

# An afternoon at Cortez Fishing Village

Since I have lived in Florida for the past 22 years, I have heard people say that there really isn't anyone living here now who actually grew up in Florida.

Obviously, that's not true. Every week, I meet new people, and many of them were born and bred in the sunshine state.



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But this week, I met someone in the historic Cortez Fishing Village who has lived there for most of his life, and listening to him talk about what it was like to grow up playing and working on the docks in the tiny town was incredibly interesting.

An accurate statement to apply to Cortez would have to be, "Great things come in small packages." If you enjoy learning about the history of small towns, and are interested in how such a place could have achieved, and is still achieving, remarkable success in the fishing industry, a visit to this village is a must.

My first stop upon arrival was the Florida Maritime Museum, which is housed in a 1912 school building, and does not charge an admission. I was shown around by a docent,

**IF YOU GO!**

**Where:** The Historic Cortez Fishing Village is south of State Road 64 (Manatee Avenue) just before the bridge to Anna Maria Island.

**When:** The two museums are both on 19th Street West. The Maritime Museum is open Tuesday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Cultural Center is open Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, from noon to 4 p.m.

**Cost:** There is no admission cost for the museums, but they will accept donations if you offer.

**Information:** To find out more about the Florida Maritime Museum and its programs, visit the website at [www.floridamaritimemuseum.org](http://www.floridamaritimemuseum.org). For information about the Cortez Cultural Center, visit [www.cortezvillagehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.cortezvillagehistoricalsociety.org).



**John McDonald, with the Cortez Village Historical Society, has lived in Cortez Village his entire life.**

and former museum president, Ted Adams, who told me that the museum was founded to help promote the last remaining fishing village in the state of Florida. As a matter of fact, Cortez still has two major commercial fishing fleets who still call the town home.

There were many replica wooden model ships in the museum, some very large, and Mr. Adams told me that a 93-year-old volunteer,

a former surgeon who was legally blind, had built and repaired all the ships. As I left the museum, Mr. Adams suggested that I go speak with John McDonald, who was volunteering just down the road at the Cortez Cultural Center.

That was a good call. Mr. McDonald, a 25-year US Navy veteran, had grown up in a little house in Cortez Village, right across the street from the



LET'S GO PHOTOS BY DEBBIE FLESSNER

**This historical marker down by the waterfront is dedicated to Florida's commercial fishermen.**

museum, with his five brothers and sisters. He told me tales of an idyllic childhood, fishing all the time, playing football in the salt flats and helping out the commercial fishermen on the docks.

The Cultural Center also has a museum which is free. This one focuses a little more on the early settlers of the area, most of them from Carteret County, in eastern North Carolina. I asked Mr. McDonald and his co-volunteer, Kris Martinez, where I should head next and they sent me down to the Sarasota Bay waterfront.

I drove, but the village

is so small that there is a walking map you can get at the museum which shows where all the historic homes are, and there are dozens of them. Not only are the longtime fishing companies at the water, so are the seafood restaurants. They're right alongside where the fishermen are coming back in with their day's catches, so you know for a fact that anything you eat there is super-fresh.

This village is not about quaint little shops and Starbucks. It's a working fishing industry town and to see it in action is fascinating. There is even

a covered dock next to the Star Fish Company restaurant that has benches for the public to sit and observe from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

My day in Cortez Village ended as my days typically do — by almost getting in trouble. Just for future reference, if you stand outside a United States Coast Guard station taking pictures too long (because you miss your oldest son who is in the Coast Guard) someone WILL come out and have a chat with you.

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