Headline: Clearwater avoids dreary, gray skies

Deckhead: Sun always shines bright on the Florida, gulf-coast town

Western Pennsylvania is dubious for its gray skies. So much so, the sight of a blue sky might seem like witnessing a unicorn.

A recent study found that Pittsburgh ranks fourth among major cities for number of cloudy days. It’s hardly an honor of which to be proud, but it does keep people yearning to choose the perfect spot for their next vacations.

The options are plentiful. Florida is an excellent place to start – Clearwater to be exact. The city that hugs the Gulf of Mexico on the state’s western side is synonymous with sunshine. Gray skies are an enigma, and rain is a rarity.

Clearwater averages 361 days of sunshine per year. And it holds the record for consecutive sunny days with 768 – more than two consecutive years.

It’s astonishing, particularly to the many who reside north of the Mason-Dixon line. Here, clear skies and sunshine are a bonus; in Clearwater, they’re a given. The temperatures rage year-round from the low 70s to the low 90s. The water is just as unblemished as the sky, and the beaches are softer and more pristine than a country club’s fairways.

Clearwater’s sugar-white sand and tranquil setting create a gorgeous and captivating environment for guests. The beaches are arguably the city’s greatest attribute. Visitors spend hours bathing in the sun or sitting under an umbrella. The scent of saltwater wafts from the gulf, enticing beach bums to take a dip.

Beach Walk is one of shore’s primary attributes. The $30 million redevelopment initiative has transformed the look and atmosphere of south Clearwater Beach. It’s a long and meandering promenade – a half-mile in length – surrounded by resorts, entertainment, restaurants and artwork. It’s dotted with palm trees, resting areas and lush landscaping.

Pier 60 is a recommended stop on Beach Walk. Dangle a fishing pole during the day, but by evening, don’t miss the free sunset celebration, a local tradition for more than a quarter century. Highlights of the sparkling festival include street performers, artists, crafters and live music. The event begins two hours before sunset and concludes two hours after the sun drops beneath the gulf’s horizon.

Clearwater’s revitalized downtown area offers shopping, dining and live entertainment. The Cleveland Street District overlooks the eye-catching Clearwater Harbor and Marina and provides a stunning backdrop for a variety of concerts, festivals and exhibits throughout the year.

The Gulf of Mexico is home to an abundance of delicious seafood, making Clearwater well known for its fresh daily catches. Grouper is the town’s favorite. The flaky, white fish can be prepared many ways and is a hit among the locals and visitors. Stone crab is another specialty, available from May to October.

Food festivals and events are held throughout the year, including Frenchy’s Stone Crab Festival, Cooters Annual Crab Fest, Clearwater Beach Uncorked and many more. The seafood might be just as delectable as the beaches.

Guests also can golf, charter fishing boats, go dolphin watching, or simply … just relax.

The sky is blue, the sun is shining, and the gulf waters are pure. It’s safe to assume that Clearwater more than lives up to its name.

Cutline: SUNSATIONAL High-rises sit in the background of beautiful Clearwater Beach Image: Scott. Adobe Stock.