



# *The Driftwood Inn and Resort*

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## *The Story of the Treasure Coast*

On July 24, 1715 a Spanish treasure fleet of eleven ships and an accompanying French warship left Havana, homeward bound for Spain with a cargo of 14 million pesos worth of gold, silver and jewels. On July 31, a fierce hurricane wrecked all but the French ship in the Florida Straits between the present Cape Canaveral and Ft. Pierce. Over 700 persons perished and nearly all the treasure was lost at sea. About 1500 men, women and children survived; they banded together to survive and form salvage camps to recover the treasure for the Spanish Crown. They built temporary shelters, dug shallow surface wells for water, and were assisted by Spanish Indian auxiliaries from St. Augustine consisting of Timucan, Guali, Yamassee and refugee Apalachees, dispatched by the governor to help castaways forage for food. The local Ais Indians also supplied the camps with fresh fish and game in exchange for trinkets and other trade items. The main campsite of the survivors, and later the salvage camp for Spanish sailors and English pirates, was located just south of Sebastian Inlet at the Barra de Ays, or sandbar of Ays.

Although 6 million dollars worth of treasure was recovered during salvage operations immediately following the disaster, much of the treasure lay beneath sand and sea for more than two centuries. Occasionally, tides and storms tossed blackened silver coins onto the beaches, tempting would-be treasure hunters. Underwater treasure salvaging operations did not get into high gear until the 1960s, when a combination of the Real Eight Company and Treasure Salvors, Inc. recovered several million dollars of the treasure from wrecks between Sebastian Inlet and Fort Pierce. One particularly rich find from a wreck near Fort Pierce yielded nearly 2,500 gold doubloons in one week, worth an average of several hundred dollars apiece. As word of the fabulous treasure hit the headlines from coast to coast, the Great Florida Gold Rush was on. It was during this period that Ft. Pierce city fathers made a bid for the anticipated influx of tourist dollars by dubbing the area "The Treasure Coast." The nickname has been used ever since.

Our beautiful part of the Treasure Coast, which became the oceanside home of the renowned Driftwood Inn and Resort, was settled a century ago by a pioneer postmaster Henry T. Gifford. This unspoiled community in 1891 was made up of just three homes and a general store, and today has retained its feel with a laid back, outdoorsy charm. The residents swell with pride when pointing out clean, spacious beaches, lush tropical landscaping and meticulously maintained specialty shops. Since being officially chartered as the City of Vero Beach and the county seat for Indian River County in 1925, residents have been relentless in their efforts to preserve the natural beauty of the city. Mrs. Henry T. Gifford, who was asked by her husband to select a name for his new post office location, couldn't have dubbed it more appropriately. For Vero, a derivation of a Latin word meaning "true," is simply that....truly peaceable, truly tropical, truly remarkable.

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