

**“Things to Do” Especially with Visitors to The Villages
Updated March 2019 – Random Order of Venues
Be sure to check with Venue – Prices & Hours may change**

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**Premier Boat Tours of Mount Dora**

From Jan Rassier — We recently took a boat tour of Mount Dora tour with friends and found it relaxing, fun and interesting. We saw plant life, birds, alligators. It was great to be out on the water and learning the history of Mt Dora. See the website: <http://www.doracanal.com>

Take a two-hour pontoon boat tour on Lake Dora and The Harris Chain of Lakes. The tour includes the famous Dora Canal, which has been described as "The most beautiful mile of water in the world."

Certified captains and crew will share their stories and local knowledge of the area, its history, flora and fauna. Conveniently located at the historic Lakeside Inn ([100 N Alexander Street](http://www.lakesideinn.com)) in downtown Mount Dora.

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Gatorworld, a New Local Attraction

1 mile w/of I75 on HWY 44 in Wildwood, FL,
<https://www.gatorworldparks.com/> Entering through the main gateway, provides views of some of the 400+ rescued & relocated alligators that call GatorWorld Parks of Florida home. You and your family will have the opportunity to feed, hold, and have your photo taken with the alligators, including “Big Al”—a giant gator just waiting to make your acquaintance. Young visitors will enjoy the small and cuddly animals in our petting zoo. There will be opportunities to feed and interact with the goats and sheep and, as an added attraction, a visit to the “Bunny House” makes it possible to hold a live (and very friendly) rabbit. There is something exciting for everyone here at GatorWorld Parks of Florida; Come check it out!

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From John Modica — Click on links below to view information about these venues that are within an hour of The Villages:

1. Lake Woodruff — U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [https://www.fws.gov/refuge/lake\\_woodruff/](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/lake_woodruff/)
2. Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park — <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/paynes-prairie-preserve-state-park>
3. K.P. Hole Park — <https://www.marioncountyfl.org/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/54/663>
4. Salt Springs Run Marina and Landing — <http://www.saltspringsmarina.com>
5. Barberville Pioneer Settlement — [https://www.pioneersettlement.org/?gclid=EA1aIQobChMI7bLtv-Dt4AIVTQOGCh3uXwJjEAAAYASAAEgJiVPD\\_BwE](https://www.pioneersettlement.org/?gclid=EA1aIQobChMI7bLtv-Dt4AIVTQOGCh3uXwJjEAAAYASAAEgJiVPD_BwE)
6. Avian Reconditioning Center for Birds of Prey in Apopka — <https://arc4raptors.org>
7. Withlacooche Trail in Inverness — <https://www.alltrails.com/trail/us/florida/withlacooche-bay-trail>

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**The Ivy House**, 352-528-5410  
106 NW Main Street  
Williston, FL

Wonderful old Victorian house turned into a lovely restaurant. Great Southern food. Interesting gift shop upstairs. Get reservations before you go. Website: [ivyhousefl.com](http://ivyhousefl.com). Open for lunch and dinner. 1 hour from The Villages. Also the Ivy House in Ocala has moved to just off the square and has an updated menu. The gift shop is now across the street

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Gypsy Gold Horse Farm
12501 SW 8th Ave.
Ocala, FL 34473
Home: 352-307-3777
Cell: 352-817-1777
<http://gypsygold.com/>

Gypsy Gold welcomes visitors, and in fact is the #1 Thing to do in Ocala and a favorite in all of Central Florida on Trip Advisor! Join us on Wednesdays, Fridays or Saturdays at 10:00 am for a two-hour informative tour of our farm. Meet the Gypsy Vanner horses in person, hear the history of the breed from its discovery in Great Britain to its growth in the United States. Your Tour Guide is Dennis Thompson, who discovered this unique breed and brought it to American soil. Your tour will include an overview and introduction to the breed and its history, the unique British Gypsy culture and where the breed is today by Dennis Thompson. A walking tour of the farm where you'll meet the stallions, mares, foals and various other animals loved at Gypsy Gold. There are treats you may purchase, or you are welcome to bring your own carrots. Photo op time! You'll be invited to create a memory of your Gypsy Gold tour with a photo of yourself and one of our beautiful Gypsy Vanner Horses to share with your friends.

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**Carney Island Recreation Area**  
14215 SE 115th Ave, Ocklawaha, (352) 671-8560  
<http://www.marioncountyfl.org/Home/Components/FacilityDirectory/FacilityDirectory/24/663>

This is a well kept secret, during the week you probably won't see another soul. A 30 minute drive from The Villages to a lovely park located on Lake Weir. It's known for its swimming area with a sandy beach, and large climbing jungle gym nearby for kids if they get bored with the swimming. There is a large pavilion for picnics, a volley ball net, and nearby rest rooms.

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There are three hiking trails that are eight feet wide, and range from 1 mile to 3.2 miles, well maintained, with a level dirt surface. For walkers who like to see the sights, meander from side to side and not worry about trail width or getting lost, it doesn't get any better than this. Some of best scenery you will see in Central Florida.

Enter Carney Island, pay the \$7 use fee (honor system, have the correct change to put in the box), and continue on the long winding road past the sign that says "beach" and go all the way to the parking lot at the end of the road. Straight ahead of you are large, old oak trees with spreading limbs framing a good view of Lake Weir.



**Weeki Wachee Springs State Park**

<http://www.weekiwachee.com>

The mermaids of Weeki Wachee Springs State Park have delighted visitors since 1947. Today, visitors can still witness the magic of the mermaids, take a river boat cruise and canoe or kayak on the Weeki Wachee River. The 538-acre park features a first magnitude spring and a 400-seat submerged theater for watching the live mermaid show.

Buccaneer Bay offers a fun-filled flume ride for thrill seekers of all ages. Our white sandy beach area and covered picnic pavilions provide a relaxing day for your entire family. Weeki Wachee's animal shows provide audiences with an entertaining and educational look at domesticated birds and reptiles. Located on U.S. 19 at the intersection of SR. 50, just North of Spring Hill and South of Homosassa Springs. Drive time is about 1 ½ hr from the Villages.



**Ocala Farm Tours in Ocala, FL**

Contact: Karen Grimes

352-895-9302, <http://farmtoursofocala.com>

Can accommodate 5 people on a normal tour but is willing to rent a larger vehicle for larger groups. The tour was approximately 3 hours and we visited 5 different farms. Every where we went she was recognized and we were all welcome to ask any questions and see whatever we liked. The cost per person is \$40.00



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Appleton Museum of Art

4333 E. Silver Springs Blvd.
Ocala, FL 34470-5001
352-291-4455, www.appletonmuseum.org

From Lakesider, Kent Strobel: As some of you already know, I volunteer at the Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala and I always like to let people know about what a gem it is and that it is very close by. Visit the website to see photos of the outside and inside and get a sense of the exceptional beauty of the place and the extent of their collections. They host a wide variety of temporary shows each year. UPDATED FEES: Adults \$10. AAA \$8. Seniors \$8. Age 6--17 \$5. Five and under free. Active military and veterans with ID, free.

Address: [4333 East Silver Springs Boulevard, Ocala, FL 34470](http://www.appletonmuseum.org). Telephone 352-291-4455. Special rates for group tours.

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**Wild Bill’s Air Boat Tour**

<http://wildbillsairboattour.com/ride.html>

Lots of fun. Only 20 minutes from Villages. Would not recommend for small kids (under 6). Do recommend reservations. There is a \$10 coupon on website, along with all other info.

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Silver Springs State Park

<http://www.silversprings.com>

Combines the charm of a historic Florida attraction with the crystal clear beauty of one of the last uninhabited spring runs in the state. There are three entrances. The Main Entrance is located on State Road 40 at 5656 E Silver Springs Blvd, Silver Springs, FL 34488. The Camping Entrance is located on State Road 35 at 1425 NE 58th Avenue, Ocala FL 34470. Third entrance is an Equestrian Entrance, also located on State Road 40, about 1.3 miles east of the SR 40 Main Entrance.

The Main Entrance: Enjoy the headspring from a viewing deck, walk along the river on paved trails, see the ornamental gardens, and enjoy an easy stroll through the Real Florida. Enjoy a meal from the restaurant with a view of the spring. Glass bottom boat rides and canoe and kayak rentals are offered through our concessionaire. There is a \$4.00 per boat launch fee if you bring your own canoe or kayak at the headspring launch. There is no land access from the water along the river and in the headspring area except at the canoe and kayak launch ramp. About 45 minutes from The Villages.

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The Carriage Museum

3000 Marion County Road, Weirsdale
Telephone 352-750-5500, www.TheGrandOaks.com

As of Feb 22, 2019: THE MUSEUM IS CURRENTLY CLOSED

The Florida Carriage & Car Museum is currently **undergoing reconstruction**. Check their website for updates.

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**Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, (352) 628-5343**

<https://www.floridastateparks.org/park/Homosassa-Springs>

See West Indian manatees every day of the year from the park's underwater observatory in the main spring. Showcases native Florida wildlife, including manatees, black bears, bobcats, white-tailed deer, American alligators, American crocodiles, and river otters. Manatee programs are offered three times daily. At the Wildlife Encounter programs, snakes and other native animals are featured. Recreational opportunities include picnicking, nature study, and bird-watching. There is a children's education center with hands-on experiences about Florida's environment. Transportation from the visitor center on U.S. 19 to the West Entrance is available by tram or boat. The park has two concessionaire-operated gift shops and a café with a selection of beverages and snacks. Plan 3 1/2 to 4 hours to tour the park.

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Butterfly Rainforest, University of Florida Cultural Plaza

SW 34 Street and Hull Road
Gainesville, FL, 1 hour from The Villages
352-846-2000
Florida Resident is \$8, Children 3 - 11 is \$5
Butterfly releases at 2 - 3 - 4 PM on Saturday and Sunday
Also, it's in the same building as the Florida Museum of Natural Science.

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**Stumpknockers Restaurant**

13821 SW Highway 200  
Dunellon, Florida  
352-854-2288

A really interesting place on the river. Sometimes there are river tours (extra)--it seems just when they feel like it. Good food and folksy atmosphere. 40 - 50 minutes from The Villages.

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**St. John’s Rivership Company**, 321-441-3030 or 888-235-1266  
433 N. Palmetto Ave., Sanford, FL 32771  
<http://www.stjohnsrivershipco.com/home.html>

Cruise the Historic St. Johns River Aboard an Authentic Sternwheel Paddleboat. A century ago, the St. Johns River was Florida's first great inland highway connecting the ocean port of Jacksonville with the still-wild interior. The Rivership Barbara-Lee takes you back to a more adventurous, more romantic time.

From its home port on Lake Monroe in charming downtown Sanford, the Barbara-Lee cruises the St. Johns, offers food cooked fresh in the ship's kitchen (you can choose from entrées), live music and dancing. You'll also get close-up views of the area's abundant wildlife. You'll see prolific bird life — majestic great herons, "snakebirds," osprey, eagles, plus turtles and alligators lazing along the banks. During the cooler months manatees are often spotted.

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Barberville Pioneer Settlement for the Creative Arts

1776 Lightfoot Lane
Barberville, Florida
386-749-2959

Where State Road 40 and US 17 meet (near Deland) about an hour from The Villages. It's an old schoolhouse where the pioneer arts and gardens are practiced. They have a wonderful festival there in the fall, around November.

Monday - Saturday 9 - 4, Closed Sunday
\$6 adults, \$4 6 - 12, Free 5 and under

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**De Leon Springs State Park**

601 Ponce De Leon Blvd.  
De Leon Springs, FL 32130  
386-985-4212--about an hour from The Villages (close to Daytona)  
\$6 per car of 8 or less, Open 8 to Sundown  
Restaurant is open 9 - 5 on weekdays and 8 - 5 on weekends.

Lots of nature things to do including a boat tour. Best part is the Old Sugar Mill Restaurant which is actually part of the old sugar mill that used to stand there. On Saturday and Sunday you can make your own pancakes from the tastiest batters (more than one kind) right at your table. Get there early because it's crowded and they close the parking lot when it's full. This is a wonderful day-use state park.

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**Winter Park** has a great boat tour and a quaint downtown for lunch at outdoor cafes and nice shops. Boat tour website is <http://scenicboattours.com/home.htm> address 312 E Morse Blvd, Winter Park (10 minutes from downtown Orlando), 407-644-4056. \$12 for adults, \$6 for kids. Winter Park also has the Morse Museum, the largest collection of Tiffany Glass in the world.

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Zipline

8045 Gainsville Rd (CR 25A), Ocala
<http://zipthecanyons.com/> 352-351-9477

How about a Zipline nearby--right off the interstate. It is 2 1/2 to 3 hours on the zipline for kids (at least 10 years old), and adults, weight requirements 70-270 pounds, cost is \$89 per person. Great scenery and lots of fun for the adventurous.

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**Uncle Donald's Farm**

2713 Griffin Avenue, Lady Lake, Florida 32159 (352) 753-2882 [www.uncledonaldsfarm.com](http://www.uncledonaldsfarm.com)

Great for kids and adults. You can milk a goat, pet a pig, touch a chicken, or feed a cow. Visitors pet and feed a variety of animals and see wildlife up close. Hand feed cattle, watch for llamas and ostriches on the hayride. Great fun.

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Kids Bowl Free

Click on a link to register grandkids for 2 free games of bowling everyday in the summer: [Kids Bowl Free, Spanish Springs](#) or [Kids Bowl Free, Fiesta Bowl](#).

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Terrific website: 120 Free Things to Do with Kids this Summer,  
<http://www.mrfreestuff.com/120-free-things-to-do-with-kids-this-summer>

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Book at Barnes and Noble is entitled "Days Out in Central Florida from The Villages" by Gillian Birch... it has many ideas for interesting day trips.