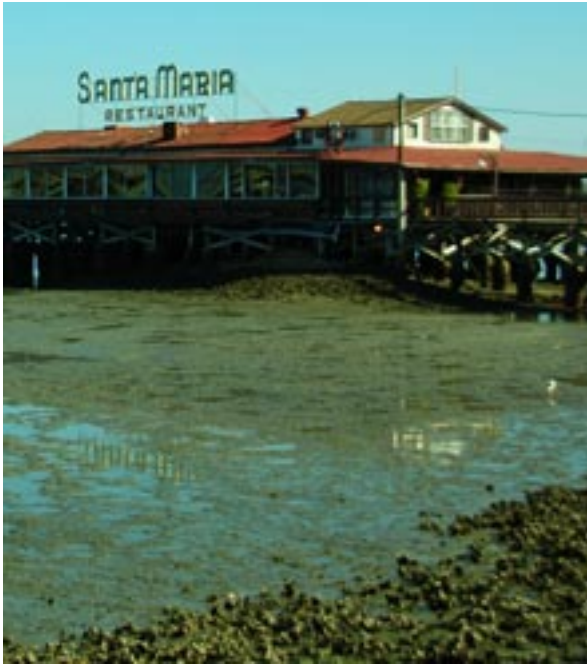


Greetings from Sunny St. Augustine (Part II)

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 08 June 2011 14:07

The Backyard Tourist Sails on Stranger Tides: Food, drink and music in America's Oldest City



Editor's note: [To read Part I, go here.](#)

The words are etched on the window in the shape of a giant eye in bold block print: FOR SCENIC VIEW PRESS NOSE HERE. It's a postcard spring day on St. George Street, St. Augustine's pedestrian promenade of shops, bars, restaurants, museums, street performers, and local color. This is the heartbeat of the tourist trade, the main vein. St. George splits the north end of the historic district running from the City Gates southward eventually spilling out in the shadow of the magnificent Cathedral Basilica onto the Plaza de la Constitución.

Even in the dead of winter the foot traffic along St. George Street never seems to ebb. Today

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the sun is bright, the breeze is balmy and heady with the scent of Confederate jasmine. The sky is a surreal turquoise broken by the occasional cotton ball cloud floating past the bell tower of the Basilica like a ran



dom thought lost in a daydream. The street is a river of demography – a human herd of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities and nationalities stumbling through the same shared daydream. One of the herd breaks away and heads for the window – a middle-aged guy sporting a straw sun hat with a red bandana band, shorts and polo shirt loud enough to shatter local noise ordinances, caped off with the always unfortunate fashion choice of dark socks and sandals.

It's a little like watching a na



ture documentary: *as the wildebeest 's nose meets its own reflection the water explodes in foam as the concealed crocodile lunges from beneath the surface to ambush its unsuspecting prey*. I involuntarily grit my teeth. Socks & Sandals pushes his hat back and leans into the window cupping his hands around his face to shield out the glare and get a better look at the SCENIC VIEW. Like the wildebeest, he realizes his mistake even as he makes it. As

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his eyes adjust he finds himself peering into a room full of people peering back at him, crocs beneath the surface. Like thousands of victims before, he's squinting into the smoky abyss of the St. George Tavern to the enthusiastic delight of the regulars, most of whom are well on their way to Buzztown at 11 a.m. on a Saturday morning.

Cheers!

Socks&Sandals is a fresh notch on the bar, another nose print on the glass. His head snaps back. He readjusts his hat, spins around and quickly fades back into the herd.

Welcome to St. Augustine, amigo

.

DRINKS

Mas cervezas por favor...



There are a lot of immutable rules when it comes to the bar business. Among them, 1) the moment you seek intimate conversation the loudest most obnoxious drunk will lock on to you like a sidewinder missile, and 2) women with expensive handbags invariably believe these accessories deserve their own barstool. And then there's one of the great Life Behind Bars truths: bars are better in seafaring towns. Always. This is no great mystery. In fact, it is an ancient tradition and St. Augustine is pretty good at it with four and a half centuries of experience.

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To riff on an old saying (and countless bumper stickers) St. Augustine is an historic drinking town with a tourist problem. I like to think that if the city's founder Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles sailed into the municipal marina today, the first thing he'd do is march across the street to A1A Ale Works and wash away the salt spray with a few frosty beverages. The award winning brewery and restaurant sits on the corner of King and Avenida Menendez with a grand view of the newly restored Bridge of Lions.



Ponce de Leon, who made landfall nearby in 1513, stands in the park at the foot of the bridge. His gaze is set in the direction of his Fountain of Youth, a poor second choice to what they're serving up in the Ale Works right behind him.

So far during two trips to St. Augustine the Ale Works has emerged as a favorite spot to grab a beer, a bite or both. The street level pub offers ample bar and booth seating with a relaxed atmosphere and live music each evening. Upstairs the emphasis is on the restaurant side of the business. The bar's a bit smaller and more intimate but the second story view of the bridge and waterfront is arguably the best in the historic district and when the weather cooperates there's outside seating on the veranda. The craft brewed signature beers and ales also rank pretty high. I'm picky on this account having spent the better part of four years in the northwest steeped in local brews conjured by stoic burly guys in Carhartt coveralls with Odin beards and images of hops tattooed on their arms – beer Vikings.

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For more information on the history of St. Augustine, Florida, visit the website www.staugustine.com or call 888-888-8888.