

Get Out And Enjoy Some Of The Bay Area's Great Beaches

By Karen McBride

Honeymoon Island has gone through many names over the years since it was first visited by the Tocobaga tribe, who lived in the Tampa Bay area from the 900s into the 1500s. The Indians were known to eat large amounts of shellfish, and this may be one of the reasons they traveled to the island. Spanish explorers, pirates and traders also visited the barrier island. Over the next few centuries the island's name changed from Sand Island to Hog Island in 1880. In 1921, a hurricane split the island creating Caladesi Island and Hurricane Pass.

A New York developer, Clinton Washburn, had a vision for the pristine beach area and named it Honeymoon Island. In 1939, he built 50 palm-thatched bungalows for honeymooners. The beautiful Florida weather and white sandy beaches made it a perfect destination point for the brides and grooms. When the war started and factories were producing goods around the clock, it became a place to relax and unwind for tired workers. In the 1950s, Honeymoon Island was sold to Arthur Vining Davis, then Hyman Green, and eventually the state bought it in the 1970s.

Honeymoon Island is still enjoyed by visitors today. Whether you want to stay on dry land or enjoy the crystal clear water, you can rent bikes, kayaks, umbrellas and beach chairs at Café Honeymoon. Dog lovers can bring their four legged friends to the dog park, so they can play in the warm Gulf waters.

A ferry from Honeymoon Island can take you to Caladesi Island, a 600-acre oasis only accessible by boat. Three miles of beaches and a meandering nature trail make this a nature lovers paradise. Bring a picnic lunch or enjoy eating at Café Caladesi. Restrooms and showers are



Enjoy gorgeous sunsets at Howard Park in Tarpon Springs

available.

As you walk along the nature trail, you may see a gopher tortoise, osprey, eagles, egrets or even an armadillo. Walk along the shell-laden beach or sit on one of the many commemorative benches and enjoy all that nature has to offer.

Just North of Honeymoon Island is Fred Howard Park, named for the former mayor of Tarpon Springs. Howard was a successful businessman with a passion for the community. He was Commissioner and Vice Chairman of the Pinellas County Park Board for more than 30 years. The 155-acre park first opened in 1966. Howard worked to secure the property for Tarpon Springs residents and people from the surrounding area, to enjoy. A bronze plaque has been placed at the bottom of the flagpole in his honor.

The park has playgrounds and picnic tables in well-shaded areas. Along the open causeway you will find people fishing and jet skiing. The causeway then leads to the sandy beach area. Palm trees provide some much needed shade and the gradual slope of the sand into the water make this an ideal place for families with young children. From March through September, lifeguards are on duty from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Automated pay stations have been installed: the fee is \$5 per

day. Annual parking passes can be purchased for \$75 (\$55 for people 65 or older).

From the causeway at Howard Park you can see Sunset Beach. Whether you want to sit under a shady palm tree and read a good book or wade in the shallow warm gulf, Sunset Beach is the place for you. Photographers will love the unobstructed view of the sunset as

it melts into the horizon. Picnic tables, bicycle racks, boat ramps and facilities are available. Concerts are held on the first Thursday of each month at 7:00 pm. De Lei'ed Parrots (Parrot Head Music) will be performing on June 7 and The Relics (Classic Rock) in August. Music on the Beach hosts a variety of genre. Past entertainers include Time Bandits (Classic Rock), Evergreen (Traditional Irish Music), Tarpon Springs High School Jazz Ensemble and Slick side (Classic R&B).

If you enjoy music, travel to Clearwater Beach. As one of the top tourist destinations, many of the hotels offer live entertainment. "Sunsets at Pier 60 Festival" is a daily event that starts two hours before sunset and ends two hours after sunset (weather permitting). The festival features artisans, crafters, street performers and live

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music and entertainment on the weekends. The event is free to the public.

During your visit to Clearwater, you may wish to spend some time at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium. It is the home of the famous dolphin named Winter; featured in the film "A Dolphin's Tale". The Clearwater Municipal Marina offers Fishing Charter Boats, Dining Cruise Boats, Parasailing, Dive Boats, and Sightseeing (like Captain Memo's Pirate Cruise). For contact information, go to www.visitclearwaterflorida.com/press/marina.aspx.

With all of the million dollar condos and high-rise hotels, it is hard to imagine what it looked like back in 1883 when the first recorded settlers arrived. Travel to and from Clearwater was more difficult back then. They didn't have the convenience of traveling across the Courtney Campbell Causeway. There were no bridges to reach the island at the time



Or if you prefer enjoy the sunsets at Sunset Beach

that Prudence Chafter, who purchased most of the south end of Clearwater, and Patrick Houston, who purchased the north end, arrived. A little more than a decade later, in 1897, Ernest Tate bought the island for \$200 and it was called Tate's Island. He wasn't able to keep the island for long and it went into foreclosure in 1899. Christopher

Bouton and James Malone of Dunedin then purchased the land in the northern part in 1902 and J.R. Davy, J.T. Bennett, and T.H. Asbury purchased the southern part in 1903. L.B. Skinner, a citrus industry and hotel mogul, headed the development of the island from 1910-1920. He partnered with E.T. Roux and formed the Clearwater

Island Bridge Co. The city built the first wooden bridge in 1917.

There are still some of the original cottages along Mandalay Avenue, Eldorado Avenue and Bay Esplanade. The cottages were actually constructed on the main land and then barged across Clearwater Harbor. The Palm Pavilion, opened in 1926 as a bathing/beach pavilion and is located at 10 Bay Esplanade, is now a restaurant. Even though Clearwater is a world renown tourist destination, it's good to know it has maintained a little of its history over the years.

To help support the beaches in our area, you may wish to join "Friends of the Island Parks or "Tampa Bay Watch". Friends of the Island Parks is a Florida Park Service Citizen Support Organizations, which is a volunteer organization that sponsor events, raise funds, and support the goals of the parks. For more information, go to www.islandparks.org/



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