



# TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA



Comments are by CruiseCritic.com members & friends  
collected by 'DarryDFL' & 'PegEggFL'.

Names in single quotes are a *nom de plume*.

Click on any blue, underlined text to go to its linked reference.<sup>1</sup>

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## AIRPORTS



### ST. PETERSBURG – CLEARWATER AIRPORT

14700 Terminal Boulevard, Clearwater, FL 33762 — Call 1-727-453-7800

- 6 **AIRLINES** serving 16 states, Toronto, & Nova Scotia.
- **Allegiant Air** — [www.allegiantair.com](http://www.allegiantair.com) — Services selected cities in IA, IL, IN, KY, MI, MO, NC, NY, OH, PA, SC, TN, VA, & WV. Call 1-702-505-8888
- **Beau Rivage** — [www.beaurivage.com](http://www.beaurivage.com) — Services: Gulfport-Biloxi, MS. Call 1-877-462-2328
- **SeaCoast Airlines** — [www.seacoastairlines.com](http://www.seacoastairlines.com) — Services: Marathon and Key West, FL — Call 1-727-507-8582
- **Sunwing Airlines** — [www.flysunwing.com](http://www.flysunwing.com) — Seasonal service to Toronto; call 1-877-786-9464
- **Transat Holidays** — [www.transatholidays.com](http://www.transatholidays.com) — Services: Halifax, Nova Scotia
- **USA3000 Airlines** — [www.usa3000.com](http://www.usa3000.com) — Services Chicago – O’Hare, IL (beginning December 2009). Call 1-877-872-3000
- ‘DarryDFL’, Sep/9/15: Flying into here can be a lot less expensive than flying into TIA. If you’re going to rent a car any way, this might be a better option.

### TAMPA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (TIA)

Call 1-813-870-8770; [Search for flights into and from TIA.](#)

## ATTRACTIONS

### 101 THINGS TO DO

► 101 Things to Do with Kids this Summer in Tampa Bay by *St. Petersburg Times*, FL, March 16, 2010, <http://tinyurl.com/yg4mlhq> — We live in Tampa Bay, home to year-round sun, beaches, sports, the arts and endless fun for the kids... This list includes contact information for each idea.

### BEACHES

► 'MMWoz', Aug/23/09: St. Pete Beach, Anna Maria Island, and Siesta Key Beaches. The gulf beaches are beautiful — take your pick! The sand at Siesta Key is a beautiful snowy white and never gets hot!

### BUSCH GARDENS

► Daily 9:30 AM – 6 PM (hours extended in the summer). Located at Busch Blvd. and 40<sup>th</sup> Street. <http://www.buschgardens.com/bqt2/>

► 'MetroAlto', Aug/15/09: If you have an extra day at the front or end of your trip, both **Busch Gardens** and **Adventure Island** [a water theme park] are wonderful parks with tons of fun things to do!

► 'DarryDFL', Aug/15/09: It's as good as Disney, and it's local. Featuring the state's largest zoo, it offers live shows, beautiful flora, and thrill rides:

► **Montu** — 'DarryDFL', Aug/15/09: Traveling at 60 mile per hour and feeling a G-force of 3.85, you'll experience 7 insane inversions on one of the tallest and longest inverted coasters in the world. Reaching 150 feet, you'll drop 128 feet at a 50-degree angle. Named for an ancient Egyptian god of war, this will test your courage. This will be the longest 3 minutes of your life.

► **SheiKra** — 'DarryDFL', Aug/15/09: Never eat before this ride. After a 200-foot climb, this coaster takes you just over the edge of a true 90-degree drop. Then it stops. For 4 seconds, you find yourself looking straight down at the ground below as you're held suspended above it. Then it plunges down at speeds of more than 70 miles per hour. An tremendous loop, another vertical dive into an underground tunnel, and a surprise for your friends who are looking from the bridge.

- **Congo River Rapids** — ‘DarryDFL’, Aug/15/09: It is PegEgg’s favorite ride. Picture 10-12 people in a circular, rubber raft being pushed around a river by the current. Did I mention that your friends can ambush you with water cannons?
- **Rhino Rally** — ‘DarryDFL’, Aug/15/09: A 10-minute, off-road ride where you view and photograph animals. Not as good as the Safari Adventure at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, but nonetheless fun .
- **Kumba** — ‘DarryDFL’, Aug/15/09: Never eat before this ride. Consistently voted one of the world’s top roller coasters by enthusiasts around the world, it takes you from hair-raising heights to absolute weightlessness in 7 complete inversions.

## CHANNELSIDE

- ‘MMWoz’, Aug/23/09: A nice place to browse, shop, eat in one of the waterfront restaurants and watch the port activity, and bowl at [Splitsville](http://splitsvillelanes.com) — <http://splitsvillelanes.com>. Most weekends, there are bands in the courtyard for entertainment.
- ‘Gator0178’, Aug/24/09: There is a bar/eatery bowling alley called [Splitsville](http://splitsville.com). There is one of the few [Bennigan’s](http://bennigan.com) left in the country. There is a good Thai restaurant on the upper deck. There is also a REALLY fun dueling piano bar called “[Howl at the Moon](http://howlatthemoon.com)”. It is in the back and hard to find at first, but a must-see, especially since Royal Caribbean Line got rid of the dueling pianos on its ships.
- Parking. “4 Channelside Bay Plaza Clubs Evicted,” *The Tampa Tribune*, Business, November 28, 2009, p. 1

“Owners of Margarita Mama’s, Banana Joe’s, Lucky’s and the Velvet Room fell behind on rent.” [So they were evicted from Channelside.]

Parking has been a constant challenge. ... Tampa Port Authority charges a \$10 fee to park in Channelside’s parking garage during special events. *Customers may not realize they can pay as little as 50 cents to park in the garage if they visit one of the shopping center’s tenants, including the cinemas. Many just see the \$10 sign and decide to go elsewhere, Edelman said.*

## CSI: MIAMI IS TAMPA

“CSI: Miami sure look a lot like Tampa,” *Tampa Bay Times*, Sep/23/09: Tampa Bay viewers of “CSI: Miami” got a surprise during the show’s Monday night season premiere [Sep/21/09]... The title screen of CSI Miami on CBS is, in fact, using downtown Tampa buildings in their alleged skyline. Clearly the “beer can” building (Sykes building) on the left. And if you look close, further to the right, you can see the distinctive stair-stepped side of the Wachovia building! Guess Tampa just has cooler buildings than Miami.



## FLORIDA AQUARIUM

► ‘DarryDFL’, Aug/15/09: Located at the Port of Tampa, the Florida Aquarium showcases 5,000+ aquatic animals and plants. There’s also the new Dive with the Sharks, which lets certified scuba divers swim with sharks for 30 minutes. Daily 9:30 AM – 5 PM. It’s located at 701 Channelside Drive. General Admission: Adults: \$19.95; Seniors 60+: \$16.95; Children under 12: \$14.95; and Children 2 & under: Free

## HENRY B. PLANT MUSEUM

401 W Kennedy Blvd, Tampa, FL 33606 — (813) 254-1891. Open Tuesday – Saturday 10 AM – 4 PM and Sunday 12 PM – 4 PM

<http://www.plantmuseum.com/>

- Inside the old Tampa Bay Hotel is the Henry B. Plant Museum. This Victorian palace offers up stunning European furnishings and art.
- ‘DarryDFL’, Aug/22/09: The “Tarpon Tales & Sport Fishing in Early Florida,” March 27 – December 27, 2009 shows sport fishing from the late 1800's to the 1930's on the west coast of Florida.



Map to Plant Museum



There are period photographs, mounted fish, rods, reels, tackle, & gear. If you're a fisherman, see this.

➤ 'DarryDFL', Aug/22/09: The "Victorian Christmas Stroll," December 1-23, 2009, transports you to the 1891 Tampa Bay Hotel. You'll hear beautiful music while viewing period toys, Christmas stockings and Old Saint Nick. You'll meet men, women, and kids dressed in period clothing. Your mind wanders and you wander along. Bring your camera.

## LOWRY ZOO

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo, 1101 W Sligh Ave, (813) 935-8552

<http://lowryparkzoo.com>

➤ 'BeechCat', Aug/23/09: For a smaller version of a zoo, with more Florida landscape, the Lowry Park Zoo is good. This is not as commercial as Busch Gardens and you are closer to the animals. We enjoyed it with adults and children. It's a good learning park.

## MANATEE VIEWING CENTER

➤ 'Mkross', Feb/6/10: I took my husband & son right after Christmas. They couldn't believe the numbers of manatees. We were lucky enough to have seen a pair of large rays who entertained us with high jumps. This is truly one of the most outstanding features of the Tampa Bay area.

➤ 'DarryDFL', Aug/15/09: If you have a rental car, and you're adventurous and it's winter, you must make time to visit the Tampa Electric's Manatee Viewing Center. Located next to the Big Bend Power Plant, the warm water discharge from that plant makes a perfect place for manatees to vacation during the winter. *Parking and admission is free.* The Center is open from November 1 to April 15. Two webcams at <http://tinyurl.com/cczz5n> operate when it is open.

**DIRECTIONS:** Take the Causeway to US 41 South, and turn right at Big Bend Road, The center is ¼ mile on the right.



Mom Manatee & Calf

## TAMPA MUSEUM OF ART

<http://www.tampamuseum.org/> Everything from contemporary art to a world-class collection of Greek and Roman Classical artifacts. Tuesday – Saturday, 10 AM – 5 PM, Sunday 11 AM – 5 PM. Located at 600 N. Ashley Dr.

## TAMPA THEATER

<http://www.tampatheatre.org/>

➤ ‘MetroAlto’, Aug/15/09: If you are just looking for something to fill the hours during the evening, both the *Tampa Theatre* (an old Fox-style movie house).

➤ MLGardenGirl, Aug/24/09: Tampa Theater has a great Wurlitzer organ, one of a few left in the world. There is a 107-year-old lady, from Sun City Center, who gives an occasional concert. She played the organ for silent movies and was Mary Martin’s (*Peter Pan*) music advisor. I had the chance to visit the theater with Red Hats and we got the history a tour of the whole theater minus the attic. There was a man who gave us the history and played the organ for us. I believe they offer tours on Saturday morning for \$5. It is on our list of places to go with all the guests we get.



**Tampa Theatre**

➤ “City to Give \$2M to Tampa Theatre,” *Tampa Bay Times*, Sep/23/09: “The City Council on Thursday will vote on a deal Thursday that will give Tampa Theatre \$2 million to buy the building’s lobby and the adjacent storefront from its current owners. The theatre will then deed the property to the city. Tampa currently contributes about \$200,000 a year to the theater’s operating expenses. Buying some of the property will cut that figure in half by eliminating about \$100,000 a year in lease payments made to the current owner of the lobby. Getting the lobby out of private hands will also make it eligible for restoration grants, theatre president John Bell said. Mayor Pam Iorio included the money for the purchase in last year’s budget, which was approved by the City Council. “If it was on the budget this year, it might be a lot harder to justify,” said City Council member John Dingfelder. ‘But we made a commitment and I think we have to live up to it.’”

## TARPON SPRINGS

➤ 'MMWoz', Aug/23/09: For those with Greek blood and those who don't, what a great way to spend the day browsing the sponge docks and even taking a cruise to the sponge dives as well as shopping, eating at one of the many wonderful Greek restaurants without going to Greece.

## YBOR CITY

➤ 'MMWoz', Aug/23/09: You can hop the trolley from Channelside and go to Ybor City to browse, take in a movie, and eat at a favorite local. Try the Columbia for a nice Spanish dinner or lunch — or for less formal occasions, stop at Carmine's for a Cuban. You can't leave Ybor without having a Cuban — the Cuban version of the Philly Hoagie or the all American Sub or Grinder.

## DINE

### BERN'S STEAKHOUSE

➤ 'MetroAlto', Aug/15/09 & Aug/17/09: As for eating, there are tons of great places, but whenever we have guests from out-of-town we try to make sure they experience (and that IS the only word to describe it) Bern's Steakhouse. This is not your ordinary restaurant, and trying to describe it here would simply not do it justice, so suffice it to say that everything in the place — from the Victorian bordello decor, to the way they serve their martinis, to the home-grown veggies, aged beef and pages of caviar choices, to the tour of the kitchen and wine cellar (the largest privately owned one in the world) and culminating in the Harry Waugh dessert room — a separate locale for your after dinner treat — will be memorable! Hubby wanted me to clarify that Berns is so popular that it opened a second, smaller restaurant — SideBerns (tee hee) — and while I'm sure that it is also great, we haven't been there and it's not the same thing as the original.

Any time of the evening is good — try to avoid Prom or Homecoming nights though! The only proviso I would make is that you should leave yourself plenty of time to enjoy the meal and the dessert experience (2-3 hours is about right). Your server will ask you if this is your first visit when you are seated, and he or she will probably offer the tour at that point. If they don't,



just tell them that you'd like the tour before heading upstairs to the dessert room (which they will definitely ask you about, as it requires a separate reservation when you arrive).

It's hard to put a price on an experience like Berns, and it can vary dramatically depending on what you order. The beef is ordered by the cut/pound, and we usually get the Chateaubriand, about 10 ounces — cooked in one piece and cut at the table. That size is plenty for two, and usually we have leftovers as well. The meals come with “all the fixin's” — i.e., a wonderful salad (over a dozen interesting dressing choices), fresh veggies, baked potatoes or other side, bread, etc. There are some great extra options that are worth the money (if you like creamed spinach, don't miss theirs!), but you'll have plenty of food either way! The main meal will probably run about \$75-85 per couple, and the desserts upstairs may cost another \$20-25.

The dessert room is extraordinary. It's divided into numerous different private “rooms” which are made from wine casks and smoked glass, so that each table is an intimate little haven, with its own closed-circuit choices of music (including the live piano player in the main lounge area). Don't skip dessert — trust me on this one! Many people just go for that alone!

## **COLUMBIA RESTAURANT**

► ‘2Dogs’, Aug/25/09: Since 1905, this Ybor City attraction is one of Florida's oldest restaurants. Filled with history, this huge eatery also has great food. If you find yourself here in the evening, get a table near the dance floor for up-close view of the colorful flamenco dancers. Per-person cost for three courses including wine is about \$25. Monday–Saturday from 11 AM, Sunday from noon. 2117 E. Seventh Ave.

## **CRISTINO'S (Clearwater, FL)**

► ‘JillyBabes’, Jul/25/09: Cristino's on Ft. Harrison downtown for the best pizza. It is a little place and *not* a place for a meet and mingle with more than 4 or 6 people.

## MAZZARRO'S, St. Petersburg

- 'MLGardenGirl', Aug/24/09: Mazzarro's Italian grocery store and eatery. Their cappuccino is to die for.

## LODGING

- 'Gator0178', Nov/5/08: If you want to be near the ship and downtown, you have waterside **Channel Side Marriott** or **Embassy Suites**. (You can take the trolley the ship.) If you want to be on the beach, I recommend **Sirata** or **Tradewinds Hotel** on St Petersburg Beach.
- Anonymous, Oct/25/09: We parked for a week, at no charge, after staying only one night at the **Embassy Suites**. We took the shuttle to the ship and back to our car (after the cruise).
- 'Golfpi', Nov/5/08: We booked the **Sailport Resort** for Friday night pre-cruise. It is about 15 minutes west of the airport at Rocky Point.

## SHIPS

- "Norwegian to upgrade ship," *Tampa Bay Times*, Jan/19/2011  
 "Norwegian Cruise Line will replace the *Norwegian Star* in November 2012 with the newer *Norwegian Dawn*, which will winter in Tampa for week-long cruises to Roatan, Honduras; Belize City, Belize; and Costa Maya and Cozumel, Mexico. It joins Carnival, swapping the *Carnival Inspiration* for the *Carnival Paradise* in December, and Royal Caribbean, swapping the *Radiance of the Seas* with the *Jewel of the Seas* in November."
- "More Cruise Customers are on the Way," *Tampa Bay Times*, Aug/28/09, p. 8  
 "Tampa's cruise business is getting an upgrade. Royal Caribbean International will bring a newer ship to the Port of Tampa in fall 2010 and with it, thousands of additional visitors to Tampa Bay. The 2,500-passenger *Radiance of the Seas* is only slightly larger than Royal Caribbean's current winter/spring season vessel, the *Grandeur of the Seas*, and will sail the same 4- and 5-day cruises to Mexican resorts. But the *Radiance* will stay for an extended season, operating 44 cruises from early October through April — 16 more than the *Grandeur*. That could mean 40,000 more visitors starting and ending cruises in Tampa, the nation's eighth-largest cruise port with 382,000 passengers last year.

“The *Radiance* will debut here with a 7-night cruise around the Western Caribbean, then settle into a routine of 4-day cruises to Cozumel and 5-day cruises that also stop in Costa Maya, Mexico.

“This Fall, Holland America Line will bring a new ship to Tampa. The *Ryndam* is a little smaller and a couple of years older than its predecessor, the *Veendam*. But Holland America gave the 1,270-passenger vessel an extensive make-over.

“Tampa also is home port to two Carnival Cruise Lines ships, the *Inspiration* and *Carnival Legend*, which sail year-round.”

### ► **Carnival Inspiration**

★ “Carnival to swap ships,” *The Tampa Tribune*, Sep 4, 2010

Carnival Cruise Line’s *Inspiration*, the liner that sails from Tampa on excursions to the Caribbean, is scheduled to switch places next year with the *Paradise*, a sister ship that cruises out of Long Beach, Calif.

The switch is to take place at the end of 2011, and the cruise line is offering one-way 14-day cruises between Tampa and Long Beach through the Panama Canal.

The *Inspiration* and *Paradise* each have a passenger capacity of 2,052, and reservations for the Panama Canal trip are being taken now. Cost is \$949 a person, based on double occupancy. The package includes return flights to the city of origin.

In California, the *Inspiration* will offer three- to four-day Baja cruises. The *Paradise* will sail out of Tampa on four- and five-day Caribbean voyages.

Carnival officials said the reason for Carnivals *Inspiration* will depart Tampa on Dec. 3, 2011 for a Panama Canal crossing on its way to Long Beach, the switch is to offer passengers in each city a ‘fresh alternative’.

The *Paradise*’s Panama Canal cruise will depart from Long Beach on Nov. 28, 2011, and the *Inspiration*’s voyage will leave Tampa on Dec. 3, 2011.

Both voyages will feature visits to Cabo San Lucas and Acapulco in Mexico; Puntarenas, Costa Rica; Cartagena, Colombia; and George Town, Grand Cayman.

In October 2011, the 2,240-passenger *Norwegian Star* will begin cruising out of Tampa. The Norwegian Cruise Line ship will offer seven-day voyages to the western Caribbean until April 2012, officials said.

The itineraries will include Roatan, Honduras; Belize City, Belize; and Costa Maya and Cozumel, Mexico.

Currently, Tampa is served by Carnival, Holland America and Royal Caribbean International cruise lines. The *Norwegian Star* will be the first Norwegian Cruise Line ship to sail out of Tampa.

In 2009, nearly a half-million people sailed out of Tampa on cruise ships, according to the Tampa Port Authority.

☆ Carnival [Inspiration](#) website.

➤ **Carnival Legend:** [Website](#)

➤ Holland America **Ryndam:** [website](#)

➤ Holland America Line **Veendam:** [website](#)

➤ Norwegian Cruise Line **Norwegian Star** is coming in October 2011. The 2,240-passenger Norwegian Star will offer seven-day trips to western Caribbean destinations in Honduras, Belize and Mexico. The 965-foot-long vessel will sail from Tampa through the six-month winter season. It will edge-out the Carnival Legend as the biggest cruise ship at the port. Norwegian pioneered “freestyle cruising,” which encourages ultra-casual clothing and no set hours for dining. They are known for aggressive fare discounting. Two ships, the Carnival’s Legend and Inspiration, now cruise year-round from Tampa. Source: “Norwegian Star’ Coming to Port,” Steve Huettel, *Tampa Bay Times*, February 24, 2010, p. 6

➤ RCI [Grandeur of the Seas](#)

➤ RCI [Radiance of the Seas](#)

## PARKING

➤ ‘Joybaby’, Dec/01/09: Parking is \$14/day — but for me — I am into safety, so that’s what I will do. It’s terminal 2.

➤ ‘StacyCakes1’, Dec/03/09: I have done a bit of digging around for cheaper/safe options for parking. I found out that you can park at the Amtrak parking lot for free. They lock the gate at night and it is open during the day. It is a five minute cab ride from there to the port.

➤ ‘BSSCruisers’, Dec/06/09: They need to lock the gates at the Amtrak station at night, it is in a pretty rough part of town. I recommend not parking there.

## TERMINALS

### CHANNELSIDE TERMINAL

- *Carnival Legend* boards here.
- 'DarryDFL', Dec/30/09: This is the most difficult of the Tampa terminals to access (map).

❶ On Sunday, beginning at 10 AM, you can drive in and drop luggage off. However, wait until 11 AM since there are still passengers offloading until then.

❷ Beginning at about 7:30 AM, on Sunday, handicapped people and their luggage can be picked up at the circle in front of the Florida Aquarium.

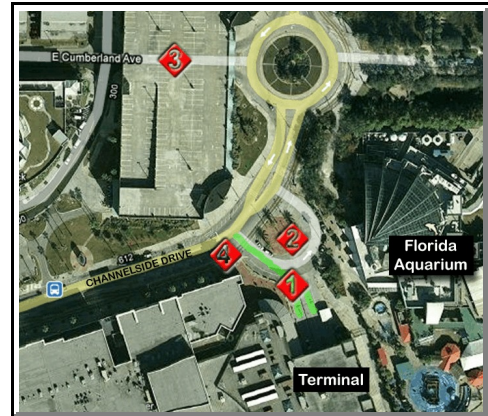
❸ If you're not handicapped, you and your luggage must be picked up at the north end of the parking garage exit onto E. Cumberland Ave.

❹ There are orange cone barriers erected here from 7:30 – 10 AM to prevent anyone but those picking up handicapped persons from entering the terminal grounds. Those barricades are removed at exactly 10 AM (personally confirmed).

➤ **PARKING:** 2,500 parking spaces.

"Channelside parking expands," *The Tampa Tribune*, June 30, 2010, Business, p. 1: An additional 730 parking spaces are available beginning today at the parking garage at Channelside Drive, across from [the cruise ship port], when the expansion of the 2,500 space main garage is opened to the public. The addition to the Tampa Port Authority facility will provide extra-high first floor clearance for large trucks that service cruise ships at nearby cruise terminals.

RCI Grandeur of the Seas Terminal



**Channelside Terminal**



## SAILINGS

► Over 800,000 cruise passengers sailed from the Port of Tampa for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30. Tampa Port Authority counts passengers twice — when they board and depart. With 27 cruises scheduled for the 2011-2012 winter season, the Norwegian Star could bring an additional 114,000 cruise passengers to Tampa annually. Source: “Norwegian Star’ Coming to Port,” Steve Huettel, *Tampa Bay Times*, February 24, 2010, p. 6