

by Jack Ryan

THE FIRST BREATH of frost has signaled the start of what may be the nation's biggest Winter vacation season. But millions of cold-weather fugitives needn't worry. The Southland has a full supply of sun and sundries for all.

The popularity of Winter vacations has expanded our Southern playground in booming proportions. From a few elite Wintering spas, mostly in Florida, the resort area has spread all along the mild Gulf Coast and throughout the Caribbean.

Florida reflects the entire area's fantastic growth. In Miami Beach, fabulous hotels and equally fabulous guests have established a holiday capital of international fame. Another celebrated section is Palm Beach. Made famous by the social set, its homes are a sight-seer's delight. But don't let the exclusive air scare you off. This beautiful city, like other Florida spots, has added many good accommodations at average cost.

In fact, that's the story of Winter vacations down South—they are no longer solely for the wealthy. And sun and surf are no longer the sole lures.

True, the spacious firm sands of Daytona Beach are a sun worshiper's dream, and you'll have a hard time topping water sports in the sheltered waters near Pensacola. But while acquiring your tan in healthful, gradual steps, you'll find plenty of other pastimes.

You might try Fort Myers, for example, where there's shell collecting on a mass scale and, for the more robust, excellent salt-water fishing. And don't overlook deep-sea fishing from the big ports like Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale or the fresh-water variety on beautiful inland lakes around Orlando. There's even good hunting in the back country near Panama City.

Florida has some sports all its own, and speed is the key factor. Ever seen jai alai? It's a Spanish game resembling handball, but it's swift, rough, and exciting. Tampa has one of the few jai alai frontons in the country. There's also greyhound racing, another Florida specialty, in several cities, including Orlando and Tampa.

For sight-seeing try Tallahassee or Gainesville. Tallahassee, the state capital, offers traditional Old South beauty with oaks and magnolias draped in Spanish moss and parkways planted with camellias and azaleas. The University of Florida is in Gainesville, and its 1,500-acre campus is studded with floral displays.

Sarasota offers something unique in resort sight-seeing with its Ringling Museum of Art. Here are some of Europe's outstanding masterpieces, including the finest Rubens collection in America. The Winter quarters of Ringling Brothers-Barnum & Bailey Circus are open to the public, too.

FLORIDA's neighbors, of course, share in the sunshine and fun. Mississippi has developed a 26-mile white-sand beach along the mild waters of the Gulf of Mexico for its Northern guests. The section, centering around Biloxi and Gulfport, features good salt- and fresh-water fishing, swimming, boating, golfing, and other outdoor recreation—but with the charm of the Old South.



Sailing off colorful Nassau is one of the water sports offered by the sunny Southern regions.

Antebellum homes and century-old historic sites contrast with sleek modern hotels and motels. In Biloxi, you can see Beauvoir, the stately mansion of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Farther north, historic Vicksburg and Natchez hold colorful balls and pilgrimages in Southern plantations.

Tradition rules the South's festivals, too—as long as it doesn't interfere with fun. The biggest party of them all is Mardi Gras, of course. New Orleans is famous for its pre-Lenten festival, but Biloxi and Mobile have wonderful carnivals, too, with parades, pageants, and parties. Mardi Gras falls on February 18 this season, but the fun begins days before.

Still another advantage of a Gulf Coast vacation is the ease of travel. From Mobile westward into Texas, you can follow Highway 90, an excellent route that links major resorts along a scenic seashore drive. Side trips will take you to such spots as the Acadian settlements of Louisiana.

The western Gulf Coast in Texas also attracts millions of Winter vacationers, and its popularity is on the upsurge. The region's central location is a factor, of course, but it has other advantages.

Galveston best exemplifies the area's holiday attractions. A 30-mile white-sand beach and year-round mild climate make the city ideal for water sports. Deep-sea fishing is among the best, and a multimillion-dollar recreational pier provides plenty of carnival-like fun.

FROM Florida and the Gulf Coast it's only a short hop to Winter havens that are part of another world—the Caribbean. By plane or ship, you can visit enchanted islands, no two of which are alike except for fun and a favorable rate of exchange.

Havana, Cuba, is only 60 air minutes from Miami. The city itself is strikingly modern, but if you look

beyond the tourist section you'll find old Spanish towns and communities that bear their centuries-old history gracefully. Cuba itself is a lush island of mountains and forest, but it's Havana night life that first captivates the visiting American.

More peaceful but equally charming are Nassau, only 185 miles southeast of Miami, and Bermuda, farther northeast in the Atlantic's warming Gulf Stream. You won't find blaring horns or neon lights in these British Colonies, just superb service at excellent hotels and a relaxing way of life.

Puerto Rico, the United States' only Commonwealth, is another warm-weather paradise. Here's old Spanish atmosphere seasoned with tropical color and up-to-date convenience. There's also plenty of sport (including the national pastime of cockfighting) and exciting night life.

Farther south, yet still only a few hours by plane, are the British West Indies, cooled by the trade winds and warmed by a tropic sun. The roaring Spanish Main has quieted down for everybody but tourists, whose major dilemma is whether to go island-hopping or enjoy a single resort.

The British West Indies are amazingly varied. They mix old Dutch sugar mills, French restaurants, Indian bazaars, ancient Spanish forts, pirate castles, and harbor police jauntily dressed in the uniforms of Admiral Nelson's day.

The choice of islands, as you see, is a difficult one. Like the rest of the sunny Southland, vacation possibilities are limitless both in miles and attractions. But the southern regions offer one common assurance (besides wonderful climate) — their guests will have an all-around good time.

Planning a winter vacation? Many handy booklets are available to help you. For a free list of these booklets, send a stamped, addressed envelope to Travel Editor, Family Weekly, 179 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.

South to the Sun



Florida, the Gulf Coast, and the Caribbean are booming as Winter