

The county seat of Manatee County is a popular base for tourists in search of lovely, white beaches. Bradenton Florida offers a beach lifestyle, culture and the natural world. It's fun to explore the different islands in the gulf. Nearby Long Boat Key is a favorite haunt for beachcombers searching for shells.

The South Florida Museum also incorporates the Bishop Planetarium and the Parker Manatee Aquarium. The museum contains exhibits on the natural history and cultural heritage of the local area. The Planetarium presents an exciting star laser show. One of the most famous residents of Bradenton Florida lives at the aquarium. Snooty is in the record books as the oldest manatee in captivity. Born in 1948, this popular attraction is probably the oldest manatee anywhere. The aquarium celebrates each of the manatee's birthdays and makes sure it gets its favorite food of fruit and lettuce.

The town is close to another visitor destination, namely Sarasota, also known for its pristine beaches. It also has the impressive Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, seven acres of different types of habitat, including mangroves, palms, succulents, bamboo and koi pond. The gardens specialize in the research and conservation of orchids and bromeliads (tropical plant family). Culture is important to the area and Sarasota has a prestigious resource in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. The collection includes painting, sculpture, photography, drawings and prints. There are numerous galleries of European paintings, artifacts from Cyprus and ancient and modern Asian and American art. The most famous collection is that of the old master, Rubens.

Fort De Soto Park at St. Petersburg is close to Bradenton Florida and is made up of five offshore keys and is open throughout the year. It's a great place to chill out on the beach or go for a swim or a picnic. There is a camping site and a boat ramp, canoe trail and nature trail. Souvenirs can be bought at the gift store.

The actual fort was built in 1898 and was manned on and off until the park opened in 1962. Visitors can still see the carriage mounted mortar guns on the ramparts. The Quartermaster Storehouse Museum is a replica of the original building where the Quartermaster kept supplies. The displays tell the story of the military conflicts that the area around Bradenton Florida and the fort were involved in, including the Spanish - American War and World War II, when the site was used as a bombing range.