

FLORIDA

YOURS TO DISCOVER

Unexpected FLORIDA

A shop, see, sip and savour
guide to the Sunshine State's
most unexpected highlights

PLUS!

**Snorkelling
with manatees**

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**Disney World
secrets, revealed**

page **36**

**Florida's untamed
national parks**

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The latest & greatest in Florida travel

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In partnership with Visit Florida, a most unexpected gift is arriving on the doorsteps of *Canadian Traveller's* Experience The World subscribers. Claim yours today.

54 • Events to look forward to in 2020



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WHAT'S NEW IN FLORIDA?

What's the latest and greatest going on in Florida? *Canadian Traveller* looks at what's new, what's hot and what's trending, in hopes of inspiring your wanderlust.

BY CANDICE WALSH.



Hotel Effie Sandestin

ATTRACTIONS

Key to the wild

The new **Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuge Nature Center** is now open in Big Pine Key. This sprawling modern complex showcases the Keys' four wildlife refuges: Crocodile Lake, National Key Deer, Key West and Great White Heron. Consider this place the authority on information about the refuge's wildlife and habitats, including Key deer – the smallest deer in North America. In the future, expect a nature trail boardwalk. For now, enjoy the exhibits and shop for gifts at the bookstore.

ATTRACTIONS

Matisse, Miró and Monet – oh my!

The **Norton Museum of Art** in West Palm Beach has been making space for art since 1941. In February 2019, the museum revealed its \$100 million expansion, including an extra 1,114 square metres of gallery space for exhibitions, a restaurant, an auditorium and more. Since its reopening, the museum has unveiled eight new exhibitions and several works from its collection that haven't been publicly displayed in more than two years, including American, Chinese and European works, as well as contemporary art and photography.

HOTELS & RESORTS

Golf, sleep, repeat

Ready to tee off in 2020? Opening in June, the brand-new **Hotel Effie Sandestin** will find its home within **Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort**, nestled along the banks of Choctawhatchee Bay. The hotel's 250 guestrooms and 19 luxe suites offer views of the sparkling bay, the golf course and the lush surrounding Florida pines. After a long day of golf, the rooftop pool and bar area invite visitors to enjoy slushy cocktails and a refreshing swim, while a wide range of yoga, Pilates, Zumba and other fitness classes keep guests limber. Top it off with a candlelit dinner at **Marlin Grill** and you've got the makings of a luxury vacation.

A most unexpected gift from

FLORIDA

Exclusively curated for *Canadian Traveller's*
Experience The World subscribers

Florida is full of unexpected surprises. And while "Unexpected Florida" may be the theme of our 2019-2020 Florida guide, surprise and delight aren't contained to the issue's pages.

In partnership with Visit Florida, a most unexpected gift is arriving on the doorsteps of *Canadian Traveller's* Experience The World subscribers. Contained within this surprise delivery is some much-needed Florida sunshine. We won't spoil the surprise, but the items inside evoke the traditions, flavours and stylings of the Sunshine State.

Claim your (free) unexpected Florida gift

Not yet an Experience The World member? Good news, it's not too late to receive your own unexpected Florida box. We have a limited number of Florida gifts ready to ship new Experience The World subscribers.

What is the Experience The World subscription box?

At *Canadian Traveller*, we share two things with you: A love and excitement for discovering new places, and a passion for connecting with other travellers. *Canadian Traveller's* Experience The World subscription box allows travellers to live their day dream: Travel, 365 days a year. Each season we "pack our bags" and depart for a new, surprise destination. In each box, you'll receive 5-7 items that reflect the style, taste and décor of a destination, and a copy of *Canadian Traveller* magazine. It's a \$150+ retail value for just \$89 per quarter...plus fun weekly challenges that will let you bring the featured destination right into your home. We've already been to Italy, Morocco, New Zealand, France and Bali, and we'd love for you to join us on our next adventure: Florida.

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Maska lamb chops

FOOD & DRINK

Miami, for the masala

Miami recently welcomed **Maska Indian Kitchen + Bar**, an upscale Indian restaurant. Executive Chef Hemant Mathur is the first Indian chef in the United States to earn a Michelin star, and after dining here, it's not hard to see why. Traditional Indian food is infused with Miami flavours and signature dishes include octopus masala, Nalli Nihari (mutton stew) and lamb chops straight from the *tandoor* (clay oven). The restaurant's chic bar area offers a full happy hour menu, complete with bar bites and cocktails with a twist. We recommend the Maska Mule.



DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld



DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld Buffet

HOTELS

The real meaning of all-inclusive

Orlando just got a whole lot more family friendly. **DoubleTree by Hilton Orlando at SeaWorld** has recently completed the certification required to earn a Certified Autism Center designation, meaning that the staff have now been trained to aid autistic guests or those with other sensory needs. Families with autistic children often have trouble planning for a vacation or even a short getaway because of sensory needs and dietary requirements. Now, parents can enjoy some well-deserved fun in the sun without safety concerns. DoubleTree is one of the first hotels in Orlando to earn this designation. It's inclusivity at its finest.

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Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge

ATTRACTIONS

Party like it's your birthday

Disney World doesn't celebrate its 50th birthday until 2021, but many of its new rides and attractions have already opened. In **Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge** at Hollywood Studios, fans shouldn't pass up an opportunity to land the fastest ship in the galaxy at **Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run**. Mickey and his friends are also inviting guests to ride with them on **Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway**. With Goofy driving the train, who knows where anyone will end up? One last treat: Thanks to a new collaboration between Disney World and Cirque du Soleil, a new production of original acrobatic sequences and music debuts in 2020.

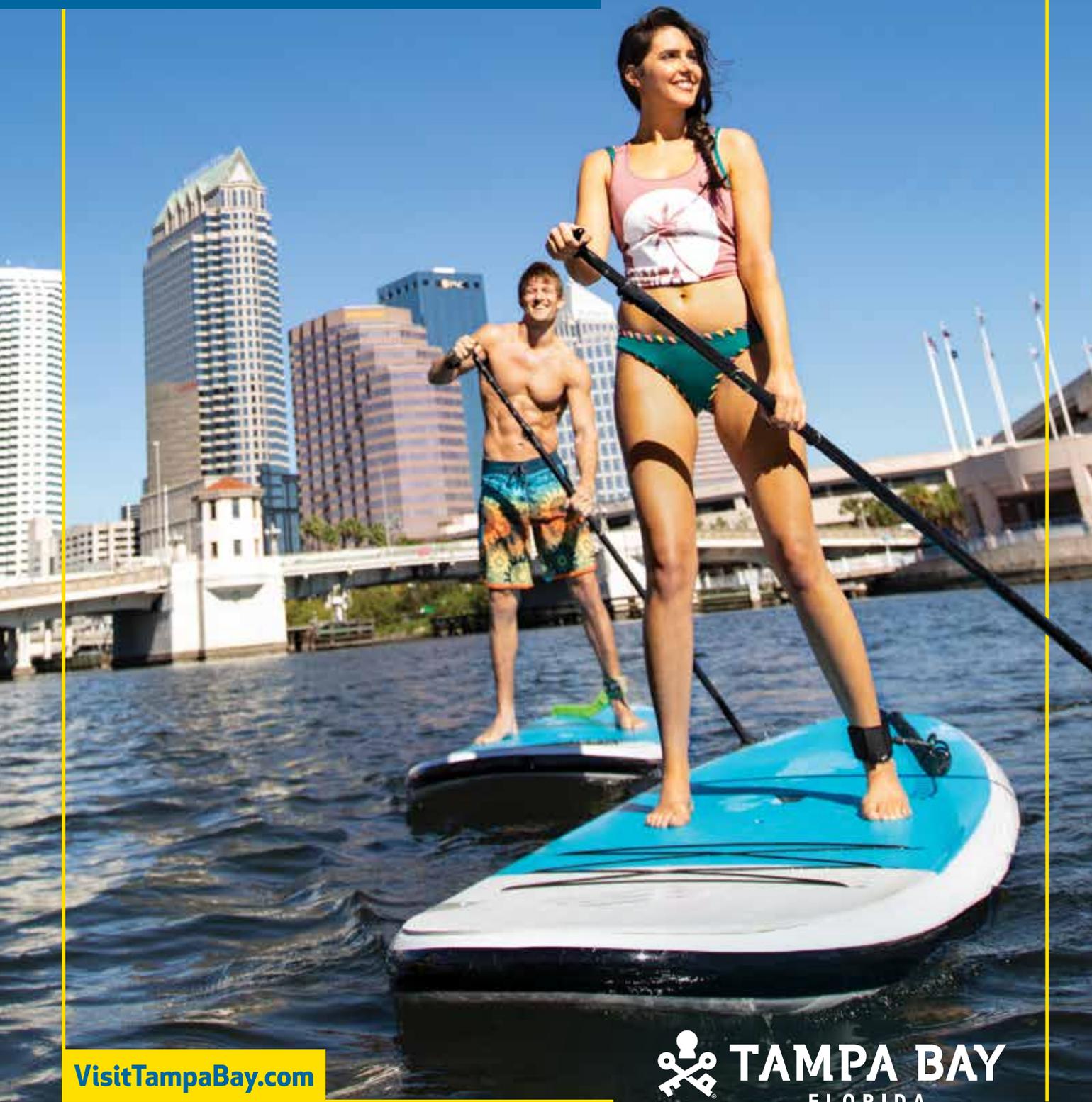
HOTELS & RESORTS

Margaritaville, elevated

There likely won't be much *wastin' away* happening at this Margaritaville: The Jimmy Buffett-themed **COMPASS by Margaritaville Hotels & Resorts** property is set to open in 2020 on Anna Maria Sound in Bradenton. This boutique, six-storey 123-room hotel invites guests to indulge at the **Floridays Restaurant and Grill**, luxuriate in Margaritaville signature bedding and soak up the vibes of its nature-inspired rooms. The property is located at Anna Maria Sound's newest marina, One Particular Harbor.

FLORIDA'S MOST WAYS TO PLAY

From paddleboards to Riverwalk strolls, Tampa Bay has hundreds of ways to enjoy the water.



VisitTampaBay.com

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FLORIDA

 **UNEXPECTED**

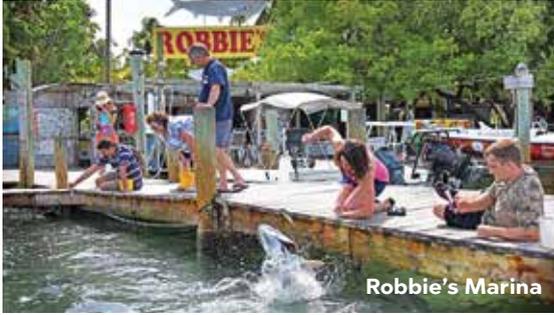
The Florida Keys

BY KRISTA DIAMOND

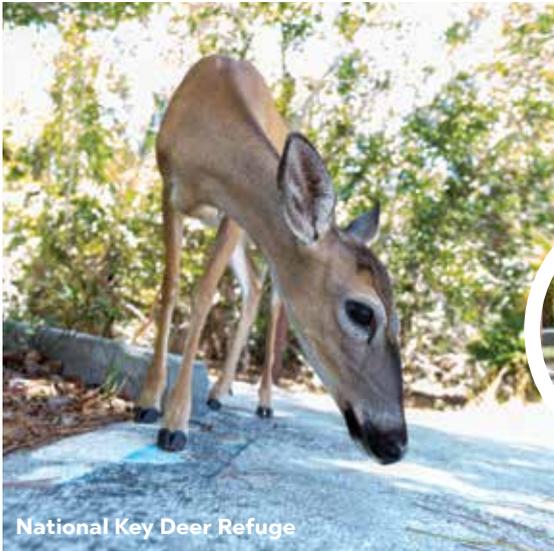
Rent a convertible, put the top down and drive the Overseas Highway to the Florida Keys, where you'll find yourself cruising above the sea itself. The Florida Keys, which are a 201-kilometre-long chain of islands connected by 42 bridges, offer more than just white sand beaches and palm trees – they're also home to rare animals, hidden hotels and surprising history.



Seven Mile Bridge in the Florida Keys



Robbie's Marina



National Key Deer Refuge



Ernest Hemingway House



HEMINGWAY HOUSE PARTY

Writer, boxer, sport fisherman, hunter...cat person? At **Ernest**

Hemingway House, an opulent Spanish Colonial-style home in Key West, you can explore the author's home and meet the 40-50 six-toed cats (also known as polydactyls) that descend from his original cat, Snow White.

MEET THE KEY DEER

On **Big Pine Key**, delicate fawns tiptoe among palm trees. These gentle, almost mythical-seeming creatures appear out of place in such a tropical environment, and yet this is their home. Key deer, which are an especially tiny subspecies of white-tailed deer, can only be found in the Florida Keys. Their population is estimated at approximately 950. Head to the **National Key Deer Refuge** where you're most likely to encounter these curious animals in their natural habitat.

WILDLIFE WATERING HOLE

Located within National Key Deer Refuge is a site that's just as uncommon as the Key deer themselves: A freshwater lake. Known as the **Blue Hole**, the lake is actually a limestone quarry which was used to build the surrounding roads. Make the short stroll through a dense forest to reach it and you'll be rewarded with the sight of alligators blissfully floating in their own personal oasis.

FLEA MARKET FINDS

Shop like a local at the **Big Pine Key Flea Market**. This unassuming, no-frills community weekend market is a family-operated destination for fresh Key limes, flowers and offbeat souvenirs. Vendors are apt to change, but if you're lucky enough to visit when the **Cone Republic** ice cream truck is around, you'll be treated to rotating flavours topped with coconut sprinkles.

A TV DINNER

The **Morada Bay Beach Café** is an Islamorada hide-away where you can savour fresh seafood just steps from the sea. Stop in for sunset and grab a table right on the sand. You might recognize the pristine, palm-studded beach and adjacent **Moorings Village & Spa** from the Netflix series *Bloodline*, which used the elegant property as the backdrop to the Florida noir drama.

HAND-FEED TARPON

Robbie's Marina of Islamorada is a roadside attraction with a curious local tradition. Visitors gather on a dock with buckets in-hand and toss bait fish to teeming schools of enormous tarpon in the water below. For \$2.25 USD admission plus \$4 for a bucket of fish, you can take part in the spectacle. Watch out for opportunistic pelicans prowling beside you in hopes of scoring a handout.

SALTY DREAMS

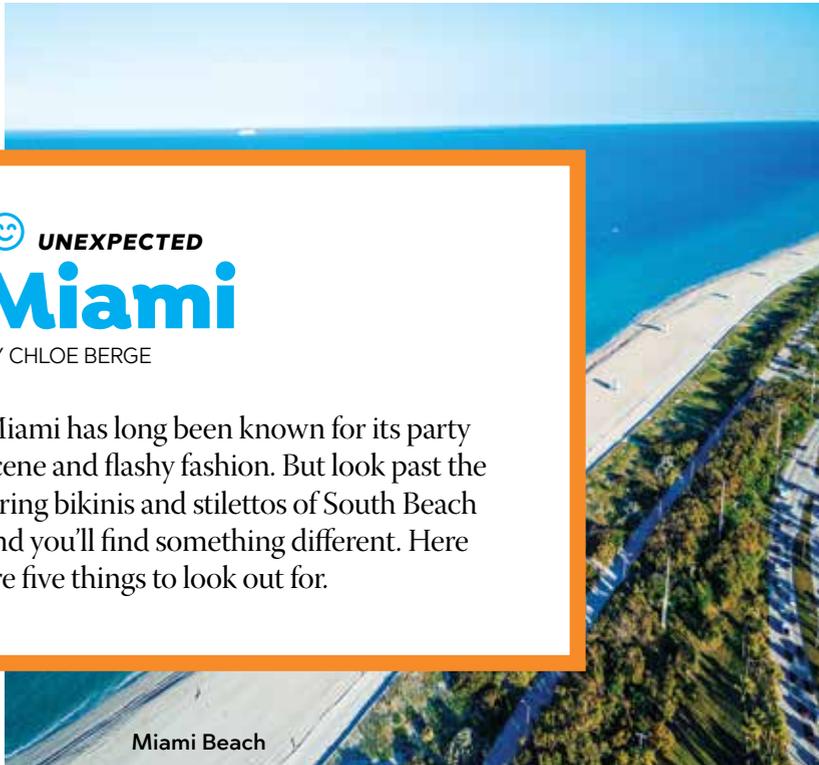
Why stay waterfront when you can sleep beneath the waves? Located in Key Largo, **Jules' Undersea Lodge** offers underwater accommodations for travellers who aren't afraid of cabin fever. This unique hotel is the only one of its kind in the world. Guests must scuba dive to their rooms, which are 6.4 metres beneath the surface of Emerald Lagoon. Once settled in your room, order underwater pizza delivery and enjoy a slice while you watch fish swim through the tropical mangrove habitat outside the window.

Peter W. Cross / VISIT FLORIDA

UNEXPECTED
Miami

BY CHLOE BERGE

Miami has long been known for its party scene and flashy fashion. But look past the string bikinis and stilettos of South Beach and you'll find something different. Here are five things to look out for.



Miami Beach



The Bass Museum

INSTA-WORTHY ICE CREAM

Sometimes it's the little things we remember most from a trip. At **Taiyaki**, soft serve ice cream is dressed up in a fish-shaped cone and topped with a fondant unicorn horn. Taiyaki honours the centuries-old importance of tai fish in Japanese culture, where tai-shaped cookies and cakes are still given out at weddings and other celebrations as a symbol of good luck. Snap a picture quickly before it melts.

BOUTIQUE STAYS

For an alternative to Miami's string of glitzy high-rise hotels, head to one of **Life House's** newly opened boutique accommodations. Locations on South Beach and in Little Havana draw design inspiration from fictional characters who might have once lived there. Life House embraces a social vibe with co-working spaces and cafés serving fresh food inspired by the vibe of the surrounding neighbourhood. Details like La Labo toiletries and retro room decor make you feel instantly at home.

NAKAI CUISINE

Celebrity Chef Kurt Zdesar's restaurant, **Chotto Matte**, specializes in modern Nakai cuisine, a Japanese-Peruvian fusion. Situated on South Beach's tony Lenox Avenue, the menu takes the best of both countries' food and reimagines them in dishes such as sashimi topped with Peruvian corn and potato, dumplings stuffed with pork, prawn and cassava, and grilled octopus served over a sweet potato purée. The chef's choice tasting menu, which includes nine small plates, gives the full range of Nakai flavours, and ends with a surprise dessert like mochi ice cream.

NEW NEIGHBOURHOODS

Miami is perpetually reinventing itself, so keep an eye out for emerging neighbourhoods set to be the next hot spot. Not long ago, Wynwood was a place most avoided and now it's one of the city's trendiest locales. In **Little River**, on the outskirts of Little Haiti, there's a similar transformation happening. The formerly industrial area is welcoming young creatives and new businesses. Start your day with slow-pour coffee from **Imperial Moto Café** before checking out the modern galleries that dot the streets, like Emerson Dorsch and Bill Brady. Shop for contemporary streetwear at **Forty Five Ten** and peruse fine art-inspired floral arrangements next door at **ROSE COLOURED**. For now, Little River's rebirth is still a whisper, so experience these spots before the crowds arrive.



Wynwood District

MODERN ART

The annual **Art Basel** event established Miami as a key player on the international art scene, but modern art in the city is a year-round affair. Stop by **The Bass Museum** to take in work by contemporary artists or head to nearby **ARTECHOUSE** for immersive, multimedia exhibits you can interact with. Stroll past the vibrant murals of the **Wynwood District** before heading to the adjacent **Rubell Family Collection** to take in one of North America's largest private art collections, which includes works by Cindy Sherman, Jeff Koons and Keith Haring.

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Fort Lauderdale

BY ALYSSA SCHWARTZ

Less boisterous but every bit as sophisticated as neighbouring Miami, Fort Lauderdale offers much more than just great beaches. Visit the city for many reasons, from its quiet, picturesque canals to its happening art and craft beer scenes. Though it's home to one of the busiest cruise ports in the world and attracts more than 13 million visitors a year, the vibe is utterly laid-back and totally unpretentious.



Fort Lauderdale Beach



Himmarsee Canal

THE VENICE OF AMERICA

When you think of getting out on the water in Fort Lauderdale, you probably think of the beach. But the city is also home to a 265-kilometre maze of canals, earning it the nickname the “the Venice of America.” These meandering channels date back 100 years and are a great way to glimpse some of the city’s most remarkable mansions and yachts, otherwise tucked away from view. While you can stroll alongside the canals in many spots, the best way to experience these romantic waterways is right on the water, whether via kayak, a water taxi or motorized tour boat.

CRAFT BEER BOOM

“Hard to find, easy to drink,” is the motto at **LauderAle**, one of nearly four dozen nano- and microbreweries and craft brew pubs along the **Greater Fort Lauderdale Ale Trail**. Minutes from the airport and Port Everglades, the design of **LauderAles**’s 1,500-square-foot taproom and outdoor beer garden matches its industrial location; the brewery’s bootstrapping owners built the facility out of recycled pallets, railroad ties and shipping containers. There are 30 rotating taps for thirsty patrons to explore.

FOLLOW THAT BIRD!

Weaving its way through **FAT Village**, an arts and culture district in downtown Fort Lauderdale, the **Mockingbird Trail** melds South Floridian flora and fauna with public paintings and sculptures, and a hip urban vibe. The 13-kilometre path includes a series of sculptures, by Florida-based artist Valeria Yamamoto that act as a scavenger hunt that tells the story of Florida’s mythical urban-dwelling state bird.

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

Discover how the other half lives – or used to live – with a visit to one of Fort Lauderdale’s historic mansions, which are open to visitors. The city’s history comes to life at **Stranahan House**, one of the oldest residences in Florida and the former home of Fort Lauderdale pioneer Frank Stranahan, who originally built it in 1901 as a trading post and community hall. At **Bonnet House Museum & Gardens**, you can stroll the oceanfront 1920s-era estate of artist Frederic Clay Bartlett and his wife, Evelyn Fortune Lilly. The artists’ own work, along with a collection that includes pieces from Picasso and Gauguin, are on display inside, while the 14-hectare gardens are lush with orchids, tropical foliage and wildlife.

DRINKS, ELEVATED

For some of Fort Lauderdale’s best cocktails and views, take the elevator to the 25th floor of the retro-luxe **Dalmar** hotel. There, the team behind New York City’s famed **Death & Co.** cocktail lounge shakes up tropical riffs on classic tipples, from the **Apocalypso**, made with Plantation 3 Star Rum, cachaça, mango, lime and mint, to the **A1A**, named for Florida’s main oceanfront thoroughfare.

THE SEAGATE HOTEL & SPA

Located in charming Delray Beach, The Seagate Hotel & Spa is an elegant and intimate, 154-room boutique hotel. The luxurious property is located on buzzing Atlantic Avenue, just steps from the beach. To properly unwind, add a treatment at Seagate’s on-site, award-winning spa and make a dinner reservation at The Atlantic Grille, Delray Beach’s premier seafood restaurant.

When guests check in, they also receive member privileges at The Seagate Beach Club, a private oceanfront club just down the street from the hotel. (Complimentary transportation is included.) Lounge poolside or lay out on the beach at this chic, British Colonial-style club with distinctly Bahamian accents.



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 **UNEXPECTED**

Martin County

BY HOLLY V. KAPHERR

Florida boasts the most coastline in the continental U.S. It's a distinction that attracts sun worshippers, surfers and shell-seekers, crowding out some of the state's most popular strands. Martin County, on Florida's southeast coast, is one of the few spots with virtually unspoiled beaches and where urban-adjacent wilderness still feels untamed.



Martin County's Atlantic Coast



The Environmental Studies Center



Downtown Stuart



Kemp's ridley sea turtles

PADDLE SAFARI

Take a kayak eco-tour on the **Indian River Lagoon**, which is home to 4,300 species of flora and fauna, including about 50 that qualify as threatened or endangered. You'll get up-close-and-personal with manatees, wood storks, sandhill cranes and peregrine falcons, so wildlife enthusiasts should make sure they've got their cameras at the ready. Venture out with **Zeke's Surf and Paddle** or **Go Clear Kayaking** for a guided tour or have a kayak rental delivered to your launch site of choice by **Native Water Sports**.

LEARNING COMES NATURALLY

Martin County is a touchpoint for environmental research and conservation. Learn about Florida's rich, biodiverse habitats at **The Environmental Studies Center** in Jensen Beach, home to loggerhead sea turtles, gopher tortoises, a juvenile alligator, freshwater turtles and a touch tank. Another esteemed facility, the **Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center**, has a tank where you can witness a "feeding frenzy" and touch or feed a stingray. Amble along a nature trail and through a butterfly garden and check out the massive 2,800-cubic-metre game fish lagoon.

GET YOUR FEET WET

Lay out a blanket at **Bathtub Beach** if you're looking for a spot to wade, snorkel or lounge in the surf. The southernmost beach on Hutchinson Island is a favourite for all ages. At low tide, the reef and rock formations protect the inland waters, which are warmed by the sun's rays. Spot coastal critters like sand crabs, pelicans and plenty of gulls.

KITSCHY KITCHEN

Dine in at **Harry & the Natives** in Hobe Sound, an eclectic, unfussy eatery serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. The menu features down-home cooking. For a real taste of Florida, try the conch fritters, the mahi Reuben sandwich and smoked fish dip. Most evenings, the restaurant features live music and entertainment on the covered patio in the back.

ART WALK

Martin County might not be top of mind for art, but in Stuart's historic downtown district, a bevy of galleries featuring local and regional artists have popped up along the town's main thoroughfare. Visit the **Rare Earth Gallery**, in business since 1976, which features the handmade artwork of 45 artists, all priced to take home. At **Gallery 36**, art lovers find photographic fine art prints emphasizing the area's natural beauty. **Geoffrey C. Smith Galleries** exhibits sculptures with stunning pieces from the nationally recognized bronze sculptor and photographer. Spot the Stuart Sailfish, a 5.7-metre monument in downtown Stuart, created by this master of the craft.

TURTLE TREK

Martin County's shores are home turf for the green, leatherback, loggerhead and Kemp's ridley sea turtles that come ashore to lay their eggs, usually returning as close as possible to their own birthplaces. The season starts in the spring and lasts until the end of October. In the springtime, watch in the evenings and after dark for female sea turtles to come ashore, dig their nests and shuffle back into the water. In autumn, the baby turtles emerge for the world's cutest conga line to the ocean.

This year, take time to create memories.

You remember it, don't you? The family beach vacation: miles of blue water, sand castles at your feet, a sea breeze blowing your hair back, and not a cell phone or a skyscraper in sight. This summer, plan a family trip to a place where memories come naturally, and time isn't the only thing that's preserved.

Plan your trip at DiscoverMartin.com

UNEXPECTED

Okeechobee County

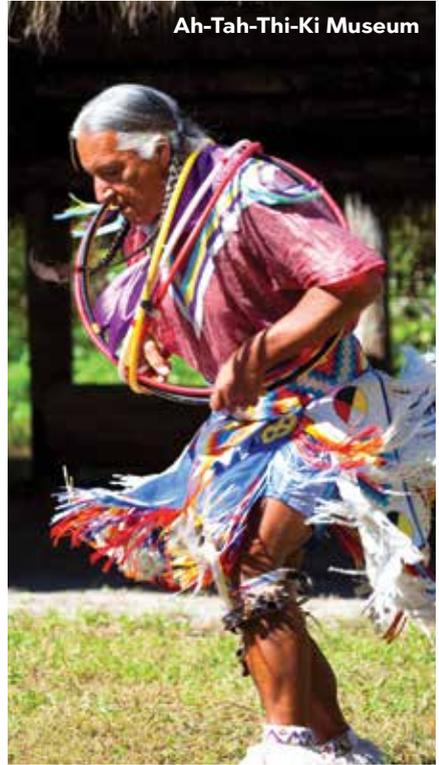
BY JENNIFER AGRESS

Let's be honest, when you hear the word "Okeechobee," you probably think of the lake. (Which is valid – Lake Okeechobee is the largest freshwater lake in Florida, so it stands to be recognized.) What most visitors don't know, however, is that there are plenty of places to explore and activities to try all around that famous lake.





Okeechobee Battlefield Historic State



REACH OUT AND TOUCH HISTORY

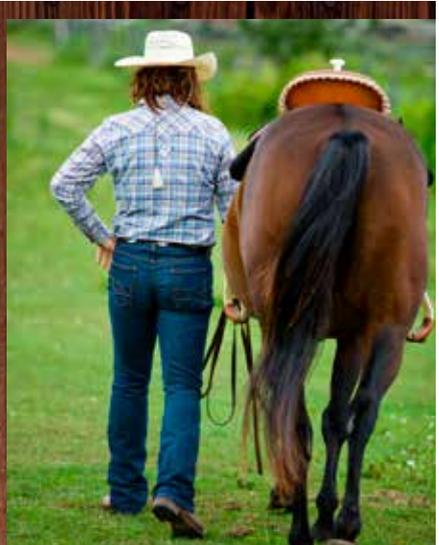
During the Second Seminole War, about 800 U.S. soldiers clashed with several hundred local Seminole and Miccosukee peoples. Named The Battle of Okeechobee, this conflict took place on Christmas Day in 1837 along the northern edge of Lake Okeechobee, at a place now called **Okeechobee Battlefield Historic State Park**. That fateful battle was considered a turning point in the war and because of it, the site was designated a National Historic Landmark on July 4, 1961. Come enjoy its storied parkland, go birding or geocaching, lay out a picnic, hike or simply enjoy a beautiful day outdoors. The park is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday, and historic battle re-enactments play out every February.

WINNER WINNER CHICKEN DINNER

During your next trip to Okeechobee, visit **Seminole Casino Brighton** to test your luck at more than 400 slot and gaming machines, poker and high stakes Bingo. This 2,508-square-metre casino, which sits in the heart of the Brighton Indian Reservation, has a full-service restaurant (serving “the best steak on the lake”), a lounge and live music each weekend. Because of its remote location, the casino offers the luxuries of big city gaming with an intimate, neighbourhood feel. Don't leave without visiting the nearby **Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum** to learn about Seminole culture and to peruse more than 180,000 unique artifacts and archival items.

GET BACK TO NATURE

The sprawling **Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park** is home to the largest remaining stretch of Florida dry prairie. Inhabited by an impressive roster of endangered plants and animals – including Florida grasshopper sparrows, crested caracaras and burrowing owls (three birds that are very hard to find) – this state-protected park offers endless opportunities for birding and stargazing. There are also 161 kilometres of dirt roads that are well suited for hiking, bicycling and horseback riding, and plenty of wetlands and shady hammocks, too. In fall and winter, travellers can hop on ranger-led prairie buggy tours to view the most remote parts of the preserve. If you want to stay longer, you most certainly can; camping facilities are available on-site.



CAST A LINE

Fun fact: Lake Okeechobee is also known as the “Black Bass Capital of the World.” Take a freshwater fishing trip on Lake Okeechobee to see why. Guided by the world-class fishing guides at **Okeechobee Bass Fishing Guide**, charters can last from four hours to five days. Anglers will fish for everything from largemouth bass and crappie to bluegill, shellcracker and sunshine bass.

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 UNEXPECTED

Sebring

BY CHLOE BERGE

The city of Sebring, in Central Florida, may be known for its namesake raceway, but the town's natural beauty and burgeoning locavore scene are charming another type of traveller. Here are five ways to uncover Sebring's hidden gems.



Highland Hammocks State Park



Airboat Wildlife Adventures

TASTE THE COUNTRYSIDE

A visit to **Sugar Sand Distillery** is as much about the surrounding postcard landscape as it is about the distillery's smooth, handcrafted spirits. A drive down a quiet, bucolic highway leads the way, before travellers turn off into Sugar Sand's sprawling sugar cane fields. At the centre of the farm is the tasting bar and distillation room, where one of the bartenders will happily give you a tour and demonstration. Savour swigs of watermelon moonshine and limoncello (infused with lemons from the owners' backyard) as the late afternoon sun winks between the towering sugar canes.

GATOR SAFARI

No trip to Florida would be complete without setting sights on a couple of alligators. **Airboat Wildlife Adventures** puts a twist on the traditional gator safari by taking visitors out on an amphibious boat. Owner Jon Scott immerses guests in Sebring's swamplands, navigating circuitous waterways flanked by old-growth oak trees draped in Spanish moss. When you least expect it, the boat will veer off course and climb a muddy embankment or rumble over a rocky island, while gators, turtles and spoonbills watch from the reedy sidelines.

PRETEND YOU'RE IN PARIS

Sebring resident Tiffany Nier-Cadzow liked Paris so much when she visited that she decided to open her own Parisian-inspired wine bar in her hometown. Stop by **Mon Cirque** for a glass of jammy red wine or a pint of Florida cider. The plush velvet sofas and chandelier-lit room were made for lingering and the spot has become a local, pet-friendly favourite.



Sebring Pier



Mountain biking

FOREST BATHING, THE FLORIDA WAY

Sebring may not have the groves of ancient cedars usually associated with a therapeutic walk in the woods, but you can still get out in nature at **Highland Hammocks State Park**. Flat, dry trails carved through the cinnamon-coloured earth are perfect for mountain biking or hiking. Keep your eyes peeled for Florida scrub jays and other bird species flitting about the shrubbery. You'll be accompanied by alligators and brown anole lizards along the Cypress Swamp Trail, where leggy trees and lush cabbage palms offer a respite from the Florida sun.

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME

Sebring Soda & Ice Cream Works harkens back to the 1950s with its retro diner styling. One almost expects to find the slick-haired, leather jacket-clad cast of *Grease* cozied up in one of the booths. The shop's focus is exclusively on real, premium ice cream and craft soda, boasting 300 different types of the latter, some made right in Sebring. On weekdays, the family-friendly spot is packed with kids angling for an after school treat like a creamsicle float (a sugar coma-inducing combination of orange cream soda and vanilla ice cream) or a banana split. Sugar spikes aside, there's something wholesome about the scene here that evokes a simpler time from decades ago.

CHOOSE YOUR SPEED

VACATION At your pace in Sebring, the off-the-beaten-path, affordable Florida destination you won't want to miss. Just 60 miles south of Disney, Sebring offers a myriad of unique attractions and activities that let you choose your own vacation speed.

visit **Sebring**
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 **UNEXPECTED**

Fort Myers & Sanibel Island

BY JILL GLEESON

Located two-thirds of the way down Florida's Gulf Coast, Fort Myers is perhaps best known as the gateway to a bevy of beautiful islands. But be assured, this historic, deeply charming town is way more than the sum of its sun and surf.



Minnesota Twins at Hammond Stadium



Sanibel Island

BASEBALL & BEER SHAKES

Sure, the Blue Jays are opening fancy new spring training digs next year in Dunedin, Florida, but this March, Fort Myers offers the chance to catch two American MLB teams tune up for summer: The Boston Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins. Not a baseball fan? You might want to head to the Twins' **Hammond Stadium at CenturyLink Sports Complex** anyway. Concessions there serve up "beer shakes" that are the stuff of legend, served in flavours which include Key lime, root beer and orange creamsicle. All are made from different brews, along with ice cream and a few other ingredients. If you want to get really fancy, you can even ask for a dollop of whipped cream on top.

GARDENS OF GENIUS

Fort Myers was once the vacation home of two of history's most celebrated Americans: Inventor Thomas Edison and automobile magnate Henry Ford. The friends owned properties next to each other, which are open to the public as the **Edison and Ford Winter Estates**. The on-site museum fascinates, but be sure to leave time to wander the eight hectares of stunning botanical gardens. Edison and Ford imported many of the 400 species currently on display to study or simply enjoy, including the soaring royal palms that line the walkways.



Edison and Ford Winter Estates

MAKE FRIENDS WITH MANATEES

Forget panthers and alligators, there is no Florida critter more iconic than the mellow manatee. If you have a hankering to hang out with these gentle giants, head to Fort Myers' seven-hectare **Manatee Park** during the winter months, when they swim inland from the Gulf in search of warmer waters. The park offers nature trails and a viewing dock but we recommend renting a kayak or canoe to paddle alongside the sweet sea cows which ply the serene waters of the Orange River's non-captive, refuge environment.

PRACTICE THE SANIBEL STOOP

Sanibel Island famously serves up some of the best seashell pickings in the world thanks to unique geographical features like an underwater shelf, which allows currents to gently deposit shells on shore intact. But did you know Sanibel is also home to the **Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum**, the only such institution in the U.S.? Currently in the midst of a renovation, the museum will reopen a much-anticipated new aquarium in early 2020 which will feature exhibits of octopus, cuttlefish, squid and other mollusks.

SUBLIME KEY LIME

There are Sunshine State residents who spend their entire lives trying to track down the perfect Key lime pie. Made from the juice of the small but flavourful Key lime and sweetened condensed milk, this dessert is a Florida staple – and one of the tastiest versions can be found at Fort Myers' **McGregor Cafe**. Boasting a dense, moist crust and a rich, nicely tart filling, this slice of heaven is the real deal. For extra enjoyment, grab a piece out on the restaurant's lovely little patio.

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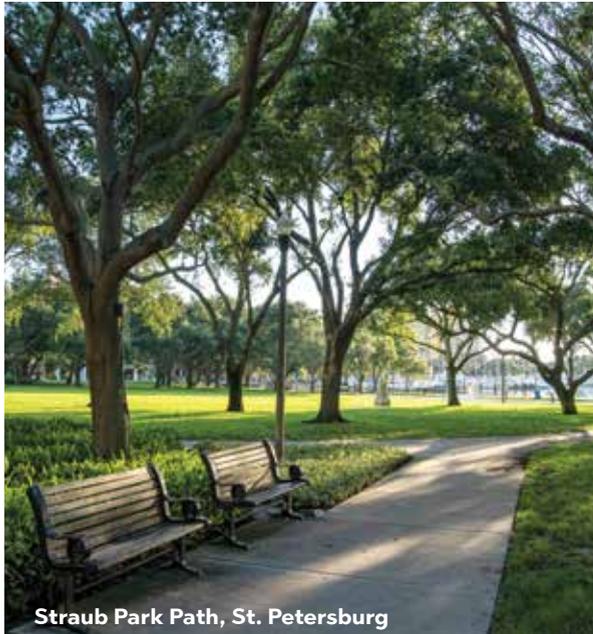
St. Pete/Clearwater

BY JENNIFER AGRESS

Sitting on the Gulf of Mexico's sparkling-clear shores, St. Pete and Clearwater offer a treasure trove of art, culture, food, craft beer and more. Don't believe us? Come sip, savour and see it for yourself.



Clearwater Beach



Straub Park Path, St. Petersburg



Central Avenue, St. Petersburg



Craft Beer Trail

SIP THE GULP COAST

Florida might not be the beer state that Colorado is, but it does have the “Gulp Coast.” **The St. Pete/Clearwater Craft Beer Trail** runs from Tarpon Springs to St. Pete and includes 35-plus homegrown breweries. The area’s signature beer is the Florida Weisse, a spin on a Berliner Weisse. It’s a tart brew, low in alcohol, carbonated and made with hints of Key lime, dragon fruit or even passionfruit. Try that and other local brews (like a mango-habanero IPA) on the trail, and don’t forget to grab a Craft Brewery Passport 2.0 when you do. With the passport in hand, you’ll meet local tastemakers and take brewery tours. To imbibe responsibly, book a tour or arrange a rideshare. Use the code GULPCOAST to get up to \$15 USD off your first Uber ride.

AN OPEN-AIR ART AFFAIR

Did you know downtown St. Pete is home to 70-plus wall murals? It all started back in 2010, when Central Avenue’s 600 block was in disarray, and the walls surrounding a slew of independent galleries, boutiques and restaurants became a blank canvas for the area’s best graffiti artists and muralists. The area has since been revitalized and the art stuck. Today, visitors can head to **Florida CraftArt** gallery on Saturday mornings to take a Walking Mural Tour of what has been dubbed “St. Pete’s outdoor museum.”

ATTEND THE HIGHLAND GAMES

Okay, not the *actual* Highland Games – the 54th-annual **Dunedin Highland Games & Festival**. Modeled after the real thing, visitors can expect Scottish bagpipe bands, a parade of dignitaries, live music and dancing, all weekend long. Taking place each April, the games themselves kick-off with the Highland Trail 5K Run, followed by solo piping and drumming competitions, performances by Scottish bagpipe bands and traditional Highland dancing contests. Athletes from all over the world will compete in traditional Highland games like the caber toss and hammer throw, in front of an esteemed panel of judges. Through it all, onlookers dine on authentic Scottish food, drink imported beer and spirits, and shop for Celtic goods.

LA DOLCE VITA

You haven’t lived until you’ve eaten your way through **Mazzaro’s Italian Market**. Occupying a colourful, can’t-miss building in an unassuming part of town, a single step inside transports shoppers all the way to Italy. Part food hall, part gourmet market, it’s filled with Italian delicacies. Think: Fresh-roasted coffee, handmade pastas, made-to-order paninis, pastries, gelato, Italian cheese, olives and wine. After you pick your poison, head out back to the first-come, first-served picnic tables and then *mangi, mangi, mangi!*

ADMIRE CHIHULY’S GLASS ART

Downtown St. Pete is home to so much of world-renowned artist Dale Chihuly’s glass art that the city created a permanent collection to house it. Find the 18+ piece **Chihuly Collection** at the **Morean Arts Center**. Travellers will know they’ve arrived when they see the six-metre glass “rocks” sculpture outside the foyer. After perusing the artwork, wander over to the Morean Arts Center for glass blowing classes and demonstrations.

Pete Cross, Patrick Farrell

 **UNEXPECTED**

Tampa Bay

BY LORI A. MAY

What's the best way to enjoy Tampa's revitalized vibe? First, lean into the past with vintage cocktails, Gilded Age nostalgia and Cuban influences. Then, bite into the city's fresh and innovative offerings: A buzzing mixed-use food hall-market, indie roasters and crafty beer makers.

Tampa Riverwalk



Ybor City



Armature Works



Coppertail Brewing Co.

FOOD HALL FRENZY

Tampa takes its food halls seriously. **Armature Works** in historic Tampa Heights is a restored mixed-use facility packed with culinary treats high and low, from fine dining to kiosk quick. Discover unbor-ing flavours at **Astro Ice Cream Co.** (Tampa guava cream cheese, anyone?) or tuck into some Southern-inspired fare at **Steelbach**, where aged beef is prepared in a 1,000-degree Celsius Florida oak-fired grill. Admire the views along Hillsborough River before exploring artisan home goods at **A.W. Mercantile** in this trendy industrial community market. For another food hall twist, visit **The Hall on Franklin** for happy hour cocktails, multi-vendor global cuisine and live music.

DO YOU BREW?

No matter your preference – craft beer or indie coffee roaster – Tampa has your back. The brewery scene dates back to 1896 when **Florida Brewing Company** first opened shop. Today, there are more than 50 breweries in Tampa. We recommend a pint of Free Dive, a beachy IPA from **Coppertail Brewing Co.**, or sample it all on a **Brew Bus Brewing** tour. Caffeine lovers should seek out **Buddy Brew's** Double Dog Espresso, try a honey processed coffee from **Kahwa Coffee Roasters** and get cozy with a cup from fourth-generation roasters **Naviera Coffee Mills Inc.**

Keir Magoulas

A TASTE OF CUBA

Take a stroll through **Ybor City**, a National Historic Landmark District known for its vibrant nightlife and unbeatable Cuban sandwiches. There's even an annual festival celebrating this signature combination of ham, pickles and mustard. Watch hand-rolled cigars being made at **Tabanero Cigars**, then dip back in time during a tour of **Ybor City Museum** to learn why this neighbourhood was once known as "the Cigar Capital of the World." Follow your nose along the patio-lined streets and settle in for people watching over a cup of rich Cuban coffee.

TIME TRAVELLER

Visit **The Henry B. Plant Museum** to travel back in time to the Gilded Age. The museum, now a National Historic Landmark, is housed in what was originally the Tampa Bay Hotel (c. 1891), an opulent, Moorish Revival resort that Plant built to anchor his railroad. A trip to the museum is both an examination of the well-heeled Victorian tourists of the era and a look at a post-Civil War America that was rapidly buoyed by industrialization and economic growth. Be sure to delight in the museum's elevator – it was the first to be installed in Florida and remarkably, it's still in working condition.

ICONIC COCKTAILS

Hotel Bar is a swanky lounge specializing in the re-creation of legendary cocktails made famous by international hotel bars. Don't bother dropping in for lunch; Hotel Bar opens after business hours and stays dimly lit into the wee hours. Savour a Sidecar, hailing from Bar Hemingway in the Ritz Paris or sip a Singapore Sling, whose origins trace back to Long Bar in the Raffles Singapore. Pair your classic hotel beverage of choice with an order of deviled eggs and marinated olives. Vintage cocktail dress is optional, but office gossip is definitely encouraged.



UNEXPECTED

Central Florida

BY JENNIFER AGRESS

Most visitors to Central Florida head straight for its famous theme parks but ask any local and they'll tell you there's more to the area than just roller coaster rides. Looking for something unique and fun to do? These options are just the ticket.



Cypress Gardens



Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo



Mountain biking trails



Streamsong Resort

SIP BLUEBERRY WINE

The first of its kind in Polk County, **True Blue Winery** is home to a seasonal mom-and-pop bistro restaurant, a working blueberry farm and – you guessed it – a winery. Located in Davenport, this spot is best known for its blueberry wines, all of which are made from berries grown right on site. Visitors should belly up to the bar to sample the wines for themselves, then pair a glass with a wood-fired brick oven pizza. Promising an experience that’s as fun as the wines are interesting, True Blue Winery hosts an annual blueberry festival each April.

TEE OFF IN “AUSTRALIA”

Located just 30 minutes south of Lakeland, **Streamsong Resort** doesn’t look like it belongs in Florida at all. Home to a 216-room luxury lodge and European-style grotto spa, this nature-ensconced resort is well regarded by golfers. Enthusiasts should play the 18 holes at Streamsong Black, a 2017-built, par 73 course designed by acclaimed course architect Gil Hanse. Designed to look like the Sandbelt of Australia, it’s filled with towering sand dunes, sweeping ridge views, rolling terrain and tall grass swaying in the wind.

GEAR DOWN

The League of American Bicyclists acknowledged Lakeland as a Bicycle Friendly Community and **Loyce Harpe Park** took that designation and ran with it. Off-roaders will love its 18 kilometres of mountain biking trails, most of which wind through old phosphate mining land, run up and down ridges and skirt scenic lakes. It wouldn’t be the great outdoors without some wildlife, so keep an eye out for Big Mamma. She’s a four-metre gator that notoriously calls the park home.

LIFE’S A GARDEN. DIG IT.

The world-renowned **Cypress Gardens** were once considered “Florida’s first theme park,” but today, they’re part of another one: **LEGOLAND® Florida**. Opened in January 1936 and featuring 8,000 varieties of flowers from 90+ countries, Cypress Gardens still contains remnants of its deep-rooted origins. There’s a Banyan tree that was planted in 1939 and the kitschy water ski shows that made the gardens famous in 1943 still occur regularly. (Except now the performers are LEGO pirates, not bikini-clad women.) This historic garden is free with admission to LEGOLAND® Florida.

SADDLE UP

For a Florida lodging experience like no other, travellers might book a room at **Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo**, near Lake Wales. At this 688-hectare dude ranch, guests can sleep in glamping tents, rail car cabins, RVs or a frontier-themed lodge. Take part in everything from horseback riding, campfires, nightly s’mores and swamp buggy rides to professional Saturday night rodeos, an on-site saloon, airboat rides, largemouth bass fishing, skeet shooting and even archery. There are activities for tots, too, like pony rides and a petting zoo.

Streamsong Resort – LC Lambrecht/VISIT FLORIDA

 UNEXPECTED

Crystal River

BY HOLLY V. KAPHERR

Fed by Kings Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, Crystal River offers one of west Florida's most beautiful natural landscapes, sheltering manatees, dolphins and a bevy of birds year-round.



Crystal River manatee

SWIM WITH SEA COWS

Crystal River is the only place on the continent where you can legally swim with and observe manatees. For an unforgettable aquatic adventure, we suggested a tour departing from **Plantation Adventure Center**. Guests are outfitted with a wetsuit, mask and snorkel and then ferried to Three Sisters Springs. It's an unchoreographed adventure that's completely nature-driven – you're on the manatees' turf. Your captain will swim alongside you while snapping photos which are made available for purchase back on shore. Wintertime (November through February) is the best time to visit, as that's when more than 400 manatees make their way from the chilly Gulf of Mexico to the springs' constant 22-degree Celsius waters.

ME TARZAN, YOU JANE

Soar through the canopy of **Florida Tree Top Adventure**, a suspended woodland challenge course featuring ziplines, obstacles and ropes courses. Were you born a competitor? The online "Bragging Board" invites guests to try and beat the best posted time, and leaders will have their name posted for all to see. The attraction is also home to **Soquili Stables at Faith Haven**, where equestrians of all levels can enjoy time with seven majestic Florida Cracker breed horses, known for their smooth gait and agility. Saddle up for a trail ride or a session in the training ring.

CATCH AND COOK

Florida's bays and the Gulf Coast teem with fish and shellfish, and there are plenty of opportunities to catch or collect your dinner. Crystal River is best known for

scalloping in the summer and blue crabbing in the cooler months. (Yes, they really are blue!) Guided scalloping excursions can be booked through **Plantation on Crystal River** – an activity the hotel describes as "an Easter egg hunt while swimming above shallow saltwater grass flats." Once you've collected your limit, your guide will deliver the haul to the kitchen to be served up fresh. Now *that's* what we call tide-to-table dining.

INDIGENOUS HISTORY

The 25-hectare **Crystal River Archaeological State Park** marks one of the longest continually occupied pre-Columbian Native American sites in Florida. Some 10,000 years ago, the Crystal River area was originally populated by Paleo-Indians. Now, visitors can visit the park to view six burial mounds, temple/platform mounds, a plaza area and a midden. Stop by the museum to see exhibitions displaying artifacts and comparative history displays.

CHEEKY MONKEY

In nearby Homosassa, guests will find an unlikely attraction: a "monkey detention centre" – of sorts – called **Monkey Island**. The story goes that Dr. John Hamlet, a polio researcher, brought the spider monkeys to live at (the now-named) Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park as retired research subjects. The monkeys weren't agreeable residents, though, and were seen swiping candy from children, snatching food from tourists and breaking into cars. Following the antics, the park transported the troop to Monkey Island, where visitors can now see the descendants of those monkeys playing freely, safe from tourists.



Rock Springs Run



Winter Garden



UNEXPECTED

Orlando

BY MIRIAM PORTER

You know sunny Orlando for its exceptional theme parks and exciting attractions but there is another side to this Central Florida city. Don't miss out on trendy neighbourhoods packed with hidden gems, art installations, unique dining experiences and even a few natural wonders.

STOP AND SMELL THE FLOWERS

You don't have to go far to immerse yourself in an urban botanical oasis. The 20-hectare **Harry P. Leu Gardens** is an Orlando treasure and a peaceful spot to rekindle your love for plants and flowers. Bring your camera to capture the many collections including woody-stemmed bamboo, an entire banana compilation, a spectacular citrus grove, fruit trees, pretty pink camellias, and herbs and vegetables to inspire your next meal.

GLASS HOUSE

There is no stone throwing from this gorgeous **Glass House**. Located in the Lake Nona neighbourhood, this life-size art installation is a glistening hidden gem. Imagine the sun shining down upon a kaleidoscope house made of reflective panes of stained glass. New York artist Tom Fruin, whose work has appeared across Europe, used reclaimed materials to create his rainbow masterpiece.

MURAL, MURAL ON THE WALL

Lace up your walking shoes for an excursion to Orlando's **Mills 50 District**. This funky urban neighbourhood is made up of culturally diverse and creative shops, galleries, venues and restaurants, all within a walkable community. Admire brightly coloured and professionally illustrated murals as they relate to Orlando living. Murals include flying birds, jogging people, comical characters, amusing animals, symbols of peace, and hearts and rainbows with "Love wins" messages. Artwork even decorates the neighbourhood's storm drains, utility boxes and dumpsters.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

Bring your appetite to **Market On South** in Orlando's **Milk District** and dine on delightful plant-based goodies. This shared market space serves up specialties made with local produce. Our pick: The Dirty South Scramble from **Dixie Dharma**, a dish made with fresh greens, squash, tofu, veggies and faro grains. Save room for colourful vegan cupcakes and cookies from **Valhalla Bakery**. With a full tummy, shop for sundry provisions and artisan crafts including cruelty-free soaps, candles, jewelry and distinctive clothing.

PEDAL THROUGH TOWN

Rent a bike and cycle along Orlando's longest paved bicycle trail in **Winter Garden**. Not far from downtown Orlando, this charming historic town is situated near beautiful Lake Apopka, an old citrus settlement. **West Orange Trail Bikes & Blades** offers hourly or daily bike rentals so you can explore the impressive 32 kilometre trail at your leisure. Trails are open from sunrise to sunset and will take you past lush fields and beneath forest canopies. Keep an eye out for roaming wildlife.

FLOAT YOUR BOAT

Rock Springs Run at **Kelly Park** is a natural lazy river and an under-the-radar paradise just a car trip away from city life. Admire crystal clear water as you leisurely make your way downstream past Amazon-like beauty on a kayak, paddleboard or floating tube. Search for wildlife along the riverbank among rustic pine trees beneath a sunny sky. If you dare, camp overnight along Rock Springs Run, where primitive and remote campsites are accessible only by canoe.

 **UNEXPECTED**

Kissimmee

BY VAWN HIMMELSBACH

Kissimmee is right next door to Disney World – so close, you can watch the nightly fireworks from your rental villa's terrace. It's also a quick drive to Universal Studios and Legoland. But there's a lot more to Kissimmee than theme parks, from vintage Americana to outdoor adventure.



Hot-air Balloon Rides



Lake Tohopekaliga at sunrise



Celebration

STEP BACK IN TIME

Many travellers base themselves in Kissimmee (with 22,000 vacation homes to choose from) and head out to nearby attractions. But after two years of extensive renovations, **Old Town Kissimmee** is an attraction unto itself. With seven hectares of tree-lined brick streets to wander, Old Town is a throwback in time, like stepping into a classic Florida town. Plus, there's free family-friendly entertainment and old-school carnival rides, like its iconic Ferris wheel. On weekends, people line the streets for a parade of hot rods, street rods and antiques during Friday's muscle car cruise and Saturday's classic car cruise.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

As a gateway to the Everglades, travellers can hike, bike, kayak or airboat their way through Kissimmee's great outdoors. But they can also get above it all for 360-degree views of forests, swamps and orange groves in a hot air balloon with **Orlando Balloon Rides**. Adrenaline junkies can jump out of a plane with **Skydive City** or hang glide at 610 metres with **Wallaby Ranch**. For something truly out of the ordinary, **Stallion 51** lets pilot wannabes take control of an authentic dual-cockpit WWII vintage aircraft – these aren't simulators; they're the real deal.

ELEVATED EATS

Theme parks often bring to mind foot-long hot dogs and litre-sized cups of fountain pop. While theme parks have stepped up their culinary game, Kissimmee's restaurant scene continues to grow and diversify. Over in Disney Springs, celebrity Chef Wolfgang Puck recently brought his laid-back California cuisine to Central Florida with **Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill**. At ICON Park, new Executive Chef Francisco Galeano is expanding the popular **Tapa Toro** (a tapas bar and paella pit), while **Estefan Kitchen**, a soon-to-open restaurant and nightclub operated by Gloria and Emilio Estefan, will bring the flavours of Cuba to Margaritaville Resort's Sunset Walk.

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Kissimmee sits on the edge of the Everglades, which means...gators. There are several state parks and nature reserves in the area with near-guaranteed wildlife spotting that rivals any theme park animatronic animals. Opening December 21, is an expansion of Kissimmee's **Wild Florida Airboats** and **Gator Park**, which will unveil a new 30-hectare drive-through safari (drive your own vehicle or take a guided swamp buggy tour). A zip line will let adventure seekers soar above gators in scenic cypress swamps.

CYCLE THROUGH A STORYBOOK TOWN

Rent a bike in **Celebration** and pedal the quiet streets of this storybook town, designed as a Southern American village from the 1930s with Classical, Victorian and Colonial Revival architectural styles. The town, with a retro theatre and post office, is located on land once owned by Disney, but now part of Kissimmee. There's plenty of shopping and dining here, but it's also worth exploring the elevated boardwalks that wind through old-growth cypress to spot gators, deer and turtles.

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Where to stay



HOLIDAY INN CLUB VACATIONS AT ORANGE LAKE RESORT

This resort offers spacious villas with family-friendly amenities just minutes from Walt Disney World. **Perfect for:** Families with water babies. **By the numbers:** Seven pools, a 365-metre lazy river, nine restaurants and bars, a 32-hectare lake for watersports, three arcades, four golf courses and mini golf. **Book it:** To save 25%, call (866) 892-5890 and mention the Stay and Play discount code: **ILHK3**. Visit discoverhcv.com/stay-and-play for more information.

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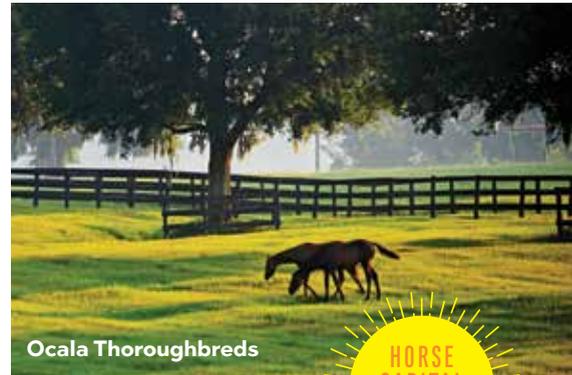
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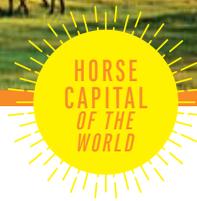
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Canyons Zipline & Canopy Tours



Ocala Thoroughbreds



 UNEXPECTED

Ocala/Marion County

BY HOLLY V. KAPHERR

Ocala is known as an equestrian mecca, and there are plenty of trail rides to experience in the area. But if you're looking for unexpected outdoor adventure, Marion County's forested landscape delivers.

AERIAL ADVENTURES

Experience the longest, fastest and highest ziplines in the state at **Canyons Zipline & Canopy Tours**, which includes nine ziplines, two rope bridges and a rappel to lower you back to Earth. For an experience you'll never forget, take flight at night. Full Moon Zip Tours are offered once a month, glow stick included.

FLORIDA'S OLDEST ATTRACTION

Glass-bottom boats have been a fixture at **Silver Springs State Park** since the 1870s, making it the oldest attraction in Florida. Later, the park gained fame in the 1930s when it served as the set location for the *Tarzan* films. Just as Florida's earliest tourists did, you can take a glass-bottom boat ride to peer beneath the crystal waters. You'll see aquatic plants, fish, birds and wildlife, as well as the odd movie prop. Don't leave before spotting the unique crooked palm tree, known to give good luck to those who take a photo with it.

NEED FOR SPEED

The **Don Garlits Museum of Drag Racing** is a must-visit for gearheads. Garlits, who is considered the father of drag racing, founded the museum in 1976. With nearly 300 cars on display between the Drag Racing and Antique Car buildings, visitors should allow two or three hours to properly appreciate the extensive car collection and sporting memorabilia.

MARKET MANIA

From Friday through Sunday, visit the **Market of Marion**, a massive indoor-outdoor antiques mall, flea and farmers' market. Shoppers can spend hours perusing the stalls searching for that special find while munching powdered-sugar dusted funnel cakes and other treats. Kids will love checking out the animals and livestock for sale, including chickens, ducks, rabbits and reptiles.

FLOAT THERAPY

Canoeing and kayaking is always good fun, but sometimes you just want to sit back, float and enjoy the view. Enter **Ride and Tube** in Dunnellon, where you can rent an inner tube for a leisurely four-hour float down the Rainbow River. Pro tip: Pack a foam cooler and stock it with beverages and snacks. Ride and Tube also provides a convenient shuttle service to and from the river.



 **UNEXPECTED**

Walt Disney World Resort

BY KIM PEMBERTON

Disney World might be in full celebration mode in anticipation of its upcoming 50th anniversary in 2021, but many new rides and attractions have already opened – with more set to come in 2020.

Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance

...IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY

In the new **Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge** at **Disney's Hollywood Studios** park, you never know when Chewbacca or a gang of stormtroopers will march past you. Take a seat in the cockpit of the **Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run** ride and try your hand at landing the craft that's said to be the fastest ship in the galaxy. **Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance** will have you battling to escape the clutches of the First Order. After all that action, you've likely worked up an appetite. Be sure to stop in at **Ronto Roasters**, which uses an old pod racer engine to roast sausages and pork on a spit. Delicious for any rebel guest.

A MOUSE-DO ATTRACTION

For the first time in Disney's history a ride starring Mickey and his friends will be featured. **Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway** at Disney's Hollywood Studios will take you on an unpredictable journey inside the wacky world of Mickey, based on the award-winning *Mickey Mouse* cartoon shorts. With Goofy driving the train, the dynamic duo will have you whizzing through this dark ride which has more hidden Mickeys throughout it than any other Disney attraction. The ride opens in spring 2020.

ELUSIVE EATS & TREATS

Pssst! Did you know there's a secretive food scene at Disney World? The next time you order, quietly ask for a mystery menu to score some rare fare – like a cinnamon bun burger or a rum-spiked Dole Whip. Whether or not you receive the menu is part of the hunt-and-peck fun. Search hashtags like #DisneySecretMenu on Instagram for helpful real-time hints on who is serving what.

LEAPS & BOUNDS

Step into a live acrobatic journey where an animator's desk becomes the stage and drawings come to life thanks to a new collaboration between **Cirque du Soleil** and **Disney World**. The production will feature new original acrobatic sequences and music in what has been described as a "love letter to the art of Disney" and "a celebration of life and all of its deliberate and unanticipated movements." The show premieres on April 17, 2020.

A SECRETIVE CLUB

Have you ever heard of **Club 33**? It was originally an exclusive club Walt Disney created in Disneyland to entertain his family and friends. The offering has since expanded to Disney World. What's behind the door? High-end lounges and restaurants, to name just a few of the member perks. Those who can't justify the five-figure cost might have more fun searching for the club locations. Hint: There's one in each of the four Disney World parks; look for a doorbell which may or may not be emblazoned with a logo.

FLOAT ON

You don't need Aladdin's Magic Carpet to float above Disney World, you just need to board the **Disney Skyliner**. This new aerial gondola connects Disney's Hollywood Studios and Epcot to four resorts: Disney's Riviera Resort, Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort, Disney's Pop Century Resort and Disney's Art of Animation Resort. It makes getting around a literal breeze.



UNEXPECTED

Universal Orlando Resort

BY JOHANNA READ

Whether it's your first visit or you've lost count, Universal Orlando aims to surprise and delight at its two Orlando theme parks, water park, and at its CityWalk entertainment area. Expect even more once the newly announced Epic Universe opens.

THE WIZARDING WORLD

Universal's entire **Wizarding World of Harry Potter** is a wonder. From the new Dark Arts projection show at Hogwarts Castle on the **Hogsmeade** side of **Universal's Islands of Adventure**, to **Diagon Alley** and the (air-conditioned and shaded) **Knockturn Alley** on the **Universal Studios Florida** side, to the **Hogwarts Express** which connects the two. (Watch for the chocolate frogs that hop by your compartment.) The extreme level of detail will make it difficult for Potterheads to want to explore the rest of the parks.

PEER BEHIND THE SCENES

Several of Universal's top attractions offer free "backstage" tours. If your timing is right and you ask nicely, you might get to visit **Men in Black: Alien Attack's** Immigration Room to get your photo taken with multi-armed aliens, walk beneath the dark tracks at **Revenge of the Mummy**, or go behind-the-scenes at **Race Through New York Starring Jimmy Fallon**.

FIND HIDDEN "EASTER EGGS"

As the parks constantly evolve, Universal creates subtle odes to attractions past. For example, the **Fast & Furious – Supercharged** motion simulator was built on the spot that formerly housed Beetlejuice Graveyard Revue. Hidden in the automotive displays that keep you entertained while you're queued are two Beetlejuice tributes: A toolbox belonging to the poltergeist and a green-haired bobblehead doll. Easter eggs are hidden throughout the parks; staff will help you spot them if you ask.

MAKE YOUR OWN S'MORES

Universal CityWalk Orlando's new restaurant, **Bigfire**, is located right outside Universal's Islands of Adventure. It features comfort foods and meats grilled over a specialty wood blend. After dinner, toast gourmet marshmallows at your table, then melt peanut butter cups and dark chocolate to make your own s'mores. And check out the staff uniforms. Are they trying to be Canadian?

A THRILLING SURPRISE

The newest *Harry Potter* ride is **Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure**, and it's a record-breaker. Your enchanted motorbike is Florida's longest coaster, the only U.S. free-fall coaster, and boasts seven launches (more than any other in the world). Taking riders both forward and backward on a 1,500-metre track through the Forbidden Forest, this three-minute ride is uproariously fun for kids and adults. Those who know the books well will kick themselves for not anticipating the surprise. Find the coaster in Hogsmeade at Universal's Islands of Adventures, next to **Flight of the Hippogriff**.

UNLOCK THE SECRET PLAYLIST

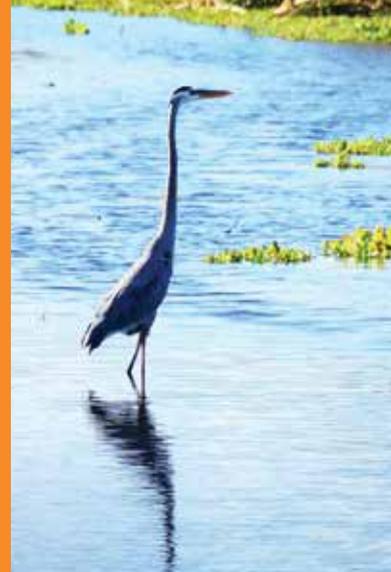
Aboard the **Hollywood Rip Ride RockIt** rollercoaster in **Universal Studios Florida**, riders are distracted from the 104 km/h speeds by singing along to a song they chose from a list of 30 tracks. Pro tip: Google the secret list of 60 additional songs (Wi-Fi is free at Universal) and memorize the code of your favourite hit. Take your seat and press the screen's coaster logo. After about 10 seconds, a keypad appears. Type in your three-digit code, press enter and get ready to rock 'n' ride. Universal's programmers have a sense of humour: Code 128 is U2's *Vertigo*.



Everglades National Park

BY KRISTA DIAMOND

Journey to a wilderness where alligators swim among mangrove roots; where saltwater meets and mixes with freshwater; and where pink-winged birds take flight against peach-coloured sunsets. Everglades National Park may be just an hour's drive from the neon-lit streets of Miami Beach, but it feels an entire world away.



TAKE A HIKE

The flat landscape of Florida is seldom associated with hiking, but there are a surprising number of trails in the Everglades. Start with **Snake Bight Trail** (6-km round-trip) which meanders through a tropical hardwood hammock to reach a bight (a bay within a bay). Here you'll find a boardwalk terminus, which is the perfect place for a relaxing lunch paired with birdwatching.

CRUISE INTO THE SUNSET

Drive deep into the heart of the Everglades and board a double-deck catamaran for a sunset cruise of Florida Bay with **Florida Adventures**. Stock up on snacks and drinks at the marina store and don't forget your binoculars and camera. The 90-minute tour, led by a trained naturalist, offers ample opportunities to spy dolphins, manatees and coral-feathered flocks of roseate spoonbills.

GO GLAMPING

In 2005, two hurricanes battered the beloved Flamingo Lodge, closing the only hotel in Everglades National Park. Fourteen years later, there's finally an option for those who don't want to BYO-Bed. The eco-tents at **Everglades Flamingo** offer an elevated camping experience to travellers who'd rather not sleep directly on the ground. Canvas tents sit atop a platform and are outfitted with a queen or two doubles, a set of chairs, bookshelf, fan, lamp, dresser and linens. Each has a deck and bath-house access. Rates start at \$90 USD per night based on double occupancy.

AIRBOAT ADVENTURE

In the Everglades, alligators lurk on the sides of roadways and peer up from the depths of slow-moving rivers. See them up-close by taking a ride on an airboat. Numerous options are available just beyond the official border of Everglades National Park, including **Gator Park**, which offers excursions every 20-30 minutes. For a slightly macabre post-tour meal, head to **Everglades Gator Grill** in Homestead and dig into gator tacos and bites.

PADDLE A KAYAK TRAIL

Like a hiking trail on water, the kayak/canoe trails in Everglades National Park are well-marked waterways that you can experience in an afternoon or as part of an overnight backcountry adventure. One memorable option is the eight-kilometre **Nine Mile Pond** route which winds through mangroves and golden sawgrass prairies. For a more challenging kayak trail, paddle **Hell's Bay** and experience mangroves punctuated by bays.

BIKE IT

The Everglades is often referred to as "the River of Grass" due to the fact it is made up of a wide, slow-moving river. However, there are still options for visitors who'd like to enjoy dry land activities among the area's 6,106-square-kilometres of wetlands. One such option is a bicycle tour of the **Shark Valley**. Rent a bike from **Shark Valley Tram Tours** and spend a leisurely afternoon pedaling a stretch of the 24-kilometre road that snakes through the valley, offering glimpses of birds, alligators and other wildlife.



😊 UNEXPECTED

Dry Tortugas National Park

BY KRISTA DIAMOND

Located 113 kilometres from the shores of Key West, a fortress rises from the Gulf of Mexico's turquoise waves. The mysterious, alluring Dry Tortugas National Park ranks among the least visited in the national park system and is only reachable by boat or seaplane, but it's well worth the journey.

Historic Coaling Pier Pilings

EXPLORE THE FORT

The Dry Tortugas is composed of seven islands, but the only one you're likely to visit is Garden Key, the island where **Fort Jefferson** is located. Spend some time wandering the eerily beautiful halls of this historic 19th-century fort, which was an advance post originally built to defend American shipping in the Gulf.

DON A SNORKEL

Ninety-nine per cent of the national park is underwater, so strap on your flippers, mask and snorkel to explore the shallows. Near the Historic Coaling Pier Pilings and just beyond the moat, you'll find coral reefs, parrot and angel fish, nurse sharks and more.

PITCH A TENT

A sportfishing enthusiast, Ernest Hemingway was a frequent visitor to the Dry Tortugas during his residency in Key West. Follow the legendary author's lead by spending the night on Garden Key. Make a campground reservation *well* in advance (we warn, it's pack-in, pack-out primitive camping) to enjoy sunset and dark sky stargazing in total solitude.



Fort Jefferson

GET THERE

Dry Tortugas National Park can be accessed by ferry, private boat or seaplane. Most visitors opt for a day trip via the **Yankee Freedom III** ferry, which departs from Key West and offers meals, bar service and an open-air deck. Tickets are \$180 USD round-trip per adult and include the national park entrance fee. Reservations should be made as far in advance as possible.

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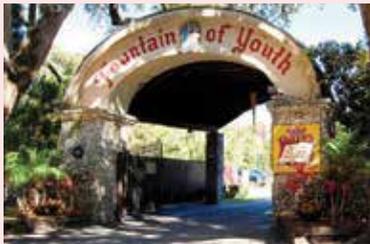
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 **UNEXPECTED**

Daytona Beach

BY JENNIFER AGRESS

Play a quick game of word association and you might associate Daytona Beach with spring break and NASCAR. We think it's time to add a few more wonderful connotations to travellers' perception of this Atlantic Coast gem.



Daytona Beach



Greek festival

SIP THE ALE TRAIL

The **Daytona Beach Ale Trail**, which stretches from just south of Daytona Beach to Ormond Beach and even includes DeLand, is made up of more than 20 taprooms, breweries and distilleries specializing in craft beer and artisan spirits. The first brewery to open on the trail was **Ormond Brewing Company**. Another interesting spot, **Beachside Brew Pub**, uses a five-barrel system to make 11 ales, stouts and porters. Also worth a visit, **Rock Bottom Restaurant & Brewery** is a three-storey restaurant, brewery and rooftop bar where guests can get perfect views of the races at **Daytona International Speedway**. Travellers should head to **Copper Bottom Craft Distillery** for rum or vodka, and **Odd Elixir MeadWorks**, the area's first and only local boutique winery, for craft mead.

OPA!

Would you believe us if we said you can travel to Daytona Beach to visit Greece? For 40+ years, the city has hosted an authentic Greek festival complete with traditional music, dance, food and drink. At this annual event, attendees can expect to see the Saint Demetrios Dancers performing ancient folk dances like the Hasapiko, Zeibekiko and Tsamiko. Shop for Greek gifts and jewelry while snacking on authentic gyros, pork souvlaki, spanakopita and stuffed grape leaves. (Everything is made from family recipes handed down through the generations.) The festival is held at St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church and is free for all to attend.



Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse

DINOS IN THE GARDEN

Marry history with natural beauty at **Dunlawton Sugar Mill Gardens**, a 4.8-hectare botanical garden with English sugar mill ruins dating back to the 19th century. Once home to a mid-century theme park, Bongoland, the gardens still have life-size dinosaur statues hidden between its native trees, bromeliads, ginger, cacti and butterfly gardens. There's a human sundial where visitors can stand next to the current month's tablet and raise their arms to cast a shadow that will point to the correct time. Dunlawton Sugar Mill Gardens is open from dawn until dusk.



Daytona Beach Ale Trail

RISE AND SHINE

Ponce Inlet is home to the tallest lighthouse in the Sunshine State, standing 53 metres tall. Visitors can ascend the 203 steps of the 1887-built **Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse** to admire breathtaking, 360-degree views of the Atlantic Ocean and the Intracoastal Waterway. There's an on-site lighthouse museum that holds one of the finest collections of restored Fresnel lenses in the world, in addition to Cuban rafts that washed ashore on Ponce Inlet. Travellers who tour the lighthouse should keep an eye out for Nelly, the resident cat. It's considered good luck if you spot her.

DRIVE THE BEACH

While in Daytona, visit "The World's Most Famous Beach," a moniker earned back in the 1920s. Spanning 37 kilometres of Florida coastline, this hard-packed white sand beach is one of the few in the nation that visitors can drive (yes, *drive*) right onto. Offering fun for all ages, there are beachfront splash parks, jungle gyms and beach volleyball courses, and plenty of vendors from which travellers can rent paddleboards, kayaks and surfboards.



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Weeki Wachee Springs State Park



Deep-sea charter fishing



UNEXPECTED

Hernando County

BY HOLLY V. KAPHERR

Paddling, fishing, birdwatching, manatee spotting and scalloping – these are all popular activities in Hernando County, where “adventure” is paramount. Head for the state’s forests, beaches and waterways for adventures that nature lovers will remember forever.



Dirt biking

CAST A LINE

Snap that iconic picture of yourself with a major catch on a fishing trip led by one of the county’s many expert charter fishing operators. A deep-sea charter into the Gulf of Mexico will likely yield grouper, cobia and snapper. Otherwise, cast a line into the inshore flats for redfish, tarpon and trout, or the inland lakes for largemouth bass, bream and crappie.

FROLIC WITH FAIRYTALE CREATURES

Think mermaids aren’t real? **Weeki Wachee Springs State Park** proves their existence with a performance you’ll only find one place in the world. The live show is not to be missed, with mermaids swimming their rendition of the fairytale classic, *The Little Mermaid*, in a 400-seat submerged theatre, three times daily, 365 days per year. Bring your swimsuit for a dip in the natural springs and dive headfirst down the four waterslides at **Buccaneer Bay** water park. Fun fact: Weeki Wachee has the deepest known freshwater cave system in the United States.

SHELL SHOCK

The catch-and-cook lifestyle is a way of being in Hernando County, where seafood is plentiful. During scallop season (July 1 through September 24) you can embark on a guided excursion with a fishing charter to collect bay scallops from the sea grasses that grow in the Gulf. You’ll receive a catch bag to put your scallops in, then you’ll head back to the shore where your crew will cook them up for dinner.

ATTENTION: ADRENALINE JUNKIES

Strap on a helmet and zoom off on an unforgettable afternoon of four-wheeling or dirt biking at **Croom Motorcycle Area**. In this 1,052-hectare parcel of Withlacoochee State Forest, miles of trails appeal to first-timers and experts alike. There’s a training area for newbies, groomed and graded trails for rookies and plenty of rough, natural terrain for seasoned drivers. No need to bring your own wheels; one of the nearby rental vendors can offer the right equipment for your size and skill level.



 **UNEXPECTED**

St. Augustine

BY SABRINA PIRILLO

Founded by Spanish explorers in 1565, St. Augustine is the oldest continually settled city in America. Here, old-world charm meets new and exciting horizons that extend far beyond the sun-kissed Atlantic.



Alcazar Courtyard



Salt Run



Kayak St. Augustine



Carriage on Aviles

OLD SCHOOL JEWEL

Historic tours of **Flagler College** highlight the centrepiece of Spanish Renaissance architecture. Built in 1887 by entrepreneur and railroad mogul, **Henry Flagler**, the former Ponce de Leon Hotel was the lavish setting for the presidents, dignitaries and royalty who stayed and played in St. Augustine. Today, Flagler College stands as a National Historic Landmark. The 79 Louis Comfort Tiffany stained glass windows that adorn the Dining Hall make it the largest such collection in the world. Keep your eyes peeled for the impressive white onyx timepiece that sits in The Flagler Room; it was one of the first publicly installed Thomas Edison clocks.

ZIP THE ZOO

The **St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park** is the only place in the world where you can see every living species of crocodylia, including the rare and mystical albino alligator. For the daring and adventurous, set out on Crocodile Crossing, a duo of courses spanning three hectares that will see you zip lining and navigating aerial obstacles while suspended some 10 metres in the air over alligator and crocodile enclosures. As a heart-stopping bonus, the Python Challenge plunges visitors into a 12-metre controlled free fall.

THE LIFE AQUATIC

A serene morning of stand-up paddleboarding along **Salt Run** (an estuarine tidal marsh) offers astonishing views of St. Augustine. Didn't pack your board? Rent one from **Kayak St. Augustine**. The tranquil backdrop is the ideal setting for potential dolphin, manatee and sea turtle sightings.

WORTH THE WHITE

If you can get past the legendary hauntings of Mrs. Worth at **O.C. Whites Seafood & Spirits** restaurant, one worthwhile cocktail is The Smokey Paloma. This version of the libation is served with a local twist: Gracias a Dios Mezcal and Q Grapefruit soda served on the rocks with a Datil pepper salt rim. The Datil pepper is native to St. Augustine and is *muy caliente* (that's *very hot*, in Spanish).

OVER THE BRIDGE WE GO

The Bridge of Lions is the main drawbridge used to access St. Augustine's **Historic District**. The oldest part of the city offers panoramic views of Matanzas Bay framed by buildings dating back to the 1700s, where most of the streets remain in their original structure. Drink from the **Fountain of Youth**, made famous by Ponce De Leon, and treat yourself to a Peace Pie, a combination of an ice cream sandwich and pie filling. You'll want a piece...or two.

LEGENDS & LORE

Founded more than four centuries ago, St. Augustine has plenty of haunted history to intrigue and delight. There's a **Creepy Crawl Haunted Pub Tour** for those who want "spirits with their spirits," an interactive, city-wide Mystery Tour with **Dark Endeavors** for puzzle lovers, and a Ghosts & Gravestones Night Tour offered by **Old Town Trolley Tours**. Listen closely for ghostly footsteps, wailing and inexplicable pungent aromas at the Old Jail.

George Kamper, Rhonda Lovett/FloridaHistoricCoast.com

 **UNEXPECTED**

Panama City Beach

BY CORRINA ALLEN-KIERSONS

Following Hurricane Michael's unwelcome arrival in the Florida Panhandle in 2018, coastal towns like Panama City Beach are putting everything they have into rebuilding their communities. The effort is paying off and the welcome mat has once again been rolled out for visitors.



Panama City Beach



WonderWorks



Lake Powell

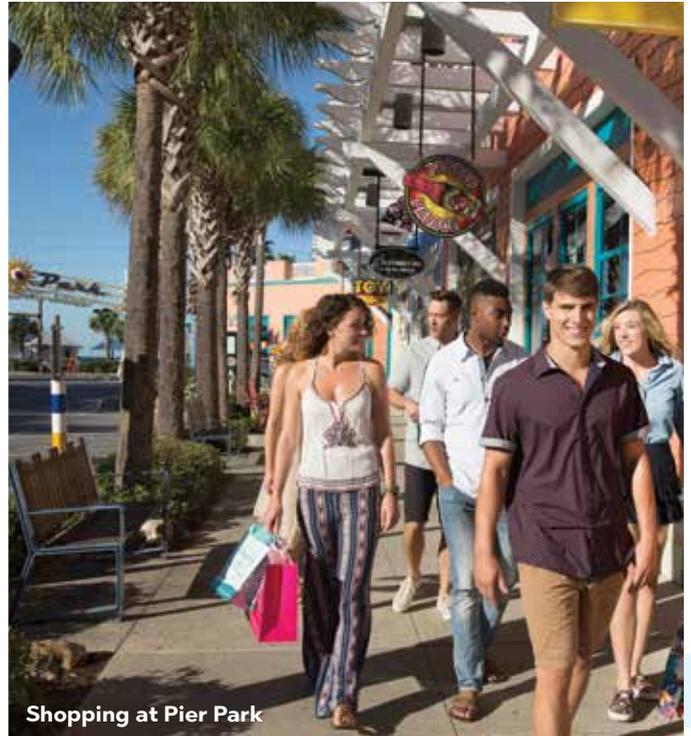
BEACHSIDE BITES

Once known as a destination for the wild antics of spring breakers, Panama City Beach is now home to a sophisticated dining scene. **Hang 5** beachside eatery serves up surf shack vibes, decadent seafood nachos dripping with queso and a mean blackened mahi mahi taco. Chef is always improvising and is currently experimenting with a tofu taco that even the meat-lovers on staff rave about. Best of all, there isn't a dish on the menu that doesn't pair perfectly with a glass of Hang 5's beachy Frosé. Over at **Firefly**, an upscale restaurant offering al fresco dining in a Mediterranean bistro setting, guests peruse an extensive wine list beneath the grand old oak tree. Savour masterfully grilled steak prepared in a 982-degree Celsius broiler and succulent lobster tails.

DO YOU TAKE SUGAR WITH YOUR BEACH?

The Florida Panhandle's white, sugar-fine sand is 97 per cent quartz, giving it a sparkly, reflective quality. Even on the hottest days, the squeaky sand remains magically cool to the touch. Topping the list of PCB's must-do activities is a visit to **Shell Island**, an 11-kilometre-long undeveloped barrier island. Cruise there with **Lagoon Pontoons** on a half-day excursion, while keeping an eye out for dolphins along the way. Once there, dig your toes into that luxurious sand or don a mask and snorkel in search of seahorses.

Keir Magoulas



Shopping at Pier Park

CHECK YOUR PULSE

For a slightly wilder ride (and a free, onboard comedy set courtesy of your captain and first mate), venture out with **Wild Thang Airboat Tours** to cruise through West Bay in search of gators.

Rain doesn't last long in Panama City Beach, but a drizzly morning spent inside **WonderWorks'** uprooted, upside-down bank building will chase any cloud away. There's an indoor ropes course, a bubble lab and a seriously fun virtual roller coaster that rivals the real thing.

BEACH AND BEYOND

Head to **Camp Helen State Park** to explore an unexpected ecological feature: **Lake Powell**. It's one of the largest coastal dune lakes, which are found in only a few places on the planet. Just a small berm of sand separates the lake from the Gulf and when breached, salt and fresh waters mix to create a brackish habitat that supports species from both. Visitors should pack closed-toe shoes *and* flip flops so they can wander through the varied terrains, from basin swamp and marsh to scrub oak and beach.

FESTIVAL SEASON IS EVERY SEASON

Panama City Beach plays host to a bevy of festivals and community events that inspire a visit. November hosts the city's **Bloody Mary Festival** (uh, *yum!*), while New Year's Eve sees thousands of locals and tourists alike attend an epic beach ball drop, complete with fireworks. Food trucks and craft beer take over the streets for two days in February, and in March, it's time to **UNwineD** with a celebration of cocktails, locally brewed ales, and – just as the name promises – wine.



UNEXPECTED

Emerald Coast

BY CORRINA ALLEN-KIERSONS

Destin, Fort Walton Beach and Okaloosa Island are a paradise for anglers and seafood lovers alike. This region of Florida's Panhandle boasts the closest access to the deepest part of the Gulf of Mexico, meaning the diversity of marine life is unmatched.



Destin



The Gulf on Okaloosa Island



Sunset Sail

WORLD'S LUCKIEST FISHING VILLAGE

Gulf-caught tuna, mahi mahi, grouper, snapper, swordfish and shellfish can be found on most menus and many restaurants offer a “cook your catch” service where a pro will clean, fillet and grill your very own catch of the day. Think of it as all the glory, minus the messy prep.

A former fishing village-turned-resort-town, Destin pays homage to its roots each October with a month-long fishing derby called **The Destin Fishing Rodeo**. The event, which attracts more than 10,000 visitors, is open to everyone and offers prizes for record-setting catches across multiple categories. Operating the scales at this fishy festival is Weighmaster Bruce Cheves, a character and a true local legend who has been on the job for nearly 50 years in what’s known as “The World’s Luckiest Fishing Village.”

NO FINER DINER

Serious sandcastle engineers should not hit the beach without first eating a hearty breakfast. Locals know to hit up **The Donut Hole** in Destin, with its neon sign advertising daily, fresh-baked Key lime pies. (On vacation, pie for breakfast is more than okay.) During peak season, lineups for this hot spot can exceed two hours. The *huevos rancheros* and chicken and waffles are well worth the wait and a basket of the restaurant’s namesake donut holes still warm from the fryer pacify guests until the main course arrives. For the best Florida souvenir *ever*, pick up a kitschy donut-embazoned T-shirt featuring a large fish leaping through the centre of the shop’s signature confection.

Robbie Caponetto, Daniel Webster

CAN'T CONTAINER OUR ENTHUSIASM

For dinner, **The Gulf on Okaloosa Island** in Fort Walton Beach has one of the prettiest al fresco dining spaces in the state and perhaps the best scallops anywhere. This casual waterfront eatery, a collection of sky-blue shipping containers surrounding an outdoor lounge-like area strung with little white lights, serves sublime crab cakes, crispy shrimp tacos, peel-and-eat shrimp and did we mention the scallops? Because, *wow*. East Pass might be the Emerald Coast’s most photographed spot, but The Gulf’s scallops should be the most photographed dish.

CRUISE ALONG

A catamaran cruise – yes, just like the ones which feature on every single season of *The Bachelor* – is the best bet for dolphin-spotting in Destin. **Smile N’ Wave Sailing Adventures** takes visitors out to the sandbar known as Crab Island for a swim and introduces them to the local dolphin population. Equally as lovely is a romantic Sunset Sail or Moonlight Cruise. Just don’t bring a banana onboard – that’s seen as bad luck by seasoned sailors.

NO BOAT, NO PROBLEM

No joke, fishing the Gulf waters and catching glimpses of dolphins and sea turtles doesn’t require a boat. Just pay a visit to the **Okaloosa Island Fishing Pier**, which stretches a whopping 385-metres into the sea. Anglers can cast a line and wait for Spanish mackerel, whiting or bluefish to bite (rods and tackle are available for rent on-site) or simply take in the unobstructed views as the setting sun sinks below the horizon.



 **UNEXPECTED**

Pensacola

BY CORRINA ALLEN-KIERSONS

Pensacola's city-by-the-beach vibe is ideal for travellers who want their sun and sand served with a side of arts and culture. The city also offers a generous helping of history. Watch out St. Augustine, Pensacola has staked its own claim to the title of "America's oldest settlement."



Pensacola Beach Gulf Pier

GET YOUR ART ON

Pensacola is home to a vibrant arts scene anchored by the **Pensacola Museum of Art**, a 1900s-era jailhouse-turned-gallery which recently hosted a temporary exhibit from The Smithsonian. Across the street in a building that previously served as Pensacola's fire station is **Quayside Art Gallery**, a shop stocking the works of artisans who live within a 95-kilometre radius. On offer are unique jewelry pieces, wildlife paintings, inlaid woodwork and ceramics in colours inspired by the sea. Each November, the city hosts the **Foo Foo Festival**, a downtown party celebrating outdoor art, theatre events and musical acts.

UNBORING LIBATIONS

The artsy vibe carries over to **Perfect Plain Brewing Co.**, a standout Pensacola watering hole. The sunny backyard space is *the* place to enjoy a flight of beers brewed on-site, ranging from a coconut stout to a Weissbier sour. For the cocktail crowd, there's an evolving mixed drinks menu, some of which are served in ceramic Japanese

lucky cats. (It's very Instagrammable.) At the legendary **Flora-Bama**, drinks are served dive bar-style (in plastic cups) but that doesn't mean their famed Bushwacker (a kind of Kahlua milkshake) isn't worth trying.

CITY OF FIVE FLAGS

Spanish, British, French, Confederate and U.S. flags have all, at one time, flown over Pensacola. The history of that evolution is documented at the **T.T. Wentworth, Jr. Museum**, once the town's Mediterranean Revival-style city hall. Inside, there's a tribute to local hero Martin "Trader Jon" Weissman and his collection of naval memorabilia. Trader Jon's bar, a Pensacola institution, once hosted guests like Elizabeth Taylor, Neil Armstrong and John McCain. The highlight of the museum, however, is an installation dedicated to the local DIY 'zine and punk scene that looks like the bedroom of the coolest teenager on the planet, circa 1989. The University of West Florida-curated exhibit is aptly titled *Punksacola: Reflections of a Subculture* and will be exhibited until July 2020.



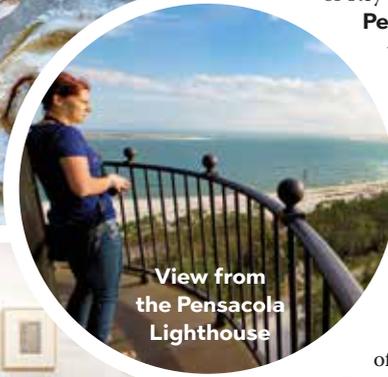
Oysters at The Grand Marlin

CATCH OF THE DAY

Oysters, gumbo, top-notch pizza and late-night snacks dished out of a refurbished Airstream – they're all options for hungry Pensacola travellers. Make a reservation at **The Grand Marlin** for high-end dining where oysters are served four ways (Oysters Casino is a must-try) and followed by dishes like Parmesan-crusted grouper or Key lime grilled lobster tail. At **Cypress**

Pensacola, guests nosh on divine shrimp toast, but just try to resist the *étouffée*.

It's equal parts smokey and spicy, and totally yum. **Graffiti Pizza's** New York style pies are all excellent but brave eaters should go for whatever's on special; Graffiti's pizza artists/mad scientists know what they're doing.



View from the Pensacola Lighthouse

COUNT STAIRS (OR SPIRITS!)

The well-fed traveller can work off those extra calories with a visit to

Pensacola Lighthouse & Maritime

Museum to climb the 177 stairs to the top. Visitors who want to experience an unexpected side of this historic landmark might take a 90-minute ghost tour of the 1869 Keeper's Quarters. The truly brave can arrange an overnight stay.



Pensacola Museum of Art



THE BEACH IS JUST THE BEGINNING...



EXPERIENCE
Pensacola
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EVENTS TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2020



ART DECO WEEKEND

Ocean Drive, Miami Beach
January 17-19, 2020

What started as a small grassroots festival 39 years ago has turned into one of the largest celebrations of Art Deco architecture and culture in the country. artdecoweekend.com

FLORIDA MANATEE FESTIVAL

Crystal River
January 18-19, 2020

Celebrate Florida's beloved gentle giant with arts and crafts, live music, a beer garden and manatee viewing at the nearby Three Sisters Spring. gomanateefest.com

FLORIDA STATE FAIR

Tampa
February 6-17, 2020

Nearly 500,000 people are drawn to the midway, thrill rides, indulgent food and headline bands of the long-running Florida State Fair where bragging rights are still won for the prized bull, best pie and the most beautiful quilt. floridastatefair.com

ART WYNWOOD

Miami
February 13-17, 2020

Art Wynwood continues to shine a spotlight on Midtown Miami and the Wynwood Arts District as a flourishing international cultural destination. More than 70 top galleries will showcase their art. art-wynwood.com

DAYTONA 500

Daytona Beach
February 16, 2020

Regarded as one of NASCAR's most prestigious races, this event draws families and adrenaline junkies from all over the world. daytonainternationalspeedway.com

MARDI GRAS PARADES

Pensacola
February 22-25, 2020

It's a bead-lovers extravaganza with four days of Mardi Gras parties and parades. Elaborate floats and outlandish costumes lead the Florida-style pageantry. pensacolabeachmardigras.com

THE PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP

Ponte Vedra Beach
March 10-15, 2020

Affectionately known as the PGA tour's fifth major, The Players Championship features the world-famous "Island Green" at the 17th hole. pgatour.com

SUNFEST

West Palm Beach
April 30-May 3, 2020

Join about 175,000 other attendees as music meets the water at the granddaddy of South Florida festivals. More than 50 top live acts will be on hand. Also: a juried art and craft show, three floating bar barges, fireworks and tons of kids activities. sunfest.com

FLEET WEEK

Fort Lauderdale
May 4-10, 2020

This annual Fort Lauderdale event allows visitors to tour active Navy and Coast Guard ships for free. But don't wait - reservations are necessary. Public ship tour registration is expected to open in early April. browardnavydaysinc.org

WATERMELON FESTIVAL

Fort Myers
May 2020 (Date TBD)

Come celebrate the harvest season at this annual tribute to the watermelon. Highlights include speed eating and seed-spitting competitions, live entertainment, stilt walkers, skill games and balloon animals. fleamall.com

PENSACOLA BEACH AIR SHOW: RED, WHITE AND BLUES

Pensacola Beach
July 8-11, 2020

Catch the world-famous Blue Angels' daredevil tricks and incredible aerial acrobatics on their home turf. visitpensacolabeach.com

HEMINGWAY DAYS

Key West
July 2020 (Dates TBD)

The annual Papa-fest features readings, a museum exhibit of rare Ernest Hemingway memorabilia, a three-day marlin tournament, short story competition and the famous Look-Alike Contest. fla-keys.com/hemingway-days

SHINE MURAL FESTIVAL

Downtown St. Pete
October 2020 (Dates TBD)

More than a dozen local and national mural artists put their work on display on downtown building walls and inside galleries throughout St. Petersburg's funky, growing arts district. stpeteartsalliance.org/shine-mural-festival

OCALA ARTS FESTIVAL

Ocala
October 2020 (Date TBD)

Art lovers and collectors fill the streets of historic downtown Ocala for this juried fine art show which features 155 artists and craftsmen from across the country. fafo.org

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL AIR SHOW

Punta Gorda Airport
November 2020 (Date TBD)

The air show features incredible military and civilian aircraft, some doing death-defying stunts performed by some of the best pilots in the world. floridaairshow.com



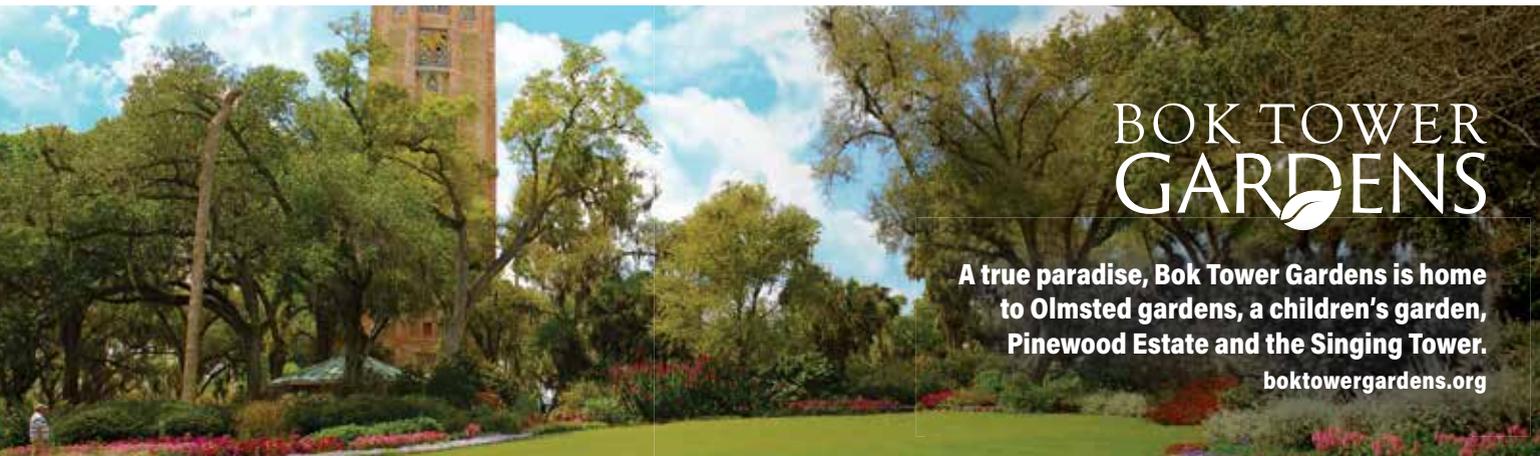
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