

Destin is living LARGE

City has best beach and is family friendly, too, says Southern Living magazine

By JENNIFER RICH

Florida Freedom Newspapers

Destin residents just got a few more reasons to brag about the place they call home.

In the January issue of Southern Living magazine, Destin got a lot of love from the Readers' Choice Awards. Many categories compiled the top 10 places to travel, shop, dine and relax in the South.

"This is great news and PR at a time our economy and businesses can use it," Shane Moody, president and CEO of the Destin Area Chamber of Commerce, told The Destin Log in an e-mail.

Destin placed 10th for the Best Weekend Getaway, ninth for Best City, third for the Best Family Destination and, to no surprise, was named No. 1 for the Best Beach.

"They say Destin, but it's actually the area — the Emerald Coast," said Darrel Jones, president and CEO of Emerald Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Grand Boulevard also received a separate write-up, getting major kudos for their "park and shop" fun. The article stated, "With its Mediterranean-style architecture, rustling palms, and small central park, Grand Boulevard invites you to slow down, enjoy the scenery, and occasionally rest your weary shopping bags at one of its cool eateries."

This is the area's 14th year racking up honors with the Readers' Choice Awards, meaning that the great reviews come from people who actually visit and leave with a good impression.



DEVON RAVINE | Daily News

Destin took numerous honors in the recent Southern Living Readers' Choice Awards. Destin placed 10th for Best Getaway Weekend, ninth for Best City, third for Best Family Destination and first for Best Beach.

Jones compared the accomplishment to getting a USDA stamp for top grade.

"That's quite an accomplishment, (when) others out there wish they could get this once," Jones said. "To continue to get this is unprecedented."

As for the tourism in Okaloosa County, the Tourist Development Council is "very optimistic." The Snowbirds already have given the TDC a good indication that things will do well into 2009.

"It looks like we are doing quite well for the first three months," Jones said.

Southern Living Readers' Choice for Best Beach

1. Destin, Fla.
2. Myrtle Beach, S.C.
3. Gulf Shores/Orange Beach, Ala.
4. Panama City Beach, Fla.
5. Hilton Head Island, S.C.

Readers' Choice for Best Family Destination

1. Orlando/Walt Disney World Orlando, Fla.
2. Myrtle Beach, S.C.
3. Destin, Fla.
4. Gulf Shores/Orange Beach, Ala.
5. Gatlinburg/Pigeon Forge, Tenn.