

WORTH THE TRIP

History, fishing, seafood, charm — Cortez has it all

BY PATRICIA HORWELL

Town Chronicle Correspondent

Take a trip back to old coastal Florida — and it will take you only about an hour.

Cortez Historic Fishing Village is across the Cortez Bridge from Bradenton Beach and is one of the last small coastal fishing villages in the state. With the Gulf of Mexico lapping at the village's back door, fishing continues to be prolific here. Fresh-caught fish and seafood are available in the area's markets and laid-back restaurants.

This charming community was settled by North Carolinians in the 1880s.

The village's maritime heritage is on display almost everywhere. Beach bungalows, historic cottages and single-family homes dot a maze of tiny streets and along the water. Personal and commercial vessels, perfectly restored or weathered, can be found all over — on the water, in parking lots and drive-ways, and in front and backyards.

Several of the 1920s cottages (some are available as rentals), and the village itself, are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Tourism thrives here but in a relaxed fashion. Rent a kayak or jet ski by the hour, day or week. Join a fishing charter with an experienced captain. Take a moonlight or an eco-cruise.

Beach wear and gear are available at The Beach Stop (11904 Cortez Road W.) or rent stand-up-paddleboards, kayaks and bikes at the Cortez Surf & Paddle Shop (4110 127th St. W.) and purchase clothing, swimwear and souvenirs. You also can pick up watersport rentals on Anna Maria Island.

If you simply want to soak in local history,



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Fishing boats, both commercial and personal crafts, dot the Cortez waterfront.

take a walk and discover some of the houses that belonged to the original founding families of this village.

The Maritime Museum features interesting exhibits and classes in which visitors learn traditional seafaring skills. Learn about knot

tying, how to build a fishing rod, Native American heritage and sailing. The museum is at 4415 119th St. W. and is open 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays.

But really, Cortez is all about the fish — catching it and eating it. Local fisheries like

Star Fish Company (12306 46th Ave. W.) still sell fresh grouper and shrimp to local restaurants and visitors directly.

Waterfront dining on fresh, gulf-caught seafood is available at several neighborhood eateries. Star Fish Company also maintains

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ABOVE: Another type of fish scale at Starfish Company. **TOP RIGHT:** Take a walk and discover the village's vintage bungalows and cottages. **RIGHT:** Have lunch at Starfish Company or bring home some fresh local seafood. **FAR RIGHT:** Captain Kathe is a fourth-generation Cortezian and shares her expertise and fishing lore with her passengers.



a retail market and an outdoor restaurant, serving up reasonably priced seafood, with picnic-table seating and a gorgeous view of the water. But it doesn't take credit cards, so bring your cash. Tide Tables Restaurant and Marina (12507 Cortez Road W.) is owned by the folks at Star Fish and offers some tasty fare. Swordfish Grill & Tiki Bar (4628 119th St. W.) combines good food and a jovial

atmosphere with live music on weekends. Closed for now, Cortez Kitchen (4528 119th St. W.), popular for its food and live music, is currently undergoing renovations, but plans to reopen under the same ownership in the future. It shares the parking lot with Swordfish.

Cortez is an ideal fishing spot for many because of its deep water. It is a great place to

learn fishing techniques from some old salts.

And if you're lucky enough to run into some of the longtime locals, get ready to hear some great yarns. So, pack up the sunscreen and a few towels and spend a day — or more — here.

Cortez is a friendly and fun place to visit. You might never want to leave. 🐟

PUZZLE ANSWERS

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