

**St. George Island Visitor Center
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St. George Island “Bed Tax” Certainly Benefits Visitors

Likes hundreds of other visitor destinations across the country, St. George Island and Franklin County have a “bed tax”. It is a couple pennies on the dollar that are added to the tab when you stay in short-term accommodations. Not a major imposition on our guests but the pennies do add up after a while. Where do these dollars go?

The lion’s share of Franklin County’s collections (which are processed through the state and then returned to the Franklin County Commission and the (FCTDC) Franklin County Tourist Development Council are raised on St. George Island. Because the bulk of this remote, rural area’s short term accommodations are situated on the popular 28-mile-long stretch. With the exception of the nine-mile-long state park, the remainder of the island (including the exclusive “Plantation”) features many homes that are part of the vacation rental pool. There are also a couple of “Inns.”

A significant portion of the monies raised is used to promote the area during the “shoulder months.” Everyone wants to visit St. George Island and the area during the family summer vacation swim season – that’s a given. But not everyone knows that the absolute best time to take in the “real” island is during the non-summer months.

First, it’s a heck of a lot cooler. Accommodation rates are generally lower. The Gulf waters are still warm but miles of beaches have no footprints. Washed up sea shells can go unclaimed for days on end. There’s little traffic and virtually no wait time at restaurants or souvenir shops. Plus the full range of fishing is still fantastic.

The Franklin Tourist Council also contributes money to volunteer groups that stage festivals and special events in the county. You will see the TDC logo and website “anaturalescape” on nearly every poster and event advertisement in the area. The FCTDC was also the single most important factor in this area being able to have a reasonably “normal” 2010 summer season during the Horizon Crisis. Continually sending out the message that oil was not near the Forgotten Coast and beach and seafood was still fabulous.

For St. George Island the “bed tax” has also meant that, for the first time ever, it could have its own “Visitor Welcome Center”. The Apalachicola and Carrabelle visitor centers, run by the respective

Chambers of Commerce in those communities, did an excellent job of providing information about the island. But some visitors to Franklin County drive non-stop to the island and thus didn't always necessarily benefit from the county having exceptional ambassadors at those locations.

In stepped the TDC and a combination of that organizations contributions; the moving of the Cape St. George Lighthouse to the Lighthouse Park in the center of the island business district (at the main entrance to 28 miles of powdery white sand beaches); tens of thousands of hours of volunteer work; and the rest is history. Under the direction of Elaine Rosenthal, St. George Island has a brand new Visitor Center.

The volunteer staff ready, willing and able to provide you with all of the information you might wish to know about the island and area. And more! Of course, what we are also trying to say is that thanks to your "bed tax" dollars we now have a visitor center to serve your needs. We hope you feel it was worth it.

And right next door to the Welcome Center is the now famous Cape St. George Light. "Famous" because many light enthusiasts consider the recovery of its remains from the floor of the Gulf of Mexico and reassembly on the nearby "main" island one of the greatest community efforts to save a light in United States history.

For a relatively small fee you and your youngsters can climb the stairs of the historic lighthouse and see St. George Island as it has rarely been seen before.

And be sure to visit YOUR visitor center.