AAA Destination Guide: Tampa includes trip-planning information covering AAA recommended attractions and restaurants, exclusive member discounts, maps and more.

Historical preservation and a good measure of civic pride have contributed to a cultural richness that makes Tampa comparable in Florida to Miami. Consider vibrant, historic Ybor City, birthplace of Tampa’s cigar industry and now it’s hot-hot-hot Latin-infused nightspot. Or an eclectic mix of art, history and science museums that inspire adults and children to explore new horizons together while having loads of fun.

When it comes to family-oriented entertainment, animals figure prominently in the mix at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay and such top-notch attractions as Big Cat Rescue and Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo.

Nearby Gulf Coast beaches sing a siren’s song to visitors who can’t resist superfine sand and gently lapping waters. And while the area’s parks, rivers and other natural attributes are conducive to active participation, there’s plenty of spectator action for those who like a good game. Tampa’s championship football, arena football and hockey teams provide seasonal sports excitement, but baseball rules in March when the Tampa Bay Rays and fellow “boys of summer”—the New York Yankees, Toronto Blue Jays and Philadelphia Phillies—suit up for spring training. Family outings don’t get any better than a day at the ballpark.

And when you’ve seen all there is to see, Tampa can be an ideal starting point for a cruise to Caribbean ports of call, or maybe just a drive trip down Florida’s scenic west coast to Bradenton, Sarasota, Sanibel or Fort Myers.

**Essentials**

Guide the family on a safari through Busch Gardens Tampa Bay. You’ll be transported to the countries and landscapes of Africa the moment you walk through the arches of this extraordinary 335-acre animal preserve and theme park.

Immerse yourself in the Cuban culture of Ybor City: Learn about this district’s historic cigar industry at Centro Ybor Museum; take a walking tour offered by the Ybor City Museum State Park; sample traditional café con leche and guava pastry for breakfast at La Tropicana Café; buy a painting executed in coffee or tobacco extract by local artist Arnold Martinez; and watch sensuous flamenco dancers while dining at the 100-year-old Columbia Restaurant. On weekends, live la vida loca (the crazy life) among thousands of club-hoppers along Seventh Avenue.

Don your beach attire and head to the Gulf Coast beaches on the Pinellas Peninsula. These are some of the best sandy shores in the nation when it comes to climate, water, sand and safety.

Get acquainted with the man who turned Tampa into a winter resort at the Henry Plant Museum, which occupies a wing of the railroad magnate’s luxury 1891 hotel. The preserved Victorian-era building, with its sprawling veranda, ornate gingerbread trim and signature silver minarets, is part of the University of Tampa.

©2010 American Automobile Association
Root for the home team or cheer on a favorite at baseball exhibition games during March. On the Grapefruit League’s one-month spring training circuit you can catch the New York Yankees in Tampa, the Toronto Blue Jays in Dunedin, the Philadelphia Phillies in Clearwater, and Tampa Bay’s own Rays in Port Charlotte. Even the workouts draw crowds. If you miss spring training, keep in mind that the Rays play their St. Pete home games April through October.

Talk to the animals at Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo, or spend the day among lions, tigers and leopards, just some of the 140 residents of Big Cat Rescue.

Take a drive. Here are two suggestions: Tampa’s Bayshore Boulevard meanders alongside Hillsborough Bay through picturesque Hyde Park—Tampa’s first subdivision—and is lined with stately homes. Beyond Greater Tampa, explore Bradenton, Sarasota and innumerable attractions, parks, keys and small coastal communities lining Florida’s Sun Coast via I-75 or US 41. Return to Tampa via I-275 and the Sunshine Skyway, a 15-mile causeway spanning the mouth of Tampa Bay between the mainland north of Bradenton and the Pinellas Peninsula.
Day 1 Details - Get additional information on AAA.com; AAA Diamond Rating information available on AAA.com/Diamonds
- GEM Attraction offers a Great Experience for Members
- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Busch Gardens Tampa Bay
3000 E Busch Blvd
Tampa, FL 33674
Phone: (888) 800-5447

2. Tampa Bay History Center
801 Old Water St
Tampa, FL 33602
Phone: (813) 228-0097

3. Henry Plant Museum
401 W Kennedy Blvd
Tampa, FL 33606
Phone: (813) 254-1891

4. University of Tampa
401 W Kennedy Blvd
Tampa, FL 33606
Phone: (813) 253-3333

5. MOSI (Museum of Science & Industry)
4801 E Fowler Ave
Tampa, FL 33617
Phone: (813) 987-6300

6. Kids in Charge! The Children's Science Center at MOSI
4801 E Fowler Ave
Tampa, FL 33617
Phone: (813) 987-6300

7. Bern's Steak House
1208 Howard Ave
Tampa, FL 33606
Phone: (813) 251-2421

8. SideBern's
2208 W Morrison Ave
Tampa, FL 33606
Phone: (813) 258-2233

9. The Colonnade
3401 Bayshore Blvd
Tampa, FL 33629
Phone: (813) 839-7558

Tampa in 3 Days

Three days is barely enough time to get to know any major destination. But AAA travel editors suggest these activities to make the most of your time in Tampa.

Day 1: Morning
You'll want to set aside a full day to enjoy all the shows, rides and live
Day 1: Morning
In the alternative, devote the first day of your itinerary to Tampa’s museum group. Begin with an introduction to the early days at the Tampa Bay History Center. Four floors of interactive exhibits cover periods of native habitation, Spanish exploration and events of the 20th century. A satellite of the renowned Columbia Restaurant opens for lunch at 11.

Afternoon
Among Tampa’s milestones was the arrival of railroad tycoon and developer Henry Plant in the late 1800s. Complement your history lesson with a visit to the Henry Plant Museum, in the restored Tampa Bay Hotel on the University of Tampa campus. With its exotic minarets, domes and cupolas, Plant’s Moorish-design hotel overlooking the Hillsborough River was a magnet for the Victorian-era’s well-heeled. Peer into lavishly decorated rooms filled with antique furniture, period accessories and vintage clothing.

Grasp the laws of physics on a high-wire bicycle, withstand the forces of nature in a wind tunnel and experience aviation technology through a flight simulator, all at MOSI (Museum of Science & Industry), another of Tampa’s leading cultural attractions. Dozens of engaging exhibits appeal to all ages, but youngsters really get to push their imaginations to the limit at Kids in Charge! The Children’s Science Center at MOSI.

Evening
Head back to your hotel and freshen up for a gourmet repast at either the Tampa landmark Bern’s Steak House or SideBern’s, in the Hyde Park neighborhood. For a more casual dining atmosphere, opt for signature seafood dishes and a view of Hillsborough Bay from a window seat at The Colonnade: after dinner, walk across the street and enjoy a leisurely moonlight stroll along Bayshore Boulevard.

Day 2: Morning
This is your day to talk to the animals. Start out in west Tampa at Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo, where you can feed giraffes, ride a camel, pet a pony, interact with kangaroos, observe submerged manatees and giggle over monkey shines in the primate exhibit. Arrive early for breakfast at the Garden Grille.

If time allows, don’t miss an opportunity to see lions, tigers, ligers, servals, snow leopards and other endangered cats living in harmony at Big Cat Rescue. Bring a camera—photo ops are guaranteed on a tour of this 45-acre sanctuary that lovingly shelters abused or abandoned cats for their lifetime.

Afternoon
Get up close for a personal encounter with penguins at The Florida Aquarium. Dive shows, animal feedings, touch tanks and a live coral reef place you within reach of the secrets of the sea.

The aquarium is next to Channelside Bay Plaza, where you can grab a bite and a brew at Channelside Bennigan’s or several casual eateries serving everything from pizza and sushi to tapas and Thai.

After lunch explore Tampa’s Riverwalk, a waterfront linear park punctuated with plazas. Walk from Fort Brooke Park (just south of Channelside) on Ybor Channel to the Tampa Convention Center on Garrison Channel to USF Park facing the Hillsborough River. On the way, break for a snack at Sail Pavilion.

Evening
Don casual cocktail attire and step aboard Yacht Starship for a romantic evening of dining, dancing and stargazing in luxury surroundings. The ship departs from a berth near Channelside Bay Plaza and cruises the scenic waterways bordering Tampa.
## Day 2 Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](http://AAA.com); AAA Diamond Rating information available on [AAA.com/Diamonds](http://AAA.com/Diamonds)

- GEM Attraction offers a Great Experience for Members
- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. **Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo**  
   1101 W Sligh Ave  
   Tampa, FL 33604  
   Phone: (813) 935-8552

2. **The Florida Aquarium**  
   701 Channelside Dr  
   Tampa, FL 33602  
   Phone: (813) 273-4000

3. **Big Cat Rescue**  
   12802 Easy St  
   Tampa, FL 33625  
   Phone: (813) 920-4130

4. **Yacht Starship**  
   223 S 12th St  
   Tampa, FL 33602  
   Phone: (813) 223-7999

5. **Garden Grille**  
   1101 W Sligh Ave  
   Tampa, FL 33604  
   Phone: (813) 935-8552

6. **Channelside Bennigan’s**  
   615 Channelside Dr, Suite 205  
   Tampa, FL 33602  
   Phone: (813) 223-5108

### Day 3: Morning

Spend the day in **Ybor City**, the 1886 birthplace of Florida’s once-lucrative cigar industry. Transportation tip: Take the TECO streetcar from your lodgings in downtown Tampa, or park your own car in Ybor’s pre-pay, self-park lots or one of two parking garages.

Start with a breakfast of toasted Cuban bread, guava pastry and rich café con leche at **La Tropicana Café**, on the corner of Seventh Avenue and 19th Street. Exit through the back door on Eighth Avenue and walk through Centennial Park to **Ybor City Museum State Park**, on Ninth Avenue. On Saturday mornings an outdoor produce and crafts market enlivens this otherwise peaceful plaza.

After perusing the museum’s exhibits, walk over to Ybor’s bustling shopping district on Seventh Avenue. Between 15th and 17th streets
you’ll find vintage clothing, Panama hats, jewelry, giftware, and artwork plus cigar shops with wine and coffee bars (a few even offer cigar rolling demonstrations).

**Afternoon**

Remain immersed in the Ybor cultural experience by sampling a traditional Cuban sandwich or deviled crabs at Carmine’s, on Seventh Avenue. You’ll taste why this family-owned restaurant and bar has served the community for more than 60 years.

Walk off the calories while you work up an appetite for dinner on a self-guiding tour of the cigar city. Look for old cigar factories, historic casitas (frame houses rented to factory workers), benevolent society buildings, statuary honoring prominent citizens and unique architectural features such as wrought iron balconies and globe street lamps. Maps, brochures and an orientation film are available at the visitor information center on Eighth Avenue, just across from Centro Ybor, a popular entertainment center in the heart of the district.

**Tampa in 3 Days – Day 3 Map**

Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com

**Evening**

Start the evening with authentic Spanish-inspired cuisine and a flamenco show at one of Florida’s oldest dining establishments. The Columbia Restaurant had its start as a lunch counter for cigar rollers in 1905 and is still operated by descendents of founder Casimiro Hernandez. An informative menu tempts you with detailed descriptions of dishes prepared from original family recipes.

After dinner, return to Seventh Avenue and sample nightlife at a variety of clubs. See our Nightlife article under Things to Do for recommendations.

**Day 3 Details - Get additional information on AAA.com:**

**AAA Diamond Rating information available on AAA.com/Diamonds**

1. Ybor City
   1600 E Eighth Ave, Suite B-104
   Tampa, FL 33605
   Phone: (813) 241-8838

2. La Tropicana Cafe
   1822 E 7th Ave
   Tampa, FL 33605
   Phone: (813) 247-4040

3. Ybor City Museum State Park
   1818 E Ninth Ave
   Tampa, FL 33605
   Phone: (813) 247-6323

4. Carmine’s
   1802 7th Ave
   Tampa, FL 33605
   Phone: (813) 248-3834

5. Columbia Restaurant
   2117 E 7th Ave
   Tampa, FL 33605
   Phone: (813) 248-4961

**Restaurants**

If you are visiting Tampa for the first time, chances are your itinerary will include a day of sightseeing in Ybor City, the historic cigar-making district established by Vicente Martinez Ybor in 1886. In the very heart of the district you will find the Columbia Restaurant, founded in 1905 by Casimiro Hernandez and owned and operated by fourth and fifth generations of the founding family. Latin traditions run deep in both the Spanish and Cuban cuisine created from family recipes, and in the excitement generated by flamenco dancers. Sample tapas classics such as black bean cakes, empanadas or chicken croquettes, then try a robust seafood, pork and chicken paella entrée or Casimiro Hernandez’s red snapper casserole. This 52,000-square-foot restaurant with 15 dining rooms and patios sprawled over an entire city block is the flagship of a
fleet of six other restaurants in central and south Florida.

With its upscale décor and Mediterranean-influenced new American cuisine, Mise En Place, also downtown, caters to diners who tend to be adventurous in palate and spirit. Fresh local ingredients are the foundation for lunch and dinner originals that include crispy duck shiitake dumplings, roasted tomato tart with crab salad and grilled filet of beef tenderloin with horseradish goat cheese pavé. The “Get Blitzed” tasting menu pairs selected samples of Chef Marty Blitz’s weekly specials with complementary wines.

Nestled in Old Hyde Village—Tampa’s oldest planned neighborhood—since 1956, Bern’s Steak House has built its reputation on the premise that preparing steak is an art form. Their menu—more like a book—features detailed descriptions of USDA Prime steak cuts ranging from filet mignon to delmonico to chateaubriand, plus all you need to know about rare, medium and well done cooking instructions. In addition to steak, the menu consists of nearly 95 other appetizer, soup, salad and entrée options. Because fresh ingredients are paramount, Bern’s even grows most of its own vegetables. Every meal is a masterpiece, but the pièce de résistance here has to be the second-floor, after-dinner dessert retreat where guests can enjoy sweets and sip champagne, Cognac, coffee and dessert wines in cozy little spaces where you choose your own background music.

Nearby SideBern’s, sister to Bern’s Steak House, is a fine-dining restaurant appealing to sophisticated palates. Chef Jeannie Pierola’s menu of international cuisine changes frequently, in synch with the availability of fresh seasonal ingredients, and might include selections such as dim sum, foie gras, cocoa cinnamon scallops, pistachio goat cheese-crusted rack of lamb, wild game and, for dessert, a Valrhona chocolate degustation.

The Colonnade, owned and operated by the Whiteside family since 1935, specializes in seafood dishes made from the freshest catches of Gulf grouper, Alaskan salmon, mountain rainbow trout, jumbo shrimp, bay scallops and rock lobster. A tempting dessert menu features homemade pies baked daily. “The ‘Nade’s” wraparound picture windows afford sweeping views of Hillsborough Bay. If scenery was a menu item, everyone would order a window seat.

Locals go to Kojak’s House of Ribs, just west of Bayshore Boulevard, for barbecue. Everything from tender pork spareribs to pit-smoked chicken and beef to hot smoked sausage links is cooked Oklahoma-style and served in a relaxed, country-kitchen atmosphere. Seating is available on the front porch shaded by stately old oak trees.

In west Tampa, Charley’s Steakhouse specializes in aged USDA Prime and Choice beef cooked to perfection over aromatic hardwood flames. But if you’re in the mood for something from the sea, try a succulent two-pound lobster with your steak. Charley’s also operates three other award-winning restaurants in the Orlando area.

The fine dining experience of Vari Asian Crazy Buffet combines elegant décor, nightly piano entertainment and a full-service bar with a delirious assortment of multicultural cuisines: an all-you-can-eat Asian fusion buffet, a 50-item sushi and sashimi bar, seafood delicacies, a Peking duck carving station, and wok and grill cooking stations—you select the ingredients, the chef cooks it to order.

Soulful Southern cooking is the essence of Lee Roy Selmon’s restaurant, namesake of the former Tampa Bay Buccaneer and a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The menu recalls Selmon’s Oklahoma farm roots with comfort food made from Mama Selmon’s recipes: fried green tomatoes, crispy fried chicken, smoked pulled pork, two-handed hamburgers and down-home desserts such as cobbler, bread pudding and pecan pie. Portions are generous enough to please a hungry defensive lineman, and sports fans will enjoy the football memorabilia displayed about the restaurant.

Old Tampa Bay provides a tranquil backdrop for lunch, dinner or Sunday brunch at Oystercatchers, an upscale casual eatery. Signature dishes such as tandoori shrimp and Kentucky bourbon barbecued scallops
highlight the restaurant’s flair for contemporary cuisine. Fish selections include yellowfin tuna, mahi mahi, Chilean sea bass, Gulf Coast grouper, Alaska king crab and striped bass that you can have sautéed, grilled, poached, broiled or blackened. Oystercatchers is tucked behind the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay.

Restaurants Map

Armani’s, atop the Grand Hyatt Tampa Bay, claims bragging rights to spectacular views of Old Tampa Bay and beyond. The menu of Northern Italian cuisine is intriguing, partly because some of it is written in Italian—if you’re not sure whether to order vitello or pesce, read on and all will be revealed in mouthwatering detail in the subtitles. Scaloppine Armani’s, the restaurant’s signature dish, features veal (vitello) sautéed with exotic mushrooms and Cognac and finished with creamy truffle sauce. After perusing the menu, visit the elaborate antipasto bar that caught your eye on the way in. Armani’s dining room is elegant, the mood romantic, the service efficient and food presentations artistic.

The View at CK’s Restaurant, on the top floor of the Tampa Airport Marriott Hotel, revolves full-circle every 80 minutes while you feast on your choice of sushi, steaks, seafood, sweets and, of course, the ever changing view. CK’s is known for its interesting fish dishes—granola and cornmeal-crusted trout filet, for example—and for USDA Prime beef steak cooked just the way you like it. A Japanese chef oversees the sushi and sashimi bar.

Restaurants Details - Get additional information on AAA.com; AAA Diamond Rating information available on AAA.com/Diamonds

1. Columbia Restaurant 7. Charley’s Steakhouse
2117 E 7th Ave 4444 W Cypress St
Tampa, FL 33605 Tampa, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 248-4961 Phone: (813) 353-9706
2. Mise en Place 8. Vari Asian Crazy Buffet
442 W Kennedy Blvd 2702 N Dale Mabry Hwy
Tampa, FL 33606 Tampa, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 254-5373 Phone: (813) 998-9228
1208 Howard Ave 4302 W Boy Scout Blvd
Tampa, FL 33606 Tampa, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 251-2421 Phone: (813) 871-3287
4. SideBern’s 10. Oystercatchers
2208 W Morrison Ave 6200 Courtney Campbell Cswy
Tampa, FL 33606 Tampa, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 259-2233 Phone: (813) 207-6815
5. The Colonnade 11. Armani’s
3401 Bayshore Blvd 2900 Bayport Dr
Tampa, FL 33629 Tampa, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 839-7558 Phone: (813) 207-6800
6. Kojak’s House of Ribs 12. The View at CK’s Restaurant
2808 Gandy Blvd Tampa International Airport
Tampa, FL 33611 Tampa, FL 33607
Phone: (813) 837-3774 Phone: (813) 878-6500
Attractions

In a city with dozens of attractions, you may have trouble deciding where to spend your time. Here are the highlights for this destination, as chosen by AAA editors. GEMs are “Great Experiences for Members.”

Tampa’s top attractions fall into four fun-packed categories—theme parks, museums, outdoor activities and historic sites. Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, the area’s only theme park and a AAA GEM attraction, predates Disney’s earliest Orlando park by several years, making it something of a regional pioneer in family oriented entertainment. Through exciting rides, live entertainment and natural animal habitats, Busch Gardens presents a grand tour of Africa. A Serengeti safari among free-roaming animals, a soaking raft ride on the Congo River and a lowland gorilla domain plus Egyptian tombs, a Moroccan bazaar and syncopated drumbeats re-create the sights and sounds of exotic places known only to world travelers. Four unique steel roller coasters punch up this park’s thrill factor.

Tampa’s Lowry Park Zoo features outstanding animal exhibit areas with lots of interaction, shows, safaris, rides and learning stations. Hop aboard the Treetop Skyfari for a round-trip aerial view of the park.

Speaking of treetops, chances are you will spot a leopard lounging in one when you tour Big Cat Rescue, a sanctuary for unwanted or abused exotic animals.

Of the art, history, science and nature museums that dot culturally chic Tampa, two AAA GEM attractions exude exhibit excellence. The Florida Aquarium, set under a shell-shaped, glass and steel canopy, offers a marine life roundup of more than 10,000 oceanic and freshwater creatures plus dive shows and personal interaction with sharks, rays and other species. You don’t have to be a science geek to get into MOSI (Museum of Science & Industry), where practical applications put scientific principals into perspective for all age groups. Ride a bicycle across a balance beam and learn why the laws of physics won’t let you fall off; or feel the power of nature as you sit in a hurricane-force wind chamber. And while you’re at MOSI, take in an IMAX film or two.

Take your inner child about 50 miles south on I-75 to Sarasota, the former winter home of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus. Steeped in its circus heritage, Sarasota also is rich with tangible treasures bequeathed to the state by John Ringling. The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, a AAA GEM attraction, holds a world-class collection of European masterworks amassed by the couple on their world travels in the early 1900s. Cà d’Zan (or House of John), the palatial Ringling mansion, reflects the family’s passion for all things Venetian. Costumes, posters and nostalgia-evoking displays at The Circus Museum preserve the Ringling legacy and even have the potential to trigger a few happy childhood memories of your day under the big top.

In nearby Bradenton an important collection of American Indian artifacts unearthed in Florida during the 1930s and ‘40s forms the core of the South Florida Museum. With cultural and natural history exhibits, a dome-style planetarium featuring digital astronomy shows, and a habitat for the state’s oldest manatee born in a protective environment (Snooty marked his “golden” birthday in 1998), this AAA GEM attraction captures Florida’s life stages like a cherished family scrapbook. Hope you brought a camera.
Attractions Map

Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com

Attractions Details - Get additional information on AAA.com

- GEM Attraction offers a Great Experience for Members
- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Busch Gardens Tampa Bay
   3000 E Busch Blvd
   Tampa, FL 33674
   Phone: (888) 800-5447

2. Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo
   1101 W Sligh Ave
   Tampa, FL 33604
   Phone: (813) 935-8552

3. Big Cat Rescue
   12802 Easy St
   Tampa, FL 33625
   Phone: (813) 920-4130

4. The Florida Aquarium
   701 Channelside Dr
   Tampa, FL 33602
   Phone: (813) 273-4000

5. MOSI (Museum of Science & Industry)
   4801 E Fowler Ave
   Tampa, FL 33617
   Phone: (813) 987-6300

6. The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art
   5401 Bay Shore Rd
   Sarasota, FL 34243
   Phone: (941) 358-3180

7. Cà d’Zan
   5401 Bay Shore Rd
   Sarasota, FL 34243
   Phone: (941) 359-5700

8. The Circus Museum
   5401 Bay Shore Rd
   Sarasota, FL 34243
   Phone: (941) 359-5700

9. South Florida Museum
   201 10th St W
   Bradenton, FL 34205
   Phone: (941) 746-4131

Events

In addition to its many cultural and historic landmarks, this destination hosts a number of outstanding festivals and events that may coincide with your visit. GEMs are “Great Experiences for Members.”

Around the turn of the 20th century, Tampa leaders introduced a citywide,
pirate-themed festival based on the adventures of legendary buccaneer Jose Gaspar. Gasparilla Pirate Fest evolved into a full-blown mock pirate invasion followed by a downtown parade, an arts and crafts show and live entertainment on multiple stages.

The tongue-in-cheek surrender of the city to swashbucklers kicks off in late January with the arrival of the fully rigged Jose Gasparilla—a faithful replica of a Spanish galleon—at the Tampa Convention Center. The festival is a AAA GEM event.

Catch daily parades, top-name entertainment, rodeo competitions, cook-offs, livestock shows, agriculture demonstrations, exhibits of everything from antique farm equipment to purebred canines and so much more at the Florida State Fair, a AAA GEM event that takes place over a 10-day period in mid-February. This all-American event has delighted Floridians for more than 100 years. Where else but a state fair would you make a meal of funnel cakes and corn dogs, stroll along a midway under the stars and step into the poultry barn to cast your vote for the best-looking chicken?

The promise of work in cigar factories lured Cuban, German, Italian and Spanish immigrants to Tampa’s Ybor City in the late 19th century. Fiesta Day—once a day of rest for the workers—celebrates Ybor’s rich ethnic heritage with lively music, multicultural entertainment, a colorful parade of flags, international food, cigar rolling demonstrations and contests for the best flan and the best flan eater. A high-spirited Latin tempo energizes the historic district during this celebration in late February. Fiesta Day is a AAA GEM event.

Early March is a good time to pick strawberries. If you can’t make it to the farm, celebrate the harvest at the 10-day Florida Strawberry Festival in Plant City, 15 miles east of Tampa. Taste the freshest strawberry pies, cobblers, shortcakes and milkshakes, or buy a flat of berries and make your own. Although strawberries are the star of the show, this AAA GEM festival boasts a stellar lineup of country music performers. With ag exhibits, carnival rides, a midway and a parade, this event has all the flair of a state fair.

The Apollo Beach Manatee Arts Festival, a AAA GEM event in Apollo Beach, 15 miles south of Tampa via I-75 or US 41, has a dual mission: to preserve Florida’s manatee population and to promote visual and performing arts. At this mid-March event you will find 100 booths of fine arts and crafts, live entertainment, food vendors and a beer garden as well as activities for children and lots of information about manatees and local wildlife. It’s no coincidence that the Manatee Viewing Center is just down the road.

The historic Tampa Bay Hotel is the perfect setting for a Victorian Christmas Stroll, a AAA GEM event. Christmas trees, holiday greenery, lavish period decorations, vintage toys and elegantly wrapped packages adorn the hotel’s Grand Hall and rooms of the Henry Plant Museum, harking back to Christmas traditions of the past.

Things to Do

Shopping

Tampa’s retail front offers a great deal of activity, whether you prefer expansive malls with high-end merchandise or the diversity and uniqueness found in specialty shopping districts.

Malls

Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom anchor International Plaza and Bay Street, an upscale extreme shopping mall with an outdoor dining and entertainment center. In addition to nationally recognized department stores, women’s fashions are well represented by exclusive designer boutiques Betsey Johnson, Custo Barcelona and Jessica McClintock, as well as A Pea in a Pod for mothers-to-be; men’s by Abercrombie & Fitch, BOSS Hugo Boss, Burberry and J. Crew; and children’s by Gymboree and Oilily.

More than 200 retailers have all your shopping needs covered, from
jewelry to home decor to electronics. There’s even a Build-A-Bear Workshop. A food court, two cappuccino bars and a children’s play area provide R and R time for weary shoppers, while nearly 15 restaurants in the open-air Bay Street village adjoining the mall offer variety for lunch or post-shopping dinner. The complex is located at 2223 West Shore Boulevard at Boy Scout Boulevard, near Tampa International Airport.

Westfield Citrus Park, off Veterans Expressway and Gunn Highway in west Tampa, is on one level lined end-to-end with 150 stores anchored by Dillard’s, JCPenney, Macy’s and Sears; lampposts and an antique carousel add to the mall’s Main Street ambience. The same four anchor department stores complemented by specialty shops and boutiques can be found at Westfield Brandon, at the intersection of I-75 and SR 60 on Tampa’s east side.

University Mall, west of the University of South Florida at 2200 E. Fowler Ave., is one of the region’s largest at 1.3 million square feet. The major stores operating here are Dillard’s, Macy’s and Sears, along with more than 130 specialty shops and restaurants.

Last but not least, WestShore Plaza, off I-275 exit 40A, opened in 1967 and was the first of Tampa’s enclosed malls. JCPenney, Macy’s, Saks Fifth Avenue and Sears anchor the mall, which has more than 130 other stores and an international food court.

**Specialty Districts**

Just off Bayshore Boulevard at Swann and Dakota avenues in the historic Hyde Park neighborhood is Hyde Park Village, which contains a delightful collection of more than 50 shops, restaurants and cafes. The residential area offers an Old World charm complemented by a cosmopolitan tempo. Shoppers can settle at a shady outdoor table after perusing the upscale fashions at the likes of Anthropologie, Chico’s, Brooks Brothers, Talbots, Tommy Bahama and White House/Black Market, or before seeking out specialty items at more than two dozen shops, including Crabtree & Evelyn, Pottery Barn Design Studio, Restoration Hardware and Williams-Sonoma. Free garage parking encourages browsers or buyers to make a day of it.

A short drive from Ybor City and adjacent to the Florida Aquarium at the cruise ship docks is Channelside Bay Plaza, an entertainment and dining complex with several unique shops. Surf Down Under features an Aussie-inspired collection of surfing gear, while Zagora Boutique imports handmade clothing, accessories and gifts from exotic world destinations—Moroccan leather purses, silk scarves, and argan soaps and oils, for example.

White House Gear American Classics is the place to get your official White House logo merchandise outside of Washington, D.C. Flaunt your patriotism with presidential inauguration buttons or a White House insignia tie; buy the kids a President Obama puppet; or set your dinner table with replica White House china. The shop also has a whimsical assortment of retro and vintage-style household goods and old time rock ‘n’ roll reproduction memorabilia.

Park in the garage across the street from the complex and get a discount with a purchase from Channelside shops; inquire when shopping.

The Ybor City shopping experience is as culturally rich and vibrant as its nightlife. Most of the activity centers on 10 blocks of Seventh and Eighth avenues bounded by 13th and 23rd streets, an area flush with restaurants, cigar shops, nightclubs, cultural attractions and a fun mix of shops. While you might find a national chain or two, most retailers are home-grown originals.

With vintage and reproduction clothes, hats, accessories and home décor items from the 1920s, ‘30s, ‘40s and ‘50s, La France, 1612 E. Seventh Ave., offers a unique shopping experience along with a reputation for quality over its 30-year run in Ybor City. Clothing, collectibles and home décor in sister store Jezabelle and Her Wandering Gypsies, 1923 E. Seventh Ave., harkens to the Victorian era. At Revolve Clothing Exchange, 1620 E. Seventh Ave., budget-conscious shoppers can trade in gently worn duds for more used duds or cash.

Cigar rolling is the very industry upon which the historic district was founded, and cigar shops, or *chinchales*, are a mainstay. Step inside one
of the South’s largest humidors at Metropolitan Cigars; watch cigar rolling demonstrations at Gonzalez y Martinez Cigar Factory (in the Columbia Restaurant) and La Herencia De Cuba; or enjoy Cuban coffee or wine with your smoke at King Corona Cigars Café & Bar. El Sol Cigars, founded in 1929, is one of Ybor’s oldest cigar making establishments.

Romeo Gallery and Casa Lala Gallery are among a number of art galleries featuring works by local artists. One of the most renowned is Arnold Martinez, who uses tobacco and coffee as mediums; the Arnold Martinez Art Gallery is housed in a casita on 19th Street across from Centennial Park. By the way, the park bursts into a riot of color and texture with produce, artwork, crafts, plants and gourmet foods during the Saturday Morning Markets.

Centro Ybor on Eighth Street is a multilevel complex with shops, eateries and entertainment venues. Chain stores include Urban Outfitters, Sunglass Hut and Claire’s (known for accessories). Ybor Ybor is a good place to pick up logo T-shirts and souvenir merchandise.

Speaking of souvenirs, you can also find them along with history books and locally made products at Ybor City Museum State Park on Ninth Avenue and Centro Ybor Museum on Eighth Avenue. And the gift shop at the historic Columbia Restaurant also offers a full line of the restaurant’s branded packaged foods, including salad dressing, sangria mix, seasonings and Cuban coffee.

Specialty Shops
The atmosphere is as enticing as the offerings at the bay area’s assorted specialty emporiums. Seek out these retailers for a one-of-a-kind shopping experience.

Fans of IKEA Swedish designs thronged to the grand opening of Florida’s largest IKEA store in 2009. With nearly 50 room displays and three complete model homes, this home design superstore has everything a DIY-er with modern decorating sensibilities could ask for: furniture with clean, contemporary lines; sofas with washable upholstery; ergonomic chairs; closet organizing systems; and lots of accessories including rugs, linens, lamps, artwork, cookware and cutlery. IKEA is at Adamo Drive and 22nd Street near the southeast corner of Ybor City.

If it’s hot, edgy and made of denim, chances are Reborn Couture has it in their tricked-out showroom at 701 S. Howard in Soho. With bling-bling ranging from embroidery to hand painting to gem studs, every wearable—jeans, tanks, miniskirts, bustiers, purses and belts—in this boutique is fit for a rock star, male or female. Designers include Christian Audigier, Kimikal, Laguna Beach Jean Co., Olala Fashion Miami and True Religion.

Baker & Co. General Store, 2502 N. Howard Ave. in west Tampa, is part antiques emporium, part old-time mercantile and bursting with items that evoke nostalgia in some and curiosity in others. If you need a weathered metal diner sign or a nifty calico apron, it’s here along with retro laundry paraphernalia, sundries, teacups and teapots, teddy bears and Moon Pie logo T-shirts. But the item guaranteed to put a smile on anyone’s face is the stocking-clad leg lamp like the one prized by Mr. Parker in the film “A Christmas Story.” Note to self: Dad’s next Christmas gift.

And here’s one for book lovers. Old Tampa Book Company, 507 N. Tampa in downtown, has more than 40,000 rare, used and out-of-print fiction and nonfiction reads and is a member of the Florida Antiquarian Booksellers Association.

Nightlife
Evening options in Tampa range from weekday happy-hour get-togethers at wine and martini bars to full-out weekend partying at velvet-rope dance clubs. Or maybe you’d prefer an evening of mellow jazz, twangy country sounds or high-energy pop music. Tampa’s eclectic nightlife scene appeals to everyone.

Downtown
Downtown Tampa’s business core is sprinkled with gentrified, after-five gathering places. Unwind over signature champagne cocktails and live or recorded nightly music on the rooftop of Fly Bar & Restaurant, in the
North Franklin Street Historic District. TAPS Wine & Beer Merchant on North Ashley Drive pairs its upscale environs and extensive libations list with a Thursday-night live jazz event. On Friday nights catch a live performance in the casual environment at Indigo Coffee, on North Franklin near East Madison Street. And if you land in town on the third Thursday of the month, join locals at Downtown Live after Five for music and drinks in Poe Plaza, a pedestrian mall on Franklin Street between Jackson and Whiting streets.

Serious pub crawlers most likely have the following taverns on their radar: Kelly’s Pub, on N. Morgan between Whiting and Jackson streets; Gilligan’s Hideaway, on North Morgan between E. Washington and Jackson streets; and Four Green Fields, on West Platt Street. We just thought you’d want to know where you can tap in.

Tampa residents are passionate about their championship sports teams. Still, you don’t have to be a sports nut to have a good time at Champion’s Sports Bar, located in the Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina across from the St. Pete Times Forum, or at Hattricks, on South Franklin Street near Whiting.

Hyde Park

Hyde Park is one Tampa’s oldest established suburban neighborhoods and a hub of upscale living. Nightlife venues range from casual hangouts with spacious outdoor decks to wine bars to ultrachic intimate lounges. With luxurious décor, a velvet-roped preferred seating area and a dance floor, The Kennedy, 2408 W. Kennedy Ave., ranks among the classiest nightspots in the bay area. Hyde Park Café, 1806 West Platt St., features a similar ambience plus elegant courtyard seating; resident DJs keep the music going.

A concentration of watering holes frequented by residents and college students can be found along or adjacent to South Howard Avenue, commonly known as the Soho district. Enjoy a spirit of camaraderie, sip a Guinness, play darts and listen to live music (on selected nights) with loyal patrons on the deck of MacDinton’s Irish Pub & Restaurant, 405 S. Howard Ave., or at The Dubliner, 2307 Azeele St., just off S. Howard.

The Soho lineup also includes Mangroves, 208 S. Howard; Cheap, 309 S. Howard Ave.; The Lodge, 516 S. Howard; and SoHo Tavern, 2221 W. Platt St. at the corner of S. Howard.

Timpano Chophouse & Martini Bar, 1610 W. Swann Ave. in Hyde Park Village, is the perfect steal-away for a quiet evening of drinks and smooth music. Cork, a wine and tapas bar at 406 S. Howard Ave., provides sedate surroundings where aficionados can test their palate for vintages sans such distractions as brash bands and rowdy revelers.

Ybor City

The historic cigar city is Tampa’s smokin’-hot nightspot, especially on weekends when the overflow from a lively mix of dance clubs, lounges, microbreweries, martini bars and watering holes transforms Seventh Avenue into an outdoor fiesta.

With different music and ambience on each of its five floors, Club Prana distinguishes itself as Ybor’s chicest dance scene. Show your hip-hop moves in the plush first-floor lounge and later head to the rooftop bar for reggae music and an awesome view.

Most bars offer DJ and/or live music ranging from acoustic to jazz to indie rock. Some of the most popular along Seventh and Eighth avenues are Green Iguana Bar & Grill, practically an Ybor institution; pirate-themed Gaspar’s Grotto; and Double Decker, billed as a party saloon. Crowbar specializes in high-energy bands appealing to twentysomethings, and New World Brewery has a cool free jukebox and regularly brings in touring bands to supplement its indie roster. But if you prefer a more relaxed atmosphere, slip into the Blue Shark for live blues and a casual game of pool, or The Rare Olive for martinis, cigars and jazz with a touch of class.

Ybor venues catering to alternative lifestyles include G Bar, Lounge 7.14 and Streetcar Charlie’s as well as L’Olivier, a dinner theater featuring a Moulin Rouge-style cabaret show.
If you’re not having fun yet, slip into The Tampa Improv Comedy Club and Dinner Theater for a few laughs. In its prime, the beautifully renovated 100-year-old building was a Spanish movie theater.

And when it’s time to drag home in the wee hours of morning, convenient and affordable flat-fee garage parking at two locations—Fifth Avenue at 16th Street and Eighth Avenue and 13th Street—takes the guesswork out of the closing-time conundrum "Where’d I leave the car?"

Channelside Bay Plaza
Channelside Bay Plaza is a one-stop entertainment district with mass appeal. A large courtyard opening onto Garrison Channel anchors two stories of trendy nightclubs and restaurants at this waterside party place. Forget what you know about bowling alleys, even if you’ve never set foot in one: Splitsville—equal parts bowling alley, billiard hall, restaurant and retro lounge—offers high energy playfulness in an upscale game parlor.

Stump’s Supper Club goes wild on weekends. Dining tables are whisked from the stage area after 10 p.m., at which time a house band kicks off an evening of dancing with songs from the ’60s and then belts through the decades with a cadre of musical favorites.

Catch a cool breeze, sip a frozen concoction and enjoy live music in a south-of-the-border fiesta atmosphere on the deck of Margarita Mama’s. A few margaritas later, pop into Banana Joe’s Island Party and dance the night away. Or maybe sing the night away prompted by dueling pianists at Howl at the Moon.

AJA, one of the newest additions to the Channelside nightlife scene, opened with celebrity panache during Super Bowl XLIII in 2009. Adding a level of sophistication to the Channelside nightlife scene, this swanky, seductive lounge echoes the chic nightclub ambience found in entertainment capitals throughout the United States. Chill out with live music and martinis during happy hour, or heat up the dance floor on Latin night.

The Outer Limits
Pull an all-nighter at Floyd’s, an upscale club worthy of celebrity patronage in the Seminole Hard Rock Casino. Music spun by a master DJ starts around 11 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and goes into the wee hours of morning, long after most metro-area clubs have closed. Arrive before 2 a.m. and pay a discounted cover charge; arrive even earlier and avoid long lines, especially on Ladies Night (Friday). The casino never closes, so there’s plenty of opportunity before or after clubbing to try your luck at the tables. Located on Tampa’s east side, Seminole Hard Rock Casino is an easy 30 minutes from Orlando.

Dallas Bull, a few miles from the casino on US 301 near the Florida State Fairgrounds, has been Tampa’s stronghold of country music since 1979 and a favorite performance stage of top-name artists. With seven bars, two dance floors and a VIP lounge, this ain’t no hole in the wall, pilgrim. Of course, there’s the requisite mechanical bull.

Skipper’s Smokehouse Restaurant & Oyster Bar, 10 miles north of downtown off I-275 exit 52, is an unconventional music venue, perhaps not for everyone. Skipper’s built its reputation on open jam nights featuring downhome blues and island rhythms, but now has a repertoire of Cajun, rock, funk, jazz and more. Performances typically take place Tues.-Sun. at 8 under the stars in an informal backyard arena (the “Skipperdome”) with bench seating. A compound of weathered, fish-camp-style sheds covered with concert posters, autographed head shots of former performers, neon signs and music memorabilia resembles the junkyard digs of “Sanford & Son,” but nobody seems to mind the look, especially when the music starts.

Spectator Sports
Tampa Bay area fans have the option to root for a home run; slap high-fives after a touchdown; count down the time during a power play; watch dogs chase a stuffed rabbit; or applaud as a favorite horse makes a photo finish. Whatever your pleasure, the following options will have you cheering.
**Baseball**
Professional baseball is played at several locations. Major League Baseball’s Tampa Bay Rays of the American League play April through September at Tropicana Field, 1 Tropicana Dr. in St. Petersburg; phone (727) 825-3137 for general information, or (727) 898-7297 for tickets. The team’s spring training games take place at Charlotte Sports Park, 2300 El Jobean Rd., in Port Charlotte; phone (888) 326-7297 for ticket information.

The New York Yankees major and minor league teams call Tampa home in the spring. They play at George M. Steinbrenner Field, N. Dale Mabry Highway and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. The facility’s 10,000-seat stadium is a replica of New York’s Yankee Stadium. Play is March to September; for information phone (813) 875-7753.

Two other major league teams hold spring training on the Pinellas Peninsula: the Philadelphia Phillies and the Toronto Blue Jays, both of which have minor league affiliates that play ball locally. In summer the Phillies’ Clearwater Threshers train at Clearwater’s Bright House Networks Field, 601 N. Old Coachman Rd., and the Dunedin Blue Jays work out at Dunedin Stadium, 373 Douglas Ave. in Dunedin. Both teams play a full minor league schedule; phone (727) 442-8496 for the Threshers or (727) 733-9302 for the Blue Jays.

**Football**
The NFL’s Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 2003 Super Bowl champs, play at Raymond James Stadium, between N. Dale Mabry Highway and N. Himes Avenue; for ticket information phone (813) 879-2827. The stadium also is the setting for the Outback Bowl game, played on New Year’s Day.

**Greyhound Racing**
Tampa Greyhound Track, 8300 N. Nebraska Ave. at Waters Street in the Sulphur Springs section, features greyhound racing most evenings and weekends July through December; phone (813) 932-4313.

**Hockey**
The NHL’s Tampa Bay Lightning, winners of the 2004 Stanley Cup, hit the ice at the St. Pete Times Forum October through April. For information and tickets phone (813) 301-6600.

**Horse Racing**
Horse racing devotees can go to the only Thoroughbred track on Florida’s west coast, Tampa Bay Downs, 11225 Race Track Rd. in Tampa. The track holds races mid-December to early May. For more information phone (813) 855-4401.

**Note:** Policies vary concerning admittance of children to pari-mutuel betting facilities. Phone for information.

**Recreation**
Year-round warmth and a varied system of waterways and public parks make the region a true haven for outdoor enthusiasts.

**Bicycling**
Tampa’s busy roadways generally are not conducive to safe bicycling; however, scenic Bayshore Boulevard is a delightful exception. It offers a breezy ride along the western shore of Hillsborough Bay with pretty water views as a backdrop. Suncoast Parkway Trail parallels the toll-road of the same name between the Veterans Expressway and State Road 50, and is generally separated from it by a buffer zone of plants and trees.

The Friendship Trail Bridge, once the Old Gandy Bridge connecting Tampa and St. Petersburg, now serves as an over-the-water recreation trail for bicyclists, in-line skaters and joggers.

**Fishing**
The waters of Hillsborough County yield bass, bream and perch. Lake Thonotosassa, northeast via SR 582, attracts freshwater fishing enthusiasts, and the docks off Davis Islands and Bayshore Boulevard offer ample casting sites.

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The central Gulf Coast offers some of the best saltwater fishing in the state. Boats can be chartered for inshore and offshore saltwater and freshwater fishing at Clearwater Beach and in other coastal communities.

Freshwater and saltwater fishing licenses are sold at some tackle shops, sporting goods and discount department stores and at the county tax collector’s office. Phone (813) 307-6549 for information. For details about what may be caught where and when, pick up a Guide to Florida Fishing at local tackle shops.

**Golf**
With dozens of golf courses to choose from and weather that allows for year-round play, the bay area is a true golfer’s paradise. Some of the public and semiprivate courses include Bloomingdale, 4113 Great Golfers Pl., (813) 653-6823; Heritage Harbor, 19502 Heritage Harbor Pkwy., (813) 949-4886; Northdale, 4417 Northdale Blvd., (813) 962-0428; Rocky Point, 4151 Dana Shores Dr., (813) 673-4316; Rogers Park, 7910 30th St., (813) 673-4396; TPC, 5300 W. Lutz Lake Fern Rd., (866) 752-9872; USF, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., (813) 632-6893; and Westchase, 11602 Westchase, (813) 854-2331.

**Hot Air Ballooning**
Hot air balloon flights offer views of the Tampa Bay area accompanied by a champagne brunch. For fares, flight schedules and departure locations phone Big Red Balloon Sightseeing Adventures, (813) 969-1518, or Crystal Magic Balloon Co., (727) 560-8457.

**Jogging and Walking**
Sunny weather encourages both visitors and locals to enjoy the outdoors. Some 8 miles of walking trails wind through scenic hardwood hammocks at Hillsborough River State Park, about 12 miles northeast via US 301; phone (813) 987-6771.

**Tennis**
The city-operated tennis facility at Hillsborough Community College, west of Raymond James Stadium, has both hard and soft courts; phone (813) 348-1173. There are eight clay courts at Marjorie Park, on Davis Islands just south of downtown Tampa; phone (813) 259-1664. Tampa Parks and Recreation Department, (813) 274-8615, can provide a complete list of playing courts.

**Water Sports**
While there are two public beaches on the Tampa side of the bay—Ben T. Davis Beach, along Courtney Campbell Causeway (SR 60) near the airport, and Picnic Island Park, near Port Tampa—it’s the Gulf beaches that draw lovers of water sports. Favorites are Caladesi Island State Park, Fort De Soto State Park, Clearwater Beach and St. Pete Beach.

Hillsborough County parks also offer aquatic variety. Swimmers can dip into 72-degree spring water year-round at Lithia Springs Park, off Lithia Pinecrest Road. The springs feed the Alafia River, the county’s most popular canoeing destination; launches are available in Lithia Springs Park and in Alderman’s Ford Park, off CR 39 near Lithia.

Picnic Island Park, near the original encampment of Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders during the Spanish-American War, beckons boaters, swimmers, picnickers and anglers. The park is south of the Gandy Bridge (US 92) near MacDill Air Force Base and accessible via Commerce Street.

John Chesnut Sr. Park, adjacent to Lake Tarpon, accommodates motorized boats and is a popular park for both water-skiers and users of personal watercraft. Swimming is prohibited within the park.

**Other Diversions**
For trapshooting enthusiasts, the Deer Creek Sporting Clays in Land O’ Lakes offers five-stand sporting clays and courses through palmetto and pine woods; phone (813) 996-1970.

**Performing Arts**
Tampa’s spectrum of performing arts encompasses blockbuster Broadway musicals, symphony and chamber music concerts, children’s shows and holiday spectaculars. Its keystone is the 300,000-square-foot...
Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center (TBPAC), the largest performing arts facility south of Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center. On the east bank of the Hillsborough River in downtown, the TBPAC plays host to a great variety of cultural events at its venues: the 2,557-seat Carol Morsani Hall; 1,000-seat Ferguson Hall; 300-seat Jaeb Theater; and 150-seat Shimberg Playhouse. Phone (813) 229-7827 for schedule and ticket information regarding each of these venues.

Be sure to grab a free copy of the Creative Loafing, or the Tampa Bay Times, which are available throughout the city. The publications are filled with local news features; sections on restaurants, theater, film and music; and listings of upcoming events.

**Film**
Downtown’s 1,500-seat Tampa Theatre, a restored 1926 movie palace at 711 Franklin St. Mall, is a great spot to catch foreign films, cult movies, Hollywood classics and occasional concerts. Tours of the historic building also are offered; phone (813) 274-8981.

**Music**
A full season of symphonic presentations is brought to the area by the Florida Orchestra Inc. and by local dance companies. Performances take place at TBPAC; phone (813) 286-2403 or (800) 662-7286 for ticket and schedule information.

Works for voice are presented by the Master Chorale of Tampa Bay, (813) 258-9468 and Tampa Oratorio Singers, (813) 247-3866. Performance locations vary.

**Theater**
Broadway and off-Broadway theater plays are a big hit. The Carrollwood Players, 4333 Gunn Hwy. is a little-theater group presenting a variety of productions; phone (813) 265-4000. Comedies, musical revues and stage readings are offered at The Gorilla Theatre, 4419 N. Hubert Ave.; phone (813) 879-2914. TBPAC’s Shimberg Playhouse features local performing companies and improvisational groups, and the cozy Jaeb Theater presents plays and cabaret shows.

The Tampa Bay Broadway Series brings the best of Broadway to TBPAC’s Carol Morsani Hall; phone (813) 229-7827.

**Insider Info**

**Ybor City**
If not for the efforts of one shrewd businessman, the area that is Tampa’s Ybor (E-bore) City likely would have met with a much less remarkable fate. Cuban expatriate Don Vicente Martinez Ybor moved his cigar factory here from Key West in 1886, thus opening the door of opportunity for thousands of immigrant workers and their families. In its heyday, the “Cigar Capital of the World” produced more than 700 million Cuban cigars a year in some 200 factories.

Often called the Latin Quarter—there is strong Cuban presence—Ybor City is a neighborhood in the real sense of the word, as Spanish, Italian and even German traditions contribute to its cultural mélange. Ybor City’s brick-lined streets, where Teddy Roosevelt and Cuban freedom fighter José Martí once walked, boast distinctive street lights and elaborate Spanish-American architecture featuring graceful archways and lacy wrought-iron balconies.

Retail shops, art galleries, and cafes and bistros operate within the walls of former cigar factories, and several ethnic social clubs—formerly mutual aide societies founded around the turn of the 20th century—still convene in historic clubhouses. Many of these establishments line several blocks of Seventh Avenue, Ybor’s main thoroughfare, which is definitely lively on weekend nights. Street musicians and trinket sellers hold forth, sidewalks are jammed, and entertainment options are many, particularly around Centro Ybor, the geographic and social center of Ybor City. Visit Centro Ybor Museum to learn more about the cigar trade.

If you wish to explore the historic district under more sedate circumstances, take an early evening stroll and then have dinner at the landmark Columbia Restaurant, Florida’s oldest Spanish restaurant. Inside is an opulent procession of dining areas decorated with colorful Cuban tile, gilt-framed paintings and red brocade. A lavishly appointed barroom in particular exudes old-fashioned elegance.
The area’s history is chronicled at Ybor City Museum State Park on Ninth Avenue. Formerly the Ferlita Bakery, the museum building still retains its huge brick ovens. Exhibits describe Cuba’s cigar industry in the mid-19th century, its subsequent move to the Tampa area and the neighborhood’s founding as a cigar-manufacturing center. A Mediterranean-style patio garden connects the museum to several restored casitas, cottages that were built by cigar companies and rented or sold to workers through payroll deductions. Cuban tobacco embargos all but snuffed out the cigar industry in the 1960s. But the aroma of a fine cigar still lingers along streets where hundreds of skilled tabaqueros once hand-rolled the world’s finest Havanas.

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