

**St. George Island Visitor Center
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ST. GEORGE ISLAND OVERVIEW

St. George Is a barrier island that is approximately 28 miles long and two miles wide at its widest point. It used to be longer but in the mid-fifties it was decided that the mainland fishing fleet needed a “shortcut” from Apalachicola Bay to the Gulf of Mexico. Politician Bob Sikes championed the cause and the resulting “canal” across the island became “Bob Sikes Cut.”

Obviously this resulted in one island becoming two. The second formally referred to as Cape St. George or “Little St. George”, as the locals call it. The fleet and recreational fishermen also use “East Pass” (to the east of St. George and “West Pass” to the west of Little St. George” to reach the Gulf.

The two aforementioned islands are part of an island chain approximately four miles off the Franklin County coast. Inhabited (likely less than 100 folks) Dog Island is to the east and an uninhabited (except for a couple rangers and lots of neat critters) and preserved St. Vincent Island is to the west of Little St. George.

The sandy strips help create a series of ideal “mixing bowls” (a blend of salt water from the Gulf and fresh water from the Apalachicola River) that provide a perfect seafood nursery - especially for World Famous Apalachicola Bay Oysters.

The first four-mile-long bridge to St. George Island (originally named St. Georges) was constructed in 1965. Prior to that the local residents provided their own transportation. Or used a ferry service. That bridge grew old and weary and was recently replaced with a state-of-the-art bridge. Portions of the old bridge were left intact both on the island and on the mainland (Eastpoint) and serve as convenient fishing piers for residents and visitors. With plenty of free parking and with privately operated bait shops near both ends.

Few know for certain how many “permanent” residents call St. George Island (SGI) home. In some circles the number of 999 is used. Not too big and not too small. The majority of residences on the island are owned by “absentee owners”, many of whom visit their second home on a regular basis. Many are part of a significant “rental pool”. Homes come in all kinds of sizes and shapes. From bungalow to mansion. For twosomes or family reunions. All are within walking distance to the beach and bay.

And, by the way, environmentally sensitive Franklin County allows no structure to be constructed more than 35 feet above the first habitable floor. Thus the two tallest structures on the island are the water tower and the lighthouse.

PARK ON THE EAST END

St. George Island (Julian G. Bruce) State Park occupies the eastern most nine miles of the island. The highly-rated park greets hundreds of thousands of visitors during the course of the year but its pristine beaches and other facilities rarely appear congested. Hiking trails, boardwalks, camping facilities and observation platforms are in evidence. There is a fee to enter the park.

In addition to doing “absolutely nothing”, visitors can also indulge in some outstanding surf and wading bay flats fishing as well as birding, camping, picnicking, sunbathing and swimming.

CENTER PORTION

The center portion of the isle features both a commercial district as well as residential areas. Appropriately the new bridge spills traffic into the several block commercial area. Hotel/motel accommodations are available and two service stations handle refueling needs. Grocery and convenience store businesses are in evidence in addition to complete meal sit-down restaurants. There are also on-the-run (pizza, ice cream, subs, etc) snack eateries. For obvious reasons, seafood is the most requested menu item. This is a beach community so dress is always casual. And things run on “island time” – so please be patient.

Souvenir shops abound as do “toy” rental businesses. Anything you might need to make your beach and water experience complete is for sale or rent. Also available are two and four-wheel vehicles that can be used on the separate and protected bike path that traverses nearly the entire length of the island. Fishing licenses (required of out-of-state visitors), equipment and even charters are readily available.

Beside the bird nest blue water tower, the most visible structure on St. George is the tall, white lighthouse. It is located in a park complete with a basketball court, shower, restrooms and all kinds of children’s play equipment. You can climb the recently moved and reconstructed Historic Cape St. George Lighthouse for a small fee. There is also a newly constructed lighthouse keepers building.

It is also home to the St. George Island Welcome center. Continually manned during daylight hours, the center features hundreds of informational brochures and director Elaine Rosenthal’s volunteer staff is ready and willing to answer your every inquiry.

The “dune walkovers” at the park lead to the beach. Miles and miles of unspoiled beach. Join a group or wander a bit and claim your own nearly private slice of paradise. Sunbathe, swim or cast your bait to the wind! But please keep the children from playing “king of the mountain” on the dunes or picking the sparse but valuable vegetation.

By the way, your favorite four-legged friend is also welcome. Kindly read the rules pertaining to your pets.

