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Ultimate Bar Guide: 8 Tampa Bay beach bars worth their shaker of salt

By Jay Cridlin and Robbyn Mitchell, Times staff writer

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For this year's *tbt** Ultimate Bar Guide, we tallied up more than 100 reasons we love going to bars in Tampa Bay. Here are eight beach bars on both sides of the bay that are more than worth their shaker of salt.

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Three-day weekend!: Hogan's Beach

It's only been open a year and a half, but **Hogan's Beach** has already muscled its way to the top of Tampa Bay's party-bar scene. Thanks to some smart partnerships with in-the-know promoters, Hulk Hogan's waterfront bar and grill has become a mecca for bikini-clad revelers on the Hillsborough side of the bay. In particular, it's carving out a niche as a holiday-weekend hangout, scheduling multiple nights of parties around Memorial Day (when they brought in Lil Jon), the Fourth of July (DJ Carnage and the country band Love and Theft) and Labor Day (with DJ Laidback Luke). The fact that it's connected to the Best Western Bay Harbor Hotel doesn't hurt — you can drink as much as you want and not worry about driving back. We'll see you there soon, brother. 7700 W Courtney Campbell Causeway, Tampa. (813) 281-8900, hogansbeachtampa.com.

It's 5 o'clock somewhere: Harry's Beach Bar

There are a million laid-back beach bars on Gulf Boulevard, but not all of them are worth their shaker of salt. One that is: **Harry's Beach Bar** at the Sirata Beach Resort. Harry's claims to be the "oldest beachfront bar in St. Pete," and when it's this hot out, who'd bother arguing? Located poolside, just a few steps from the beach, it's got a small menu with all the rummy, fruity classics — rum runners, margaritas, Bahama Mamas and the like. There's even a fire pit for chilly winter nights and an arcade with an air-hockey table. That last part is decidedly un-Bufferf, but we don't care — after all, it is 5 o'clock somewhere. 5300 Gulf Blvd., St. Pete Beach; (855) 344-5999, sirata.com.

We want to drink like a fish: RumFish Grill & Bar

It may hurt to hear this, but you will never get a table near the 33,500-gallon fish tank at **Guy Harvey RumFish Grill**, inside the Guy Harvey Outpost at the TradeWinds Resort. Not now, not ever. Which may be just as well, because that frees you up to check out the bar. You might opt for a rum flight, which includes a sample of the house-infused "Vanilla RumFish" rum, or one of the flavorful, easy-drinkin' cocktails (the Artificial Reef, which tweaks your average Floribbean sipper by swapping the rum for Wild Turkey American Honey, is not to be missed). Either way, it's a heck of a lot easier to sidle up to the bar's aquarium than the one in the restaurant's dining room. 6000 Gulf Blvd., St. Pete Beach. (727) 329-1428; rumfishgrill.com.

It's just too hot out: The Brown Boxer

Clearwater Beach is littered with indoor-outdoor bars, perfect for escaping the summer sun while keeping the salty breeze within arm's reach. The **Brown Boxer** is one of the best, with tables outside and big, wide-open windows near the bars. It's a sprawling place, so on weekends, when the live music is pumping, it feels a bit like a laid-back version of those rolling Hamptons house parties from *Weekend at Bernie's*, with beachgoers rolling in and out for pints and tropical delights as the weather dictates. 483 Mandalay Ave., Clearwater Beach; (727) 441-6000, thebrownboxer.com.

The beach is just too far away: Sunova Beach

Tony SoHo isn't the first place you'd look for a laid-back beach bar — especially if you're checking out 208 S Howard Ave., formerly the home of multi-leveled martini mecca Mangroves. But **Sunova Beach**, which took Mangroves' place this year, is doing its best to bring the gulf shores to you, particularly at an island-themed indoor-outdoor bar where you can order oversized punch drinks served in fishbowl-like glasses. This being SoHo, you're still going to find a ton of flavored vodka and a decent scotch and bourbon selection, and \$2 drafts and well cocktails during Happy Hour. Howard Avenue may not be the Gulf of Mexico, but a menu like that makes for a pretty nice view nonetheless. 208 S Howard Ave., Tampa. (813) 250-0304, sunovabeachsoho.com.

We're on a boat: The Getaway and I.C. Sharks

Two major tiki compounds have exploded just off Gandy Beach, catering to the Redneck Riviera's blue-collar beachgoers in general, and boaters in particular. Next-door-neighbors **The Getaway** (13090 Gandy Blvd. N, thegetawaytampabay.com) and **I.C. Sharks Seafood Market Waterfront Cafe and Tiki Bar** (13040 Gandy Blvd. N; icsharks.com) pour potent tiki drinks by the docks with nice views of Weedon Island, and there are plenty of slips for weekend cap'ns to drop anchor and hop out and play. Once on land, you'll find comfortable beachside seating, creative food-truck fare and, at the Getaway, even paddleboard lessons. Who knew the Redneck Riviera was so trendy?

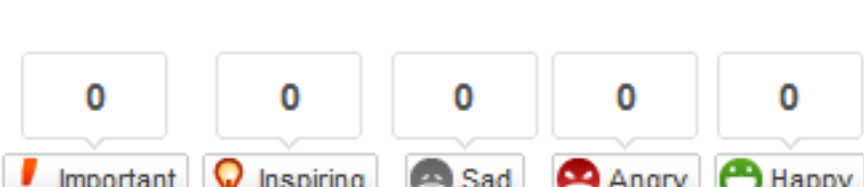
Abs!: Shephard's

The revamped **Shephard's Beach Resort** is an excellent spot for feasting your eyes on some serious abs every Sunday, as DJ's from around the world crank tunes at the behest of local promoters from noon to 9 p.m. Well-toned fellas dehydrate themselves with alcohol — making the six-packs that much more pronounced — during Shephard's Sunday Beach Party, where the uniform is your cutest swimwear and your objective is to get loose. In the past month, DJ's 3LAU, Scene and Joe Maz and Konflikt have graced the stage, pumping out jams well-suited for premium flexing. But let's face it, the music is secondary to the visuals. With its beautiful pool-bar area and penchant from drawing out some of Tampa Bay's buffest, Shephard's could practically bill itself the official bar of Instagram. Shephard's Beach Resort, 619 S Gulfview Blvd., Clearwater Beach. (727) 442-5107, shephards.com.

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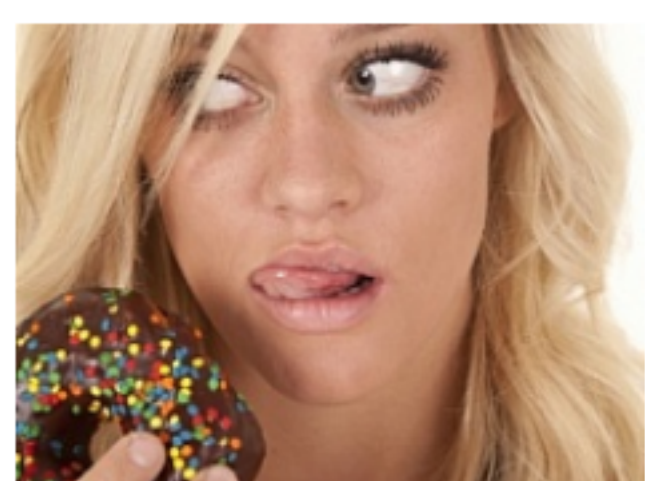
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