Florida’s Clearwater Beach and the Sarasota stretches of Lido and Siesta Key are consistently voted the best beaches in the US, and Passported correspondent Paula Franklin took her family to find out why. Read on for her report.

**Clearwater Beach:**

Clearwater Beach is a quintessential beach town: boardwalks, beach shacks, nightly sunset festivals and ample ice cream shops on over three miles of white powder sand. Next year, the room to snag will be at the new 15-story Opal Sands Resort by Ocean Properties, set to open its doors in spring 2016.

**We Slept** The newly remodeled Sandpearl, a well-appointed 4-star beachfront resort with lagoon pool, beach service, kids’ camp, large spa and three restaurants. Most of the rooms have balconies with views over the long coast and sleeper sofas for the kids. Just down the beach, the Hyatt’s 8th-floor pool and sundeck hosts daily poolside crafts, and has water toys and full pool service. The Hyatt’s in-room kids’ menu is one of the best in town.

**We Played** Clearwater’s most famous resident is Winter the dolphin, the star of Dolphin’s Tale, and we went to meet her at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium, which is currently undergoing a huge renovation. We also sailed on a Pirate Cruise and saw dolphins while enjoying the onboard festivities that included a treasure hunt, face painting and water gun games.
Sarasota

The posh city of Sarasota lies adjacent to the sandbar islands Lido Key and Siesta Key, which are home to arguably the most scenic beaches in the US (this coming from a girl from La Jolla, CA). The beaches are pristine and seem to go on for miles; the waters are crystal clear and have just enough waves to provide hours of fun. With no real beachfront amenities or beach shops, these beaches also have a secluded island feel.

We Slept The Ritz Carlton Sarasota for the spectacular harbor views, decadent spa and hip Jack Dusty restaurant. The real highlight is the beach club on Lido Key, accessible to all hotel guests, the club has a lagoon pool, beach and pool service and a Ritz Kids Club that has enough activities to keep the kiddies occupied all day. Across the harbor from the Ritz is the Hyatt Sarasota, which has a giant harbor-front lagoon pool with waterfall. The newly renovated, modern rooms come with plush beds and all stays includes free use of kayaks, paddleboards and paddleboats in the harbor as well as a shuttle to Lido Beach.

We Played It’s all about the beach here, the calm waters and soft sand are perfect for little ones and Siesta Key Beach is known for prime shell collecting. Mote Aquarium is home to manatees Hugh and Buffett and the only center for Shark Research recognized by the U.S. Congress. The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens for an authentic tropical rainforest with a focus on teaching young ones about these unique plants.

We Ate The Sarasota Outpost of Columbia Restaurant, the empanadas were just that good! Lido Beach Restaurant for lobster rolls and fish taco Fridays. Dim Sum Lunch at Yummy House, a very popular and swanky new outpost by night, kid-friendly dim sum by day.

My Take For the hideaway vibe, unspoiled beaches, beautiful blue water, and high-end shops and restaurants, Sarasota can’t be beat.