

Big Bend Scenic Byway

Along the Coast to the Oyster Capital of Florida via the Big Bend Scenic Byway



Begin your trip to the coast heading south on U.S. Highway 61 (Adams Street) to join the Big Bend Scenic Byway. USA TODAY named the **Big Bend Scenic Byway** (www.bigbenscenicbyway.org) one of the best scenic drives in America, between Tallahassee and Apalachicola. The drive will take

you through woods, waterways, and wildlife to Apalachicola. "Apalach" as the locals call it, is known for delicacies on the half shell, so while you drive tune into **OYSTER RADIO 100.5 FM** for some tasty tunes, perfect for a cruise along the coast.

There is a choice of routes to the coast from Tallahassee and they all end up at same place on U.S. 98; stay on U.S. 98 to go through pretty **Panacea** with its funky shops and the **Gulf Specimen Marine Lab** (222 Clark Drive, Panacea; (850) 984-5297; www.gulfspecimen.org) or after Medart, veer right onto U.S. 319 to **Sopchoppy**, home of the annual Worm Gruntin' Festival every April, and through the forest to **Ochlockonee River State Park**. (429 State Park Road, Sopchoppy; (850) 962-2771; www.floridastateparks.org/ochlockoneeriver).

Keep heading west along U.S. 98 to **Carrabelle**, where no traffic lights are found for miles around. In fact there is only one (!) stoplight in the entire coastal county. Imagine that!

World's Smallest Police Station on US 98 across the street from the Carrabelle Chamber of Commerce is a must-see. Stop and snap a picture next to this one-of-a-kind police station that did actually operate out of this phone booth until the 1960s.

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There are four lighthouses along the Forgotten Coast and as you travel west along U.S. 98. Just a couple of miles after the Carrabelle bridge on the right, pull into the **Crooked River Lighthouse and Museum** (1975 U.S. Highway 98; (850) 697-2732; www.crookedriverlighthouse.org) to view the beautifully restored iron and steel lighthouse. There is also a 70 foot wooden Pirate



Ship, a Lighthouse Keepers Museum on the grounds and on Saturdays and Sundays you can climb 138 steps to the top of the lighthouse for a magnificent panoramic view.

Continue west through **Eastpoint** where oyster houses dot the shore and you may even see oystermen out tonging in the bay for the day's bounty of salty succulent bivalves. This area is an authentic working waterfront, steeped in history and heritage and natural beauty and offering a taste of the Old Florida. Continue on U.S. 98, driving past the turn to St. George Island and continue over the Apalachicola Bay Bridge into Apalachicola.

Apalachicola is a charming seafood town, where 90% of Florida oysters are harvested. Naturally, the first stop is **Boss Oyster** (125 Water Street; (850) 653-9364; www.apalachicolariverinn.com/boss) where you can have 'em raw, fried, steamed or baked a dozen different ways while dining waterside looking over the docks. Oysters are available (and delicious) year-round, so sit back, relax and enjoy!