

# Hit the beach in Clearwater

BY KIM COOL  
FEATURES EDITOR

**R**ating beaches turned into a career for Dr. Beach, Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman. For the rest of us, it can be a great hobby.

On a recent road trip to Clearwater Beach, I discovered Beach Walk, a misnomer if ever there was one. Stretching for about 3 miles, this newly opened beach enhancement project provides a wide swath of concrete on which to stroll, run, bike, rollerblade or even to rent a surrey for an hour or so. Five years in the making, this project offers a whole lot more to do than walk.

A low concrete wall separates the serpentine path and adjacent road from the broad beach covered with clean white sand. That wall also keeps the sand from interfering with rollerblade and bike wheels.

For swimmers and shell seekers, there are plenty of showers at intervals and, behind the Clearwater Hyatt Regency Beach Resort, a misting station that the folks at Walt Disney World Resort would be proud to call their own. With temperatures in the 90s recently, the misting station is a popular spot.

Also popular are the Hilton and Hyatt resorts

where one can rent a bike, tandem bike, surrey for one or two or even four or a few other conveyances suitable for this stretch of beach. Gulfview Boulevard runs along the beach, parallel to the new serpentine walkway. The Hyatt is south of the roundabout at the end of Highway 60 from the mainland. The Hilton is north of the roundabout. The Clearwater Aquarium is on the north side of SR 60 just before the roundabout at Clearwater Beach. The aptly named Pier 60 is just south of the roundabout, with plenty of parking. But don't forget to pay. Pay stations are at intervals throughout the parking area. Note the number of your parking space before paying. Just south of the Hyatt, at 333 S. Gulfview Blvd. is the Chamber of Commerce Welcome Center. Folks there will help you with parking passes (Most beach area parking is metered) and to locate many other things to do in the area after you put in a few hours of beach rating work. Be sure to take plenty of sunscreen, beach chairs, umbrellas and all the other gear needed for the beach. Should you want to do some parasailing or head out onto the water, there are several other concessions just south of the roundabout, on the east side of the street.

The end of the pier is popular with fishermen.

There is a modest charge to fish from the pier. Check the bait shop at the pier for supplies and advice on how to catch the big ones. When I was there at sundown one day, one man strolled out to the end of the pier with what appeared to be at least six long fishing rods. I think he settled in for the evening. The pier also is a popular place from which to watch the setting sun and that is when street performers are most likely to show up too.

On the inland end of the pier, on any given day, vendors sell lotions and potions, paintings, handmade craft items and other things. There also is a park area there with play area for little ones and a shop and snack bar plus restrooms.

The surreys captivated me however and for \$20 an hour for one or about \$30 for two peddlers, you can get some gentle exercise while checking out this very special stretch of beach. I also noted roller bladers, strollers and plenty of serious runners as well as a few who simply wanted to enjoy the misting station.

What I didn't get to but only recently heard about is the Flowrider Wave machine inside Surf Style Retail, a surf shop at the beach.

For more information, call the welcome center daily between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. at 727-447-7600 or 888-799-3199.





SUN PHOTOS BY KIM COOL

Even from an upper floor at the Hyatt Regency Resort on Clearwater beach, one can only see part of the serpentine walking, jogging, biking strip known as BeachWalk.



A Johnny Depp lookalike greets visitors to Pier 60 at Clearwater Beach.