



BEACH, BABY.

One Ocean Resort & Spa, Atlantic Beach, Florida

Written by Jeffrey Cohen

Most Florida vacations are typically defined by one of three things: Gulf Coast “salt life” culture, buzzy South Florida fashion and nightlife, and Orlando family fun. Sitting pretty just across the Intracoastal Waterway from Jacksonville, One Ocean Resort & Spa refuses to fit conventional Sunshine State stereotypes, offering instead a bucolic beach retreat alternative that strikes a simultaneous balance between comfort and luxury.

The Atlantic Beach setting One Ocean calls home may come across as a bit sleepy at first blush, but once my wife, Jen, and I dug a little deeper, we quickly discovered a charming hamlet populated with a smattering of chic boutiques and eclectic eateries within walking distance of the hotel. Southern Grounds makes a

cozy spot in which to sit and sip from a globally influenced menu of direct-trade coffee drinks and local craft beers, accompanied by a soulful soundtrack of live acoustic music from bluesy duo Cassidy Lee and Ivan Pulley. Two blocks over, M Shack quells cravings for old-fashioned burgers and fries with Black Angus beef dressed nearly a dozen different ways, accompanied by homey, handspun milkshakes in creative flavors like marshmallow brûlée and Oreo cheesecake.

One Ocean’s enviable beachfront begs for exploration; its wide expanse of hard-packed sand is the perfect setting for leisurely barefoot strolls through the breaking waves as the sun comes up.



Remington Hotels completely updated the former Sea Turtle Inn in 2008 to reimagine the facility as a stylish, contemporary and completely idyllic getaway for couples and leisure travelers. Awash in shades of sand, sky and surf, the lobby greets guests with an elegant bar, a showy staircase and inviting sofas huddled around a soothing indoor fountain centerpiece. A small but fully realized gallery space just off the entry lures in arts-minded visitors to explore exhibits by an evolving slate of artists such as American lifestyle photographer Greg Whitaker.

The resort's exemplary service starts even before visitors arrive, setting the tone for carefree stays laced with an underlying current of sweet Southern Hospitality. Guests don't even check-in in the



traditional sense; setting up a reservation online (and preordering favorite drinks and snacks for your complimentary in-room mini-bar) ahead of time means all the valet has to do when you pull up is ask your name and hand over your room keys.

And that's just the start. Need clothes pressed? Dog walked? Pregnant wife craving pickles in the middle of the night? All you have to do is ask. Summoning "one touch" service requires only a press of a button on the in-room phone.

The resort's 193 well-appointed guest rooms and suites all boast floor-to-ceiling windows from which to drink in the Atlantic Ocean views and fresh sea breezes, along with luxe custom-designed beds, high-end linens and evening turn-down service.





A space-agey tunnel lined with cairn-like strings of rocks led us to dinner at the vibrant on-site Azurea restaurant, a highlight of our stay. A local dining destination recognized for its creative surf and turf-centric menus, the colorful eatery serves sumptuous East Coast snapper with tropical fruit chutney, outstanding lobster bisque, jumbo blue crab cakes seared in cast iron and garnished with cider-braised greens, bacon and charred tomatoes — and a simply fantastic 16-ounce cowboy bone-in ribeye. Chef Jay Mendoza regularly emerges from the kitchen to make the dining room rounds and shake hands while educated, friendly servers stand ready to offer spot-on wine pairing for each course.

Another distinguishing feature of the property: One Ocean claims status as the only beachfront luxury hotel in Duval County to maintain a full-service spa. Guests indulge in a lavish selection of marine-themed treatments in therapy rooms overlooking the ocean. The signature One Ocean massage combines Swedish techniques and aromatherapy for ultimate relaxation, and the

seaweed/lavender-based Ocean Polish and Marine Detox Wrap left Jen feeling like a self-proclaimed “new woman.”

Jacksonville may not be the first destination that comes to mind for a Florida beach vacation, but One Ocean Resort & Spa makes it a well-advised option. The scenery and the service make the resort a popular spot for romantic getaways, weddings and smallish corporate events, as well.

Allegiant Airlines flies direct from Indianapolis to Jacksonville, delivering travelers on Thursdays and returning Sundays for conveniently accessible — and surprisingly affordable — long-weekend winter escapes, with or without the kids. Speaking of kids, One Ocean’s Sea Turtle Kids Club keeps younger guests happily occupied with hands-on activities and adventures in the mornings and evenings so mom and dad can catch a break (and perhaps a much-needed happy hour to themselves). **sl**

One Ocean Resort & Spa, 1 Ocean Blvd, Atlantic Beach, Florida 32233. Room rates start from \$170. For more information and reservations, call 904.249.7402 or visit oneoceanresort.com.