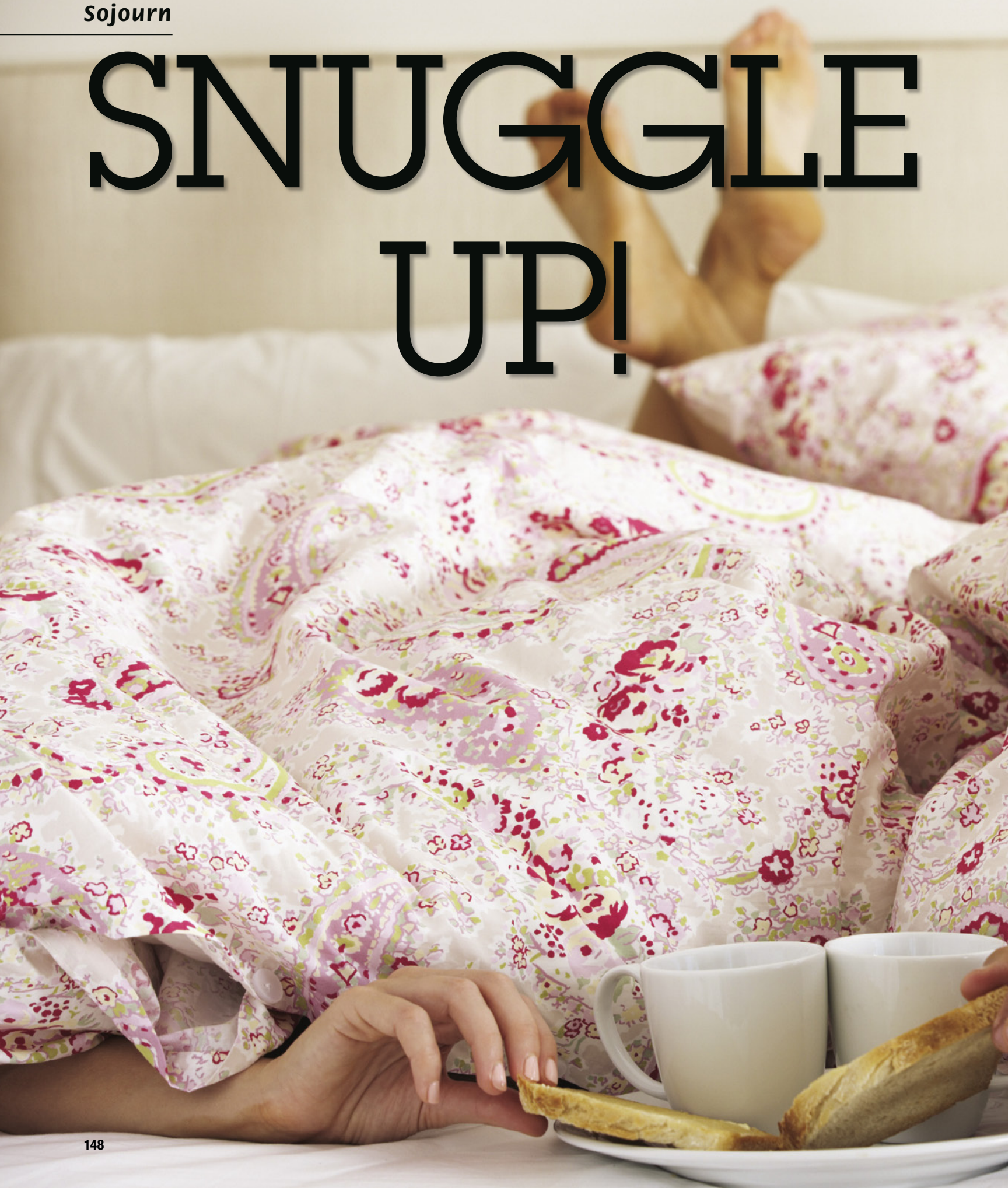


SNUGGLE UP!





Why jet off to foreign lands when we have such a captivating state we can call our very own? Join us as we explore some of Florida's coziest B&B inns.

TEXT BY FRANCESCA CRUZ



Our paradisiacal peninsula offers us an opportunity for adventure, enchantment and history. While most opt to set off on a European or Asian escape or set sail for the Caribbean as the collective fad *du jour*; we Floridians – and for that matter any non-Floridians in our midst – often forget that *this state is magic*. It's seductive. It's romantic. It's swampland. It's seedy. It's sortilege. It's The Sunshine State...and we wouldn't have it any other way!

Yes, most other states are jelly of us. The West Coast might have its glitz, New England its history, and the Midwest its... *ummm...its...well*, they have the largest mall, savage winters and comfort food. But Florida has the best beaches, a dynamic mix of nationalities, scrumptious food bedecked in *sazón* – whether Southern or Hispanic – and year-round sunshine. Are you sold on Florida yet? Doesn't take much, huh? Let's get started...

First stop on our bed & breakfast hunt is the quaint city of Monticello founded right after the Civil War, and located in The Panhandle. Named after the Virginia plantation of one of our founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, this city is nicely nestled between Tallahassee and Thomasville, Georgia. Among the Magnolia trees and sweeping Weeping Willows caressing many a Victorian home, is the award-winning National Historic Register Property of John Deham's House Bed & Breakfast. An authentic circa 1870s restored Victorian

When traveling through The Sunshine State, a stop at one of Florida's many cozy B&Bs should be on the agenda for seasoned and novice travelers alike.

Mansion built by a Scottish cotton trader, period antique pieces adorn the 13-room mansion with 8 fireplaces, a cupola and an acre of lush grounds to stroll at your leisure.

When breakfast beckons, it's all about pecan waffles, buttermilk blueberry-stuffed French toast, locally made sausage and baked ham & eggs. This B&B serves up the perfect morning treat before enjoying a bicycle tour, and later a chance for antique shopping in town. This is followed by 'down home cooking' for lunch at one of the ma-and-pa restaurants. The biggest delight is a late afternoon walk through canopied Oak tree-lined paths. Monticello will surely have you under its spell long after you leave.

Although it's hard saying goodbye to this haven, the road is wide and enticing, and the next stop on our journey is just under a 3-hour drive southeast. Destination: The oldest city in the U.S., St. Augustine.

Arriving just before dusk will give you ample time to settle into Carriage Way Bed & Breakfast, with a glass of wine in hand, where you can curl up on the veranda swing, in the company of fellow guests, to watch the horse-drawn carriages go by. The golden, baby-blue & pink-hued twilight casts the most beautiful glow over the white vernacular Georgian 9-room structure made of cypress, cedar and heart of pine





fine woods. It's a smaller B&B than the previous, but no less cozy and welcoming; an ideal place for such a picturesque and romantic city.

The smell of fresh baked breads and real fruit jams is a fabulous wake-up call; You can almost savor the fare before tasting it by means of the aroma that engulfs the home. With a happy and full belly, it's time to discover the historical city of Castillo De San Marcos with a trolley tour, and some antique shopping before hitting the road to your next stop.

After a 2-hour drive south, you'll arrive at a city founded by pioneers and former slaves: Melbourne. Known as Harbor City, the feeling is: *laidback-beach-town-join-the-fun* with just a hint of surprise. It's just an hour south of Kennedy Space Center and a 1.5-hour drive to Disney World.

Port d' Hiver Bed & Breakfast graciously awaits each guest's arrival. It's a boutique B&B that blends comfort with opulence. This award-winning hotel is a bit ritzier than the others mentioned. The amenities, such as the heated spa pool, and the gourmet breakfast, give it a more luxurious appeal that weary travelers welcome with a smile.

From Melbourne, it's off to Tampa. Among the myriad of nocturnal activities at Palmer House Bed & Breakfast is enjoying your libation of choice at nearby pirate-themed Gaspar's Grotto in Ybor City. But you may not be in the mood for any distractions: Arriving at The Palmer is like stepping onto the famed *Petticoat Junction* television show.

Finding the perfect B&B in Florida takes a little research, but the experience will surely be well worth the effort regardless of which part of the state you're in.

Sprawling oaks, a welcoming staff and a homey front porch painted lemon merengue yellow embraces the tired and weary traveler. A wonderful setting for a pastoral bed & breakfast, with activities that include canoeing, bike riding and golfing, you may just decide to take the days here in like a big dollop of sweet cream.

From here there's only one place to set your sights on: Our very own Magic City, where you can expect the unexpected and do so with excitement. The final stop on this road trip takes place on a dock where you can board the Boat, Bed & Breakfast *Borinquen* with giddy enchantment. The experience is comprised of a comfy yacht B&B that sleeps up to 4, serving a continental breakfast on the back deck of the boat, with the most glorious view of the phenomenal Miami skyline as the breathtaking backdrop. This is a place where ocean tides will lull you to sleep and cool sea breezes will keep you comfy day and night. It's an experience that feels at once whimsical and totally worth it.

Once your B&B hop has come to an end, the sense of delight and pride in this unique state of ours will undoubtedly linger on. Experiencing various parts of Florida from the comfort of a bed while enjoying an ambrosial breakfast— we're sure we had you at *breakfast!* **BM**