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Walton County

A FLORIDA COUNTY GUIDE · PANHANDLE & EMERALD COAST

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REGION

Panhandle & Emerald Coast

COMMUNITIES TO START WITH

**DeFuniak Springs,
Freeport, South
Walton**

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Walton spans rural inland towns and lakes to nationally known Gulf communities along Scenic Highway 30A.

Start at the top of Florida

The highest natural ground in the state of Florida is in this county. Britton Hill, near the Alabama line, 345 feet.

That is worth knowing not because anybody moves somewhere for a hill, but because it tells you where you are. This is the top of the Panhandle, closer to Alabama than to Orlando, and nothing about the northern half of Walton County resembles the Florida on the postcards.

The county runs 1,038 square miles of land — the twelfth largest in Florida — and 56 percent of it is rural. Almost everyone lives at the bottom.

The north: DeFuniak Springs and Freeport

DeFuniak Springs is the county seat. It sits inland on the I-10 corridor, closer to Alabama than to the Gulf, and it is the administrative center of a county whose money is forty miles away. Freeport lies south of it, toward the bay.

This is farmland, forest and small-town Florida. It is where the county votes from, where its government sits, and where the houses cost a fraction of what they cost at the other end. If you have been reading about Walton County property prices, you have not been reading about here.

The bay in the middle

Between the north and the south sits a bay, and it does more than separate two halves geographically. It separates two economies. North of it: rural, working, cheap. South of it: some of the most expensive residential property on the Gulf coast. The drive between them is not long in miles. It is very long in everything else.

The south: thirty miles of road

Florida State Road 30A runs along the coast through South Walton and it is, by some distance, the most consequential thirty miles in this county.

Miramar Beach is the largest community in Walton County. Santa Rosa Beach follows. And then, strung along 30A: Seaside, Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach — three planned communities designed by the same firm, Duany

Plater-Zyberk, built as deliberate exercises in New Urbanism. Seaside was the town they filmed The Truman Show in, which tells you something about how it was designed and how it photographs.

These are not suburbs that grew. They are towns that were drawn.

Lifestyle: Coastal communities · Growth · Small towns

Walton County by the numbers

Population 2025 estimate	93,288	At the last full count 2020 Census	75,305
In the year 2000	40,601	Aged 65 and over	21.1%
Under 18	21.1%	Median household income	\$81,986
Median home value	\$425,100	Homeownership	78.6%
People per household	2.37	Average commute	29.4 minutes
Bachelor's degree	35.0%	Land area	1,038 square miles

Look at the two age lines. 21.1 percent over 65. 21.1 percent under 18. Exactly equal, to the decimal place.

That is not a balanced county. It is two populations that never meet, arriving at the same figure from opposite directions — a retirement coast and a working interior, canceling each other out in the arithmetic while having nothing to do with one another in life.

Once you have seen it there you see it everywhere else on the table. The \$425,100 sits far above rural North Walton and well below the towns on 30A. The \$81,986 income and the 35 percent with a degree are the coastal strip lifting figures that the northern half of the county never touches.

Every number above is real. None of them describes a place you could go and stand in.

Communities to compare

DeFuniak Springs

DeFuniak Springs runs the county from the wrong end of it — the government sits up here on the I-10 corridor while the money is forty miles south at the coast. Price a house here on its own terms, because the county average is describing somewhere else.

South Walton

South Walton is the coastal half of the county, thirty miles of it strung along 30A through Santa Rosa Beach, Seaside, Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach. Find out what is a short-term rental on any street you are considering, because this is vacation-rental country and it changes what living there is like.

Freeport

Freeport sits between the northern half of the county and the bay, on the road most people take between Walton's two ends. Work out how often you would really cross that bay before you decide which side of it to live on.

Questions to answer for Walton County

And it is filling up fast

40,601 people in 2000. 75,305 in 2020. An estimated 93,288 in 2025.

More than doubled in twenty-five years, and up about 24 percent in the last five alone. That growth is not spread evenly across 1,038 square miles. It is going where the water is, and where the water is was already the expensive part.

The end of the road

Drive it from Britton Hill to Alys Beach and you cross from the highest ground in Florida to some of its most expensive, in one county, in under two hours.

Nobody moving here is choosing Walton County. They are choosing one end of it, and the other end is a different decision entirely with the same name on the paperwork.

Decide which end you are buying before anything else. Whichever direction you are not looking in is the one dragging the average.

Places that reveal the county

Grayton Beach State Park

More than two thousand acres on both sides of County Road 30A, at 357 Main Park Road in Santa Rosa Beach.

Topsail Hill Preserve State Park

1,600 acres with three miles of Gulf shoreline, at 7525 West County Highway 30A in Santa Rosa Beach.

Point Washington State Forest

15,131 acres of pine woods in southern Walton County, bought under the state conservation program in 1992.

Walton County Heritage Museum

The old railroad depot at 1140 Circle Drive in DeFuniak Springs, now the county museum.

Seaside Town Center

The town that started the whole idea, built on eighty acres from 1981 onward.

Lake DeFuniak

A spring-fed lake of about forty acres in the middle of DeFuniak Springs, and very nearly a true circle.

Alys Beach

158 acres of white stucco on 30A, built from the early 2000s and unlike anything around it.

Grand Boulevard at Sandestin

A town center at 585 Grand Boulevard in Miramar Beach, with shops, restaurants, offices, hotels and a park.

Eden Gardens State Park

161 acres of live oaks and formal gardens around an 1897 house, at 181 Eden Gardens Road.

Deer Lake State Park

A quiet park at 6350 East County Road 30A in Seagrove Beach, built around one of the less-visited dune lakes.

Camp Creek Lake

About seventy acres of coastal dune lake at Seacrest, running under 30A down to WaterSound Beach.

Choctawhatchee Bay

An estuary twenty-seven miles long and six miles wide, covering 129 square miles across Walton and Okaloosa counties.

Morrison Springs County Park

A 161-acre county park at 874 Morrison Springs Road, Ponce de Leon, built around a first-magnitude spring.

Rosemary Beach

107 acres at the eastern end of 30A, laid out in 1995 by the architects who designed Seaside.

WaterColor

A planned community of 499 acres next to Seaside, developed by the St. Joe Company.

Beaches in Walton County

Always verify current parking, fees, water quality, lifeguard coverage and posted rules before leaving.

Miramar Beach
Dune Allen Beach
Blue Mountain Beach
Grayton Beach
Seagrove Beach
Deer Lake State Park Beach
Inlet Beach

Topsail Hill Preserve State Park Beach
Ed Walline Regional Beach
Grayton Beach State Park
Seaside Beach
Walton Dunes Beach
Camp Creek Lake Beach

Where these figures came from

US Census Bureau QuickFacts, Walton County, Florida. Population estimate, 2020 count, age, income, home value, homeownership, household size, commute, education

Wikipedia, Walton County, Florida. County seat, 2000 population, land and water area, rank by area, northern and southern communities, Britton Hill at 345 feet as Florida's highest natural point, State Road 30A, the urban/rural split, Seaside and Rosemary Beach and Alys Beach as Duany Plater-Zyberk New Urbanism communities, Seaside as the Truman Show location, median age