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# RVers GUIDE to Florida



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ButtonwoodinletRVResort.com



7



Lakeland, FL  
863-665-1611  
ValenciaEstatesMHP.com



8

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**FLORIDA RV SUPERSHOW**  
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**OCALA RV SHOW**  
MARCH 4-7  
Florida Horse Park

**TAMPA BAY SUMMER RV SHOW**  
JUNE 10-13  
Florida State Fairgrounds

All Dates Subject  
to change.

For more  
information visit  
[www.frvta.org/shows](http://www.frvta.org/shows)

# WHY ARE *Florida RV shows* A GREAT PLACE TO SHOP FOR RVS?

Florida RV Trade Association (FRVTA) regional RV Shows make it easy for you to see lots of RVs in one convenient location close to where you live. These shows are held all over Florida bringing many different types and sizes of RVs together so you can compare vehicles side-by-side.

The FRVTA divides the state into seven regions and some of the regions hold more than one show per year. These shows are part of the educational program of the association introducing the general public to the RV lifestyle and explain how easy it is to get involved. Shows are a great place to get all your "RV-ownership" questions answered in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. With all the new RVs sold in Florida, the state has a great number of quality pre-owned RVs that can also be found in many shows, which is another inexpensive way to get started. Whether you're thinking of a

new or used RV, you can be assured that the best dealers and values can be found when RV dealers are competing side-by-side.

RV shows are also a great place to get those hard-to-find parts and accessories in the supplier booth area. Other products on display include insurance and financing, camping clubs, RV service and supply firms and the best campgrounds and resorts found in Florida. The variety and selection of various products and services makes the supplier booth area a favorite of show visitors. You never know what you'll see.

Florida is home to more RV shows than any other state and that means the opportunities for the public are virtually unlimited. So be sure to visit the FRVTA website ([frvta.org](http://frvta.org)) and download our new app to find the nearest RV show. You'll be glad you did.

## FLORIDA RV SUPERSHOW - *The BIGGEST and BEST!*

There are many RV shows held all over the country, but the biggest and best is the **Florida RV SuperShow**. Held every January at the Florida State Fairgrounds in Tampa. This show boasts over 1,200 RVs on display from every major RV manufacturer. With over 70,000 attendees, this show has grown every year and continues to get bigger.

Supplier and accessory booths feature everything from financing and insurance to every part and accessory you'll ever need. Whether you're a RV veteran or just getting started, the Florida RV SuperShow is the one show you have to see.

In addition to the largest selection of RVs, the SuperShow features a number of excellent seminars. Bringing in nationally known speakers, the seminars offer something for everyone. "Maps and Apps for RV Trip Planning", "RVing Alaska", "Stress Free Travel - Guided RV Vacations", "Motorhome Maintenance on a Spartan Chassis", "Maintenance for Lippert Components", and "Maintenance and Operation of Onan Generators" are some of the topics covered in the seminar area. All seminars are free with paid admission.

The general public can bring their RV and stay right on the fairgrounds in the Super

Rally. Over 800 RVs enjoy unlimited access to the SuperShow, 4 nights of camping with 30-amp electricity, and coffee and donuts each morning. All clubs and organizations are welcome to participate and will be given free meeting space as well.

The one thing that gets more mentions than anything else is the non-stop, over-the-top entertainment. The free, roaming style entertainers include clowns, jugglers, unicycle riders, music and every day the St. Andrews Bagpipe Band marches through the show. This unique blend of entertainers will keep you laughing and tapping your toes all day long.

Attendees can register for daily door prizes (no purchase necessary). You'll also find a huge selection of not only great "fair" style food but also choices of deli sandwiches and salads as well. As the day rolls on, you'll want to take advantage of the free shuttle service inside the show.

The Florida State Fairgrounds are located at the intersection of I-4 and US Hwy 301 just east of Tampa. For more details about the SuperShow and the Super Rally, visit [frvta.org](http://frvta.org) or call the FRVTA State Office at (800) 330-7882. See you there!!



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# IT'S *Technical*

## TRAINING PROGRAM GROWS WHILE RV INDUSTRY EMBRACES SERVICE TECHNOLOGY

**T**raining new RV technicians and upgrading the skills of current techs has long been a goal and challenge of the RV industry. RV Consumers demand quality service and the industry knows how vital customer satisfaction is to sustaining industry quality and growth.

Recognizing that, the FRVTA launched the RV Distance Learning Network (DLN) in January 2000. Through high speed internet connections, the RV DLN broadcasts technician training programs from the Florida Gateway College in Lake City to dealerships throughout the state, country and even Canada.

Technicians can now stay at their dealerships and receive on-site, state-of-the-art training programs throughout the year. Manufacturers and suppliers deliver advanced clinics and workshops on a variety of topics.

The on-demand Technician Certification Prep Course is delivered via the network to technicians planning to sit for their certification exam.

The RV DLN, an idea taken to reality, serves the RV customer through a process of continued quality improvement.

RV service technicians at the dealership level know that life-long learning is a necessity and, thanks to the RV DLN, training has become an ongoing process. Look for certified technicians as you visit dealerships and know they are receiving regular training to provide quality service to make your RV experience the best it can be.





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# DRIVING THE RV Industry IN FLORIDA



For 41 years, the Florida RV Trade Association (FRVTA) has been promoting and protecting the general welfare of the recreation vehicle and camping industries.

The Association was established in 1979 and has undergone many changes and today stands as one of the largest and most successful state RV associations in the country.

The FRVTA is a non-profit (501-c 6) organization made up of campgrounds and resorts, RV dealers, finance and insurance company firms, RV manufacturers and service and supplier companies representing thousands of employees. All of these companies work together to ensure that customers receive the finest RV products, services, supplies and accommodations available. All FRVTA activities are coordinated through the state office located in Riverview, FL. The staff includes an Executive Director, Marketing Director, Show Director and support staff.

The FRVTA has divided the state into seven regions, allowing members to participate in local legislative matters and RV shows. This also allows them to meet on a regular basis. In addition, there is an out-of-state category of members that includes just about every major RV manufacturer, the nation's largest campground chains, national camping clubs and a host of service and supply firms and financial companies. The FRVTA communicates with each region to keep members up-to-date on industry events.

Legislative matters are overseen by a full-time legal counsel located in the state capitol of Tallahassee. This ensures that the voice of the RV industry is heard. FRVTA also supports candidates through the FRVPC Political Action Committee Fund.

The FRVTA sponsors a number of regional RV shows and the annual Florida RV SuperShow in Tampa (see page 4). These shows not only allow the public to view a number of various types and sizes of RVs, they are forums for educational seminars and camping clubs. They also provide an introduction to the wonderful world of RV travel. Through these shows and other activities, the FRVTA works closely with the state and tourism organizations to promote RVing and camping in Florida.

So what does the FRVTA mean to you, the RV consumer? FRVTA members agree to a pledge that includes acting in accordance with all state and federal regulations, advertising in an ethical and professional manner and promoting and developing the highest standards of ethical and moral conduct. Also, due to the high volume of new RV sales, FRVTA dealers carry a wide selection and variety of quality used RVs which means your trade-in will be worth more and gives you more units to choose from.

Whether you're shopping at a FRVTA dealership or RV show, or looking for the most modern and well-equipped campground or resort, look for the FRVTA logo to be assured of the finest RV products, services, supplies and accommodations available.

**The Florida RV Trade Association (FRVTA)** was established in 1979 with one purpose in mind — to promote the general welfare of the recreation vehicle and camping industries throughout the State of Florida.



[www.frvta.org](http://www.frvta.org)  
#FLroadies





# FROM THE FRVTA PRESIDENT

Welcome to Florida an RVers Paradise. We thank you for visiting our fascinating state and we want you to know that we are here for your every need. The members of the Florida RV Trade Association (FRVTA) provide many products and services to make your stay here more comfortable. Look for the FRVTA logo for the finest RV dealers, campgrounds and services found anywhere. Our members take pride in offering the highest quality products and service and are well trained and educated in all facets of the industry.



This directory will provide you with a list of the best RV businesses broken into 7 regions to make it easy to find the closet FRVTA member to where you are staying. Also spend time reading the interesting articles about things to see and do in our great state. This is truly a guide to Florida as much as a guide to the RV industry. Many attractions are a short drive from all the major cities, so it doesn't take long to get away from it all. Florida is home to the finest spring fed rivers found anywhere. Take advantage of this opportunity to explore Florida by boat, kayak, paddleboard and in some cases inner tubes. If you're into fishing, well you've come to the right state. Florida is the sport fishing capital of the world. But if you're more into freshwater fishing there is no better place to be.

Be sure to visit our website for a list of all our RV Shows held around the state. From the largest RV Show in the Country, the Florida RV SuperShow, to the regional shows held around the state, you'll find professionally run and produced events that feature just about every RV on the market. If you're looking for those hard-to-find parts and accessories, then you don't want to miss our shows. Be sure and download our mobile app to your phone or tablet for easy access of all our members at your fingertips.

Thank you for spending time in our state and let us know how we can make your stay more comfortable and enjoyable.

**Be Safe Out There!**

*Brian Copley*  
FRVTA President



## COVER PHOTO

**A big thanks to Flamingo Lakes RV Resort for their help with the photo shoot. Also thanks to our models Joey, Devin, Zoe and Dakota Schneider and to LB Blanchard Photography.**

THE OFFICIAL 2021

# RVers GUIDE to Florida



**A Membership Directory of the Florida RV Trade Association**

**ADVERTISING SALES & PROJECT COORDINATOR**  
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Elite Marketing of CFL  
863-318-0193  
dlpearce7@aol.com

**ADVERTISING DESIGN**  
Phoenix Graphics  
863-294-7083  
pxgx.com

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Pop Design Group  
813-354-1448  
popdesigngroup.com

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# MEET Roadie!

Hi, I'm Roadie and I'm the mascot of the **Florida RV Trade Association (FRVTA)**. I was selected to be the mascot because of my vast knowledge of the State of Florida and of RVing.

Now you would think a pelican would spend his time on channel markers and sleeping on piers, but not in my case. My father would travel all over Florida in his RV and we always enjoyed all comforts of home. We would visit the sugar-white sandy beaches in the panhandle, the history of the St. Augustine area and enjoy sunsets on Florida's west coast. We are very lucky to have so many campgrounds to choose from here in Florida.

Today I travel all over the state to talk about the fun, freedom and flexibility of RV travel. Be sure to say "Hi" when you see me, and if you need any advice on fishing, I'm your man...er, bird! Enjoy your travels and I'll see you down the road.

RVing in Florida offers an array of activities for the entire family, including outdoor fun, some of the best amusement parks in the United States and a variety of museums. On the following pages, see what Florida RVing has in store for you.

**CONNECT WITH US!**  
www.frvta.org

-  Facebook: **Florida RV Trade Association**
-  YouTube: **FRVTA**  Instagram: **@floadies**
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# Renting

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### Reconnect with Your Family

Something happens when families spend time together. Bonds are built, secrets are shared, and memories are formed that last a lifetime. RV rentals offer families an affordable way to spend time together away from their overscheduled every day lives.

### RV Vacations Save Money

You shouldn't have to spend a lot of money on your vacation. Renting an RV makes good economic sense.

Many RV models allow a family of four to save up to 57 percent on vacation costs over other forms of travel. Want to take your family of four to Orlando for a week? In a motorhome, that trip will cost 53 percent less than flying, renting a car, staying in a hotel and eating out.

**For more information on RV rentals, see the companies below or visit [rvra.org](http://rvra.org).**

#### Allstar Coaches

2421 SW 41st Ave  
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33317-6910  
954-235-0802 • 866-838-4465  
[www.allstarcoaches.com](http://www.allstarcoaches.com)

#### American Dream Vacations RV Rentals

Hobe Sound, FL  
772-405-1126 • 888-546-6416  
[www.americandreamvacations.net](http://www.americandreamvacations.net)

#### Camp USA RV Rentals, Inc

2851 Hammondville Rd  
Pompano Beach, FL 33069-1137  
954-971-8188 • 800-971-8840  
[www.campusarv.com](http://www.campusarv.com)

#### Daytona RVs

5950 S Ridgewood Ave  
Port Orange, FL 32127-6802  
386-767-1573  
[www.daytonarvs.com](http://www.daytonarvs.com)

#### Giant Recreation World, Inc

1355 Culver Dr NE  
Palm Bay, FL 32907-1185  
321-242-6261 • 800-700-1021  
[www.giantrecreationworld.com](http://www.giantrecreationworld.com)

#### Giant Recreation World, Inc

13906 W Colonial Dr  
Winter Garden, FL 34787-4200  
407-656-6444 • 800-654-8475  
[www.giantrecreationworld.com](http://www.giantrecreationworld.com)

#### Jim's Trailer & RV Rentals

Wimauma, FL  
727-422-7786  
[www.jimstrailerandrrentals.com](http://www.jimstrailerandrrentals.com)

#### Journey USA RV Rentals, LLC

9610 E US Highway 92  
Tampa, FL 33610-5928  
813-802-9285  
[www.journeyrvrental.com](http://www.journeyrvrental.com)

#### Miami Alec's Truck Accessories, LLC

17110 S Dixie Highway  
Miami, FL 33157-4352  
305-234-5444  
[www.alectruck.com](http://www.alectruck.com)

#### Mid Florida RV Rentals

6114 Lewis Ave  
Gibsonton, FL 33534-4704  
813-494-8501  
[www.midfloridarvrental.com](http://www.midfloridarvrental.com)

#### Suncoast RV Rental

8821 Valletta Dr  
Tampa, FL 33637-6724  
813-984-0107  
[www.suncoastrvrental.com](http://www.suncoastrvrental.com)

#### SWFL RV Rentals & Sales, LLC

1956 Dana Dr  
Ft Myers, FL 33907-2104  
239-888-2929  
[www.swflrv.com](http://www.swflrv.com)

#### Travelcamp of Brooksville

15265 Cortez Blvd  
Brooksville, FL 34613-6072  
352-557-9120  
[www.travelcamp.com](http://www.travelcamp.com)

#### Travelcamp of Orange Park

7505 Blanding Blvd  
Jacksonville, FL 32244-5109  
904-512-5977  
[www.travelcamp.com](http://www.travelcamp.com)

#### Travelcamp, LLC

9070 Beach Blvd  
Jacksonville, FL 32216-4630  
904-297-1736  
[www.travelcamp.com](http://www.travelcamp.com)

#### Travelcamp, LLC

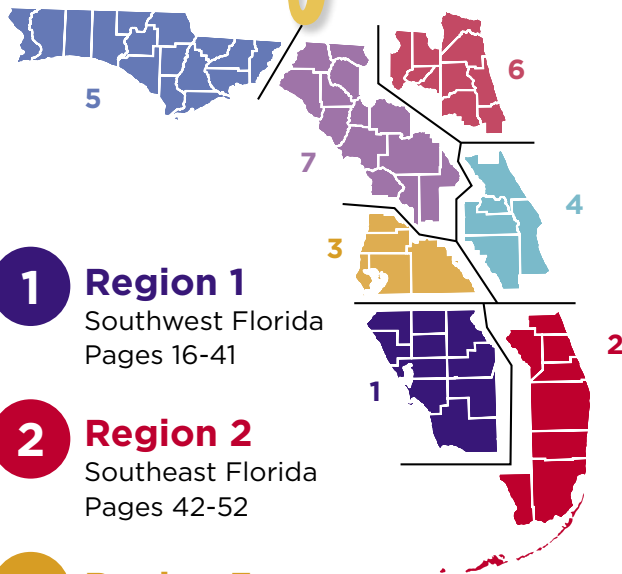
13866 S US Highway 441  
Summerfield, FL 34491-2624  
352-261-0140  
[www.travelcamp.com](http://www.travelcamp.com)



For more information on RV rentals, see the companies above or visit [www.rvra.org](http://www.rvra.org).

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# Stay in Touch WITH FRVTA



It is easier than ever before to keep up with trends in the RV Industry, get travel tips, contact local RV businesses and get all the information you need about statewide RV shows and the largest RV show in the country, the *Florida RV SuperShow*. FRVTA now has a new and improved website, can be liked and followed on a number of Social Media sites and recently launched its new MOBILE APP!

FRVTA launched its new and improved website ([frvta.org](http://frvta.org)). The new site makes it easier for the general public to get information about upcoming Regional RV Shows, the *Florida RV SuperShow* and the *Super Rally*. More importantly, the new site will give visitors more information about FRVTA members and an exact location of each member on a map.

New to the FRVTA site is an ongoing blog section. "We are working with a number of bloggers so this section stays new, current and entertaining," said FRVTA Executive Director Dave Kelly. "The new site will also allow us to make additions/corrections at a minutes notice so the information stays up-to-date".

The new site also features a search function to make it easy to find campgrounds, RV dealers and service and supplies nearest to where you are. There is also a regional information page that has loads of information about the 7 FRVTA regions, things to do and see and much more information. We want our site to be

a complete guide to the State of Florida for not just RVers but anyone wanting more information about our state. Visit [frvta.org](http://frvta.org) today and get out there and enjoy Florida!

Follow the FRVTA on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Pinterest to get RV Lifestyle, FRVTA RV Resorts & Campgrounds and Destinations, RV Tips, Special Discounts, RV Show Notifications, and to stay in touch with the Florida RV Industry. On our social sites, you can easily ask questions and interact with the FRVTA. We encourage your input on places to see, your favorite restaurants, and those little known spots that you love to visit!

The newly launched mobile app is an RVers dream. Using your location, you will be able to find the closest service center, RV dealership, campground or hard to find parts and accessories. The app also helps you find road service, the closet gas or diesel station, restaurants, shopping, emergency clinics and even weather updates. The app is Apple and Google friendly and can be downloaded from any of the App Stores.



## CONNECT WITH US!

[FRVTA.ORG](http://FRVTA.ORG)  
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# Southwest Florida REGION 1

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Southwest Florida provides visitors unforgettable experiences, whether it is watching the sunset from a sugar-sand beach, walking through thigh-high swamps in search of rare orchids, or touring the historic homes of famous Americans. This diverse region that stretches along the Gulf of Mexico from Bradenton to Marco Island and inland to massive Lake Okeechobee includes some of Florida's most expensive real estate and exotic natural landscapes. Visitors can experience a variety of Gulf beaches, great fresh food, historic sites, and exciting recreational opportunities.



*Continued on page 18*



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Continued from page 16

## Top 10 Places to Visit in Southwest Florida



Everglades National Park

1. Naples is one of this region's most popular and sophisticated cities, known for its high-end shopping and golf courses in a beautiful Gulf of Mexico setting. The Naples Pier, first erected in 1888, is a popular fishing and dolphin-spotting destination for Collier County residents. The city's Fifth Avenue South and Third Street South upscale boutiques, galleries and cultural arts calendar oblige. Naples has guarded its natural resources and preserved older districts so visitors can bicycle through quiet neighborhoods to explore its varied architectural past.
2. One of the Florida's most fascinating historical sites is the winter homes of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, two famous friends who spent years as neighbors on the Caloosahatchee River. Edison bought his property in 1885 and Ford bought the house next door in 1916. Only a fence - called the "Friendship Gate" by both families - separated the two estates. Visitors to the Edison and Ford Winter Estates can explore the homes, pool, gardens, museum and Edison Botanic Research Laboratory where the two famous inventors worked with Harvey Firestone to discover a local source of rubber that could be grown in the United States.
3. Everglades National Park is the largest remaining subtropical wilderness in the United States. Everglades City, Marco Island's mainland neighbor, is the Gulf Coast entrance to the mysterious and captivating Everglades and where you will find the Gulf Coast Visitor Center. The park, accessible here for tours, provides important habitat for numerous rare and endangered species like the manatee, American crocodile, and the elusive Florida panther. The park's 1.5 million acres protect the southern 20 percent of the original Everglades. Everglades's wildlife is suffering the destructive force of an overpopulation of non-native Burmese pythons.

Continued on page 22

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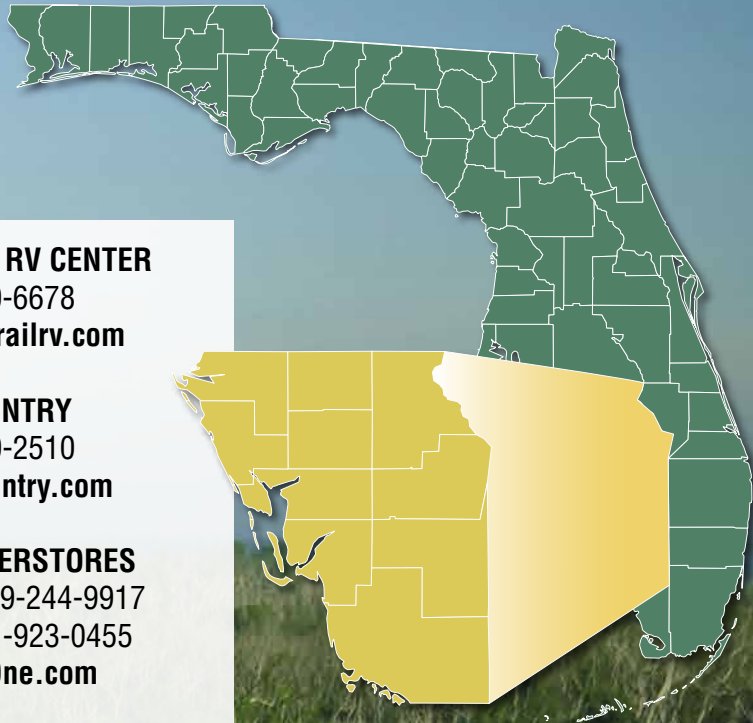
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Photos Courtesy Tahni Carver & Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau



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Continued from page 18

4. Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium, a nonprofit research organization, is home to more than 100 species of marine life. It is located south of Longboat Key on City Island in Sarasota. Mote's world-class scientists are devoted to the ocean and its future, and visitors can explore the secrets of the sea through touch pools, viewable working labs and high-tech interactive exhibits, many focusing on children and families.
5. A trip to Judah P. Benjamin Confederate Memorial at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park on the Manatee River offers an authentic glimpse into the workings of an antebellum sugar plantation. Built between 1845 and 1850, this mansion in Ellenton is the last surviving plantation house in South Florida and is believed to be where Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin took refuge after the fall of the Confederacy. The mansion was the hub of a molasses and sugar shipping enterprise up the nearby Manatee River to markets in New Orleans. In 1925 the United Daughters of the Confederacy bought it and 16 acres, and donated it to the state.
6. A truly unique experience is a tour of the richly diverse wilderness swamp that is the Big Cypress National Preserve. The Big Cypress Swamp's freshwater is essential to the health of the neighboring Everglades and the rich estuaries along Florida's southwest coast. The swamp can easily be experienced by the casual visitor via a boardwalk that winds through the ancient trees. Look for rare ferns, orchids, threatened bromeliads, native birds and swamp creatures. The preserve offers camping and ranger-led programs.



John Ringling's Ca' d'Zan

7. Sarasota is known for its world-class cultural offerings, including American circus owner John Ringling's Ca' d'Zan, modeled after the magnificent palazzos of Venice, built as a love letter to his wife, Mable. This 36,000 square-foot Venetian Gothic villa served as their winter home and housed their priceless Baroque, Italian and Flemish Renaissance art collection and exquisite 17th-century tapestries. A visit can include the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, established in 1927, the Circus Museum, a collection of original circus art and artifacts, along with the historic Asolo Repertory Theatre, created in Asolo, Italy, in 1798 and installed on the Ringling property in 1957.

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*Continued on page 36*



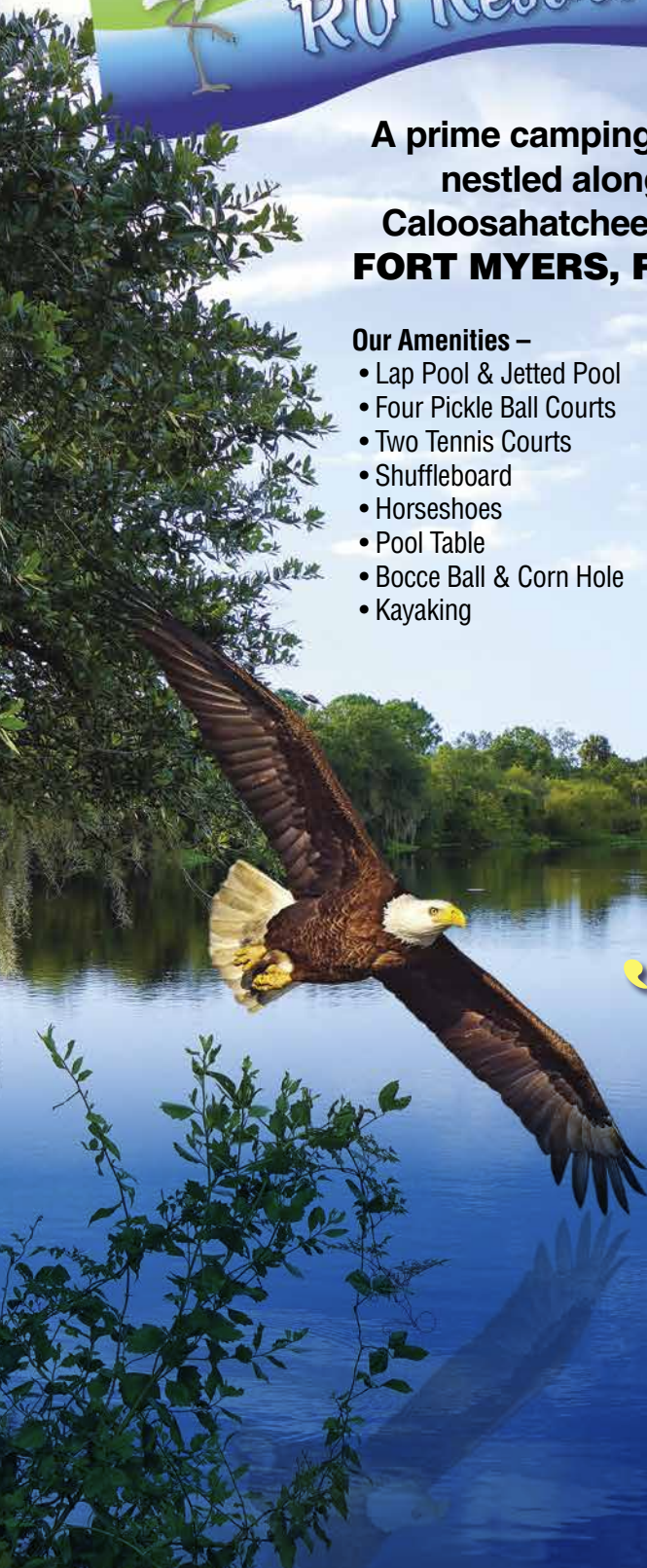
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**Sanibel Island**

Continued from page 22

8. The DeSoto National Memorial commemorates a historic event that took place nearly 500 years ago. Located five miles west of Bradenton, this 27-acre national park marks where Conquistador Hernando DeSoto landed in 1539 and began the first European excursion into what is now the southern United States. His four-year, 4,000-mile "odyssey of intrigue, warfare, disease and discovery" played a key role in the history of the United States. The park offers free ranger-led kayak tours Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m.

- 9. Off the Lee County coast, tiny Sanibel and Captiva islands are among the best known in the region, popular for the hundreds of varieties of shells that can be found on their pristine shorelines. The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum in Sanibel is an interesting stop for shell collectors, and the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village accounts for the island's history, from the Calusa and Spanish eras to the early pioneer families who settled in the 1800s. Nine restored buildings on site include a vintage island residence, 1920s-style general store, post office and tea room. One of the region's most photographed landmarks, the Sanibel Island Light, also known as Point Ybel Light, first illuminated in 1884 when the entire island was a wildlife refuge.
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Please be sure to go online to check hours of operation, ferry schedules and seasonal closings for the sites mentioned.



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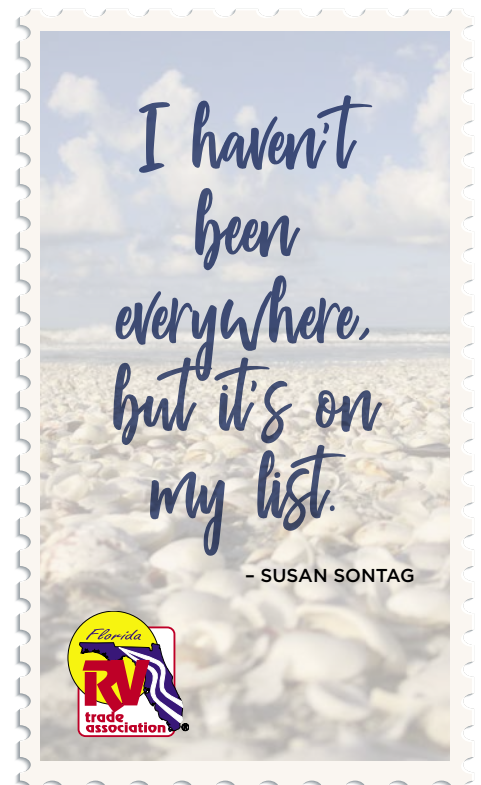
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## REGION 1

### Boca Grande

On the west coast of Florida near Cape Coral stands the Port Boca Grande Lighthouse, built in 1890 to guide ships into Charlotte Harbor. The lighthouse and its museum are part of Gasparilla Island State Park. The black lantern tower sitting atop a white wood frame building is just 44 feet tall but its light is visible 12 miles away. The museum houses artifacts of Gasparilla Island history, including Calusa Native Americans, the phosphate industry and tarpon fishing. Visitors should call ahead to assure hours of operation. [www.barrierislandparkssociety.org/port-boca-grande-lighthouse-museum](http://www.barrierislandparkssociety.org/port-boca-grande-lighthouse-museum)



## REGION 2

### Jupiter

The Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse's distinctive red tower was designed by George Gordon Meade and first illuminated in 1860. The 108-foot tall tower is topped with its original first-order Fresnel lens, possibly the oldest in the state. The Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse and Museum, operated by the Loxahatchee River Historical Society, offers climbing tours of the waterfront lighthouse, beautiful natural areas and conservation lands, and a museum that features 5,000 years of regional history. Those wishing to tour the lighthouse should call in advance for information on tour availability. [www.jupiterlighthouse.org](http://www.jupiterlighthouse.org)

### Miami

The Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park and Lighthouse is known for being minutes from Miami and providing stunning Atlantic Ocean views. The Cape Florida Lighthouse, built at the southern tip of Key Biscayne in 1825, has survived nearly 200 years of erosion, dozens of hurricanes, an attack by Seminole Native Americans, and an explosion of lantern oil and gun powder. Climbing the tower's 109 spiral steps provides a legendary view over Key Biscayne including Miami Beach. [www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/bill-baggs-cape-florida-state-park](http://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/bill-baggs-cape-florida-state-park)



### Key West

The Key West Lighthouse at the southernmost part of the continental United States and the end of U.S. 1 was first built in 1825, and predated the city that later grew up around it. The current lighthouse opened in 1848 with a woman as its keeper, nearly unheard of during the 19th century. A climb to the top of its 88 steps rewards the visitor with a great view of the nearby Ernest Hemingway House, the downtown area, and beautiful water in multiple shades of blue and green. Plan ahead for tours. [www.kwabs.org/museums/lighthouse-keepers-quarters/visit](http://www.kwabs.org/museums/lighthouse-keepers-quarters/visit)

### Hillsboro Inlet

The Hillsboro Light Station in southeast Florida was first lighted in 1907. Its framework structure is 142 feet tall and it takes 175 steps to reach its black lantern on top. The Hillsboro Lighthouse Preservation Society is dedicated to preserving its structures and artifacts, and arranges tours by shuttle boats launching from Sands Dock in Pompano Beach. Before a planned visit, call ahead for hours of operation. [www.hillsborolighthouse.org](http://www.hillsborolighthouse.org)



Photo by Steven Miller

## REGION 3

### Anclote Key

Anclote Key Preserve State Park, located three miles off Tarpon Springs, is home to a picturesque lighthouse built in 1887. The lighthouse on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico stands on the southern end of Anclote Key in Pinellas County. The island is one of four that make up Anclote Key Preserve State Park - Anclote Key, North Anclote Bar, South Anclote Bar and Three Rooker Island, an important Gulf Coast beach-nesting bird sanctuary. The park totals 11,773 acres and is home to at least 43 species of birds. The historic state park is accessible only by private boat or ferry, and offers visitors swimming, picnicking, grilling and primitive camping on the northern part of the island. Visitors must bring their own water and supplies. [www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/anclote-key-preserve-state-park](http://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/anclote-key-preserve-state-park)

### Egmont Key

The Egmont Key State Park lighthouse on Egmont Key has stood since 1858, guiding boats entering the mouth of Tampa Bay into St. Petersburg. This remote island accessible only by boat includes pristine beaches, historic sites and trails, and offers visitors swimming, fishing, picnicking and wildlife viewing. Captured Seminoles in the Third Seminole War were housed on the island during the 19th century, and the Union Navy occupied it during the Civil War. Fort Dade was built on the island in 1898 and remained active until 1923. Visitors should bring water, food and sunscreen when visiting, as there is no drinking water on the island and no stores. [www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/egmont-key-state-park](http://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/egmont-key-state-park)



## REGION 4

### Ponce Inlet

The Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse, located about 10 miles south of Daytona, is a 175-foot-tall tower, the tallest lighthouse tower in Florida and the second tallest in the United States. This National Historic Landmark was completed in 1887. A 213-step climb brings you to the lighthouse's gallery and an unparalleled view of the Atlantic coast. The Ponce Inlet Light Station and Museum hosts visitors and school groups to learn about the more than 500 years since Spanish explorer Juan Ponce De Leon first encountered Florida in 1513. [www.ponceinlet.org](http://www.ponceinlet.org)

Continued on page 38



## REGION 5

### St. George Island

The Cape St. George Light was reopened to the public in 2008, reconstructed following the collapse into the Gulf of Mexico of the previous structure in 2005. Visitors to the lighthouse, originally built in 1833 and rebuilt in 1848 and 1852 on what is now Little St. George Island, climb 92 stairs to the top. The reconstruction was a labor of love by the St. George Lighthouse Association, as volunteers cleaned the mortar off thousands of the old bricks and used as much of the original materials as possible to rebuild according to the original plans obtained from the National Archives. A replica of the original keeper's house next to the tower opened in 2011 houses a museum and gift shop. [www.stgeorgelight.org](http://www.stgeorgelight.org)



### Pensacola

The Pensacola Lighthouse and Maritime Museum in the western Panhandle dates back to 1859 when the tower was first lighted on New Year's Day. Today, the Pensacola Lighthouse at 150 feet tall rewards visitors who climb 177 steps to the top with a great place to watch the Blue Angels practice from Naval Air Station Pensacola. The black and white tower also provides beautiful views of the Gulf of Mexico. The keeper's house built in 1869 provides display rooms for historic artifacts and maritime descriptions of the past. A claim that the lighthouse is haunted once brought camera crews from the TV show Ghost Hunters. As the lighthouse is located on Naval Air Station Pensacola, access is limited, so please check the website for further information. [www.pensacolalighthouse.org](http://www.pensacolalighthouse.org)

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*Continued on page 44*





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# Top 10 Places to Visit in Southeast Florida



## McKee Botanical Gardens

1. Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge, the nation's first wildlife refuge, is located just off the western coast of Orchid Island in the Indian River Lagoon, east of Sebastian. This natural stretch of beach and protected wilderness was discovered to be the last rookery for brown pelicans on the east coast of Florida at a time when plume hunters and egg collectors had exterminated other birds. It was protected in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt. This was the first time the federal government preserved land for the sake of wildlife. Today the planks of a boardwalk through the refuge's 5,400-acres of protected water and lands include the names and states of the more than 560 wildlife refuges throughout the nation.
2. Vero Beach is the only true metropolis on the island known as North Hutchinson. This vital city hosts McKee Botanical Garden, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and known for its subtropical jungle hammock. It was founded in 1929 when Waldo Sexton and Arthur G. McKee purchased an 80-acre tropical hammock along the Indian River.
3. The St. Lucie County Regional History Center acts as a "window into the past," displaying artifacts from Spanish shipwrecks, a reconstructed Seminole Indian encampment, military material from Old Fort Pierce and the Seminole Wars, and other interesting exhibits. The center is part of Museum Point Park overlooking the Indian River.

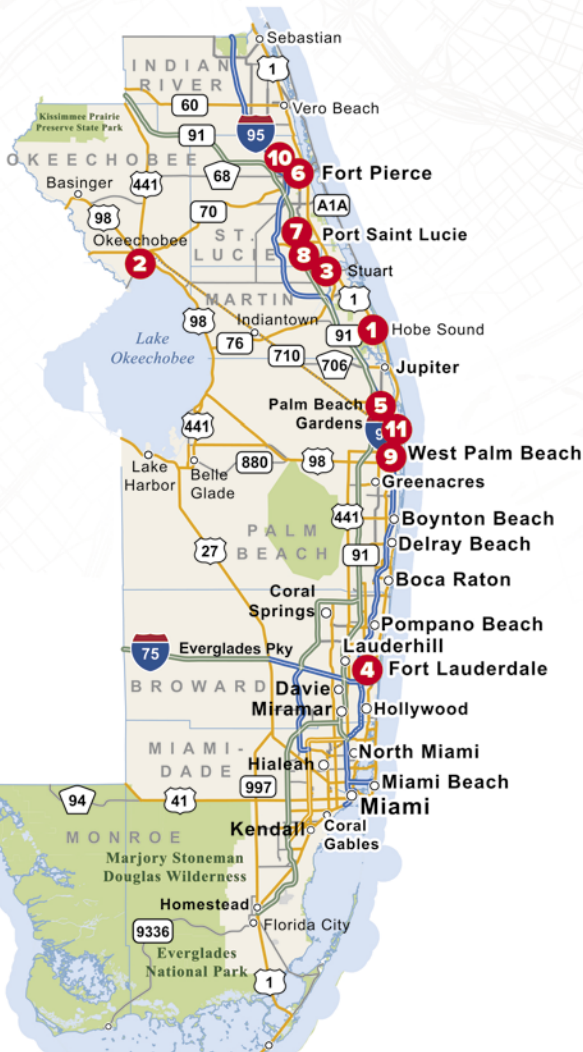
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## Lion Country Safari

*Continued from page 44*

4. Tranquil Martin County takes pride in its preservation efforts, and many beaches protect turtle nesting areas, like the Hobe Sound Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge, and The Nature Conservancy's Blowing Rocks Preserve on Jupiter Island, the site of Florida's largest outcropping of Anastasia limestone. Extreme high tides and storms provide the best opportunities to see surging waves at Blowing Rocks, sending plumes of water up to 50 feet in the air. At nearby Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Hobe Sound, visitors take guided nature tours, canoe on the Loxahatchee River and camp amid towering greenery
5. Visit Lion Country Safari for a wild time on the western edge of West Palm Beach. Florida's only drive-through safari adventure and walk-through amusement park, this 600-acre wildlife preserve protects more than 900 animals, from giraffes and bison to elephants and lions, and includes animal feeding experiences, six rides, water sprayground, food, shopping and more.
6. At Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation off Alligator Alley, Billie Swamp Safari offers a host of adventures across 2,200 acres to experience the wonders of the Everglades, including an eco-tour by swamp buggy, folklore storytelling around the campfire and an overnight stay in a thatched Chickee hut. Run by the Seminole Tribe of Florida, the park also features hiking tours, guided hunting, sunset canoe rides, air boat rides, alligator exhibits and the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum, home to more than 180,000 unique artifacts. The Big Cypress RV Resort features cabins, tent sites, and full hook-ups.
7. The 83-acre Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables is considered one of the best botanic gardens in the world. Fairchild offers tram and walking tours through extensive collections of rare tropical plants including palms, cycads, flowering trees and vines. The site includes a museum, laboratory, learning center and conservation research facility, and features exhibits, a rare-plant house, rain forest, and sunken gardens.

8. Miami, often referred to as the "Gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean," is a city that offers many ways to see, hear and taste its rich heritage. Visitors can drink a cup of café con leche in Little Havana, Miami's most concentrated Cuban community; stroll past Art Deco architecture in SoBe, the city's South Beach district; explore trendy Coconut Grove; or take a cruise from the "Cruise Capital of the World." The Miami experience also includes world-class ballet, theater, opera and philharmonic orchestra companies; unique cultural events and museums; and exciting professional sports.
9. John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park in Key Largo is a favorite destination for snorkelers and divers. Established in 1963, it was the first undersea park in the United States. Pennekamp together with the adjacent Florida Keys National Marine sanctuary encompass 178 nautical square miles of coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangrove swamps. Snorkelers and divers have reported seeing 40 varieties of delicate corals and more than 600 species of tropical fish. The park, which extends 3 miles into the Atlantic and is 25 miles in length, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. Snorkeling and scuba tours, and boat and kayak rentals available.
10. Key West, the southernmost point of the United States, is home to a fascinating mix of history, eccentricity and island charm. Civil War-era forts, famous writers' homes, sidewalk cafes and unusual residents add to the unique atmosphere - and watching the sun set at the docks of Mallory Square is an experience not to be missed. The eclectic end of the continent is just a 90-mile swim from Cuba, which adds intrigue to the legend of Ernest Hemingway as you tour The Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum or have a drink in his old hangout, Sloppy Joe's Tavern.

*Please be sure to go online to check hours of operation, schedules and seasonal closings for the sites mentioned.*



## Key Largo



Photo by Steve Beaudet / VISIT FLORIDA

## Tarpon Feeding Islamorada

What started out more than 40 years ago as a rescue effort has turned into a daily spectacle in the Florida Keys where visitors can feed tarpon at Robbie's in Islamorada.

A school of more than 100 tarpon come daily and linger for hours, awaiting bait snacks provided by visitors from all over the world. Admission to the dock is \$2 per person, and each bucket of fish is \$3 plus tax.

Robbie and his wife, Mona, began feeding a tarpon they named Scarface, when it appeared floundering in the shallow waters near the dock in 1976. At first they thought it had gotten stuck on the bank, and when Robbie went out into the water to free it, he saw that the right side of its jaw was torn open. Robbie placed it in the oxygen-rich shrimp tank and called Doc Roach, who sewed up the jaw using his wife's mattress needles and some twine, the story goes. Scarface became the first known tarpon with stitches. After several days of force-feeding, Scarface showed good recovery and weight gain; six months later he was released into the waters off the dock. Afterwards, Scarface continued to frequent the docks, sometimes bringing a friend. Soon more and more of the fish began to appear.

Today the tradition continues, often called "amazing," "breathtaking" and "impressive" by first-time visitors. Occasionally, a tarpon actually rises up from the water in a powerful flash of silver and green to meet a tossed fish before the pelicans can get it.

**For more information, visit [robbies.com](http://robbies.com) or call 305-664-8070. Located at 77522 Overseas Hwy., Islamorada.**



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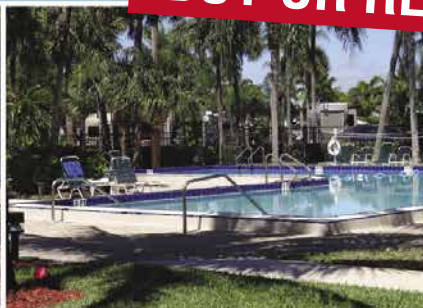
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# Everglades TRAIL

**A** unique and highly sought after destination for visitors to Florida is the Everglades, a fascinating natural landscape that begins in Orlando and stretches hundreds of miles south into Florida Bay. The easiest way to plan a visit - and practice social distancing, by using your own car - is to take advantage of the driving tour called The Everglades Trail.

More than 20 national and state parks, conservation areas and wildlife refuges located within the greater Everglades system joined together to form The Everglades Trail - a way to simplify exploration of this rare ecosystem and discover its hidden beauty. This driving trail provides visitors accessible outdoor opportunities across south and central Florida to experience what is often referred to with pride as America's Everglades, and gain insight into this unique landscape's natural and cultural history.

Each site tells the story of water in the Greater Everglades Ecosystem and its contribution to the ecosystem as a whole. Visitors can enjoy nature, observe plant and wildlife habitats, and learn about the restoration efforts underway by numerous government agencies and private conservation organizations.

Restoration is needed due to physical alterations to the natural water flow made years ago. The Greater Everglades Ecosystem is 18,000 square miles of sawgrass sloughs, cypress swamps and coastal lagoons connected by three watersheds: the Kissimmee, Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp. Everglades water that begins as a trickle from springs, lakes and creeks just south of Orlando once crept slowly south through broad, shallow grasslands into Lake Okeechobee and then eventually into the salty waters of Florida Bay.

*Continued on page 79*





# West Central Florida REGION 3

Hernando,  
Hillsborough,  
Pasco,  
Pinellas and  
Polk counties

West Central Florida stretches from the Gulf of Mexico through Tampa and Lakeland to Winter Haven, and north to Brooksville, offering a wide selection of pristine natural areas, beautiful stretches of coastline, and a diverse cultural calendar. Residents of the Tampa, St. Petersburg, Clearwater area are spoiled by beautiful water vistas while driving even routine trips. The charm of Old Florida can be found throughout the region.

*Continued on page 60*



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Belle Parc RV Resort's location offers local access to gulf beaches, rivers, and springs for kayaking, canoeing, fishing, or just relaxing. Croom State Park, "Rails to Trails" and the Suncoast Trail are nearby and offer paved, dedicated bicycle trails and off-road trails. Our rural location offers great motorcycle excursions. We are a short distance to Disney, Busch Gardens, Weeki Wachee Springs and Water Park, Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, and Citrus County Speedway.



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[www.BelleParcRVResorts.com](http://www.BelleParcRVResorts.com)

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HERNANDO, HILLSBOROUGH, PASCO, PINELLAS AND POLK COUNTIES

3

# West Central Florida

Region 3 has everything you'll need for a great RV adventure!



This area offers a wide variety of things to do and see... attractions, sporting events, cultural activities, shopping, picturesque state parks and some of the top beaches in the world.

Photo courtesy of GoRVing.com



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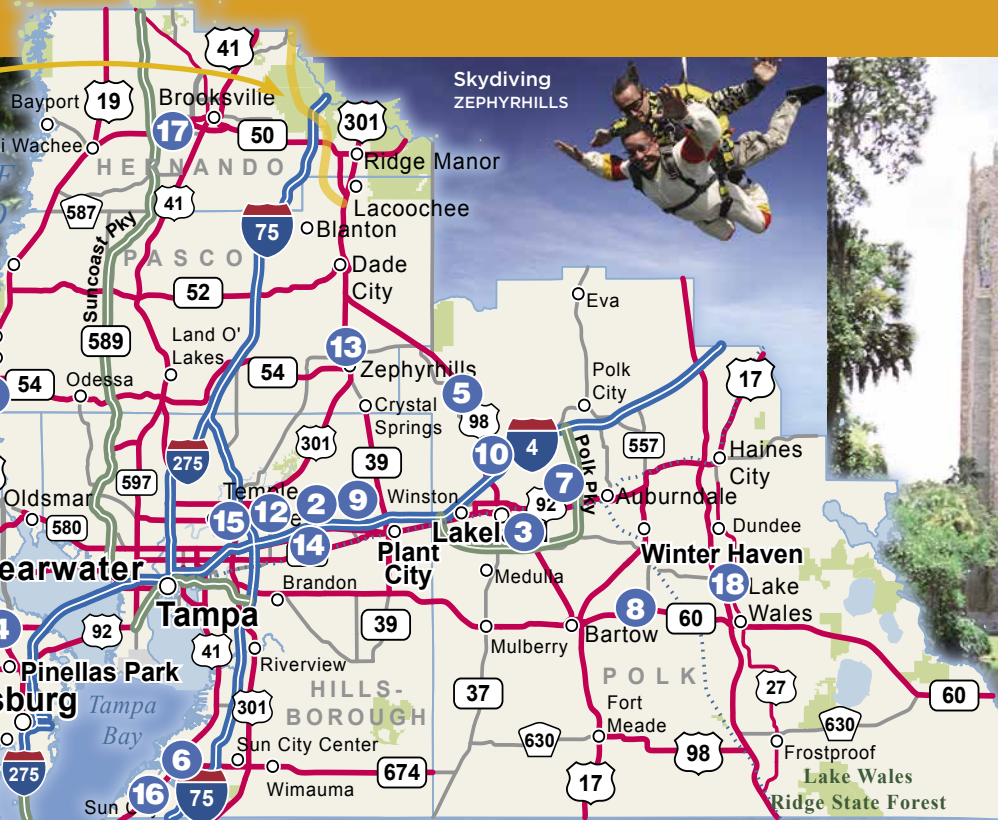




Rails to Trails of the Withlacoochee



Stilt House PORT RICHEY



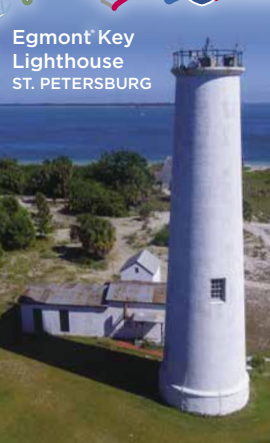
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See complete list of Region 3 Members beginning on page 58



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www.campersholiday.com



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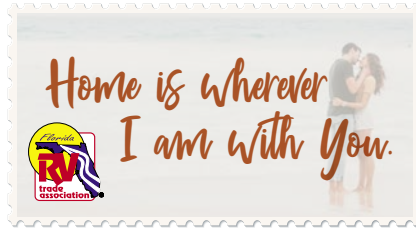
863-858-4455 • 800-981-2787  
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 (see our ad on pages 70-71)



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 (see our ad on pages 62-63, 140)

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**Tampa South RV Sales**

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 Ruskin, FL 33570  
 www.tampasouthrvsales.net

*Continued from page 54*

# Top 10 Places to Visit in West Central Florida



Photo courtesy of LEGOLAND

1. Winter Haven was first homesteaded in the 1860s and gained international attention with the opening in 1936 of the water ski shows and horticultural displays of Cypress Gardens. Today the site is LEGOLAND Florida Resort, which includes a theme park and water park. Opened in 2011, LEGOLAND preserved the beautiful gardens in its 145-acre layout and offers more than 50 attractions over 14 distinct lands, including multiple roller coasters and a water slide to fit its amazing collection of giant Lego figures. Lego Movie World is based on the company's movie franchise and offers rides, character meet-and-greets, and a giant playground for kids. The Great LEGO Race is a virtual reality-enhanced coaster designed just for kids. There is even an onsite LEGOLAND Water Park, which includes a wave pool, lazy river and tube slides.
2. Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, just off Interstate 75, features rides and roller coasters, world-class shows, animal experiences, events, safaris and tours. The park's 335 acres provide one of the country's premier zoos with more than 2,700 animals, nine African-themed areas, plus live shows. Its collection of roller coasters and thrill rides is growing to 10 with the debut of Iron Gwazi, the tallest and fastest hybrid coaster in Florida. Riders travel 206 feet above the ground, endure a 91-degree drop, and reach speeds of 76 m.p.h. Across the street from Busch Gardens is Adventure Island, Tampa's premier water park, which features 30 acres of slides, tube rides, a huge ocean wave pool, and paradise lagoon.

*Continued on page 66*

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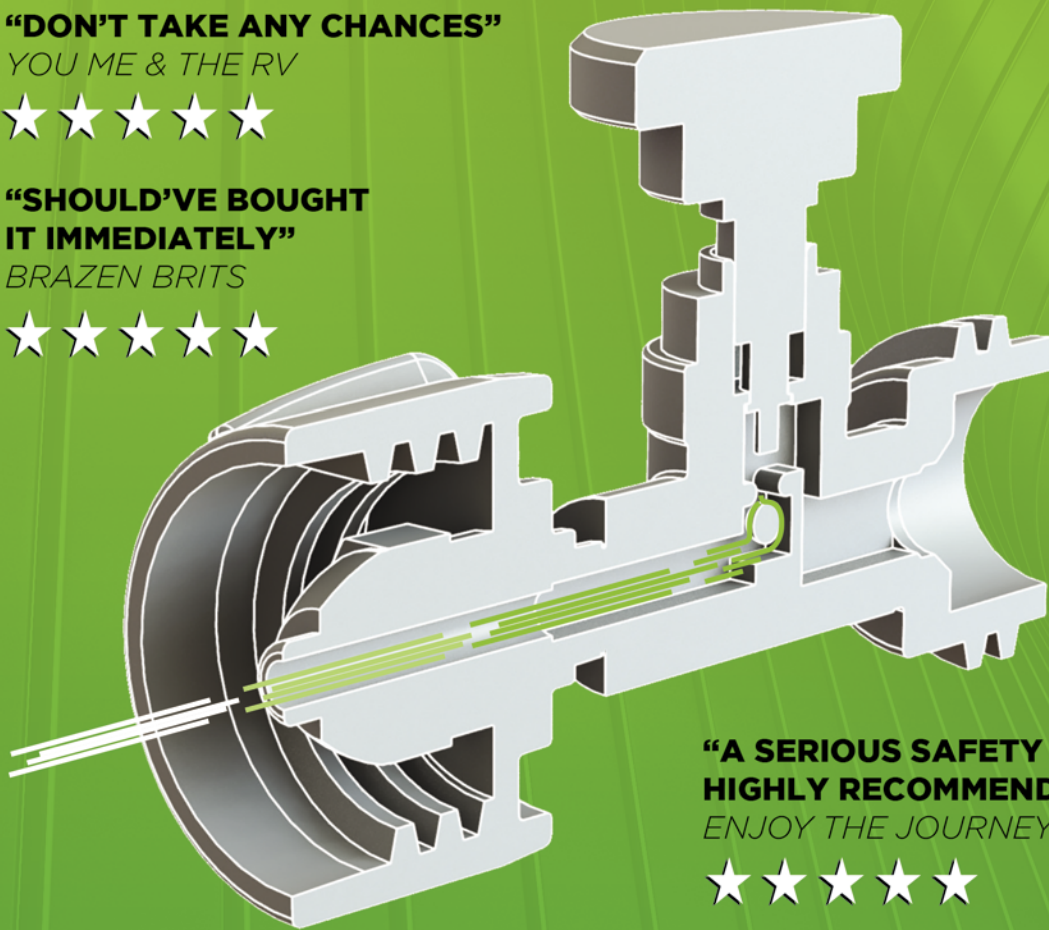
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## Bok Tower Gardens

*Continued from page 60*

3. Ybor City, Tampa's historic Latin Quarter, is rich in Spanish, Italian, Greek and Cuban tradition. Founded as a cigar-manufacturing center, Ybor City is one of only two National Historic Landmark Districts in Florida. History buffs can visit the Ybor City Museum State Park inside the former Ferlita Bakery building, where a cigar industry walking tour also begins. The area offers lively nightlife, hand-rolled cigars and some of the best food around, including the historic Columbia Restaurant, the oldest restaurant in Florida, owned by the same family since 1905. Enjoy a Cuban sandwich at Carmine's Ybor, or dine on home-style Northern Italian cuisine at La Terrazza Ristorante.
4. Visit Tampa and stroll along the Riverwalk, a continuous pedestrian walkway from the Channel District to Tampa Heights along the east side of the Hillsborough River. The Riverwalk connects Tampa's dynamic cultural venues, such as the Florida Aquarium and the Glazer Children's Museum, and incorporates interpretive elements, parks, retail and restaurants. Armature Works, a fully restored mixed-use building on the curve of the river, provides a variety of food and drink offerings, event spaces and co-working spaces located amongst open seating and a wide patio. Busts of prominent Tampa citizens continue to be added along the Riverwalk route.
5. Bok Tower Gardens' historic gardens, more than 205-foot high neo-Gothic and Art Deco Singing Tower, and Mediterranean-style mansion have provided millions of visitors cultural, artistic and spiritual enrichment since 1929. This remarkable Lake Wales site located about an hour from both Tampa and Orlando has earned recognition as a National Historic Landmark. The beautifully landscaped gardens are one of the greatest works of famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. The nearly 50 acres are home to more than 126 different species of birds, surround the historic Pinewood Estate. A children's garden includes three acres of nature play to teach the vital connection between animals, plants and people.

6. Visit the Clearwater Marine Aquarium to get a fish-eye view of mangroves and seagrass, critical nursery habitat for juvenile fish, and watch live web cams. The nonprofit's mission is to Rescue, Rehab and Release. The staff provides effective care to sick or injured animals, with the goal of returning them to their homes. Pier 60 in Clearwater Beach features a 1,080-foot fishing pier and recreational park, with a bait house, telescopes and six covered pavilions. It offers a sunset celebration modeled after Key West's popular Mallory Square festival, nightly from 6-9 p.m. Craftsmen, artists and entertainers perform two hours before and after sunset.
7. Downtown St. Petersburg offers not only the excitement of the St. Pete Pier but is home to art galleries, antique shops and museums. Downtown museums include the Museum of Fine Arts, opened in 1965 and home to exhibits spanning 5,000 years. The Dali Museum with the largest collection of the famed surrealist's paintings outside of Europe, and the James Museum of Western and Wildlife Art, collected works in oil, ink and stone that evoke the spirit and beauty of the frontier. Cultural activities in St. Petersburg are easy to visit, connected by the city's downtown trolley service, The Looper. Visit the St. Petersburg Museum of History, founded in 1920 as the St. Petersburg Historical Society, and check out Sunken Gardens, St. Pete's oldest living museum and a botanical paradise in the midst of bustling St. Petersburg.

*Continued on page 73*



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**L**azy rivers are popular additions to water parks and hotels, providing guests a slow float along teal blue plastic chutes. But there is nothing like the real thing and Florida offers plenty of opportunities to experience an easy float through beautiful trees on gently flowing rivers.

Many of the top tubing spots mentioned here are available Memorial Day to Labor Day, and can get busy at certain times, so be sure to check availability ahead of time. For longer trips, you may want to bring a floating cooler and rope to keep your group together so you don't get separated.

## ROCK SPRINGS RUN, Kelly Park, Apopka

This popular park near Orlando features a free-flowing natural spring and a clear, swift creek. Visitors can enjoy a mile long float that takes about 30 minutes to complete, and enjoy a longer day by walking back upstream and going again and again. The park is open from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day of the week during the summer, but it often fills up by mid-morning. Arriving early is best. Bring your own tubes or rent tubes from private outfitters located just outside the park.

**Address: 400 E. Kelly Park Rd., Apopka.**

## BLUE SPRING STATE PARK, Orange City

A beautiful visitor experience in the cool months is to see manatees here keeping warm at the spring head. But a summer visit to Blue Spring State Park is exceptional, too.

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BLUE SPRING STATE PARK



*Continued on page 104*

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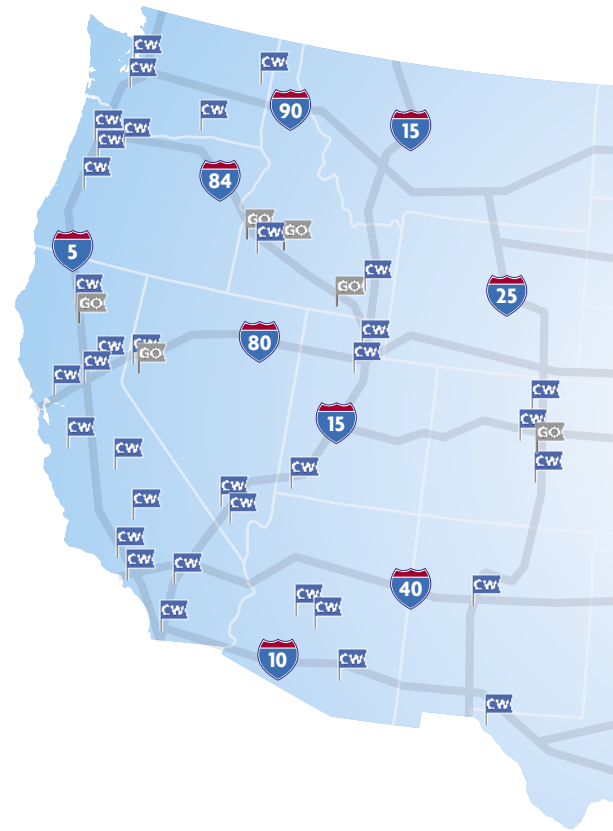
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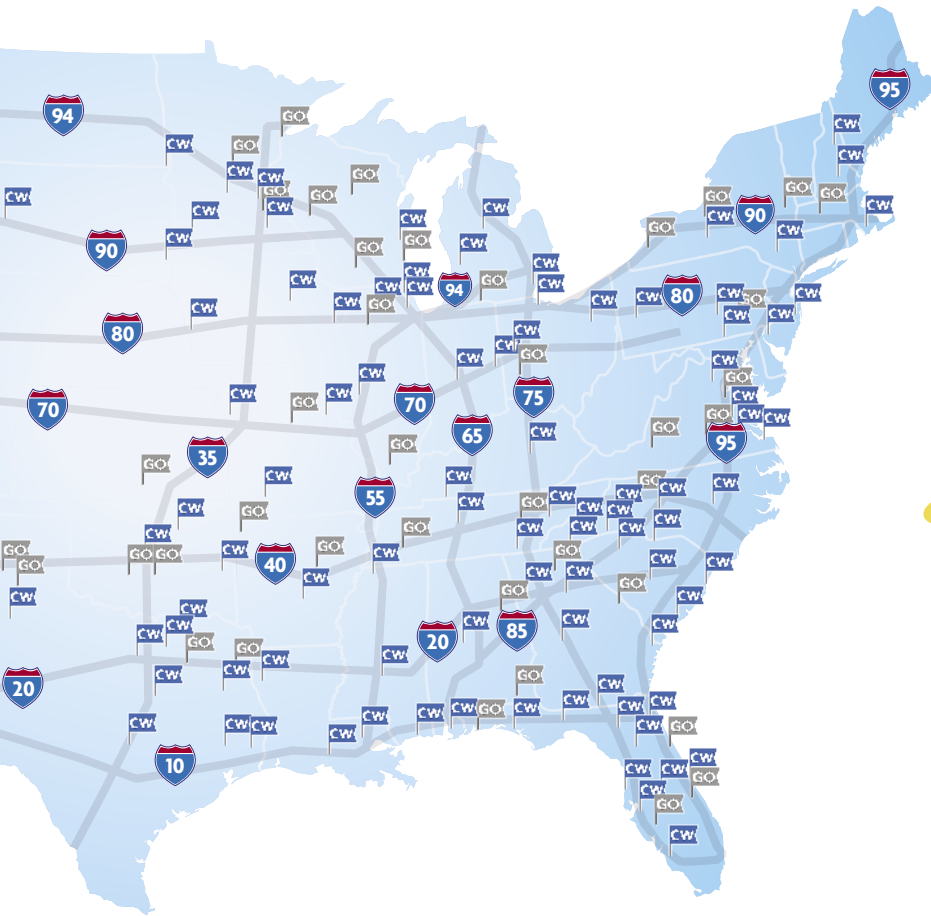
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Photo courtesy of VisitStPeteClearwater.com

## Fort DeSoto Park

Continued from page 66

8. Fort DeSoto Park, the largest park in the county at 1,136 acres, is made up of five interconnected islands and is home to more than 320 species of birds documented over the last 60 years. It rates among the top 10 U.S. beaches and offers visitors a peaceful refuge. More than a beautiful beach and great place to camp, it includes a historic fort and museum.

9. Tarpon Springs is a seaside village on the Gulf coast settled by Greek sponge divers at the turn of the century, where visitors enjoy delicious Greek pastries and shoppers find treasures in markets with a Mediterranean flair. At the Tarpon Springs Heritage Museum you can learn about handcrafted original sponge diving helmets that Nicholas Toth learned to make from his grandfather, Anthony Leros. Leros came to the area in 1913 and was renowned for his helmets that helped fuel the sponge industry. Toth carries on the tradition in a small shop nearby, investing 320 hours to make one iconic helmet.

10. The talented mermaids of Weeki Wachee Springs State Park have captivated crowds since 1947. The nearly 1,000-acre park in Hernando County features a first magnitude spring and a 400-seat submerged theater for watching live mermaid shows. The park offers a wilderness river boat cruise, wildlife, exotic bird show and petting zoo. Buccaneer Bay waterpark located inside the state park features four water slides, three of which drop you into the natural spring. Visitors also can canoe and kayak on the Weeki Wachee River.

*Please be sure to go online to check hours of operation, schedules and seasonal closings for the sites mentioned.*



## Sponge Docks Tarpon Springs

A visit to the Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks is a fun, educational, and delicious way to learn about an industry that built a community. History shows that while Tarpon Springs was an early resort area, the sponge industry quickly became the community's most important industry. In 1890, the Cheney Sponge Company sold almost a million dollars-worth of sponges.

Experienced divers from Greece were brought to Tarpon Springs, and by using rubberized diving suits and helmets they increased harvests. By 1905 more than 500 Greek sponge divers were working on 50 boats. All the boat crews needed places to eat at the docks, and thus were borne numerous restaurants serving authentic Greek cuisine. News of the interesting industry spread, drawing tourists looking to buy sponges and other souvenirs. For 30 years, the sponge industry was the largest industry in Florida, larger than citrus or tourism. Tarpon Springs was known as the "Sponge Capital of the World."

Blight affected the growth of sponges in the 1940s, and sponging as a profitable industry was nearly wiped out by the 1950s. A resurgence occurred when new sponge beds were discovered in the 1980s, and Tarpon Springs is back to being a leader in the world's natural sponge market.

Today tourists continue to visit, with some of the original shops still owned by the same families that started them. Visitors walking along Dodecanese Boulevard will find docked sponge boats, more than 100 shops selling seas sponges and souvenirs, and more than 15 restaurants, many with international reputations.

**For more information, visit [spongedocks.net](http://spongedocks.net).**



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*Continued on page 80*





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# 4

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- 10 Suppliers

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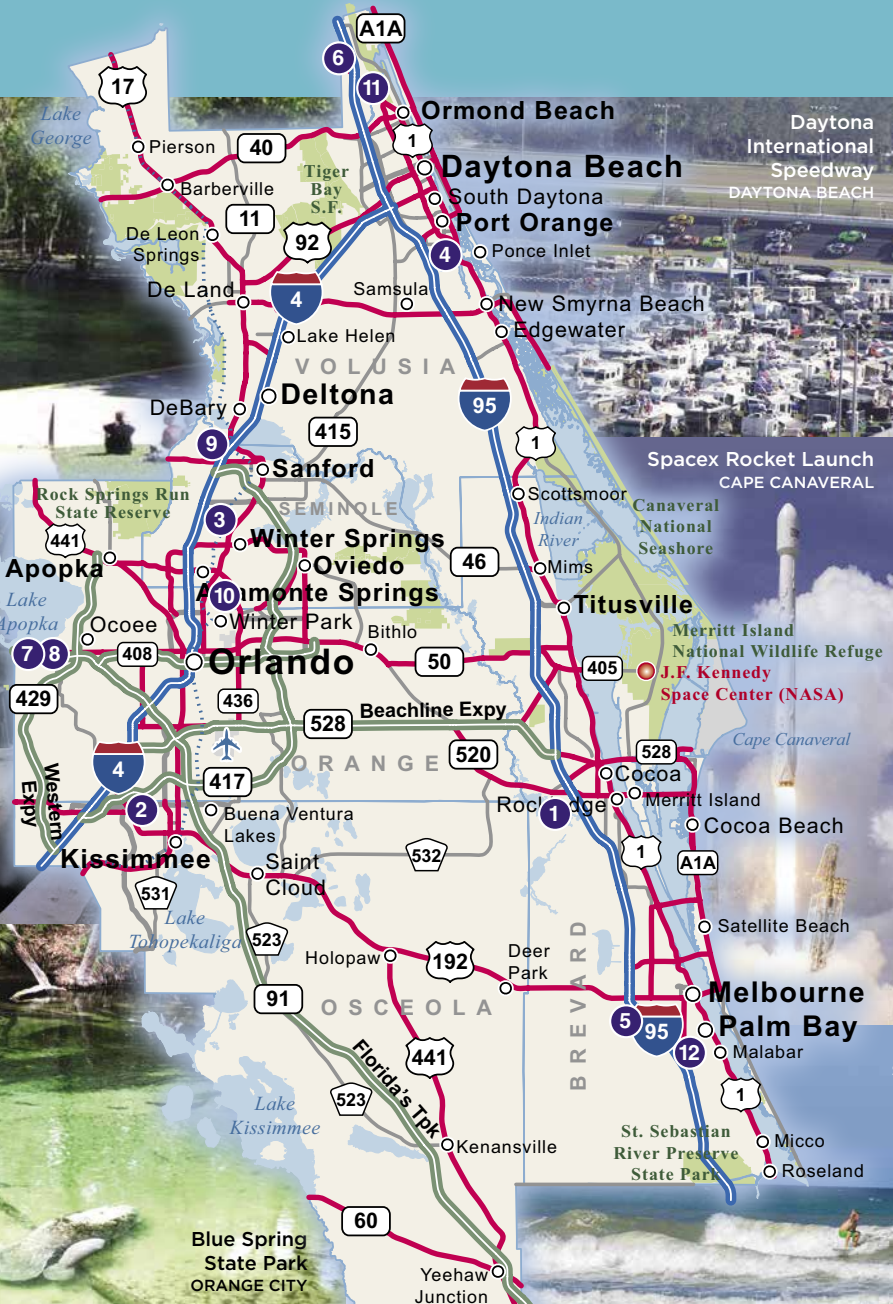


Harry Potter World Universal Studios  
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Magic Kingdom Disney World  
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See complete list of Region 4  
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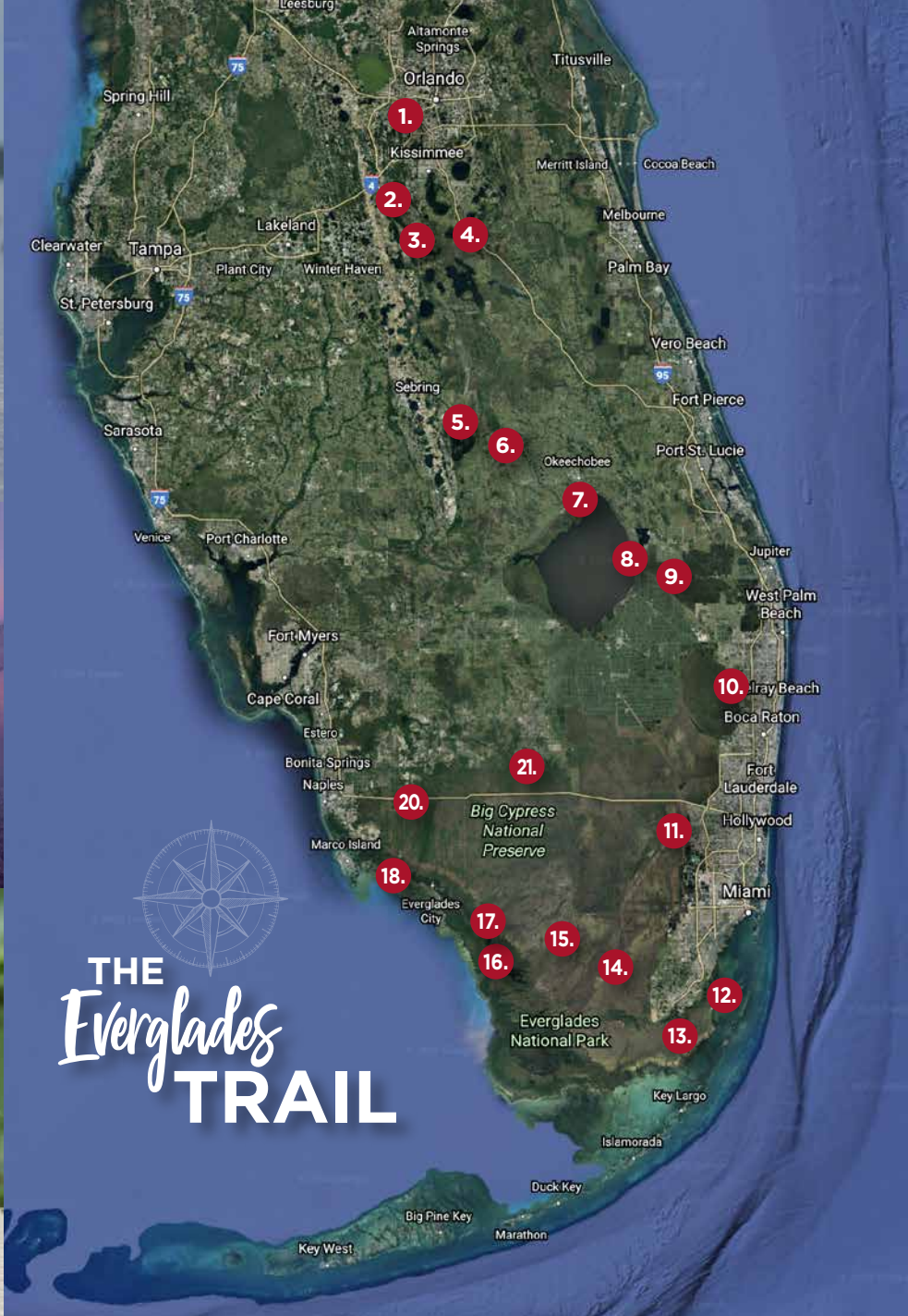
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Mon. through Sat.






Photo by James Branaman for VISIT FLORIDA



THE  
Everglades  
TRAIL

Continued from page 53

Enjoy exploring the Everglades by visiting any of these stops on The Everglades Trail, listed starting from the north:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Shingle Creek</b></li> <li>2. <b>The Nature Conservancy's Disney Wilderness Preserve</b></li> <li>3. <b>Lake Kissimmee State Park</b></li> <li>4. <b>Prairie Lake Unit, Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area</b></li> <li>5. <b>Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park</b></li> <li>6. <b>Hickory Hammock Management Area</b></li> <li>7. <b>Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail State Park</b></li> <li>8. <b>Port Mayaca Lock</b></li> <li>9. <b>DuPuis Management Area</b></li> <li>10. <b>Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge</b></li> <li>11. <b>Everglades Wildlife Management Area</b></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. <b>Biscayne National Park</b></li> <li>13. <b>Everglades National Park - Ernest F. Coe Visitor Center</b></li> <li>14. <b>Everglades National Park - Shark Valley Area</b></li> <li>15. <b>Big Cypress National Preserve</b></li> <li>16. <b>Everglades National Park - Gulf Coast Visitor Center</b></li> <li>17. <b>Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park</b></li> <li>18. <b>Collier Seminole State Park</b></li> <li>19. <b>Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve</b></li> <li>20. <b>Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge</b></li> <li>21. <b>Seminole Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum</b></li> </ol> |
|---|---|

Continued on page 83

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 (see our ad on page 84)

Continued from page 74

# Top 10 Places to Visit in East Central Florida



Photo courtesy of SEAWORLD Adventure Park

1. Gatorland, a favorite “real Florida” attraction in Kissimmee for decades, offers a variety of guest adventures including the Gator Night Shine tour. The Screamin’ Gator Zipline sends visitors flying over 1,200 feet from towers standing seven stories high, and the Gator Gauntlet Zipline takes visitors over the Alligator Breeding Marsh.
2. SeaWorld Adventure Park is a wonderful place to be entertained with rides, interactive experiences and parades while learning more about whales, dolphins, sea lions and other marine creatures. A Dolphin Nursery underwater viewing window lets visitors see dolphin calves jump and play with their moms. SeaWorld boasts the roller coasters Mako, which stands 200 feet high and sends thrill seekers flying at 73 mph, and Kraken, which reaches a speed of 65 mph before turning upside down seven times. The park also includes Discovery Cove by SeaWorld, a tropical park where guests can swim and interact with dolphins, tropical fish, sharks and stingrays. SeaWorld’s Aquatica Orlando water park includes raft rides such as Karekare Curl and Ray Rush. Aquatica has been designated as a Certified Autism Center — the first water park in the world to receive such a distinction, by enhancing the guest experience for families with special needs.
3. Walt Disney World Resort includes four theme parks – EPCOT, Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, and Hollywood Studios – two water parks – Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach – the entertainment complexes Disney Springs and the Boardwalk, and numerous hotels, restaurants and other offerings. Visitors are drawn to Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge, a 14-acre land, located in Hollywood Studios, and the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror. The large wildlife park Animal



Kingdom, offering animal encounters, thrill rides, safaris and shows, is enhanced by Pandora – a land inspired by the planet from the 2009 film “Avatar.” Of course, a must-see in the Magic Kingdom is Cinderella Castle, surrounded by favorites such as Splash Mountain and Haunted Mansion. Disney Springs includes world-class dining, serious shopping, and children’s play areas, plus entertainment options such as the NBA Experience, music at the House of Blues, and authentic Irish dance shows at Raglan Road. EPCOT’s annual food, wine and garden festivals draw visitors from around the world.

4. Universal Orlando Resort complex includes three themed hotels, two theme parks – Universal Studios Florida and Universal Islands of Adventure – the water park Volcano Bay, plus CityWalk, a 30-acre shopping, dining and entertainment area that includes the world’s largest Hard Rock Cafe. The theme parks combine technology with beloved characters on more than 25 rides, including the Transformers: The Ride-3D, the Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, Despicable Me Minion Mayhem and Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts. Each theme park includes a Wizarding World of Harry Potter, with Diagon Alley in Universal Studios and Hogsmeade in Islands of Adventure, drawing visitors from around the globe. Islands of Adventure visitors are drawn to Hagrid’s Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure, a thrilling motorcycle and side car ride near Hogsmeade and Hagrid’s Hut. Adjacent to the Universal complex is the water park Volcano Bay centered by a 200-foot-high volcano gushing water called Krakatau, part of a Pacific-inspired land of river raft rides, water slides, beaches, and wave pool.



## Wizarding World of Harry Potter

5. Orlando’s International Drive area is a popular site for eating and entertainment, including Ripley’s Believe It or Not! and ICON Park, an entertainment destination that offers the 400-foot observation wheel and Orlando StarFlyer. These towering centerpieces are surrounded by a themed complex that includes restaurants, clubs and attractions, such as Madame Tussauds Orlando, SEA LIFE Orlando Aquarium, 7D Dark Ride Adventure and Arcade City. The entertainment district includes dining options ranging from burgers to sushi, served in bars with live music to fine restaurants.

*Continued on page 82*

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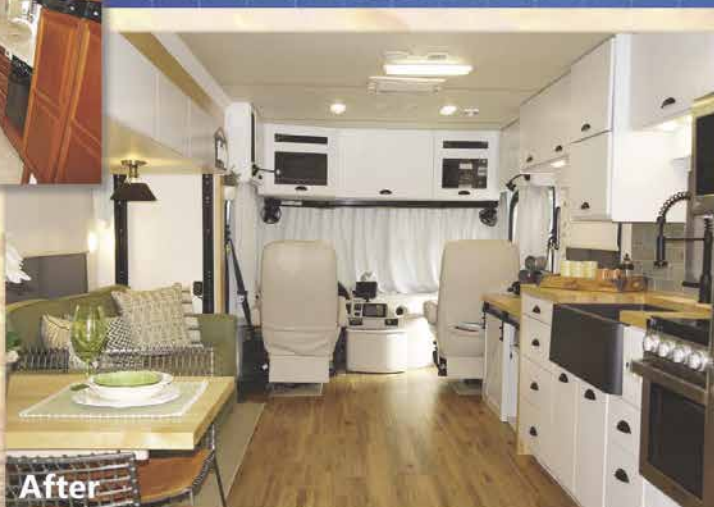


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**Kennedy Space Center**



**Canaveral National Seashore**

*Continued from page 81*

6. The renowned Kennedy Space Center on Florida's Space Coast is where visitors can learn about space exploration and hear veteran NASA pilots tell their stories at the Astronaut Encounter Theater. The history of space travel is displayed in the Rocket Garden, the rockets from NASA's Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs. A close-up view of Atlantis, the only space shuttle displayed in flight, includes 60 interactive exhibits celebrating the Space Shuttle program.
7. One of the most beautiful natural areas in Florida is found just north of the Kennedy Space Center at Canaveral National Seashore and the 140,000-acre Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. The seashore is undeveloped except for several wooden boardwalks over the natural dunes from the parking areas. The refuge, an overlay of the space center, was established in 1963 as a buffer zone for rocket launches. The coastal site is a major wintering area for migratory birds, and currently lists 20 species as state or federally threatened or endangered.
8. The Daytona Beach area offers plenty of family recreation and attractions, including the Daytona Beach Boardwalk and Pier and beach vendors offering food and motorbike rentals. Take a racetrack tour or the world famous Daytona International Speedway, or visit the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach for a unique combination of art, science and history, plus visit a digital planetarium and hands-on children's museum.

*Continued on page 84*



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*Continued from page 79*

But water control systems built to control flooding, create buildable land and distribute water for human consumption have drastically altered the natural flow of water.

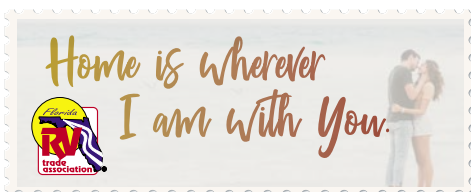
Recognizing that the severe changes to the water flow within the Everglades ecosystem were life threatening, Congress approved in 2000 the nation's largest environmental project, the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan - a long-term plan to modify how water is delivered to natural areas and improve the freshwater supply. It is being implemented by the state of Florida, the federal government, Seminole and Miccosukee tribes, and conservation organizations. The goal is to capture and store the vast amounts of water that now flow out to sea through the regional canals system, remove certain barriers to the natural sheet flow, and build wastewater treatment plants in Miami-Dade County to get water clean enough to send into the wetlands.

Restoring a more natural water flow and improving water quality will benefit not only people and farms but birds, plants and wildlife habitats, as well. America's Everglades is the largest remaining subtropical wilderness in the United States and home to 68 endangered plant and animal species.

You can plan your adventure along The Everglades Trail according to your available time and interests. Since the trail is not a specific route, you may tour for a day, a weekend or longer. Brown highway signs direct you to each site on The Everglades Trail, where you'll find a three-panel kiosk indicating the importance of the exact site to the system, a map of the entire trail, and information about the Everglades. The trail "begins" in Orlando with Site 1 Shingle Creek but you can jump on anywhere you like. Information and a printable map is available at [www.evergladestrail.org](http://www.evergladestrail.org) or at [www.visitflorida.com](http://www.visitflorida.com).

Many of the gift shops in the parks and preserves along the trail sell The Everglades Trail CD, stories of the wildlife and history of the region told by scientists, conservations and longtime residents. Included is a special bonus CD of diverse musical interpretations of the region by Florida musicians, including two songs by Florida's most famous musician, Jimmy Buffett.

Buffett donated the songs as his way of helping protect the Everglades. Florida Sen. Bob Graham introduced The Everglades Trail to help people realize the beauty and vastness often unknown to residents that sits just inside the heavily populated coastlines of south Florida. The project was launched by Wilderness Graphics, Inc., The Nature Conservancy of Florida, and the Friends of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, with the help of the Office of Greenways and Trails, Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Florida Department of Transportation Environmental Management Office, with the assistance of Visit Florida.





**DUNLAWTON SUGAR MILL GARDENS**

*Continued from page 82*

- 9. Port Orange offers two historic gems: Tour the Dunlawton Sugar Mill Gardens to see extensive botanical gardens surrounding the ruins of an 1832 plantation sugar mill, and the Gamble Place estate, a rural retreat on Spruce Creek land bought in the late 1800s by James N. Gamble (of Procter & Gamble fame). Visitors to the property will find wildlife and ancient trees much like when Gamble first visited the area. Today this 175-acre property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Anglers will find a variety of great fishing opportunities nearby in the Atlantic Ocean and Halifax River.
- 10. Escape to the relaxing sands of New Smyrna Beach, 13 miles of pristine beach popular for families with small children. The town's gentle charm, historic architecture and water views have earned it praise as "Old Florida." When the sun sets, New Smyrna Beach offers quaint restaurants and a variety of theatrical and musical performances. Events are often held at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, which draws aspiring artists in many disciplines from across the country. The Center is a nonprofit interdisciplinary artists' community featuring community programming and residencies led by distinguished contemporary artists.

*Please be sure to go online to check hours of operation, schedules and seasonal closings for the sites mentioned.*



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Northwest Florida stretching from Pensacola east to Tallahassee is only about 100 miles wide but offers visitors a multitude of outdoor activities, including boating, diving, world-renowned fishing, or simply sun bathing on gorgeous white beaches. In addition to the Gulf of Mexico, the Florida Panhandle's water experiences include some of the most beautiful lakes, bays and rivers in the state. Although summertime typically is popular for visitors here, a gentle change of seasons means your visit to these natural areas and quiet, historically rich towns make a trip to the Panhandle pleasant any time you choose. The eastern Panhandle, known as the Capital Region, has more in common with neighbors Alabama and Georgia than most of the rest of Florida. The area's "Old Florida" feel that has long drawn visitors to the state is a mix of subtropical delights and antebellum charm.

Continued on page 90



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Pandhandle  
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Region 5 offers visitors a multitude of outdoor activities, including boating, diving, world-renowned fishing, or simply sun bathing on gorgeous beaches.

Photo courtesy of GoRVing.com



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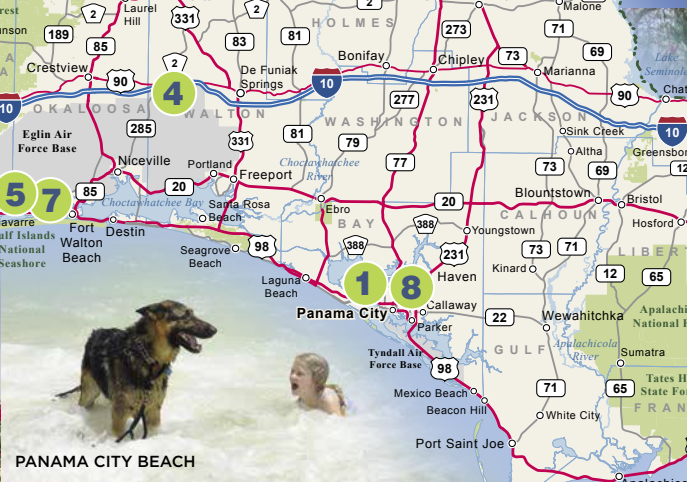
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# Top 10 Places to Visit in Northwest Florida



Tallahassee

1. Tallahassee, Florida's capital, exudes the charm of a small Southern city with its oak-canopied roads, colorful azaleas and rolling hills. The Old Capitol, restored to its 1902 American Renaissance splendor with red candy-striped awnings and stained-glass dome, sits adjacent to the New Capitol, with a 22nd-floor observation deck offering a 360-degree view of the area, including, on a clear day, the shimmering blue Gulf of Mexico many miles to the south. Near the capitol is the campus of Florida State University. Just to the southwest of the city, a 52-acre natural habitat is the home of red wolves, Florida panthers and river otters at the Tallahassee Museum. This privately funded, nonprofit museum for more than 60 years has combined a natural habitat zoo, nature trails, natural gardens, rare historic buildings and educational programs.
2. The Lodge at Wakulla Springs south of Tallahassee is a historic, elegant hotel built in 1937 surrounded by pristine forest. It is part of the Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park, and both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The park, a 6,000-acre wildlife sanctuary, offers hiking, biking or a river boat tour along the Wakulla River and one of the world's deepest and largest freshwater springs.
3. The Cape St. George Lighthouse originally stood for 153 years on St. George Island before falling in 2005. It was rebuilt using as much of the original brick and other materials as possible 72-feet high in a new location in 2008. A museum and keeper's house on site are open for seasonal tours. This beautiful barrier island includes St. George Island State Park and miles of undeveloped white-sand beaches for visitors and campers.

Continued on page 92



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## St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge

Continued from page 90

- 4. For a bird-watchers' haven, don't miss the undeveloped barrier island of St. Vincent, just offshore from the mouth of the Apalachicola River, and the St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge. Off-the-beaten-path destinations nearby also include the fishing community of Port St. Joe with its summertime scalloping, and Apalachicola, famous for its oysters. Water shuttles are available near Port St. Joe to the barrier islands.
- 5. Three Rivers State Park in Jackson County near the border with Georgia is named for the Chattahoochee, Flint and Apalachicola rivers. The Chattahoochee and Flint combine to form Lake Seminole above the Jim Woodruff Dam. Below the dam, the water forms the mighty Apalachicola River which flows to Apalachicola Bay and the Gulf. The 682-acre park, which has two miles of shoreline on Lake Seminole at the Florida-Georgia border, includes a 100-foot pier for fishing. Overnight visitors can stay in a full-facility (no sewer hook-up, dump station only) campground next to the lake or enjoy a modern cabin.
- 6. The amazing Florida Caverns State Park in Marianna provides the state's only public access to underground caves, a rare opportunity to see dazzling formations of limestone stalactites, stalagmites and flowstones. Hurricane Michael repairs are still underway, but the park is now able to offer guided cave tours with state-of-the-art LED lighting system. Other parts of the 1,300-acre park are available for picnicking and hiking and some RV camping. The park's caves have a long geological history beginning about 38 million years ago. There is also a nine-hole, New Deal-era golf course on site.

- 7. Panama City's 27 miles of white sand beaches and variety of entertainment continue to make the city a family favorite. In Panama City Beach, there's Shipwreck Island Waterpark, a 20-acre tropical landscape filled with waterslides, a lazy river, rapids, tube rides and a wave pool. Gulf World Marine Park features shark feedings, dolphin encounters, and sea lion, parrot and dolphin shows. ZooWorld Zoological and Botanical Conservatory in Panama City Beach is a zoo focusing on conservation with more than 350 animals, programs and shows in a tropical setting.
- 8. Pensacola was the site of North America's first European settlement, by Spanish colonists arriving in 1559. Historic Pensacola Village, a complex of unique museums, and the Pensacola Historic District offer visitors a look back, including through several historic homes like the circa 1871 Clara Barkley Dorr House, the oldest surviving example of a high-house in the city. Visitors enjoy the Discovery Gallery of the Pensacola Children's Museum and the T.T. Wentworth Jr. Florida State Museum, housed in the three-story Mediterranean architecture of the former Pensacola City Hall. Other historic sites include the Museum of Commerce, the Museum of Industry, the Julee Cottage, Manuel Barrios Cottage and the John Appleyard Storytelling Cottage, the Pensacola Museum of Art and the Pensacola Historical Museum.
- 9. Santa Rosa's Gulf Breeze Zoo is home to more than 900 animals from around the world roaming over 50 acres. Visitors rave about this small zoo, perfect for an afternoon visit, and its support of wildlife conservation through public education, captive breeding programs, habitat preservation, and financial aid for projects in the wild.
- 10. The National Naval Aviation Museum, located at Naval Air Station Pensacola, spans a century of military flying, from the first flight in a wood-and-fabric biplane to today's space travels with a Skylab command module. Attractions include more than 150 restored military aircraft, motion-based flight simulator rides and an IMAX theater. Check the website for the U.S. Navy Blue Angels practice schedule. Nearby is the Air Force Armament Museum, on Eglin Air Force Base, an extensive collection of historical Air Force planes and weapons, as well as a variety of the latest technology in bombs, missiles and rockets, free to visitors.

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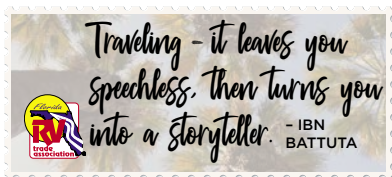
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*Continued on page 98*





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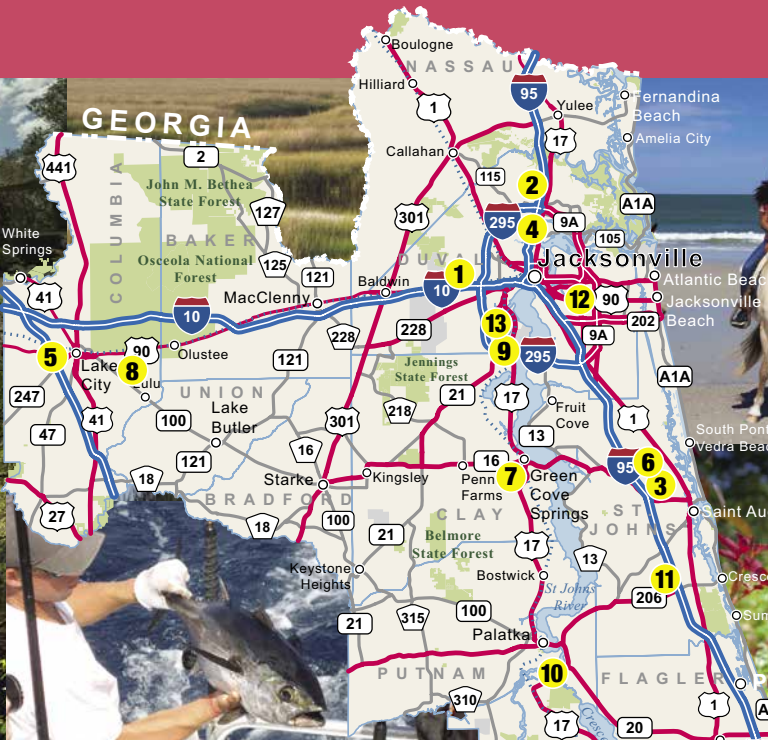
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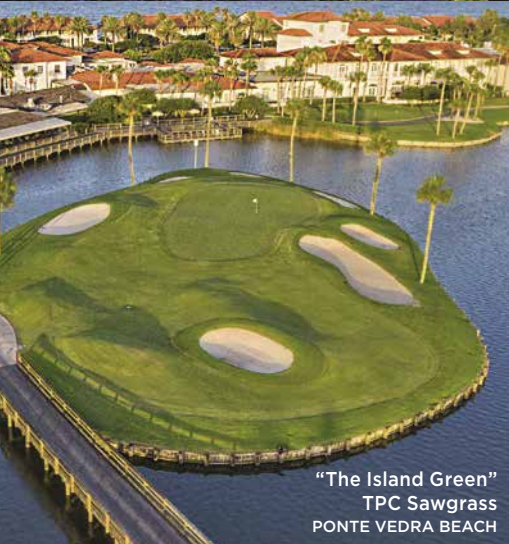
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# Top 10 Places to Visit in Northeast Florida



Photo by Sandy Auriene Sullivan, Flickr.com

## Ravine Gardens State Park

1. A local highlight in Palatka is Ravine Gardens State Park, created by water flowing thousands of years from the sandy ridges on the shore of the St. Johns River. It was transformed in 1933 into a dramatic garden by the federal Works Progress Administration. Much of the original landscaping still exists as formal gardens and an extensive trail system. Peak flowering period is azalea season, January to March. The 152-acre park is one of nine New Deal Era state parks in Florida.
2. Welaka State Forest on the eastern bank of the St. Johns River 17 miles south of Palatka offers birding through exploration of a mosaic of ecosystems, including wetlands, sandhills and bayheads, plus 4 miles of river frontage along the east bank of Little Lake George on the St. Johns River. In addition to 12.7 miles of trails, the 2,287-acre forest includes an equestrian facility and training center.
3. St. Augustine, the nation's oldest continuously occupied European-established settlement and port in the continental United States, allows visitors to escape to the past. Founded in 1565, 42 years before the English colonized Jamestown, St. Augustine has diligently preserved much of its rich heritage in the downtown historic district. Tour by horse-drawn carriage (something visitors have done since 1877), trolley, or on foot armed with tour maps. Visit the 17th-century fort Castillo de San Marcos, the reconstructed Spanish Quarter, historic churches, and see colorful re-enactments of colonial days. St. George Street, a cobbled lane that bisects the St. Augustine historic district, offers shops, restaurants and several historic attractions.
4. Anastasia Island, reached by the Bridge of Lions that spans Matanzas Bay, is home to the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum. Adults and children at least 44 inches tall can climb the 219 steps to reach the observation deck of the lighthouse, weather permitting. Various tours are available, including the Dark of the Moon Tour, "St. Augustine's only all ghosts, no gimmicks paranormal tour" to explore the 1874 lighthouse tower and the Keeper's house.



## Fort Caroline National Memorial

5. Clay County offers a taste of rural life in close proximity to Jacksonville's enticements. Bordered by the St. Johns River to the east and Jacksonville to the north, Clay County encompasses Green Cove Springs, established around a warm mineral spring in 1854; Orange Park, originally created as a southern retreat and small farming community; Keystone Heights, named after the state of Pennsylvania; Penney Farms, where department store magnate J.C. Penney founded a retirement community in 1926; and Middleburg, an unincorporated settlement near Black Creek, a tributary of the St. Johns River.
6. Ponte Vedra Beach, just 20 miles southeast of Jacksonville, is home to beautiful beaches, as well as world-class tennis and professional golf. The area's 40-foot sand dunes are among the highest in Florida. The Ponte Vedra Inn & Club is celebrating 90 years of quiet opulence, grace, stateliness and history with its oceanfront accommodations and wide array of leisure pursuits, including miles of Atlantic beach and 36-holes of seaside golf.
7. Jacksonville, situated along the banks of the St. Johns and bordered to the east by miles of wide Atlantic beaches, is known as the "Florida's River City by the Sea." Downtown includes museums of art and history, shopping and dining. The Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens showcases a permanent collection spanning from 2100 B.C. through the 21st century, plus 2.5 acres of historic gardens. MOSH, the Museum of Science and History, located on the Southbank Riverwalk, includes exhibits about energy, the body, local marine life, and early settlers from 12,000 years ago. The museum includes the Bryan-Gooding Planetarium, offers boat tours, and a variety of daily programs.
8. Fort Caroline National Memorial, the short-lived but first French colony in the present-day United States, showcases the area's colonial past. Guided tours of the reconstructed 16th-century French fort explain the struggle between European colonial powers for control of Florida. The fort is part of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, along with Kingsley Plantation, a state-owned historic site. Visitors learn the story of Zephaniah Kingsley, a plantation owner and slave trader, as they tour the restored antebellum plantation house and tabby slave quarters. The site includes spectacular views of barrier islands, savannas, hardwood forest and wetlands.

Continued on page 100

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**Amelia Island**



**Osceola National Forest**

Photo courtesy of Debbie Manser, Cheers Ranch Horseback Riding

*Continued from page 99*

9. Amelia Island on the Atlantic coast is a small barrier island where visitors find blocks of old mansions, miles of beaches and lots of seafood. The island's seaport village of Fernandina Beach showcases shops, fine restaurants and historic homes. Tours of the historic district are conducted from the Amelia Island Museum of History, located inside the old Nassau County jail. Amelia Island State Park just 7 miles north of Little Talbot Island State Park on State Road A1A and 8 miles south of Fernandina Beach. The Civil War-era Fort Clinch, one of the most well-preserved 19th century forts in the country, can be seen at Fort Clinch State Park, which offers great birding, fishing, shelling, swimming, picnicking and wildlife viewing.
10. The Osceola National Forest in Florida is connected by a beautiful natural corridor to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge in Georgia, making this area a top place to visit. In the middle is Florida's John M. Bethea State Forest, a 37,736-acre state forest in Sanderson, in northern Baker County. The Osceola National Forest was created by President Herbert Hoover's proclamation on July 10, 1931, and was named in honor of the Native American Seminole warrior, Osceola. Chief Osceola and his horse, Renegade, are the official mascots of the Florida State University Seminoles in Tallahassee.

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RAINBOW SPRINGS



ICHETUCKNEE SPRINGS

### RAINBOW SPRINGS STATE PARK, Dunnellon

Rainbow Springs State Park is beloved for its beautiful manmade waterfalls and historic footpaths through lush Florida foliage with tubing as a great way to experience the park. Tubing is not allowed within the headsprings area of the park, so visitors start at the tubing entrance and take the shuttle upstream to then relax and enjoy a two-hour float downstream back to the parking area. Visit the concessionaire to rent tubes and receive shuttle service. Memorial Day through Labor Day, the tubing entrance is open seven days a week, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. **Address: Tubing entrance 10830 S.W. 180th Avenue Rd., Dunnellon.**

### K.P. HOLE COUNTY PARK, Dunnellon

An even longer float is available in Dunnellon at K.P. Hole County Park. Visitors here can enjoy a four-hour float down the Rainbow River. Rentals, with return shuttle service from Blue Run of Dunnellon Park, are available. Due to the length of the run, children under three are not allowed to participate. Visitors may bring food and beverages for this lengthy float, but supplies must be in reusable containers. If four hours seems daunting, you can hire a local boat to take you up the river so you can take a two-hour float down to K.P. Hole. **Address: 9435 SW 190th Avenue Rd., Dunnellon.**

Photos by Paul Clark, flickr.com

### ICHETUCKNEE, Fort White

One of the most popular tubing spots in Florida, Ichetucknee is not only well-known for its tubing but also its gorgeous scenery. The daily limit of 750 tubers can easily be reached in summer months, so arrive as early as possible. Tubes are available for rent within the park or can be rented from vendors outside of the park or visitors can bring their own. Tubes must be smaller than 5-feet wide to float freely down the natural river. Located northwest of Gainesville, the park is open from 8:00 a.m. until sundown every day. Memorial Day to Labor Day marks the summer tubing season here when visitors are allowed to launch from the north end. The north launch closes at 2:00 p.m., or earlier if the limit has been reached. **Address: 12087 SW U.S. Highway 27, Fort White for South Launch; 8294 SW Elim Church Rd., Fort White for North Launch.**



GINNIE SPRINGS

### GINNIE SPRINGS, High Springs

Located on the Santa Fe River in High Springs, Ginnie Springs is one of the clearest springs in Florida. The 72-degree water is perfect for river tubing, swimming, snorkeling, scuba and cave diving. Tubing at Ginnie Springs involves a float down the Santa Fe River for an hour, from Devil's Spring to Twin Spring, then a 15-minute walk back on the trail. As one of the few places that allow alcoholic beverages while tubing, weekends can draw a more rowdy crowd. Weekdays are less busy. Tubes can be rented at the park. **Address: 7300 NE Ginnie Springs Rd., High Springs.**

### MADISON BLUE SPRINGS, Lee

While Madison Blue Springs is known around the world as a cave diving destination, its tubing experience is also popular. Tubing in the crystal-clear springs and river at the state park is offered weekends only, May through September. Inflatable floats and tubes are allowed in the spring and adjacent river. Visitors may bring their own or purchase a float from a private vendor located within the park. **Address: 8300 NE State Road 6, Lee.**

### BLACKWATER RIVER STATE PARK, Holt

Tannins in the water make the Blackwater River look dark compared to other spring-fed flows, but the river is truly one of the purest sand-bottom rivers in the country. Tubing is allowed in designated areas. Kayaking and canoeing are popular activities here as well. In addition, this park in northwest Florida has different scenery from what you'll find in Central Florida parks. **Address: 7720 Deaton Bridge Rd., Holt. Tubing offered through Adventures Unlimited Outdoor Center, 8974 Tomahawk Landing Rd., Milton.**



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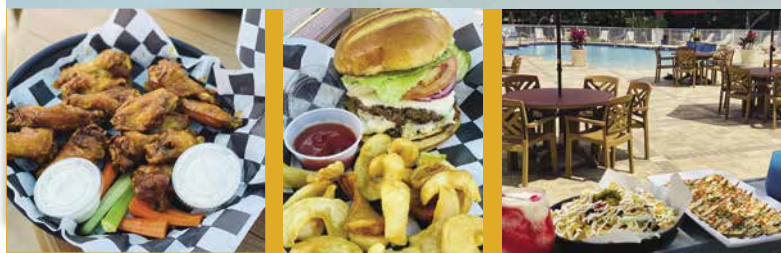


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Continued on page 110





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## Florida's Nature Coast

North Central Florida is home to some of the state's best natural wonders. This region is known for its wide open spaces offering a place to escape crowds and get back to basics.

Photo courtesy of GoRVing.com



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Continued from page 106

# Top 10 Places to Visit in North Central Florida



Silver Springs State Park

Photo by Jason Frankie and Scott Wesson for VISIT FLORIDA

1. The Florida Citrus Tower, a 226-foot-tall structure opened in 1956, was once one of the most famous landmarks of the Clermont area, built to allow visitors to observe the miles of orange groves surrounding it. The tower's antenna pierces the sky at 500 feet above sea level. The tower is still one of the highest observation points in Florida, where visitors get a 360-degree view from the glass-enclosed observation deck of eight counties.
2. Mount Dora is home to historic landmarks but is now most well-known for the specialty shops and boutiques in the downtown area, and the nearby Renninger's. This 117-acre complex includes Renninger's Vintage Antique Center and a separate Flea and Farmer's Market. Two large buildings and a number of open air shopping areas house a wide variety of dealers from produce stands, clothing shops, and oddity vendors, to high quality antiques and collectibles. Renninger's is also home to a large number of special events, including antique fairs and extravaganzas, cars and guitars shows, swap meets, and vintage garden shows.
3. Silver Springs State Park, just outside of Ocala, is celebrating more than 100 years of thrilling visitors with views of crystal-clear waters through glass-bottom boats. Tourists first arrived by stagecoach and steamboat in the late 1870s to marvel at one of the largest artesian spring systems in the world, still one of the last uninhabited spring runs in the state. Today, Silver Springs is a 4,000-acre nature theme park that includes the Silver River and undeveloped Florida wetlands teeming with native wildlife. Hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking, glass-bottom boat rides, camping, cabins, special events and concerts are available through a public/private partnership. The park was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1971.

4. Devil's Den Prehistoric Spring is a unique and popular natural attraction in Williston, southwest of Gainesville, which operates as a SCUBA diving training and recreational facility. The prehistoric springs and cave are privately owned but available for exploration by snorkeling or diving. The site includes a large RV Park. Devil's Den is a karst window that allows visitors to experience the subterranean river that winds under Florida and surfaces as springs across the state. Be sure to visit the website before planning a trip as rain amounts can limit snorkeling areas.

5. Gainesville, home to the sprawling University of Florida campus, offers a surprising number of natural attractions along with accommodations and other amenities. The university's Florida Museum of Natural History, one of the nation's top five natural history museums, hosts permanent exhibits and frequent events. The museum launched in 2018 the Thompson Earth Systems Institute to advance communication and public understanding of current research discoveries about Earth's natural systems – air, water, land and life – in Florida and beyond.

6. Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, a unique savanna designated as a National Natural Landmark, is located just south of Gainesville in Micanopy. This 21,000-acre park is a rich array of habitats for wildlife and livestock, including alligators, bison, horses and nearly 300 species of birds, living in numerous distinct biological communities. The park became Florida's first state preserve in 1971, and includes a 50-foot high observation tower for panoramic views. Noted artist and naturalist William Bartram called it the great Alachua Savannah when he wrote about his visit to the prairie in 1774.



Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park

7. Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park, just a few minutes northwest of downtown Gainesville, has attracted curious visitors since the 1880s. A wooden boardwalk that normally takes visitors down 120 feet into a bowl-shaped limestone sinkhole to a miniature rain forest is currently closed, but views into the sinkhole are available. Small streams trickle down the steep slopes of the cavity and lush vegetation thrives in the shade of the walls.

Continued on page 114



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**Manatee Springs State Park**

*Continued from page 111*

8. Manatee Springs State Park, on the banks of the Suwannee River, features one of Florida's largest springs, a first magnitude spring that flows directly into the Suwannee by way of a short run, as well as plenty of chances to view manatees and other wildlife in their natural habitats. The spring produces an average of 100 million gallons of clear, cool water daily. The park's 800-foot boardwalk runs through a majestic cypress forest overlooking the spring.

9. Big Bend, the name for a curve of land in southern Taylor County, is a coastline largely made up of shallow saltwater estuaries rather than sandy beaches, resulting in great fishing. The village of Steinhatchee, reminiscent of the old Florida "Cracker" days, offers several good restaurants and accommodations, ranging from fish camps to the charming Victorian-style Steinhatchee Landing Resort, which includes cottages, a petting zoo, sports courts and boat docks. The beautiful Steinhatchee River and the Gulf of Mexico provide a backdrop for canoeing, boating, fishing and summertime scalloping.

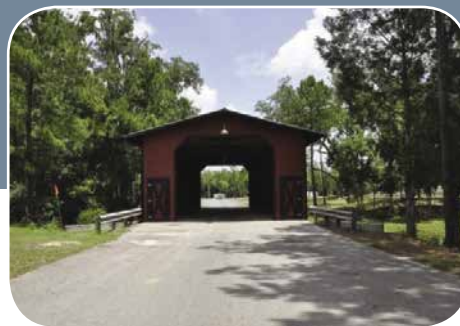
10. Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, in White Springs off U.S. 41 along the Suwannee River, honors the famous American songwriter. Visitors can see quilting, blacksmithing and stained glass making in Craft Square while listening to Foster's music ring from the park's 97-bell carillon, currently undergoing a phased restoration funded by a citizen organization. Hiking, biking, canoeing and wildlife viewing are available, as is a full-facility campground.

*Please be sure to go online to check hours of operation, schedules and seasonal closings for the sites mentioned.*

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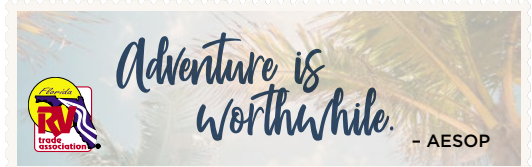


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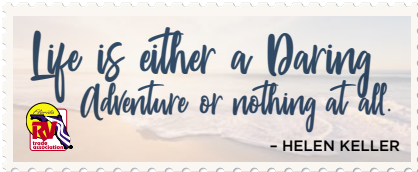
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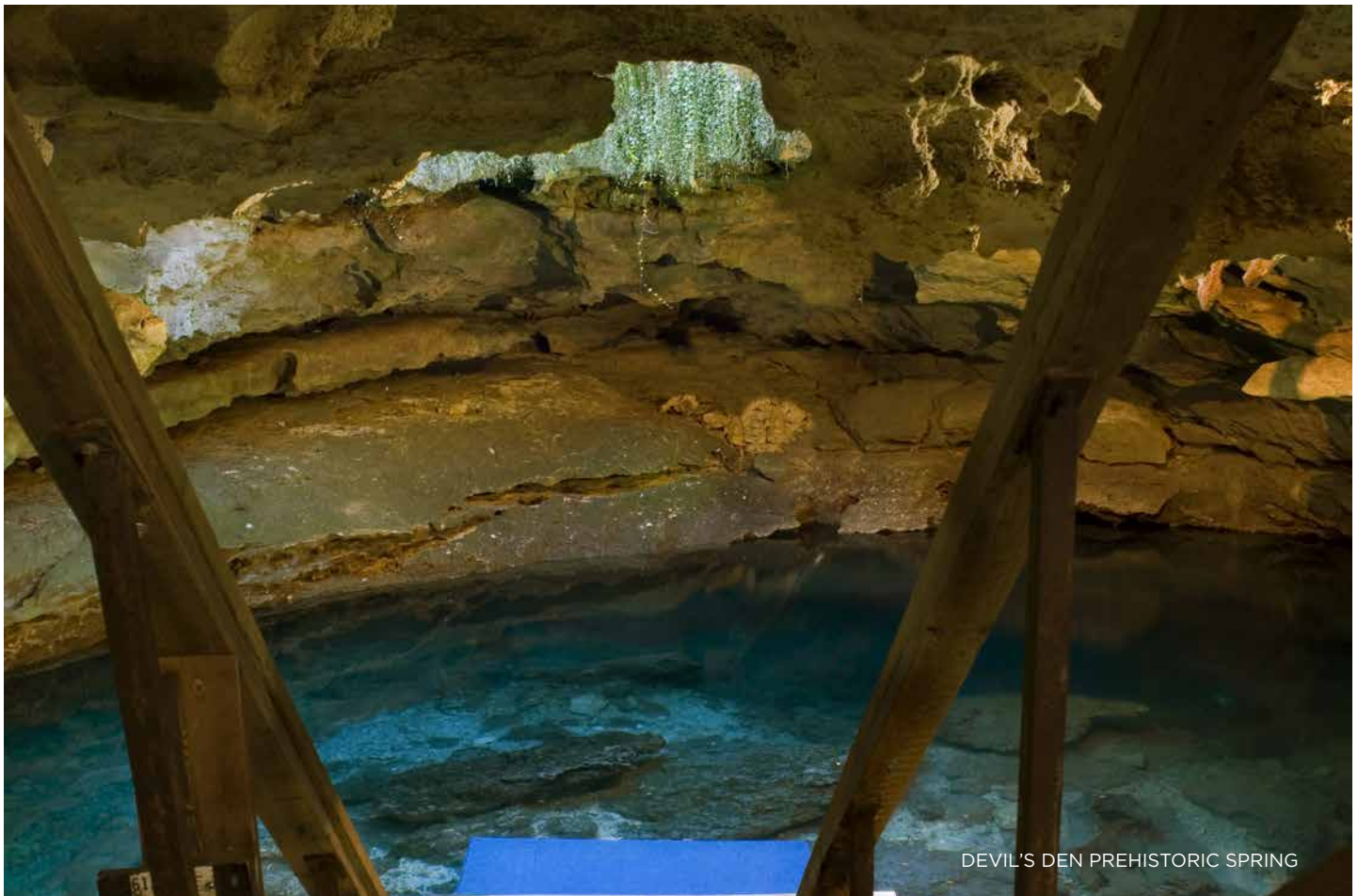
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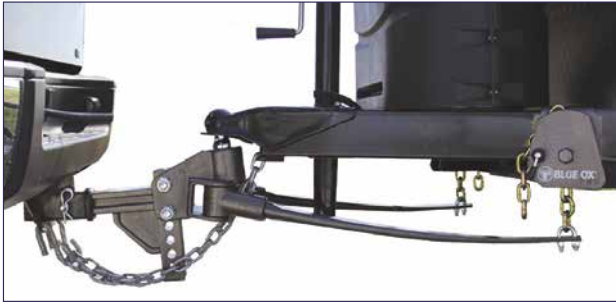
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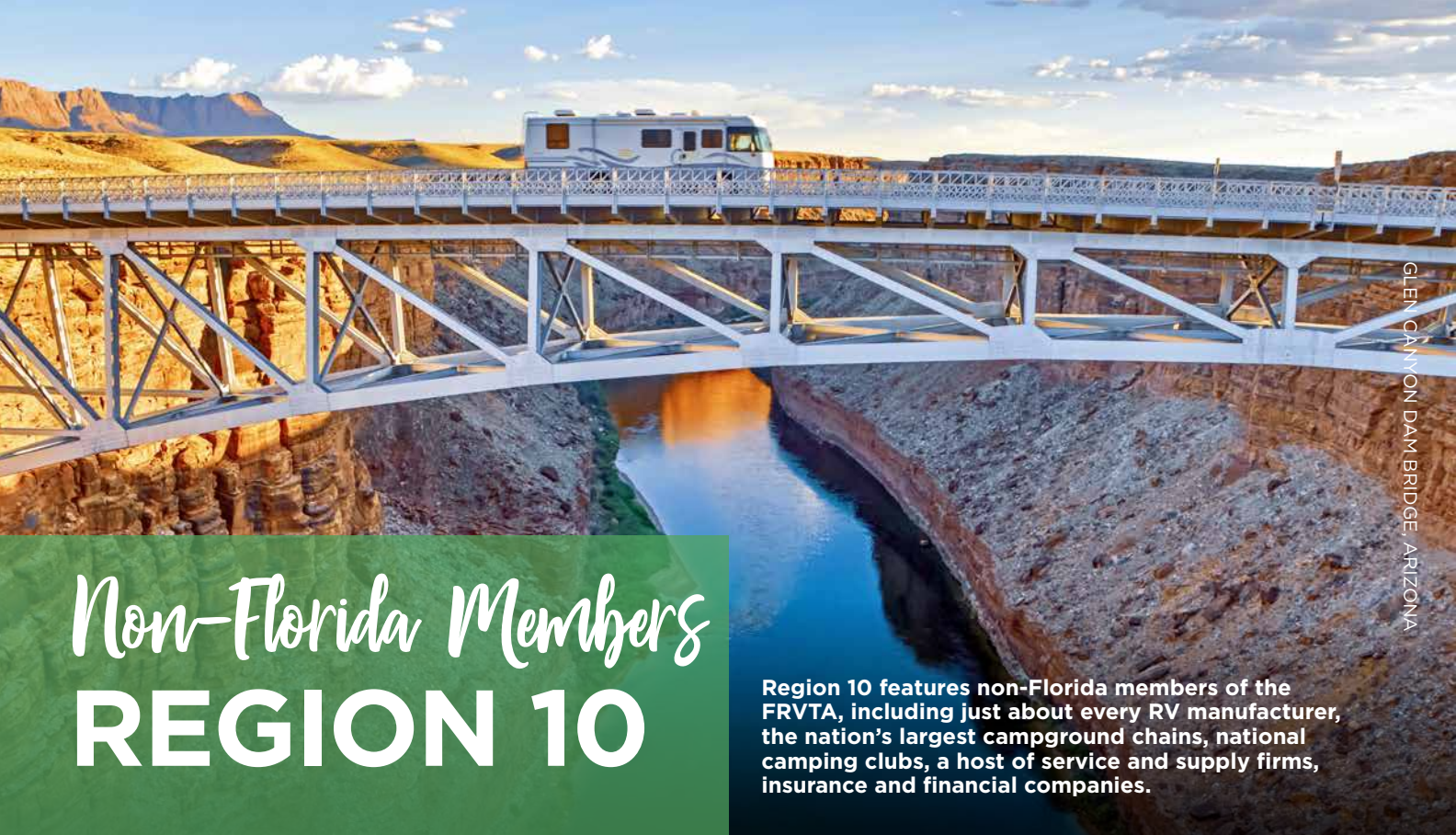


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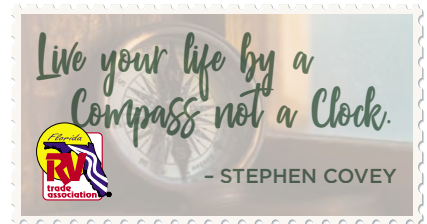
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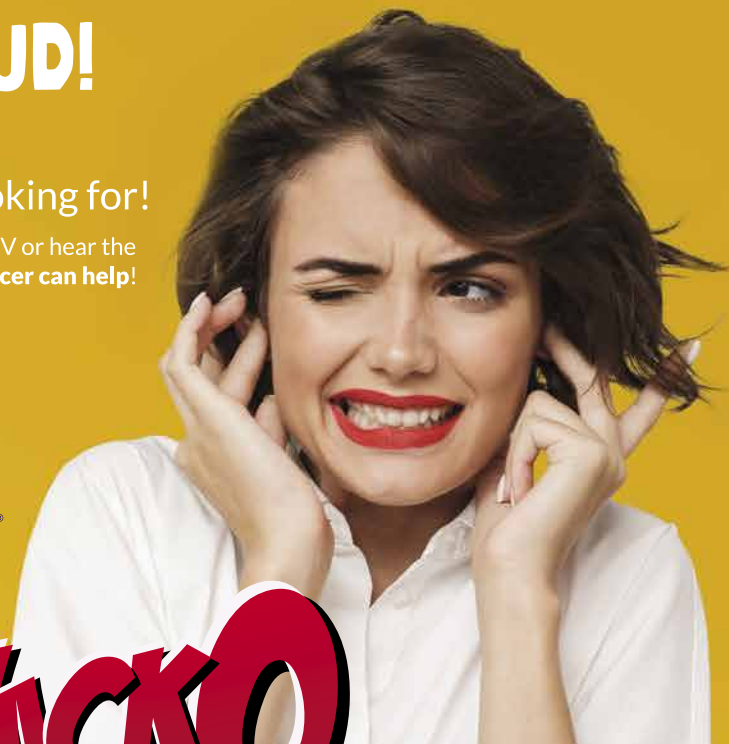
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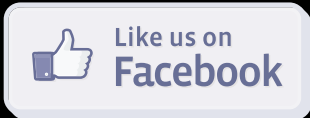
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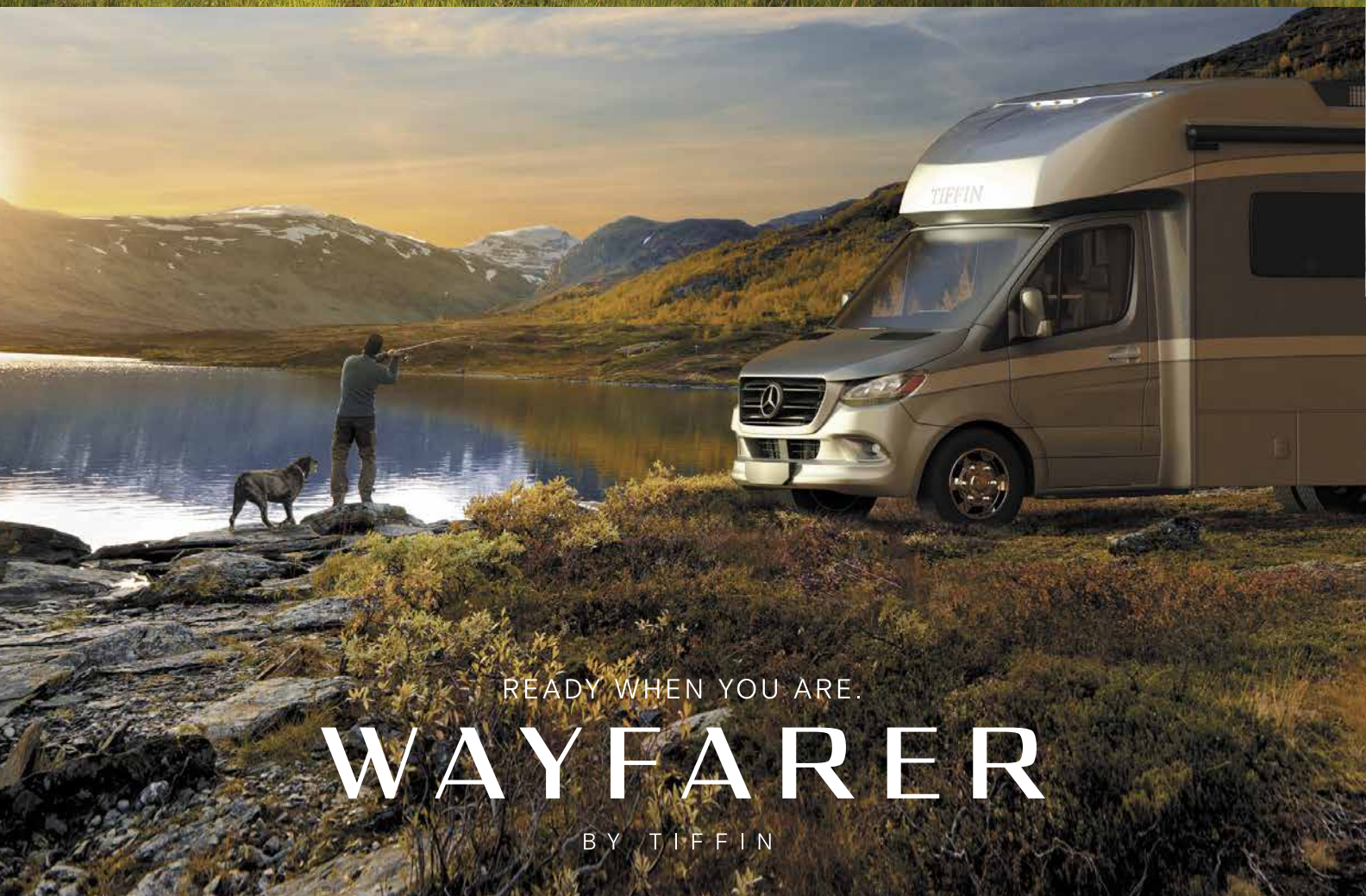
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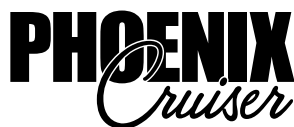
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## REGION 6

### St. Augustine

The St. Augustine Lighthouse holds the distinction as one of the first in Florida officially authorized by Congress. It was built in 1824 and the present 165-foot-tall tower, constructed in 1874, is the state's only spiral-banded lighthouse. Its iconic black and white spirals encase six flights of stairs with frequent landings to make the climb an easy one. The St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum offers visitors historical exhibits, activities, and nature trails daily. [www.staugustinelighthouse.org](http://www.staugustinelighthouse.org)



## REGION 7

### Cedar Key

The Cedar Keys Light Station is a historic lighthouse on Seahorse Key built in 1854 when the town of Cedar Key was a depot for trade and communication on the Suwannee River. It is the smallest lighthouse in Florida at 33 feet tall, and only 35 steps, and was built in a house style that includes what resembles a cupola for the lantern. The lighthouse is open annually for two days on the third weekend in October, and is managed by the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. [www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=595](http://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=595)



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# FLORIDA Springs

Natural karst limestone landscapes can be seen around the world, such as the towering rock pillars in China's Shilin, formed 270 million years ago. But karst landscapes also exist underground where eroded limestone creates caves, and underground rivers often fill the landscape with water. Such is the case with Florida's freshwater springs, a karst system of underwater limestone caves flowing with water that occasionally surfaces in sinkholes. With 750 springs, Florida has the highest concentration of freshwater springs on the planet.

While Weeki Wachee and Wakulla Springs have both become world-famous, many Florida springs flow in places tucked away and far less traveled, offering a more tranquil or romantic escape into nature. For centuries, travelers have come to Florida's freshwater springs in search of their fabled ability to restore health. Though the state's springs likely won't cure what ails you, they will provide a moment of peace and profound beauty.

Photo by Maurice Rivenbank for VISIT FLORIDA



Photo by John Athanason for VISIT FLORIDA



WEEKI WACHEE SPRINGS



### 3. Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

Though not a swimmer's destination, this state park offers the chance to catch a glimpse of the West Indian manatee year-round from an underwater observatory. The Pepper Creek Trail offers opportunities for birding and nature study. Black bears, bobcats, white-tailed deer, alligators, crocodiles and river otters also call Homosassa Springs home. A boat tour is included in admission. The park is about 75 miles north of Tampa. Phone 352-628-5343. [floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/ellie-schiller-homosassa-springs-wildlife-state-park](http://floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/ellie-schiller-homosassa-springs-wildlife-state-park)



### 1. Blue Spring State Park

A RV-friendly getaway in Orange City, Blue Spring State Park offers fun for the whole family. The largest spring on the St. Johns River, Blue Spring's 72-degree water is a winter home to a population of West Indian manatees who retreat there to stay warm. This park fills up fast - be sure to plan your trip for the early morning or late afternoon. Phone 386-775-3663. [floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/blue-spring-state-park](http://floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/blue-spring-state-park)



### 4. Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park

This beautiful site is one of the longest underwater cave systems in the continental United States. Peacock Springs State Park is home to two major springs, a spring run and six sinkholes - not to mention nearly 33,000 feet of surveyed underwater passages. Visitors wishing to cavern and cave dive must present proof of certification. Those not diving can still enjoy walking an interpretive cave dive trail, swimming, picnicking and nature walks. Phone 386-776-2194. [floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/wes-skiles-peacock-springs-state-park](http://floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/wes-skiles-peacock-springs-state-park)



### 2. Ginnie Springs

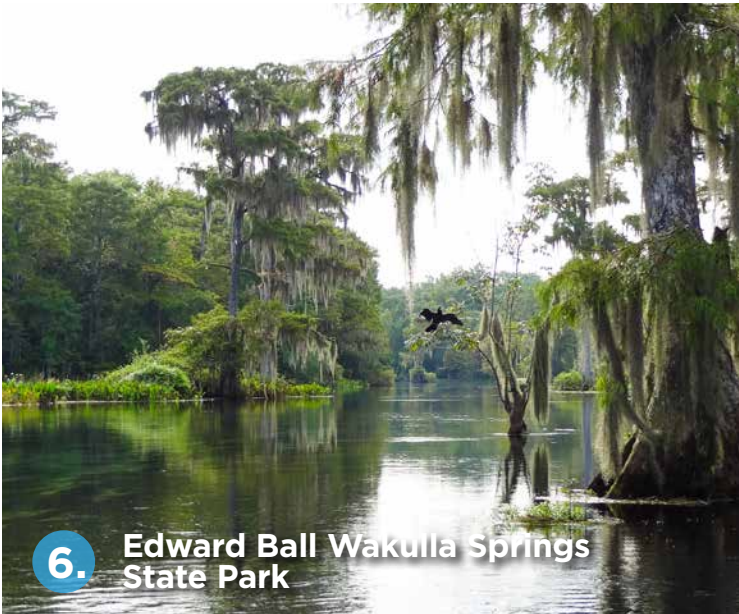
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### 5. De Leon Springs State Park

The Florida Panhandle's De Leon Springs State Park offers over 6,000 years of cultural and natural history amongst a subtropical forest that features a massive old-growth bald cypress tree. Named after the famed explorer Ponce de Leon who sought the Fountain of Youth, this spring stays at a refreshing 72-degree water temperature year-round and produces 14 million gallons of water every day. After taking a dip, many visitors enjoy picnicking and fishing. Phone 386-985-4212. [floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/de-leon-springs-state-park](http://floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/de-leon-springs-state-park)

Continued on page 136



**6. Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park**

Near Tallahassee, Wakulla Springs is the largest and deepest freshwater spring in Florida, rimmed by an ancient cypress swamp. The extensive cave system beneath the spring extends more than 32 miles and supplies more than 250 million gallons of water per day. Water temperature is always a refreshing 69 degrees. The swimming area features a dive tower and swimming platforms, and the park features nature trails and glass-bottom boat rides. Phone 850-561-7276. [floridastateparks.org/wakullasprings](http://floridastateparks.org/wakullasprings)



**7. Wekiwa Springs State Park**

At the headwaters of the Wekiwa River in Apopka (and, yes, the river is spelled differently), this park gives visitors a glimpse of what Florida looked like when the Timucuan tribe fished and hunted the land. Take a swim in the cool spring or enjoy fishing and picnicking. Canoeists can hit the river and 13 miles of nature trails offer many sites for hikers. Phone 407-553-4383. [floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/wekiwa-springs-state-park](http://floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/wekiwa-springs-state-park)

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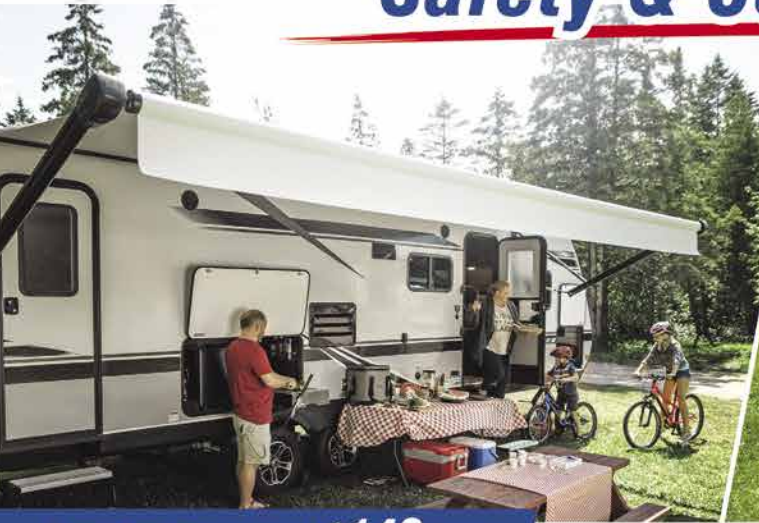
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