

PLACES TO PLAY



PSLBG 2017

VISIT ST. LUCIE

Peak Season in Port St. Lucie offers plenty of opportunity

BY WHITNEY JOSEPH

Port St. Lucie is not only one of Florida's fastest growing cities. It has also become a gem of a tourism destination. It doesn't hurt that it's adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River Lagoon, with the St. Lucie River running through it. Access to that much water, along with the famed Florida sunshine and yearlong beach weather, adds to the allure.

Fishermen and boaters have endless opportunities for play in Port St. Lucie. On land, there are multiple preserves and countless trails open for exploration — whether riverside or in primordial swamps and wetlands. Just be sure to bring enough bug spray.

Whether you're looking for a leisurely or an active outing, there are plenty of options here.

PORT ST. LUCIE BOTANICAL GARDENS

The city comes into full bloom at Port St. Lucie Botanical Gardens, 2410 SE Westmoreland Blvd. There are gorgeous grounds where people can get lost in lush landscapes that include formal gardens, fishing areas, nature trails, paved paths, a butterfly garden, a pavilion and a gift shop, as well as space for weddings and live entertainment.

The garden covers 20 acres on the North Fork of the St. Lucie River. Whether proffering petals or thorns, the displays are luscious and inviting. There's the Rose Garden, the Hibiscus Garden, the Bamboo Garden, the Cactus & Succulent Garden, the Orchid Room and other magical places to get lost in one's thoughts.

The garden holds children's programs, plant sales and live >>

entertainment throughout the year. Classes on the grounds are open to the public [members get discounts], and include Tai Chi, yoga and photography. Live Jazz Jams by the Fort Pierce Jazz and Blues Society take place every other Wednesday evening. For more information, visit www.pslbj.org or call 772.337.1959.

SAVANNAS STATE PRESERVE STATE PARK

Rather than being a manicured garden, the Savannas State Preserve State Park is nature in its native state. The area protects part of the basin marsh that once covered southeastern Florida. “The Savannas Preserve State Park’s scenic landscapes represent what the first pioneers would have seen in the area,” according to floridastateparks.org, the state’s website.

The park has more than 17 miles of walking trails that vary in length and difficulty — so, be sure to get details. Some of the preserve’s amenities and trail sections are temporarily closed. To book a guided hike, check on closures or for any other park information, call 772.398.2779. Savannas Preserve is open 365 days a year from 8 a.m. to sundown — visitors are asked to leave \$3 in the honor box per car. The entrance is at 2541 SE Walton Road.

OXBOW PRESERVE

The Oxbow Preserve stretches across 225 acres along the North Fork of the St. Lucie River. It >>



PORT ST. LUCIE BOTANICAL GARDENS PHOTOS

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JAMES NAUGLE PHOTOS

The Oxbow Eco-Center and Preserve includes four miles of trails through 200+ acres of natural ecosystems. It is one of two dozen County-managed preserves that are free and open to the public from sunrise to sunset year-round. Guided Nature Programs are offered free of charge at a variety of preserves throughout the County.

houses the Oxbow Eco-Center, where visitors of all ages can register for guided hikes, educational and special programs. The adventurous can wander along Oxbow's 3.5 miles of hiking trails from dawn to dusk, 365 days a year — all for free. The nature center is open Tuesday through Saturday from noon until 4 p.m., it is closed Sunday and Monday.

The center offers exhibits plus educational programs like Pop-Up Nature!, a Saturday class from 12:30 to 1 p.m., that has "surprise nature topics that vary each week from live animals and nature stories to simple crafts ... never knowing what may pop-up!" Then there's Critter Crunch & Munch! also on Saturdays, from 1:30 to 2 p.m., where visitors can learn from naturalists at feeding time for Oxbow's animal ambassadors.

Outdoors, there are observation areas, birding opportunities, picnicking areas, plus a canoe and kayak dock. The habitats at Oxbow are extraordinary: the floodplain forest is home to scrub and pine flatwoods as well as wetlands. Gopher tortoises, wading birds, butterflies and sand hill cranes are frequently spotted here.

Anyone who wants to let loose an arrow can arrange for private group archery lessons. It's a great activity for guests or for a group of friends with an open weekend. Scheduling depends on instructor availability. Email oxbow@stlucieco.org or call 772.785.5833 for details. All equipment will be provided; participants must be at least 10 years old. Groups must have from 10 to 20 participants; cost is \$20/person.

The Oxbow Preserve is located at 5400 NE St. James Drive, across the street from the Publix at St. Andrews Shopping Plaza. Please note some navigation devices will steer you to the wrong location.

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Children will love creating culinary magic at mud kitchen in the nature playscape at the Oxbow Eco-Center located in north Port St. Lucie.

TREASURE COAST MODEL RAILROAD CLUB

If you'd like to engineer a different sort of day, the Treasure Coast Model Railroad Club is open Saturdays from 10 a.m. to noon. It's free to visit and a great way to spend two hours.

What began with three model railroaders from Vero Beach back in 1975 has grown into "an attraction, a historical resource, and a teaching tool," according to the group's website. During the 1970s and '80s, club members held meetings in a round-robin fashion, so their model railroads could be displayed. Starting with portable module layouts at various civic events, the club bounced around from Port St. Lucie's Village Green Shopping Center to different locations on the Treasure Coast, including the Airport Industrial Park in Stuart, the St. Lucie County Historical Society and the Greenberg Train Show at the South Florida Fairgrounds. The club made its latest stop, at 273 SW Becker Road, more than 17 years ago.

Rail fans looking for family fun in PSL? This is one stop you won't want to miss. Large groups are welcome, but advance notice is advised; email tcmrrclubflorida@gmail.com or call 772.621.9636.

GOLFING

Time on the links is another must for many visitors. Port St. Lucie has some of the best courses in all of Florida — *U.S. Golf Digest* ranked PGA Golf Course, a 54-hole course designed by Tom Fazio and Pete Dye with instruction given by PGA profession->>



Caption

ANTHONY INSWASTY

als — as the 75th best course in the country. *Golfweek* ranked PGA's The Wanamaker the 14th and the Dye Course the 21st "Best state-by-state golf courses you can play." PGA Village is located at 1916 Perfect Drive in Port St. Lucie. Call 800.800.4653 or email contact@pgagolfclub.com for details.

Of course, there are more than 20 golf courses throughout the city, ranging from affordable to expensive, so do your research. The website, visitstlucie.com/golf, is a good place to start weeding through all those options.

PLAY BALL!

For the past three decades, Port St. Lucie's Clover Park has been where the New York Mets do their spring training. That's right, the Amazin' Mets come here to train and delight thousands of fans as they prepare for the season. Spring training games run from Feb. 24 through March 4, this year. Clover Park is also home to the Mets' Minor League Class A affiliate team, the St. Lucie Mets. Their first home game of the season is Friday, April 5, at 6:10 p.m., against the Daytona Tortugas.

Tickets are available for spring training and regular season games at mlb.com/st-lucie/tickets or by calling the ticket office, 772.871.2115. ❖



RUSTY DURHAM

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NEW YORK METS

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