



## ART ISLAND

Painted in magical colors, Matlacha, Florida, welcomes Cheryl Rodewig with its tropical atmosphere and laid-back vibe.

**AN ECLECTIC BLEND** of water and whimsy, the canal-lined island of Matlacha makes the most of its 440 acres. It teems with galleries painted in bright Caribbean hues, selling handcrafted treasures like seashell flowers and mermaid sculptures.

Backyards open onto waterfront gardens where bottle trees flourish alongside polka-dot buoys, and boaters pull up for a chat to while away the afternoon. The island name is even fun to say, *matt-la-shay*, though no one knows exactly where it came from.

What we do know is the island, dredged up from oyster beds in the 1920s, was once a thriving fishing village. When the industry died, the community got creative, literally, transforming its main street into a tropical Technicolor canvas of shops, galleries and seafood shacks.

The surrounding tidal flats, meanwhile, owe nothing to art. They're scenic and alive, popular for bird-watching, crabbing, shrimping and fishing, or simply admiring a glorious Gulf Coast sunset.



### GALLERIES GALORE

Effusive and fanciful, Matlacha's art encompasses everything from blown glass to coconut postcards. Browse work by dozens of local artists at Wild Child Art Gallery, Matlacha Menagerie and Island Visions, just steps apart. Leoma Lovegrove's gallery includes a one-of-a-kind garden with a Beatles stage, a 1960s glampier and several palm trees, all painted with her signature bold strokes. [leomalovegrove.com](http://leomalovegrove.com)

*“When I cross the bridge, I fall in love with my little fishing village all over again. It's home.”*

— Leoma Lovegrove, artist and owner of Lovegrove Gallery & Gardens



### OLD-FASHIONED FUDGE

Designed as the sweet shop of your childhood, CW Fudge Factory is stocked with nostalgic candy, homemade popcorn, truffles and more. But most importantly, there's fudge: around 30 flavors on any given day that might include sangria, coconut cream pie, pistachio or creme brulee. You can even watch it being made. [cwfudgefactory.com](http://cwfudgefactory.com)



### ECO TOURS

The surrounding estuary is a haven for eagles, ospreys, dolphins and manatees. Glimpse these and more on Captain Cathy Eagle's boat tours. She'll also tell you about the Calusa tribe and their magnificent shell mounds, which you can still see today. [captaincathy.com](http://captaincathy.com)

MAP BY ANNA SIMMONS

#SPINE CREDIT LIN: PHOTOGRAPHER/SOURCE

### PADDLING THE PRESERVE

Chart your own course through the Matlacha Pass Aquatic Preserve. It's less than six feet at its deepest and welcoming for first-timers and families. Rent a kayak or paddle board from Gulf Coast Kayak, but if you want to venture into the maze of mangroves, go with one of their guides. [gulfcoastkayak.com](http://gulfcoastkayak.com)



### DOCKSIDE DINING

Located at the end of "The Fishingest Bridge in the World," Bert's Bar & Grill is one of several laid-back restaurants where boaters can pull right up and enjoy locally sourced fish. Order the catch of the day or grouper and follow it with a slice of Key lime pie. [bertsbar.com](http://bertsbar.com)



### TINY HOMES

Sporting names like Flamingo and Margarita, and vivid exteriors that range from turquoise to tangerine, the houses at Matlacha Tiny Village perfectly match the rest of the town. Overnight guests have all they need with a kitchenette, outdoor grill, picnic table, dock and kayak launch. [www.matlachatinvillage.com](http://www.matlachatinvillage.com)

