

travel feature

Zota Beach Resort on Longboat Key

Stay for the Day or Longer with Lots of Beach, Amenities and Parking

#1 poolshot I think this is the best overall shot of the place - but make it big!

Caption: Zota Beach Resort, Longboat Key's beachfront, boutique resort

Callout:

The Zota Beach Resort opened in June of 2017. It offers beach and bay views, a pool and poolside cabanas, fine and casual dining, free parking and lots and lots of quiet beach

Gone are the days of easily heading to Siesta Key Beach for a walk in that famous powdered sugar sand. More likely you'll spend the day on the dark asphalt of the parking lot circling and crawling to find a spot to park the car. The beach is still great, but getting access to it is becoming near impossible. So if I said stay at a hotel on Longboat Key instead would you scoff at that suggestion? Hear me out...

First, a bit of backstory. Longboat Key used to have more hotels. But the Holiday Inn left, as did the Hilton. So the time was right for a new hotel and they got one: The Zota Beach Resort that opened in June of 2017. It stands partially on what was once the Hilton, but forget any notion of what the Hilton was like. Zota is a resort, not just a room at the beach.

Veteran resort-goers go for a reason: escapism. And that also happens at Zota. The beach at your doorstep is a strong lure, but so is lolling about by the pool, having an umbrella drink, bubbling about in a hot tub, dining al fresco and gazing at the beach from your balcony.

Stay at Zota and you can add things like your own private cabana for the day at \$159. It's so decadent that you get poolside private space that includes a fridge, sofas and a TV. Oh and you can also have meals, drinks and snacks delivered if you wish.

#2 aerial shot of the resort

Perhaps you're thinking this was The Hilton on LBK. It was, but only half of it. When Zota opened in 2017, they completely refurbished The Hilton and then added another building right across the pool for a squared off horseshoe shape. I was told that some former guests of the Hilton even request the rooms they used to have when it was under the Hilton name.

The décor colors throughout the common areas and the rooms are soothing tropical. Rooms are new and have comfy beds, spacious baths and plenty of room. BTW if you get a room overlooking the pool and it's up high enough you can see the Gulf and the Bay from your balcony. Choose from the traditional king- or queen-sized rooms, but also consider their suites for lots of room and the chance to feel like your living on the water.

They have a heated zero-entry (you stroll right in), climate controlled pool and hot tub. If you really must work out on your vacay, you'll be delighted to find they have treadmills and weights that come with a gorgeous view of the gulf and beach. It'll make that workout go a lot faster. Zota's \$39 resort fee includes beach chairs, Wi-Fi, in-room bottled water, valet parking, daily newspaper, fitness center and more.

Zota Beach Resort does loads of weddings and it's easy to see why. You can have your pre-wedding parties in the restaurant or in one of their ballrooms, then relax by the pool and have a wedding later on the beach. There are so many options including having a larger poolside cabana for your wedding guests where you can keep the festivities going. The permutations are numerous plus your out of town guests can stay in a beautiful hotel that has almost everything they could ever need without leaving the property.

#3 king sized room

#4 poolside bungalow

#5 Viento

Eventually, you'll get hungry and, if you're poolside you can order up a meal, beverage or snack and have it sent to your lounge chair or cabana. Otherwise, Cascades pool bar and lounge is just a few steps away.

You have multiple ways of dining at Zota, but maybe you want to "dress up" for dinner. Viento offers a water view in a good part of the dining room and there are a few must-get tables on the balcony. So take advantage of it.

Most popular dishes: the rib eye that is espresso rubbed, the lamb chops with fig glaze and the sous vide Moroccan chicken. They call their cuisine "Floribbean," but I'd call it eclectic with its seafood, Italian and steakhouse selections. The wine selection is also good and fairly priced.

A sign of how they want to meet your every hedonistic need is that you can order off the Viento menu and have your choices sent to not just your room, but also poolside. Otherwise, Viento is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And yes, you can experience

New Year's Eve there, or a Christmas buffet or their very popular Mother's Day buffet—whether you're a guest or not. Happy hour is 4-6 p.m. but with all these amenities, I'm starting to think every hour is a happy one at Zota.

If you need it, they have a small business center for printing boarding passes. There's also meeting space (ballroom sounds like too big of a word) made up of two rooms of 50-60 per room that combine to 140 when both are open and combined. We're told it is used all the time for weddings, but business meetings—if you have a wonderful boss—would also work here, too.

Overall, my visit was so tranquil that I easily endured a one-day uninvited guest: red tide. Fortunately, it disappeared overnight. Zota is a great place if you're thinking of a getaway (maybe you're on the mainland), a wedding, a business meeting or a family reunion.

Zota Beach Resort is not just an alternative to the more crowded beaches of Siesta Key. It offers tranquility in a new hotel that is quiet, serves up great food, has easy beach access and great views and, can't forget, easy parking. Mission accomplished.

STORY: Louise Bruderle

Another option called the “day-cation”

They've been running an extremely clever promo called the “day-cation” since they opened. For \$99 you get access to the beach plus...drum roll...parking. If that's not enough to please a person still circling that lot at Siesta Key Beach, they give you a room from 10-4.

Think about it: you get the beach and parking but, if you're like me, you like to get in and out of the sun for a while so the day-cation includes a room. Maybe you want quiet for a while to catch up on emails and phone calls, maybe a shower or a catnap. Or maybe you have a bunch of friends who are equally frustrated and will join you. Or maybe you have the grandkids and need a way to entertain them. So your options now are beach (LBK's beaches are also very beautiful they just don't have that fluffy white stuff), pool, bar, dining and a room.

I don't really like being in the sun too long, especially when it's hot. And that makes my dermatologist smile as well. So being able to get out of the sun and into a room or cabana sound like a winning proposition. Details are below, but hurry, they're only offering day-cations until December 15. I've been told they will likely pick up after Mother's Day.

About that Daycation

Zota Beach Resort, Longboat Key's beachfront, boutique resort experience, offers a Beach Day Rate program (the “day-cation”) for residents. From 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., locals seeking a secluded day-cation can enjoy the resort as a guest. The Beach Day Rate includes access to the oceanfront infinity pool and private beach with two beach chair rentals as well as access to a guest room to escape from the sun.

Capping off a blissful day, guests can venture to Viento Kitchen + Bar, the resort's Floribbean restaurant, for cocktails and dinner overlooking a Gulf sunset. Zota Beach Resort's Beach Day Rate is \$99 including parking and can be booked online using the code DAYCATION.

Rates and Packages

Guest can save up to 25% off their stay at Zota Beach Resort with their Book Early and Save 25% offer. The offer is available to guests who book their stays 14 days in advance and prepay. Visit the website (www.zotabeachresort.com) and book using special code ADVPUR.

From their website, a King Sized room with a resort view, the rate varies from a low of \$194 (advanced purchase rate) up to \$259 with more flexibility. There are also pool/resort view rooms, Gulf view rooms and those earlier mentioned suites that wedding parties especially like.

For example, their Queen resort view suite features a separate bedroom equipped with two Queen beds with an attached balcony or patio. The living area features a full sleeper sofa, 4 chair dinette, refrigerator, microwave oven, and coffee maker. There are no guaranteed views from this room type. These units are 785 square feet and have a maximum occupancy of 7 guests. Cost: \$350 to \$469. Check for specials and packages –there are a lot of them on their website.

The Facts

Zota Beach Resort

4711 Gulf of Mexico Dr., Longboat Key

Phone: (941) 383-2451

www.zotabeachresort.com

5 photos overall. Make the “Evening Pool” the biggest – meaning big. The rest can be smaller

#2 Zota Beach Resort is on the site of the former Hilton (left) but they added another building across the pool

#3 A room with a (gorgeous) view – this is the King Size room with balcony

#4 Don't settle for just a lounge chair! You can have your own bungalow near the pool. Comes furnished and includes a TV, fridge, towels, water and safe. Have food brought in while you relax

5 Viento is the main restaurant at Zota. Dine in or al fresco

