



ENTER THROUGH THE NEOCLASSICAL FACADE (BELOW) TO DISCOVER ONE-OF-A-KIND FLORIDIAN DECOR. GUESTS CAN EXPLORE THE HISTORIC HOTEL, RELAX IN A COTTAGE (FAR LEFT), AND TAKE TO THE WATER FOR A DAY OF FISHING.



QUICK TRIPS

VINTAGE Vacation

Retro resort life is alive and well at The Gasparilla Inn & Club

By Mary Murray

Florida's reputation as a winter haven for Northerners has never been up for debate. But imagine the state's appeal now versus 100 years ago and postcards of theme parks and seaside cityscapes give way to sepia snapshots of beachgoers in turn-of-the-century bathing suits and fishermen hunting high-flying tarpon. It was a simpler time then—and those nostalgic for a Floridian vacation of yesteryear can experience it all at The Gasparilla Inn & Club.

Located in the village of Boca Grande on the barrier island of Gasparilla, this century-old resort helped put Southwest Florida on the holiday map. Founded as the Hotel Boca Grande, the original two-story, 20-room structure quickly grew in size and fame. Early on, it hosted luminaries like J.P. Morgan and Henry Ford, with the majority of its guests arriving via boat or train. While the railroad has since closed (replaced in 1958 by a causeway), The Gasparilla Inn & Club remains, having earned a designation as one of the state's largest surviving hotels and a member of the Historic Hotels of America.

The inn underwent many renovations in its youth. A neoclassical facade and loggia, added to the main building in 1931, welcomes all visitors. Yellow cottages and homes are scattered throughout the property and provide large, family-style accommodations. The 63 inn rooms—some original, some

additions—are a step back in time, complete with actual keys and antique furniture.

An Old Florida approach to decor permeates the entire inn. Wicker rocking chairs invite rest. Ample orchids dress walls and tables. Seashells are expertly stacked in dormant fireplaces and caringly arranged in framed sailor's valentines. Room upon room of tropical prints in shades of pink and lime recall the most sublime of Lilly Pulitzer boutiques.

Perhaps the most stylish spot is the main dining room, with its various green accents complemented by a picturesque view of the lawn and golf course. Here, dinner features the freshest products and reflects the inn's overall theme of timeless elegance. Think: white asparagus vichyssoise and Florida black grouper in a clam butter sauce. Breakfast is another draw, one that stars decadent entrees like lobster scrambled eggs to start your day.

At The Gasparilla Inn & Club, that day can be as relaxing or action-packed as you like. Rent a bike and follow a path that runs the length of the island, with stops at salt-kissed lighthouses. Kick back at the Beach Club and laze away on the private swathe of sand. Sport your whites and play croquet at the Mallet Club. Or, take a cue from the inn's earliest visitors and hit the water for some sport fishing.

A seasonal resort, The Gasparilla Inn & Club shutters for the summer but will reopen October 4. Historic charm and a true taste of Old Florida await. (the-gasparilla-inn.com) ◀◀



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