

An Emerging Lifestyle Destination.



The Jewel of the Treasure Coast

There is a place in Florida, not too far from the delightful squeals of Central Florida's theme parks and the thumping pulse of South Florida's nightclubs, where you can still experience the Sunshine State in all its natural beauty.

Located between Miami and Orlando, St. Lucie rests in the heart of the Treasure Coast. Along with its two cities, Fort Pierce and Port St. Lucie, St. Lucie features 21 miles of pristine coastline on Hutchinson Island - one of the most popular nesting grounds for sea turtles along the East Coast.

With a history dating back to the Airs and Seminole Indians, the Treasure Coast earned its moniker after a hurricane forced a fleet of Spanish treasure ships to sink and spill tons of silver, gold and other jewels into the Atlantic Ocean in 1715. While millions of dollars worth of treasure has been recovered over the years, treasure hunters continue to dive St. Lucie waters and comb its beaches with metal detectors hoping to head home with a pocket full of coins. Samples of these coins can be found at the St. Lucie Historical Museum, which also features unique exhibits about the area's fishing and farming heritage. History buffs can also learn how St. Lucie helped win World War II with exhibits at the Historical Museum and at the National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum. Located on North Hutchinson Island

on the original training grounds for the Navy Frogmen, the SEAL Museum recently received national designation from the federal government. Its vast collection of authentic Navy weapons, photographs, uniforms and vehicles tell the story of the Navy Frogmen's transformation into today's Navy SEALs.

But there is more to St. Lucie than just history. The area is surrounded by unique landscapes from open plains, pine flatwoods, scrub habitat, coastal marshes and one of the most diverse estuaries in North America - the Indian River Lagoon. The brackish waters of the lagoon are home to more than 4,000 species of plants and animals, including dolphins, manatees, ospreys and hundreds of sport fish such as tarpon, red drum and snook. During the summer months, divers and snorkelers typically find clear waters off the beaches of North Hutchinson Island where a series of rock reefs sit 100 yards from the shoreline in 20 feet of water, holding spiny lobsters, snappers, starfish and other marine life.

For those that want to get out on the water just to enjoy the sunshine and saltwater breezes, pontoon boat

... ST. LUCIE, FLORIDA



charters and rentals are available. If you have the strength, there are even kayak rentals (both guided and self-guided available), so you can paddle your way around the Indian River Lagoon's endless trail of mangrove-covered banks and natural spoil islands.

Since St. Lucie is home to such diverse habitats, Florida leaders have taken great steps to preserve and protect these lands, setting aside nearly 11,000 acres for passive recreation such as hiking, biking, horseback riding and wildlife watching. The cornerstone of St. Lucie's environmental lands is the Oxbow Eco-Center. Located on 225-acres along the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, the Oxbow is a year-round environmental learning center with educational programs for families of all ages. With a variety of landscapes to offer from floodplain forests to coastal marshes, there are more than two dozen nature preserves throughout the Florida, some of which are part of the Great Florida Birding Trail.

If you enjoy nature, but don't want to hike miles to experience it, stop by Heathcote Botanical Gardens and explore how this one-time nursery was turned into a lush sanctuary, consisting of an assortment of specialty gardens including a Japanese Garden, Reflection Garden, Herb Garden, Rainforest Display, Native Plants Garden and a Palm and Cycad Walk.

More than just protecting the environmental, St. Lucie

is a great place to learn about the Great Outdoors. In addition to the Oxbow, the St. Lucie Marine Center, featuring the Smithsonian Marine Ecosystems Exhibit, gives guests a peak at the natural underwater world around them. The Marine Center houses 8,000 gallons of water that are home to more than 3,000 species of marine life. Across the lagoon in downtown Fort Pierce, the Manatee Observation and Education Center also offers visitors an up-close look at the area's marine life, including the Florida Manatee.

Artists also have a home in St. Lucie, which produced Florida's greatest landscape painters: A.E. "Bean" Backus and the Highwaymen. Private galleries provide selections of works by both artists, while the Backus Museum and Gallery features rotating exhibits from regional and national artists, as well as a large collection of Backus and Highwaymen paintings. The Highwaymen were a collection of Fort Pierce African-American landscape painters, who sold their work along Florida's highways in the '50s and '60s. Literary fans can visit the final resting place of author Zora Neale Hurston ("Their Eyes Were Watching God"), which is part of the Zora Neal Hurston Heritage Trail.

Those looking for active recreation will find no shortage of things to do in St. Lucie Florida from catching waves at the Fort Pierce Inlet State Park to sidewalk surfing at the new 15,000-square-foot concrete Lawnwood Skate Park to taking lessons from golf pros at PGA Village in Port St. Lucie. The area is home to more than 300 holes of championship-caliber golf; including the one-of-kind PGA Village. Featuring 35-acres of diverse training grounds, golfers can brush up their skills at the PGA Learning Center with a series of driving ranges, putting greens and bunkers that feature sand imported from some of the world's toughest courses. You can even have your swing videotaped and evaluated by the center's resident professionals. And when you're ready to keep score, hit the links on one of three courses (designed by Tom Fazio and Pete Dye). These are the only PGA courses that are open to the general public. When your swing is swung out, learn more about golf at the PGA Historical Museum, which houses trophies, golf clubs, photographs and memorabilia dating back to the game's beginnings.

Just a chip shot away from the PGA Village is Tradition Field - the spring training home of the New York Mets. Every February and March, baseball fans can watch their favorite big-league hitters get ready for a run to October. This recently renovated stadium offers traditional seating, along with picnic tables near the skybox, a party terrace along left field and a grassy berm in the outfield, where young fans with gloves wait to catch that homerun ball.

St. Lucie offers a variety of accommodations from primitive campgrounds to golf course villas to standard hotels rooms - all within minutes of area attractions, restaurants and beaches. With easy access from Interstate 95 and the Florida Turnpike, St. Lucie is a convenient drive from either West Palm Beach or Orlando airports. Once you arrive and do some exploring, it's not hard to see why St. Lucie is the jewel of the Treasure Coast. *

St. Lucie County Tourist Development Council
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