

Matlacha Getaway

by Captain Tim White

What better time of year than now to take that week-end trip you have been talking about all winter long. The weather is warming, the days are longer, and the fish are biting. For me, nothing beats a couple of days of fishing and relaxation on that island style setting, sitting next to the water as you hear the waves lapping on the shore. If you haven't already heard of Matlacha, FL, let me fill you in on this little piece of relaxation.

This area located in SW Florida lies amongst numerous small islands. The fishing is great, the town shops can keep you busy for days, the wildlife is always captivating, and the food isn't too shabby either.

It is true island style comfort.



over Matlacha Pass. When heading west into Pine Island, the Bridgewater Inn will be on your left hand side right before the bridge. It can easily be seen with its unique bright yellows, blues, pinks, and red colors.

There is parking for boats and trailers as well as dockage to keep your boat there if you so choose. From the moment you exit your vehicle, you can hear the waves lapping on the seawall. With the warm breeze in your face and the smell of saltwater, you can see birds inhabiting the area anywhere you look. Numerous dolphin play in the surrounding waters next to the dock. You can sit in the sun or sit in the shade, whatever you like.

There are several boat ramps that can be used to launch your boat, and restaurants such as the Sandy Hook and Reds will definitely take care of your appetite. We found a little place down the road from the Bridgewater Inn called Burt's. Great place to sit back and relax, enjoy some food and drinks, and have some fun. It is also accessible by water.

What I really enjoyed was hanging out at the Bridgewater Inn. The staff were incredibly nice, great people. They make your stay that much better. A dock surrounds the Inn on three of the four sides. You walk out of your door where you are staying and there is the water. The fishing isn't bad either right from the dock without even using your boat. Sheepshead, snapper, snook, trout, and tarpon, just to name a few, are



The author's friend, Rich, fooled this redfish using a soft plastic jerkbait.



The Bridgewater Inn's western dock from the bridge.

some of the species that can be seen and caught. Most of the rooms have a view like no other. Sunrises can be seen from eastern rooms, and the sunsets can be seen from western rooms. In any case, there are many hangout areas with laid back chairs and tables for you to choose from to sit back and take it all in.

The surrounding community around the Bridgewater Inn is filled with artists and various others who enjoy making crafts and displaying them for your liking. There is usually somewhere that has live music playing which is always a plus.

The rooms are very clean. They all have refrigerators, microwaves, coffee makers, TVs, and air conditioning. Each is equipped with a private bathroom and shower.

I did a lot of walking around and exploring. You can watch boats idling under the bridge all day. You can't go wrong as a fisherman when you are staying next to the "Fishing-est Bridge In The World." Anglers were fishing from or near the bridge 24 hours a day.

Speaking of fishing, the flats fishing in the areas close to the Bridgewater Inn are phenomenal. Snook, trout, redfish and tarpon encompass most of the water in Matlacha. There are mangrove shorelines to fish, pristine flats with luscious grass and sandy pot holes, oyster and sand bars, and the list goes on. Pine Island and Matlacha are known as one of the nations top fishing destinations.



The author's brother, Capt. Jason, admires a nice Matlacha redfish.

On my trip, we fished for redfish, snook and trout using artificial lures. The tide was low so we fished the two boats we had with us on the open flats hitting the sandy pot holes. The bite was tough but we did manage to catch some fish. Lures that work well in this area consist of soft plastic jerk baits and shrimp, top water lures that you can "walk the dog" with, gold spoons, and plastic swim tail bodies on a jig head.

After our long day of fishing, we headed back for our little piece of paradise at the Bridgewater Inn. We took in an incredible sunset, cleaned up and prepared for a night on the town. After some food, drinks, and some live music, it was relaxation mode back at the Inn. There were six of us staying at the Inn and we all sat on the dock fishing for hours that night, just taking it all in. We heard snook popping the surface for a meal, watched skimmer birds skim the water in search of bait fish, looked at the stars, and talked to a few locals walking by. It really was island style fun.

The island "vibe" is hard to describe, it is something that has to be experienced.

It was one of the most relaxing weekends I have had in a long time. I longed for a few more days at the Bridgewater Inn. Heck, I could probably get lost in thought and make it my permanent home in some crazy dream, though it wouldn't take too much convincing for my wife and son.

If you are thinking about taking that weekend or even that week long getaway, check out the Bridgewater Inn. They can be reached at 1-800-378-7666. Their website is www.bridgewaterinn.com. As the sign says next to the bridge, "Island Time Zone Begins Here." Or whenever you make it. ☑

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Room number three is a suite with views facing west and south on the water.

Sunset from Matlacha and Pine Island after a long day of fishing.