

Tarpon Springs

Tarpon Springs is a tale of two splendid cities molded into one community, visible by the active historic downtown and the equally historic Sponge Exchange district. It was an early splash as a warm Gulf of Mexico waterfront resort community for northern aristocrats. This led to the construction of the still visible, "Golden Crescent" of Victorian homes along Spring Bayou. In 1900, the destiny of Tarpon Springs turned to the water when the vast quantity of sponge beds just offshore was discovered. Sponges at the time were collected using long poles with hooks in shallow water, known as hook method. A local Greek sponger tried a new method of diving for sponges which proved to be much more efficient. The industry thrived. Sponge diving continues today along with over a century of Greek Mediterranean heritage and culture.

The early sponge industry created a need for eating places at the Docks for the boat crews. Soon, as news of this unusual industry spread, people began to come to the Docks to see the sponges. Shops



Sponge Boats—recent photo

opened so that the tourists could purchase sponges and other souvenirs. Some of the original shops remain at the Docks today, owned by the same families that started them. Through the years more shops have opened, putting the number at well over 100 today. There are approximately fifteen restaurants in the Sponge Docks area and more in the old downtown.



Spring Bayou, Tarpon Springs (postcard courtesy of University of South Florida)

Visitors to the Sponge Docks can shop, eat, take cruises down the Anclote River to the Gulf of Mexico, go fishing, visit a saltwater aquarium, see a movie depicting the sponge industry. Other places to visit in Tarpon Springs include Tarpon Avenue, part of the National Main Street program, with its antique shops, St Nicholas Orthodox Cathedral and the gracious homes around the bayous. Howard Park has a good beach.



Howard Park Beach

