

THINGS TO DO IN ST. PETE

These glowing spots are beyond the Florida beach. Here's how to experience them
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My feet are throbbing, and my head is giddily swimming with images of Dalí's mind-bending paintings, fantastical shapes of Chihuly glass, and murals portraying everything from pressing social issues to a ginormous shark ready to devour passersby.

Over 48 hours in St. Petersburg, a city between Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, I've immersed myself in more museums and neighborhood-hopping than a typical weekend in New York City.

With its clear, aquamarine waters and powder-soft sand, St. Pete typically falls into a tidy beach vacation that's only a four-hour drive from Miami. This visit, though, I never dipped my toes in the ocean.

Instead, my step-tracking app raged as I explored the cultural treasures that recently helped St. Pete snag a coveted spot on Condé Nast Traveler's "Top Cities in the U.S." Here are some stops:

St. Pete pier



A vital piece of the area's swelling dynamism is the newly reimagined St. Pete Pier and its Pier District, which spans 26 acres on Tampa Bay. This is not just a pier — it's an experience. Sprinkled with waterfront restaurants and unending green spaces where couples unfurl towels for picnics and kids run wild on playgrounds, the District is pulsing with contagious energy day and night.

Part of the draw is forward-thinking architecture and public art like Janet Echelman's "Bending Arc", an aerial net sculpture that transforms in the wind and changes colors in natural and projected light. (Be sure to experience it at night when the floating figure spectacularly shines purple and magenta.)



At the tip of the Pier, a gleaming building houses Teak, a swanky restaurant with floor-to-ceiling windows that offers diners the feel of floating atop the bay. As the sun sets, head up to Pier Teaki, a rooftop bar where guests lounge on tiki-hut cabanas to sip frozen concoctions, and everyone is clamoring for pictures of the jaw-dropping skyline and Tampa Bay below.

Museum central



With nine prominent museums, many within walking distance of one another, you can cover a lot of ground in a weekend.

St. Pete newbies should start at the architecturally rich Dalí Museum, showcasing the largest collection of Salvador Dalí's work outside of Europe and offering a fascinating journey through the artist's career.

Drop by the Chihuly Collection to ogle dazzling glass art by Dale Chihuly, including a stunning ruby-red icicle chandelier crafted exclusively for the space. Your ticket also includes admission to the nearby Morean Glass Studio to watch artists hand-spin and shape molten glass. (Who knew? — St. Pete is also an epicenter for glass art!)

One of the biggest surprises comes at The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art, which is dramatically moving even if the subject matter isn't typically your thing. Strikingly fashioned with sandstone from India, the museum houses around 500 vibrant paintings and realistic bronze sculptures depicting the life, landscapes and animals of the West.

Unlike Miami's centralized Wynwood area, hundreds of large-scale murals are scattered throughout various neighborhoods in St. Pete. The street art is diverse – ranging from a menacing shark by artist Shark Toof to Chad Mize's tribute to doe-eyed, British model/actress Twiggy.

For the inside scoop, book a mural walking or biking tour with Florida CraftArt, which is a shoppable space boasting more than 250 fine craft artists. Move on to the hip Edge neighborhood for more mural spotting, coffee or cocktails at buzzy Intermezzo, and lunch at local favorite Bodega, which rivals Miami with its spot-on Cuban cuisine.