



MARCH/APRIL 2012

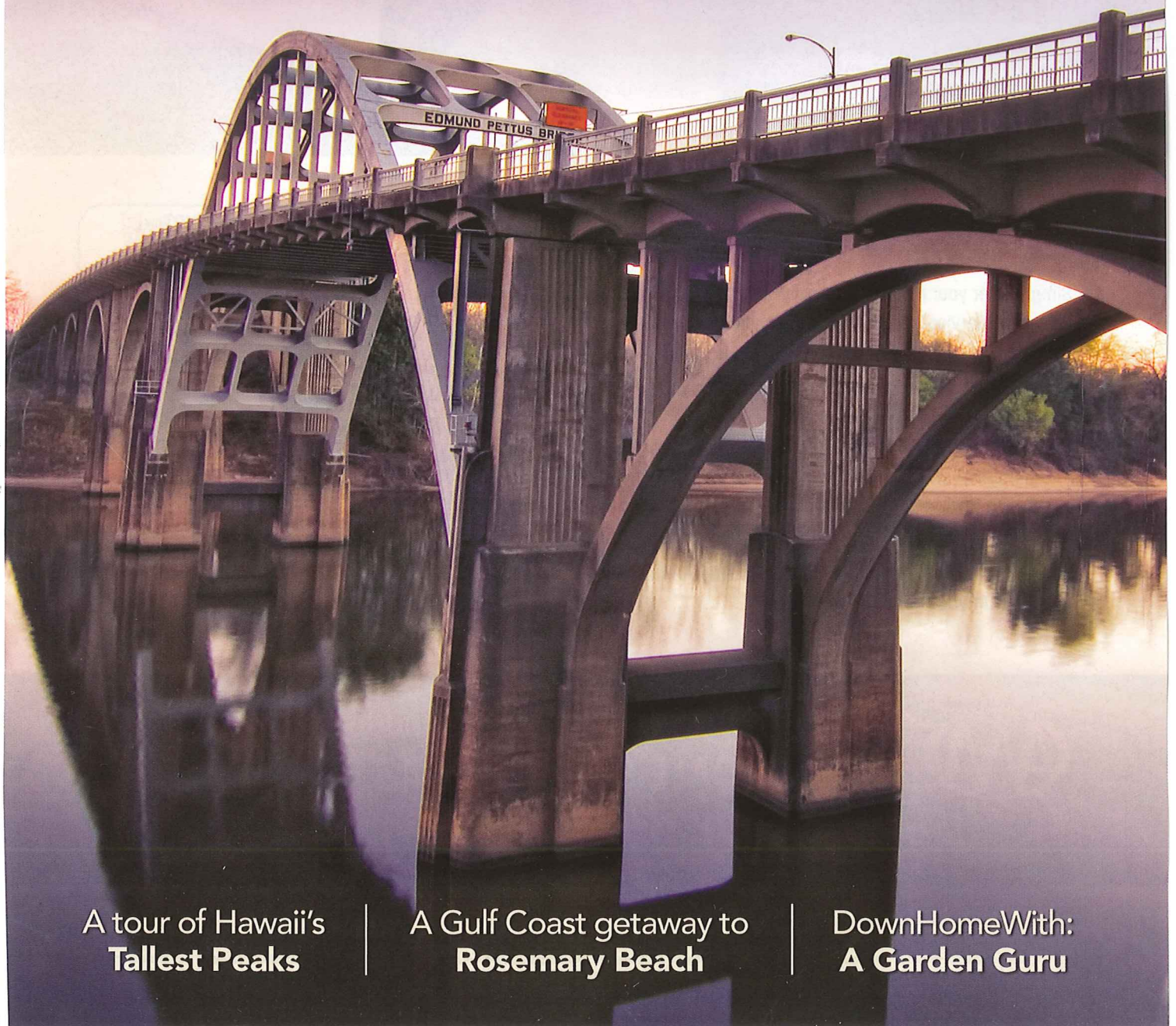
Alabama

THE MAGAZINE FOR AAA MEMBERS

JOURNEY

BRIDGING HISTORY

Reflecting on the march that changed our nation



A tour of Hawaii's
Tallest Peaks

A Gulf Coast getaway to
Rosemary Beach

DownHomeWith:
A Garden Guru

Rosemary & Time

The ingredients for an
old-fashioned beach
getaway in Florida

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY LESLIE FORSBERG

Pointing my kayak toward the Gulf's horizon, I stroked deeply with my paddle. Ribbons of water in bands of blue and seafoam green mirrored the underwater hillocks and valleys. Suddenly, an immense school of tiny silvery fish surrounded me, leaping and splashing like hail striking water. A manta ray the size of a dinner plate scooted along the pearlescent sand, and a flotilla of lacy cannonball jellyfish thrummed lazily past.

Two young boys on paddleboards—similar to surfboards, but typically used standing up, with a paddle—called out to me: "Seen any sea turtles?"

I told them I hadn't, but I wasn't really looking, either. I had come to Rosemary Beach, a Gulf Coast community 150 miles east of Mobile and 25 miles west of Panama City, Florida, for nothing more exact than a few

days of downtime in a lovely new place. Until now, I had only experienced high-octane Miami, with its bustling international resorts, trendy clubs, and restaurants. But I was eager to see the state's natural side, and a stay at Rosemary Beach sounded just right.

The real treasure for me was the warm sea that lapped at the powdery, white-sand beach—a sea that, typical of the Gulf, posed no worries about dangerous surf or currents. The underwater sand ripples reminded me of walking on a reflexology path. I waded out about 100 yards from shore, where the water was shoulder-deep, and swam in the silken sea.

Back on shore, families were at play. A dad pushed his pink-suited daughter on an orange rubber raft through knee-high wavelets. Two preteens scooted along the shoreline on skimboards.

Vacationers and residents alike enjoy the warm, calm beach.



The sun quickly dried me, and I wandered over to the beach rental manager. "Some boys were looking for turtles. Are there any here now?" I asked.

"Green and loggerhead turtles nest on the beach May through August, but they come onshore at night, so you wouldn't see them," he explained.

In the afternoon, I set out on my rental bicycle for one of the town's four pools (my rental cottage included access). Bicycles are the preferred mode of transportation in this pedestrian-friendly community.

The 107-acre resort-like town was developed in 1995 to provide a sense of community to vacationers and residents alike. It's built around a village center with shops and restaurants; the distance from the center to each of the town's four corners is less than a mile. Fountains, swimming pools, and tennis courts grace verdant public spaces. Grand, balconied three-story houses reminiscent of New Orleans command ocean views.

As I rode, I enjoyed the concert of mockingbirds warbling in the wild profusion of native sandhill rosemary (the town's namesake), sand oak, and saw palmetto. Shouts and cheers carried on the breeze turned out to be a gaggle of teenagers playing dodgeball on one of the village greens.

The next morning, I biked 5 miles to Eastern Lake, a rare coastal dune lake, for a paddleboard lesson with Tom Losee of YOLO Board. Once on the water, I was surprised by the board's stability. Paddleboarding

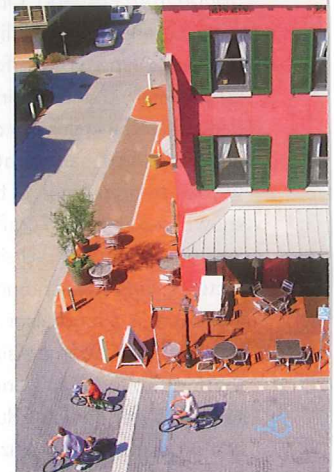


turned out to be an ideal way to explore the shallow estuary that flowed into the pine-rimmed lake.

"You never know what you'll find here—osprey, bald eagles, alligators," Tom said. I shot him a concerned look about that last one. "No worries, they're not common," he added with a grin, and I let out my breath.

Riding back to town, I stopped at Deer Lake State Park for a picnic lunch and was bemused to read the entrance sign: WELCOME TO THE REAL FLORIDA. I crossed the dunes on a boardwalk, arriving at a ribbon of bridal-white sand lapped by water the color of green sea glass, and it hit me: If the real Florida is a place to enjoy the old-fashioned joys of community, along with nature, sunshine, and warm water, then I guess I found it. **A**

Leslie Forsberg is a freelance writer based in Seattle.



Everything in town is within walking distance, whether the beachfront rental properties (top) or the town center.

DO Rosemary Beach showcases the local nature and wildlife both on land and sea. Rent a bike to get around town at **Bamboo Bicycle Company**. (850) 231-0770; bamboobicyclecompany.com. Visit the village's **Butterfly Garden** to learn about local and migratory butterflies and native landscapes. Be sure to look for the beautiful—and cleverly hidden—**Coquina Pool**. Swim in the ocean, then rent a kayak, surfboard, or sailboat at **SeaOats Beach Service**. (850) 951-3632; seaoatsbeachservice.com. To the west of town, go paddleboarding with **YOLO Board**. (850) 622-5760; yoloboard.com. Explore **Deer Lake State Park's** extensive sand beach and dunes. floridastateparks.org.

STAY **Rosemary Beach Cottage Rental Company** offers a wide variety of accommodations ranging from carriage-house studios to elegant ocean-view mansions, as well as the **Pensione Inn** located in the heart of the village. Rates start at \$189. (850) 278-2032 or (866) 348-8952; rosemarybeach.com.

EAT **La Crema Tapas & Chocolate** serves up delicious morsels with a Spanish flair; the flaky empanadas are sublime, and the chocolate fondue is fun for sharing. (805) 624-4121; lacrematapas.com. **Restaurant Paradis** specializes in fresh Gulf seafood, served in a hushed, linen-draped setting. (850) 534-0400; restaurantparadis.com. **The Summer Kitchen Café** serves spicy wraps in a Caribbean ambience. It opened in 1999 to serve the few homeowners and many construction workers at the time. (850) 231-6264; theskcafe.com.

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