

#### Where to stay? Downtown or the Beach



Vinyo Renaissance Chihuly Display

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Situated on beautiful Tampa Bay, the **Vinyo Renaissance** is like a pink palace in 'downtown' St. Pete. As you walk through the front door, you are hit with the elegance of the lobby, which is dotted with unusual art including a gorgeous Chihuly glass centerpiece. The rooms are very comfortable and spacious. The guest tower rooms feature lovely walk out balconies where you can take in the Marina and sweeping views of Tampa Bay. They have a full-service spa, golf course, pool, health club, lounge bar, cafe and 5 restaurants and they are within walking distance of many great attractions including the Chihuly Gallery, museums and shops.

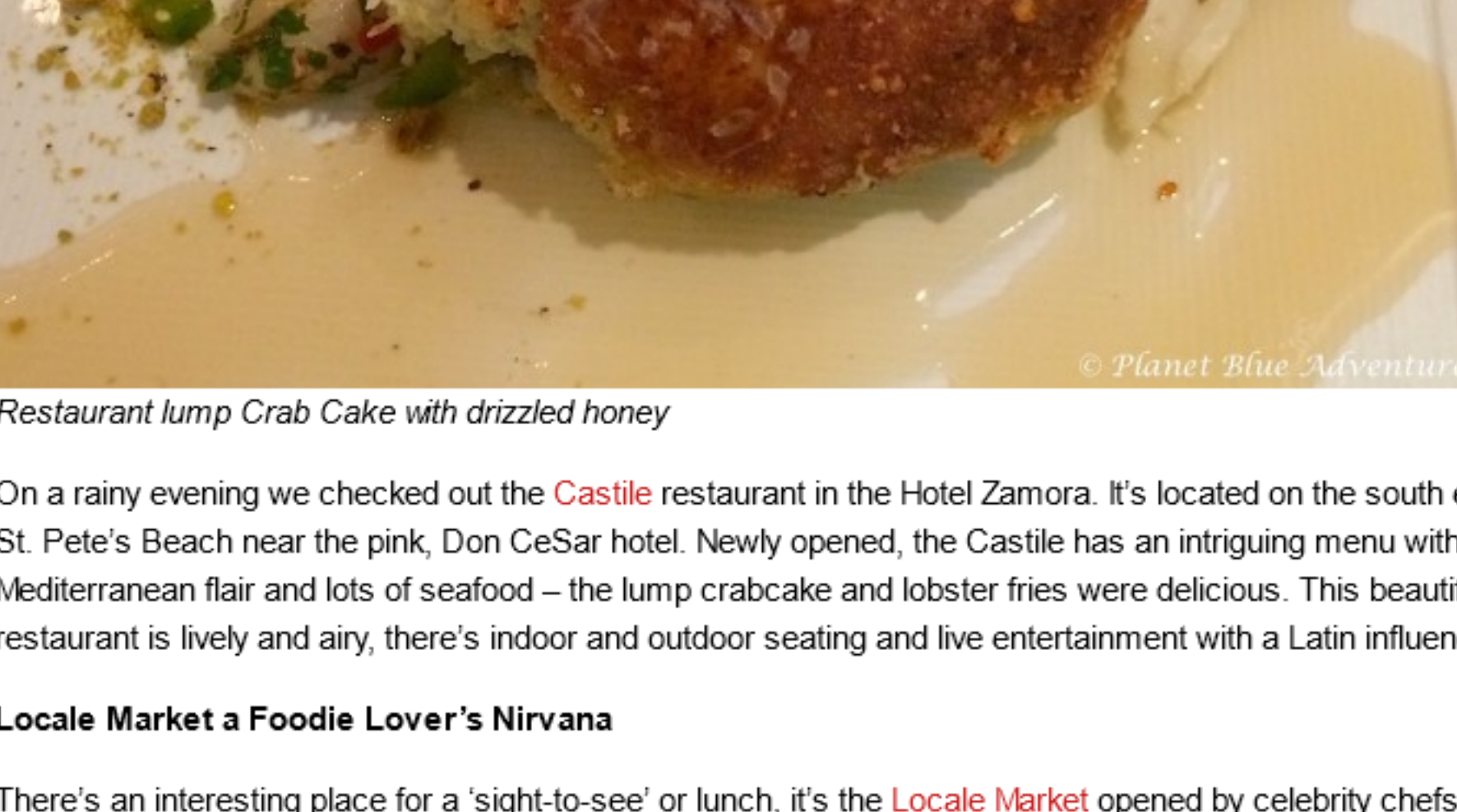
On St. Pete's beach, the **Guy Harvey Outpost** is a more casual place to stay for a quieter vacation. The resort is affiliated with the artwork of Guy Harvey, a Jamaican marine wildlife artist and conservationist. This is his first property in the United States. The kid-friendly beach and swimming pool make this a very popular resort for families. Cabanas dotting the beachfront can be reserved for breaks from the Florida sun. There's also a dolphin-viewing site, the best time to observe the dolphins would be in the early hours of the day. There is an adult pool and in the evenings you can watch the awesome sunset before cozying up to a beach fire-pit to make smores.

#### Dining Choices are Plentiful in St Pete's from Upscale to Casual Beach Restaurants

Whether you're staying at the Guy Harvey Outpost or not, you should try the **RumFish Grill** restaurant which is affiliated with the resort. There's an amazing array of seafood dishes, a good kids menu, and in a wonderful setting which would appeal to most, especially children. This is a new restaurant, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They have a 33,500 gallon fish tank taking up an entire wall in the dining room. There are 20 species sharing the tank including grouper, snook and redfish, as well as a 4 foot-long green moray eel. Interestingly, guests are allowed to snorkel in the tank, which obviously adds to the entertainment value of the diners.



If you're into catching spectacular Sunsets **"The Hurricane"** is a great spot to dine. An institution in the area growing a bit from a casual 'beach joint' with a 10 item menu to a large 2 story dining facility, BUT, maintained it's 'come-as-you-are' roots. This has always been and continues to be, a family owned restaurant. The "Hurricane Watch Rooftop" is an outdoor bar with live entertainment and spectacular 360-degree views of Pass-A-Grille and St. Pete's Beach. Order the big guest favourite 'grouper sandwich' along with a fresh cocktail. They serve breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Restaurant lump Crab Cake with drizzled honey

On a rainy evening we checked out the **Castile** restaurant in the Hotel Zamora. It's located on the south end of St. Pete's Beach near the pink, Don CeSar hotel. Newly opened, the Castile has an intriguing menu with a Mediterranean flair and lots of seafood – the lump crabcake and lobster fries were delicious. This beautiful restaurant is lively and airy, there's indoor and outdoor seating and live entertainment with a Latin influence.

#### Locale Market a Foodie Lover's Nirvana

There's an interesting place for a 'sight-to-see' or lunch, it's the **Locale Market** opened by celebrity chefs Michael Mina and Don Pintabona. This is a 20,000 sq. ft. market specializing in locally sourced food. You can shop, watch chefs cook and, best of all, indulge your taste buds. It's a feast for all senses. Each department, or station (pasta, farm-table kitchen, seafood, butcher, bakery), is manned by a chef to aid you in selections and answer questions.

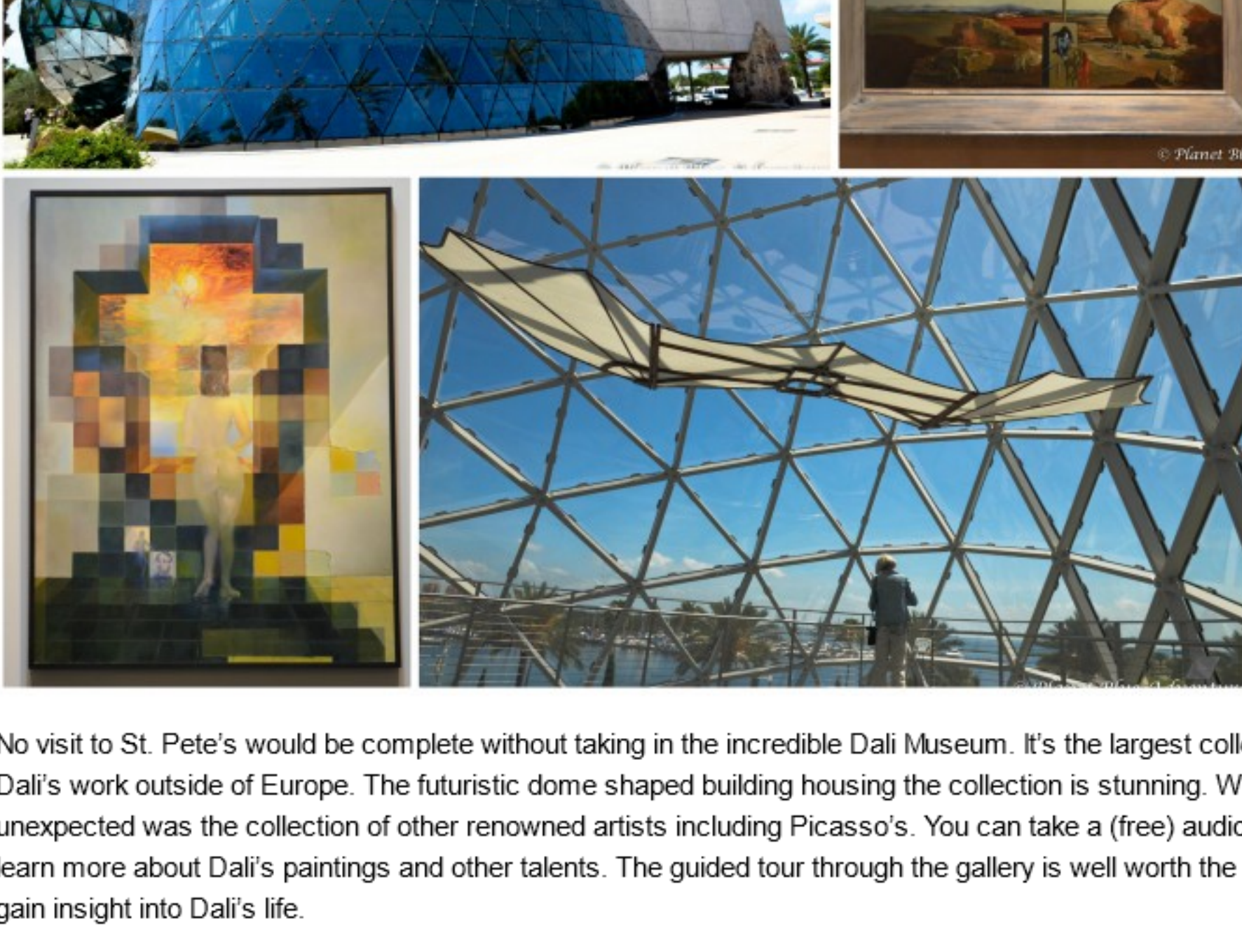


You can watch the fishmonger breakdown a cobia or salmon, then take the 'fresh' filets home for dinner or watch the butcher cut a tomahawk steak then sear it for your lunch. Whether you are stopping in for a quick breakfast sandwich, a spot of lunch or shopping for your next party, the Locale Market is the place. The market's second floor, Farm-Table Kitchen is a dining destination for locals and tourists alike where you can order off a menu. Trying their handmade squash tortellini with a salami-cheese board starter made for a great lunch.



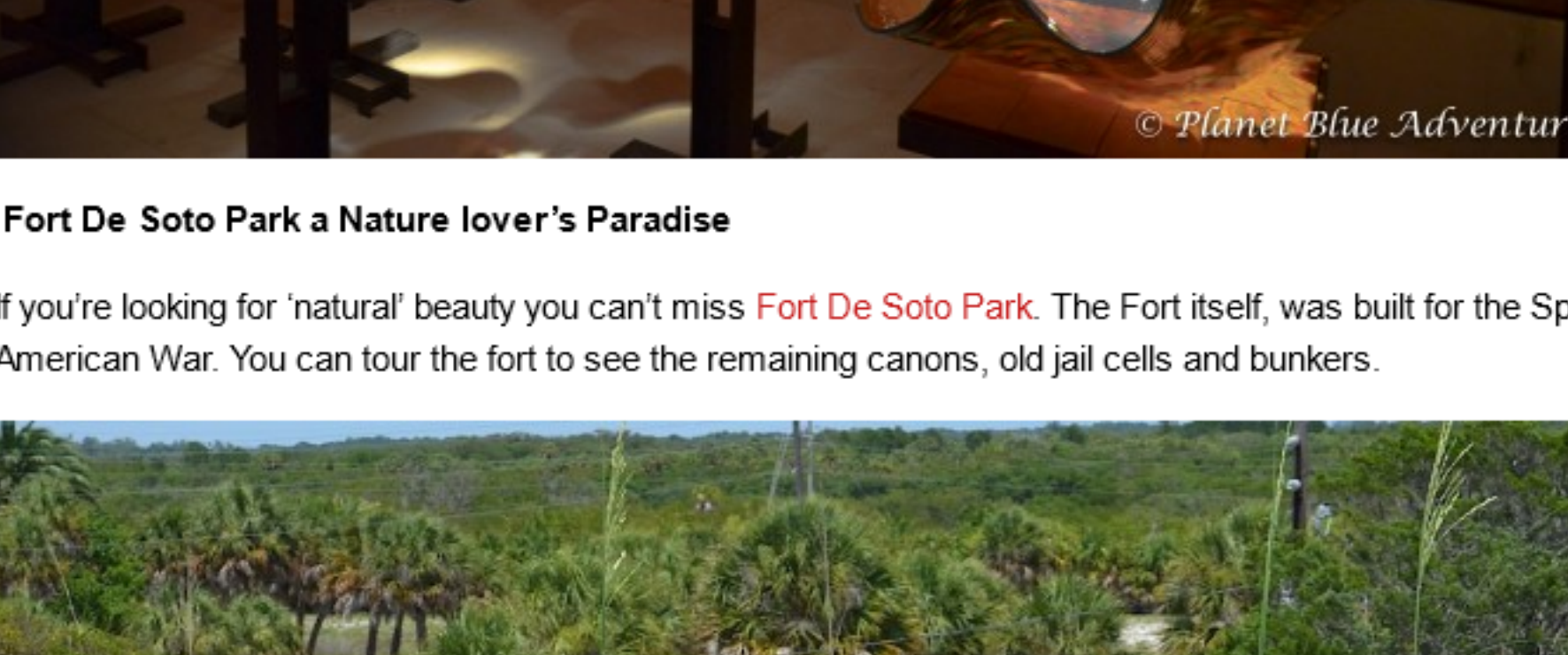
There's an artisan chocolate line available at Locale Market called **William Dean Chocolates**. Owner William Brown, while watching the blockbuster movie – The Hunger Games was stunned to see his chocolates appear in two scenes. Since the film's release, many people have visited his shop asking for "The Hunger Games" chocolates. Brown was, of course, thrilled with this bit of luck, and had created customized chocolates for subsequent movies. These handmade chocolates are simply ambrosia in the mouth. The challenge is deciding which one to bite into first.

#### World Class Art Galleries



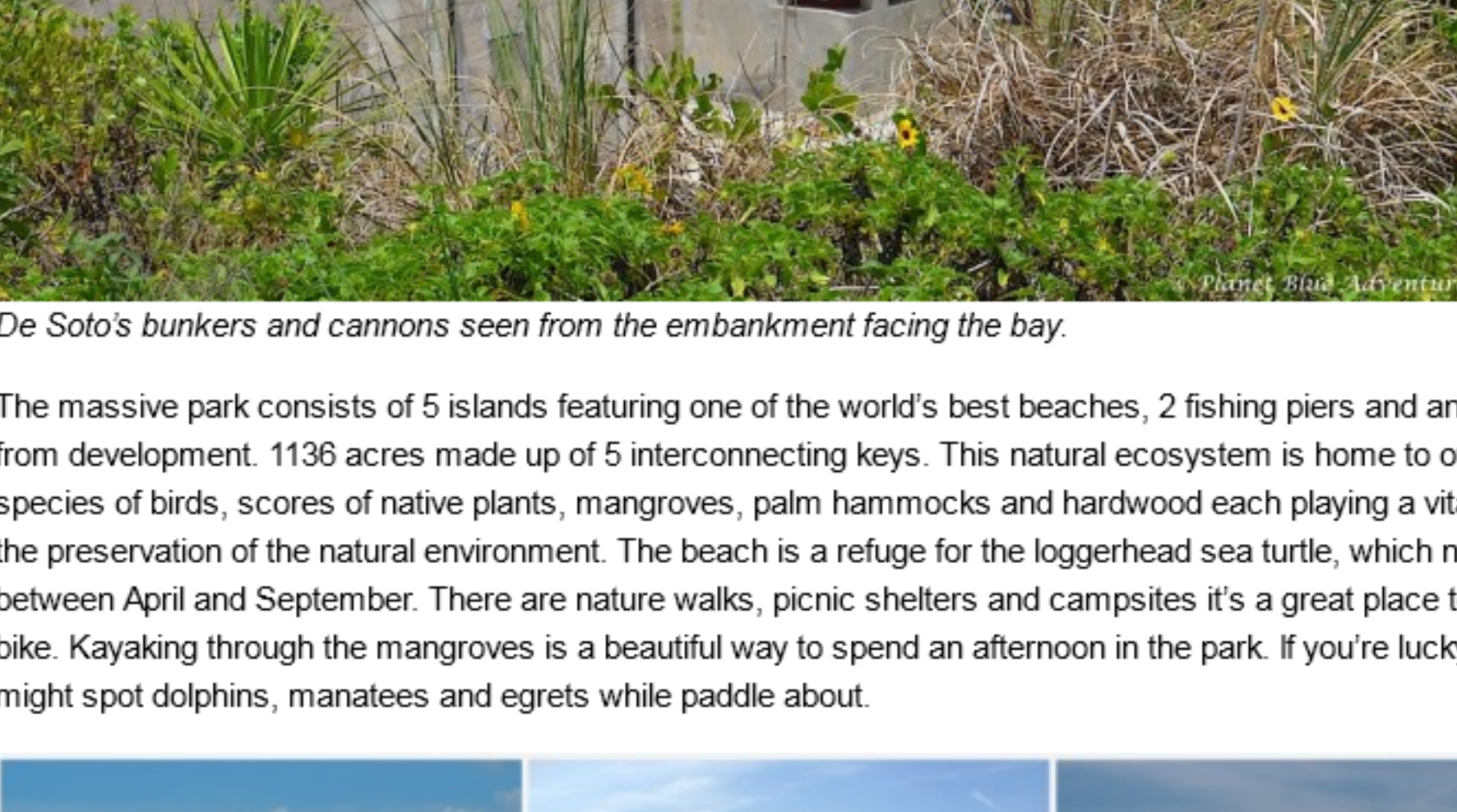
No visit to St. Pete's would be complete without taking in the incredible Dali Museum. It's the largest collection of Dali's work outside of Europe. The futuristic dome shaped building housing the collection is stunning. What was unexpected was the collection of other renowned artists including Picasso's. You can take a (free) audio tour to learn more about Dali's paintings and other talents. The guided tour through the gallery is well worth the time to gain insight into Dali's life.

Another site not-to-be-missed is the **Chihuly** Collection at the **Mbrean Art Center**. It's in a beautiful 10,000 sq. ft. setting designed by architect Albert Alfonso, located in the heart of St. Pete's on Beach Drive. No words can do justice to the whimsical beauty of these creations. You absolutely must see them for yourself.



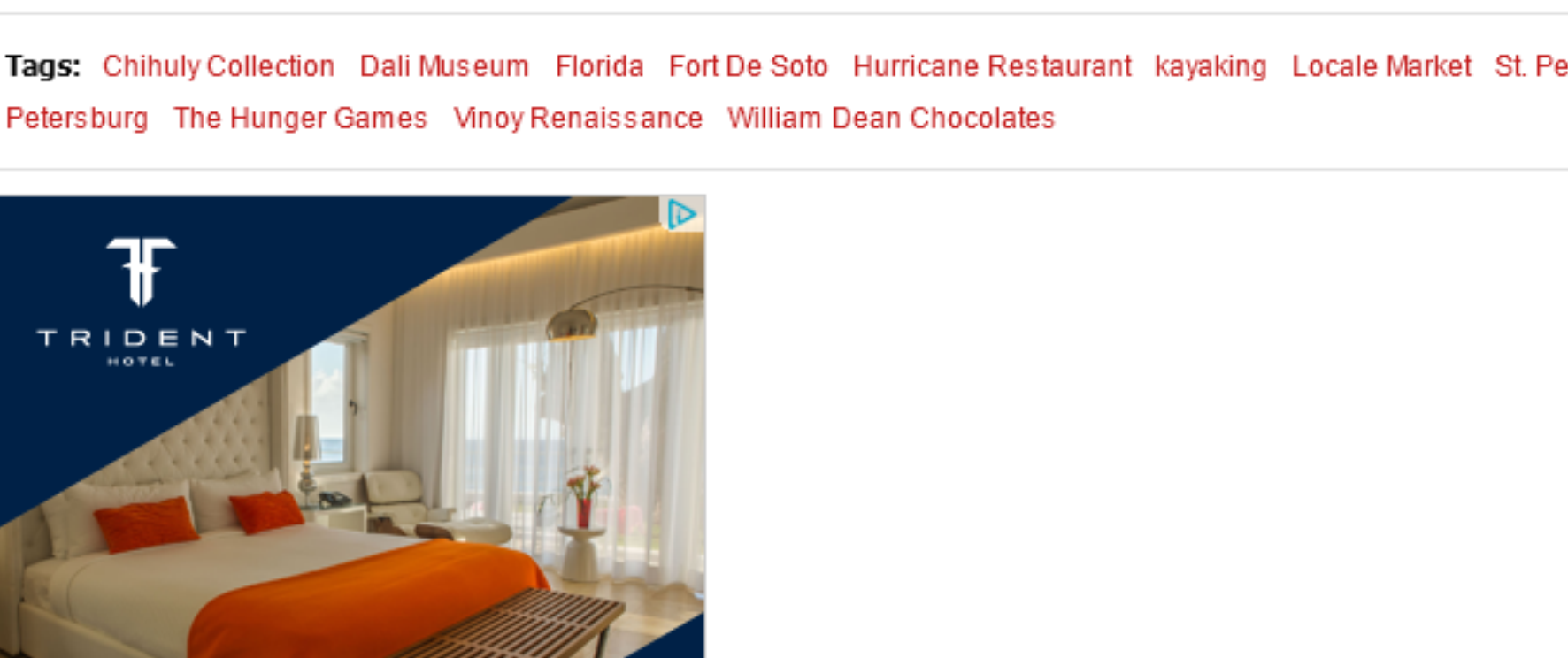
#### Fort De Soto Park a Nature lover's Paradise

If you're looking for 'natural' beauty you can't miss **Fort De Soto Park**. The Fort itself, was built for the Spanish-American War. You can tour the fort to see the remaining canons, old jail cells and bunkers.



De Soto's bunkers and cannons seen from the embankment facing the bay.

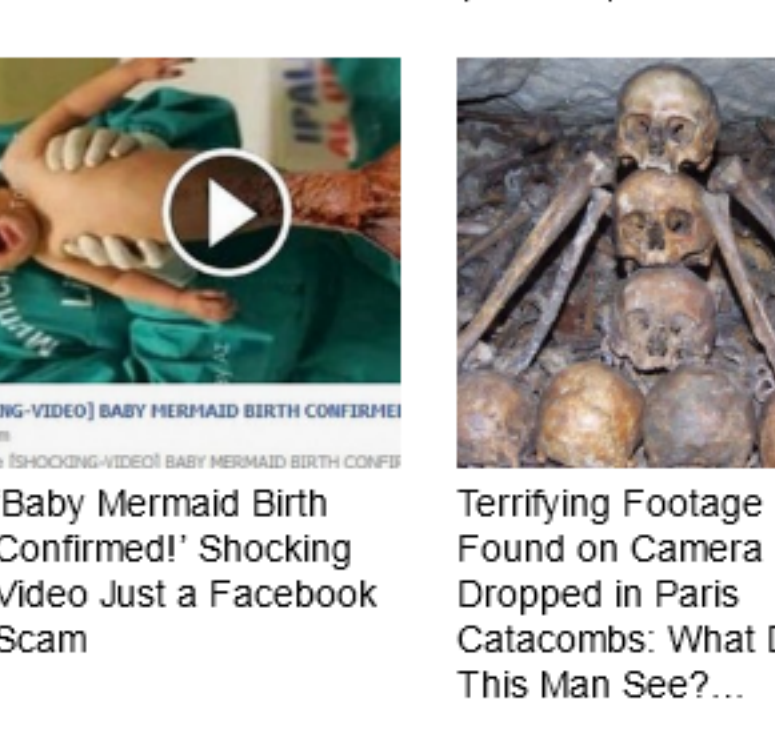
The massive park consists of 5 islands featuring one of the world's best beaches, 2 fishing piers and an escape from development. 1136 acres made up of 5 interconnecting keys. This natural ecosystem is home to over 328 species of birds, scores of native plants, mangroves, palm hammocks and hardwood each playing a vital role in the preservation of the natural environment. The beach is a refuge for the loggerhead sea turtle, which nest between April and September. There are nature walks, picnic shelters and campsites it's a great place to hike or bike. Kayaking through the mangroves is a beautiful way to spend an afternoon in the park. If you're lucky you might spot dolphins, manatees and egrets while paddle about.



Another location for family fun is the **John's Pass Village** and Boardwalk tourist mecca in Madeira Beach, located between St. Pete's Beach and Clearwater. There are more than 100 retailers, restaurants and attractions. This historic fishing village offers boat tours, mini cruises, fishing charters, water-sports rentals, Para-sailing, and dolphin spotting.

That's the new St. Petel! I've already made a wish list of what to see in my next visit.

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