

BY MARITZA COSANO

Straight from the pages of a romance novel, the drive via A1A en route to Jensen Beach in Martin County on one of Florida's visually stunning East Coast stretches can be certifiably described as an escape to another world, if only for a three-day getaway.

So, if you want to know how to have the ultimate weekend in the quiet side of South Florida, Jensen Beach and Delray Beach are the places to go. They sit alongside cutting-edge fashion boutiques, lively cafes, top-notch restaurants, and cool spots with contemporary vibes.

The two small towns balance a rich heritage with dynamic coastal day life



In the northeast corner of Martin County, **Jensen Beach** is known for its pristine beaches.

A Tale of Two East Coast Beach Towns

and thriving nightlife. And what's more, they are perfectly sized and walkable without feeling overwhelmed. What I love about them is that when it's time to rest and kick back, you can stretch out your hand, and the ocean is right at your fingertips. If you're in either town for the art, the food, or just to soak in more than the sunshine, the atmosphere is the same—laidback—the perfect mood for a three-day staycation.

Traveling from West Palm Beach, your best bet is to drive along the coast for most of the trip on scenic A1A. You will marvel at the overlooks and wonder about the people inside the small and not-so-small beach houses—living in the small towns nestled in the foliage—beach towns that, if you passed them as you drove along I-95, you would glaze over. With its tropical island ambiance, Jensen Beach is that kind of place.



◦ **When to arrive:** Arrive on Friday and leave on Saturday so you can enjoy the city's weekend vibe and still have time to drive north to Delray Beach.

◦ **How to get to Jensen Beach from West Palm Beach:** Take I-95 North, then as directed, take AIA and follow directions to Jensen Beach—only 45 miles or almost an hour's drive.

◦ **Getting around town:** Jensen Beach is not big, so driving from point A to B is a breeze. However, the best way to see the city is on foot.

◦ **Where to stay:** There are plenty of resorts and hotels in Jensen Beach, depending on your budget and plan, but I chose The Lucie Opal Collection for this romantic getaway.

◦ **Fun Activities in the Treasure Coast:** Jensen Beach Golf Club, The Pink Cottage Spa, Indian River Park,

The Children's Museum of the Treasure Coast, and Ocean Bay Riverside, a 53-acre upland and wetland preserve featuring a mile-long trail and a 200-foot fishing pier. Of course, my favorite is the Then & Now Gallery, located in an antique mall with unique items from yesterday and today. This over 5000 sq. ft. mall features antiques, home decor, coastal decor, mid-century modern furniture, jewelry, and more.

Day One | The Lucie, Opal Collection | Jensen Beach, Treasure Coast

The picturesque and inspiring Jensen Beach is almost magical for its lush landscape and coastal backdrop—perfect for a staycation any time of the year or what I like to call the Florida experience in a bottle.

As you turn into the parking lot of The Lucie, a luxurious Opal Collection

Jensen Beach provides beautiful views of the Atlantic Ocean, especially during sunset.

boutique hotel that blends modern sophistication with the natural beauty of the pristine shoreline behind it, you will notice this is not set on a sleepy beach town but in a diverse, small town with characters from all over the world. It is a place where, in the daylight, you can sink your toes in the soft, white sand, and at night, you can drive around town to savor the coastal culture, along with delicious meals at local dining venues with breathtaking views such as Drift Restaurant at Marriott Hutchinson Island Beach Resort, Golf & Marina.

With three exceptional restaurants and two more opening soon, Hutchinson Island Resort offers savory sizzling steaks, fresh seafood, delicious desserts that capture the area's tropical setting, and a myriad of American cuisine, including dining, breakfast, and poolside lunches—crafted to enhance your culinary tastes.

What makes The Lucie Hotel the perfect staycation is its beautiful, redesigned guestrooms —decorated in soft, coastal hues in a modern blend of metal and washed wood featuring private balconies and breathtaking views of their private beach.

If you're looking for a much-needed one-night staycation, The Lucie may lead you to an unforgettable experience. For me, it started as I entered its front door and was quickly welcomed by the front office supervisor, Steve Kirby, a man who has worked at this property for over two decades and has many stories to tell. The Lucie drew its name from the St. Lucie River, he explained. Not connected to the Atlantic Ocean or Lake Okeechobee, the freshwater river was modified in the early 1900s for navigation, a freshwater system upstream, and a brackish system near the St. Lucie Estuary. This explains why Jensen Beach, a small town with a charming downtown, has so many beaches, parks, boating, and fishing spots—a fisherman's haven.

After a one-and-a-half-hour drive down the coast, I arrived in Delray Beach, which USA Today describes as one of America's most beautiful beach towns.

◦ **When to arrive:** Arrive on Saturday



and leave on Sunday mid-morning so you have time to go home, unpack, and get settled before returning to “life as usual” the next day.

◦ **How to get to Delray Beach from Jensen Beach:** Take I-95 South, then, when possible, take AIA and follow directions to Delray Beach, approximately one hour and 17 minutes via I-95 South.

◦ **Getting around downtown:** Delray Beach downtown is easy to navigate. Leave your car at your hotel, download the Freebee app, request a ride, and jump



overboard! You will be driven around town in a customized, eco-friendly car, connecting you to all the deals, discounts, and “Freebees” in this cool destination. Contact: 561-376-5492 for more details. But remember, the best way to see Delray is on foot.

◦ **Where to stay:** Depending on your

budget and plan, there are plenty of resorts and hotels in Delray Beach, but I chose The Atlantic Suites on the Ave for this romantic getaway.

◦ **Fun Activities in Delray Beach:**

For art lovers, the Pineapple Grove Arts District is dotted with public art and galleries. The Cornell Art

Come for the food! - If you love seafood, sailing, and adventure then dining at Drift Delray will tantalize your taste buds. It has only been open for a few years but already it has become one of Delray Beach’s most popular dining spots.



Exploring and Dining

in Delray Beach:

Take the day to explore Atlantic Avenue, where you will find restaurants, shopping, and art galleries at every turn. Delray Beach has a beautiful wide stretch of soft, white sand—good for walking and sun bathing.

Museum displays contemporary art; the lakeside Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens is a Palm Beach County treasure. There are many parks in the area, including Wakodahatchee Wetlands Park, which features a raised boardwalk with views of birds and alligators.

◦ **Delray's public beach** is one of the best in Palm Beach County.

◦ **If you like live entertainment, you'll love Delray Beach.** This town has live music, gourmet restaurants, and happy vibes! From Tin Roof and Hurricane Bar & Lounge to casual

bars and cafes, strolling the streets of Downtown Delray Beach is quite an experience.

◦ **Don't miss Delray's Green Market on Saturdays.** This open-air marketplace is a popular hangout and one of the most popular and charming aspects of Downtown Delray Beach.

Day Two | The Atlantic Suites on the Ave Hotel, Delray Beach, Palm Beach County

The area around The Atlantic Suites on the Ave offers no shortage of beachside activities, restaurants, small cafes, coffee shops, and unique boutiques in

the city. This is also called The Atlantic Avenue District—an area packed with something to do for everyone and every budget. It is a vivacious place where you and your significant other can enjoy good window shopping on Atlantic Avenue as you pass through.

The Atlantic Suites on the Avenue Resort is simply beautiful and accommodating. This furnished apartment with a bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, dining, and living room area is all you need to make this an extended stay if one night is simply not enough. All you need to bring is your clothes and a toothbrush! At this time, the



hotel is offering exclusive discounts for Sunshine-staters. To book a much-needed staycation and receive up to 20% off, you must present a valid Florida ID.

Dining in Delray Beach is all about dining in style on the South Florida East Coast. Start the morning off right by enjoying a breakfast buffet that is included in the resort fee. For lunch or dinner... Let me put it this way: Delray Beach is a South Florida dining hot spot. So, it's safe to say that the neighborhood's vibrant culinary scene is located just steps from The Atlantic on the Ave. To really savor Delray Beach,

enjoy an elevated dining experience at Drift Delray, a nautically inspired Opal Collection restaurant. My surf and turf was "perfection." For a nightcap or as the sun sets, sip a cocktail in this signature restaurant or at nearby bars like Sandbar, Monkey Bar, 50 Ocean, or Boston's on the Beach, one of the oldest bars in Delray Beach.

Day Three | Heading Back Home

Start your last morning with a leisurely walk by the shore. The Atlantic on the Ave is half a block from the beach, so if you're peckish after the workout, grab a pastry at La Boulangerie Boul'Mich, a

characterful patisserie on the Ave about half a mile from the resort. The short walk is quite worth it. The croissants are heavenly, and the ambiance is cozy.

If you've got time to squeeze in one more stop before your journey home, pop into Lily's Handmade Ice Cream on the Ave. Voted #1 ice cream place in South Florida by the Sun Sentinel, you will taste the magic of handcrafted ice cream in every scoop. The trip back home can't get sweeter!