

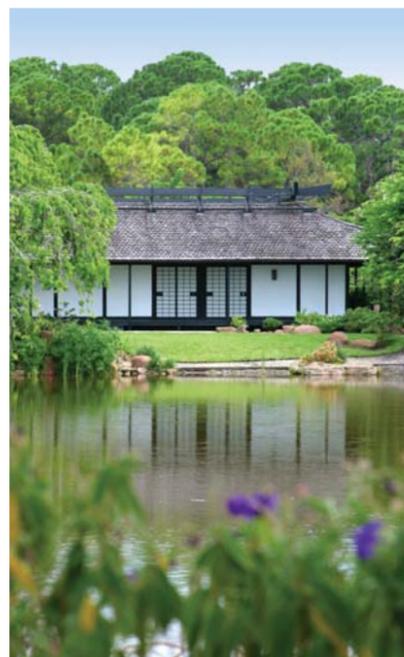
BLOOMS AMONG HISTORICAL SPLENDOR

BY KEVIN FRITZ

Aerial view of the Edison & Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers



The Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens in Delray Beach



Because Florida was discovered more than 500 years ago, some of the architecture found in parts of the Sunshine State is a surprise to many who associate the state more with the art deco of South Beach, an architectural treasure unto itself. Associated gardens, many of which surround famed architectural sites, explode with tropical flowers, palms and fruit trees, blending with northern-type flora evident by snapdragons and sunflowers. The foliage can be as diverse as the state's climate zones since temperatures vary 20 F between Tallahassee and Miami.

SOUTHEAST

Nestled on the shores of Biscayne Bay, the Barnacle, built in 1891, was home to Ralph Middleton Munroe, one of Coconut Grove's pioneers. Its gardens contain one of the last remnants of the once vast Miami Hammock, the tropical hardwood hammock that graced much of the area in the 1920s.

While visiting Coconut Grove—one of Miami's oldest neighborhoods—a visit to The Kampong will have your mouth watering for an exotic fruit salad. Candle fruit, peanut butter fruit, egg fruit, cocoplums and more than 50 varieties of mango are on site.

Miami's architecture is a splendid blend of art deco, Mediterranean Revival and Miami Modernist also known as MiMo. The Miami Design Preservation League offers 90-minute walking tours in the Miami Beach Architectural Historic District. Take time to visit the Vizcaya Museum & Gardens, a Mediterranean Revival estate built in 1916 and home to a collection of rare orchids.

Second only to Miami's vivid architecture is whimsical Key West. Its historic homes are known as "conch" houses, a term first referred to those built with conch shells, and later describing the wooden homes built by settlers. Historians will love the Harry S. Truman Little White House in Key West, which, for health



The Kitchen Garden at Pinewood Estate in Lake Wales

reasons, US President Truman visited 11 times, first in November 1946.

Also in Key West, the legacy of John James Audubon, the world-renowned naturalist, lives on at the Audubon House & Tropical Gardens. Audubon first visited the Florida Keys in 1832. Note the 1850s medicinal and herbal garden.

The Wray Botanical Collection at Flamingo Gardens in Davie features more than 3,000 exotic, tropical, subtropical and native plants and trees. The centerpiece of the gardens, which include the Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden, Croton Garden and Bromeliad Garden, is a natural hammock of 200-year-old live oaks dotted with orchids and epiphytes.

In Palm Beach, Whitehall (c. 1902), a 75-room, 100,000-square-foot mansion, built by Standard Oil co-founder Henry Flagler as a wedding present for his wife, overlooks the Intracoastal Waterway. It is now called the Flagler Museum.

In Delray Beach, the famed Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens offers 200 acres of tropical bonsai, golden koi ponds and nature trails. The Bonnet House Museum & Gardens in Fort Lauderdale has five distinct ecosystems to discover.

SOUTHWEST

Two men whose ideas changed the world shared property in Fort Myers that will marvel all ages. The Edison & Ford Winter Estates feature the homes of inventor Thomas Edison and carmaker Henry Ford, and 20 acres of gardens. Edison experimented with bamboo from the gardens while inventing the light bulb and the common goldenrod to produce rubber for Firestone car tires. Pose for a photo next to the largest banyan tree on the estate. Today, the original four-inch *Ficus bengalensis* sapling, a gift from magnate Harvey Firestone, is the largest in south Florida, taking up an entire acre and measuring almost 400 feet around.

The Mansion at Tuckahoe on Jensen Beach in Martin County



Opened in 1940, the 10-acre Sarasota Jungle Gardens showcases the rare Australian nut tree and a bunya bunya tree. If you love orchids, drop by the nearby Marie Selby Botanical Gardens and marvel at the collection of more than 6,000 of these unique flowering plants.

While most pre-Civil War plantations are located in North Florida, the antebellum Gamble mansion in Ellenton gives you a chance to step back in time to the days of this thriving sugar plantation. Once the home of Major Robert Gamble, it's the only antebellum house still intact in Florida.

The Village of the Arts is a community of artists housed in colorfully painted 1920 and 1930 cottages in Bradenton. Check to see if there is an "artwalk" scheduled when you visit. Wander over to Old Main Street to view the neo-classical-style buildings dating back to 1898. Sign up for an historical walk of downtown.

Completed in 1913, Mable Ringling's Rose Garden at the Ringling Estate in Sarasota boasts almost 1,200 varieties of roses laid out in a 28,000-square-foot circular design. Just beyond the Secret Garden, you'll find the plots of Mable and John Ringling.

CENTRAL EAST

The Bamboo Pavilion in Vero Beach was built in Colombia, shipped and reassembled at the McKee Botanical Garden. Originally opened in the early 1930s, the garden is known for its 18-acre subtropical jungle hammock.

The nation's largest public collection of tropical bonsai trees is found at the Heathcote Botanical Gardens in Fort Pierce. Experience mi-

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: CULTURAL COUNCIL OF PALM BEACH COUNTY; LEE COUNTY VCB; BOK TOWER GARDENS; MANSION AT TUCKAHOE

Frank Lloyd Wright architecture at the Florida Southern College campus in Lakeland



The Sunken Gardens in St. Petersburg

croclimates as you pass through Mediterranean and tropical plants in the Japanese Garden, Reflection Garden, Herb Garden and the Rainforest Display.

In Jensen Beach, the Mansion at Tuckahoe showcases Mediterranean design with interior terrazzo floors, eight fireplaces and marble restrooms. Overlooking the Indian River, it was built in 1938 by Ann Bates Leach, an heiress to the Coca-Cola fortune.

CENTRAL

Just a few miles north of downtown Orlando, the Harry P. Leu Gardens and Leu House Museum is a 50-acre botanical park with a 19th-century house. The gardens, created in 1936, include 50 varieties of azaleas, 50 species of bamboo, more than 2,000 camellia plants and 50 kinds of citrus trees. The house, the oldest part of which was built in 1888 by Angeline and David W. Mizell, is open for tours daily (except Christmas Day).

Winter Park is home to many architectural trends from the 1880s. Grand mansions can be seen all over town, and Park Avenue, the epicenter of Winter Park, presents original structures from the town's founding that are still in use. Take the Winter Park Scenic Boat Tour, which meanders through the city's chain of lakes and canals, passing by beautiful lakeshore mansions of yesteryear, mixed seamlessly with modern-day architecture.

Bok Tower Gardens and Pinewood Estate in nearby Lake Wales comprises 50-acre hilltop gardens surrounding a 205-foot "singing tower" that houses one of the world's finest carillons with 60 bells that ring every half hour. Pinewood Estate, built in the 1930s, is a 20-room Mediterranean-style home, sitting among a spectacular collection of ferns, palms, camelias and magnolias.

Visitors are pleasantly surprised that the largest concentration of Frank Lloyd Wright designs in the world resides west of Orlando in Lakeland. Wright designed and oversaw the construction of 12 structures on the campus of Florida Southern College, including his only planetarium and theater-in-the-round. October 2013 saw the opening of the Sharp Family Tourism and Education Center, the first Wright structure built on the original site, for the original client, since 1966.

CENTRAL WEST

On the Gulf coast, the Henry B. Plant Museum in Tampa, circa 1891, originally served as the 511-room Tampa Bay Hotel. Known for its Moorish revival architecture, opulent European furnishings and spectacular tropical gardens, it was a getaway for the rich and famous in its day catering to the likes of Teddy Roosevelt and Babe Ruth. Today, the museum is part of the University of Tampa.

Sunken Gardens in St. Petersburg is home to some of the oldest tropical plants in the region. This 100-year-old hidden treasure features cascading waterfalls, demonstration gardens and more than 50,000 tropical plants and flowers.

Don't leave St. Petersburg before visiting the Dalí Museum. Designed by architect Yann Weymouth, it is said to combine the rational with the fantastical. The outdoor Mathematical Garden allows visitors to experience the relationship between math and nature. Be sure to traverse the labyrinth in the southeast corner.

NORTHEAST

Washington Oaks State Gardens in Palm Coast is known for its shoreline of coquina rock formations. Picnic or swim from the beach or seawall along the Matanzas River, or discover nature on its hiking and bike trails.

Nowhere are America's roots more profound than St. Augustine, which was governed under



The Water Garden at the Kanapaha Botanical Gardens in Gainesville

five flags in four centuries. The oldest city in the US, there are 36 buildings of colonial origin still standing to be discovered.

St. Augustine's González-Alvarez House, the oldest surviving Spanish colonial dwelling in Florida, has been occupied since the 1600s. Architect and history buffs will love Flagler College, serving as the Hotel Ponce de Leon from 1888 to 1967. It was built by the same Henry Flagler who co-founded Standard Oil and championed the overseas railroad in the Florida Keys.

Be sure to visit the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Augustine built between 1793 and 1797, known as America's first parish, and Castillo de San Marcos, the oldest masonry fort in the continental US. Its architecture splendidly depicts the "bastion system" of fortification.

The Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve in Jacksonville provides tours of the Kingsley Plantation, the oldest standing plantation in Florida. Take time to tour the three acres of riverfront gardens at Jacksonville's Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, showcasing a blend of tropic and northern backdrops.

At Fernandina Beach, Fort Clinch is one of the most well-preserved 19th-century forts in the country.

NORTH CENTRAL

The Kanapaha Botanical Gardens in Gainesville offers 62 acres of wheelchair-accessible and dog-friendly paths and labyrinths surrounded by azaleas, double-crowned cabbage palms and southern magnolias.

The Alfred B. Maclay Gardens State Park in Tallahassee displays ornamental gardens first planted in 1923 by Alfred B. and Louise Maclay. Considered a "masterpiece of floral architecture," 1,200 acres feature a secret garden, a reflection pool, a walled garden and hundreds of azaleas and camellias. Pack a lunch! The property provides swimming, fishing, canoeing and kayaking on its resident Lake Hall.

The Tallahassee Museum features native wildlife, pioneer buildings and a plantation home with slave quarters. There is a half-mile nature trail bringing you up close and personal to a dry sinkhole, gopher tortoise burrows, oak hammocks, longleaf pine trees, and Lake Hiawatha surrounded by cypress trees.

NORTHWEST

The 161-acre Eden Gardens State Park in Santa Rosa Beach features the renovated, two-story Wesley house with its elegant white columns and a wrap-around porch built in 1897. This restored mansion is furnished with family heirlooms and antiques, and it holds the second largest collection of Louis XVI furniture in the US.

Visit Fort Pickens completed in 1834 on Pensacola Beach, the spot where the infamous Apache Indian Geronimo was held prisoner in 1886-87. The area became a tourist mecca for the first time, attracting more than 400 people to see the famed Geronimo. Next, take a "ghostly encounter tour" of the Pensacola Lighthouse, circa 1859, as you climb 177 steps to the top. **FL**

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floridastateparks.org/maclaygardens
- Audubon House & Tropical Gardens**
audubonhouse.com
- Bok Tower Gardens**
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- Bonnet House Museum & Gardens**
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- Edison & Ford Winter Estates**
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flagler.edu
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nps.gov/guis/planyourvisit/fort-pickens.htm
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leugardens.org
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heathcotebotanicalgardens.org
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- Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens**
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oirf.org
- Sarasota Jungle Gardens**
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- The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens**
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thedali.org
- The Kampong**
ntbg.org/gardens/kampong.php
- The Ringling**
ringling.org
- Timucuan Ecological & Historic Preserve**
nps.gov/foca/index.htm
- Village of the Arts**
villageofthearts.com
- Vizcaya Museum & Gardens**
vizcayamuseum.org
- Washington Oaks Gardens State Park**
floridastateparks.org/washingtonoaks
- Winter Park**
cityofwinterpark.org

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: VISIT ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER, SUNNYCENTRALFLORIDA; VISIT GAINESVILLE

WHERE MEMORIES ARE BORN

BY JENNIFER WYLIE FAUSER

Flying high with Tiki Jetpack Adventures on Islamorada Key



Throughout Florida, your family will find fabulous thrills, magnificent memory-making moments, and of course, tons of relaxation, education, sun and merriment.

SOUTHEAST

There are few destinations where kids can feed a giraffe and ride a camel at the same place but world-renowned Miami MetroZoo offers both, along with more than 2,000 animals, comprising 500 different species, 40 of which are endangered. As you stroll along beautiful landscaped walkways visiting more than 100 exhibits, check out the Amazon and Beyond exhibit, which hosts the infamous anaconda, as well as the giant river otter, jaguar and harpy eagle.

You've not experienced a museum quite like the Miami Children's Museum. Here kids climb through a two-story sand castle, walk through a six-foot piggy bank, investigate a 900-gallon marine tank, and "sail" through the newly redesigned Carnival cruise ship-shaped exhibit. Merriment and learning go



Carnival Cruise exhibit at the Miami Children's Museum

hand-in-hand as your family takes a grocery shopping challenge, explores the Everglades, and goes for a little friendly rock-wall-climbing competition.

Every little girl wishes she were Barbie-sized just to live in her house. Dreams do come true at the new Barbie The Dreamhouse Experience in Sunrise. Saunter into a 10,000-square-foot realm of Barbie doll's home for personalized touches, interactive surprises and virtual experiences that promise a dreamy day for anyone with a little girl's heart.

After some rest and relaxation at the beach, get your heart pumping again with a visit to the Everglades Alligator Farm in Homestead. Notorious for some of the largest alligators, the farm is located near the main entrance to the Everglades National Park and is home to more than 2,000 of them. Your day promises to be full of excitement and value including gator feedings and shows, exotic snake viewings and even an airboat tour (included with admission).

Forget oceanside. Go straight to oceanview aboard the *Yankee Freedom III* catamaran ferry direct from Key West to Dry Tortugas National Park to explore majestic coral formations, encounter rare migratory birds, and tour the Civil War-era Fort Jefferson. Luxury and comfort are promised on board the only commercial vessel licensed to carry passengers to one of the nation's most remote national parks.

For those aspiring to be more like *Ironman*, Tiki Jetpack Adventures on Islamorada Key offers the perfect vacation experience. Those with superhero aspirations receive training on

a 30-foot tiki-themed pontoon boat and then strap on jetpacks for a 25-minute flying adventure of a lifetime including take off, soft turns, hovering and, of course, landing.

The Keys offer much more than bars and the beach. Downwind Kayak Tours from Key West Eco Tours, Key Largo's Coral Restoration Foundation, or Clydesdale-drawn carriage rides through romantic Islamorada are unique adventures you won't want to miss.

SOUTHWEST

Golisano Children's Museum of Naples believes that when children play they learn and when families play together, they connect and create memories that last a lifetime. And so it goes at the newest exhibit Build it up KEVA. Using imagination, innovation and gravity—not glue—kids of all ages (and grown-ups, too) can build structures out of KEVA planks before they explore the rest of the museum, which includes the Banyan Tree exhibit, journeying through the Everglades, "eating" it up at the World Café, and piquing artistic interest at the fine art collection. Great for a rainy day or to escape the sun, except Monday when it's closed.

Looking for the perfect place to soak up the sun? The 14-acre Sun Splash Family Waterpark in Cape Coral offers thrilling high-speed water slides, including a five-story free-fall slide and frolic for the little ones at the Tot Spot.

Named "one of the 100 places that can change your child's life" by *National Geographic*, the 10,000 Islands Dolphin Project invites you on board *The Dolphin Explorer* on Marco Island to join dolphin researchers on an ecotour that is both fun and educational.

Southwest Florida has even more to offer including the Imaginarium in Fort Myers, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, Circus Sarasota, Sarasota Jungle Gardens and the Bishop Planetarium/Parker Manatee Aquarium at South Florida Museum.

CENTRAL EAST

Beach time is key in this region of Florida. However, be sure to take some time away from the rays to experience all it has to offer.

Daytona International Speedway, home to the Daytona 500, will blow the sand off your

Identifying dolphins with the 10,000 Islands Dolphin Project aboard the *Dolphin Explorer*



The Kennedy Space Center in Titusville

shoes with its unique tours and experiences. Take the family to explore NASCAR garages, Pit Road, victory lane and all that makes this place the world center of racing. Got a need for speed? Indulge in the ultimate NASCAR fan experience and jump in the fast lane for the Richard Petty Driving Experience. Depending on your adrenalin-seeking level, choose to sit shotgun with a NASCAR instructor as you reach speeds up to 160 mph, or grab the wheel for an experience of a lifetime and drive the car yourself. Now, kids, ages 6 through 13 who are at least 48 inches tall, can also face the wind in the Junior Ride Along experience as they sit shotgun with a professional driving instructor for three exhilarating laps. This experience is sure to claim the checkered flag of fun.

Explore a piece of world history at Kennedy Space Center in the Cocoa Beach area. A visit to the space center is a full-day, inspiring adventure as you learn about the history and future of the space program and explore hands-on, interactive space attractions. Home to The United States Astronaut Hall of Fame, which features the world's largest collection of personal astronaut memorabilia, guests will be over the moon with intrigue when they experience simulation exhibits such as the Shuttle Launch Experience and the Astronaut Training Experience. Space Shuttle Atlantis now calls Kennedy Space



Center home and tells the incredible story of NASA's 30-year space shuttle program. This trip will be one giant leap of delight for your family.

Beyond the beautiful shores of the Central East Florida region, show your family more about Florida's marine life by visiting the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet. Wow them by standing next to a full-size manatee, see how they measure up to a giant leatherback turtle, check out a real whale skull and be in awe of the 300-year-old brain coral.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: GREATER MIAMI CVB; TIKI JET, NAPLES, MARCO ISLAND, EVERGLADES CVB; V&V HOSPITALITY & MEDIA SERVICES

CENTRAL

Before you book all your vacation days at the theme parks, save a couple of days for Central Florida's unique, amazing attractions that don't include a mouse, whale or Harry Potter.

Get up close (without becoming lunch) to Florida's iconic "giant lizards" at Gatorland in Orlando, the alligator capitol of the world. Watch live 'gator feedings, learn about various exotic reptiles, catch a glimpse of the white alligators and cheer on the 'gator wrestlers. Be sure to offer a toothy grin to the attraction's newest resident, Bonecrusher II, a 15-foot, 1,400-pound American crocodile. This half-day attraction also features a splash park for kids, included with admission. Expand your visit and book an unforgettable family adventure on the Screamin' Gator Zip Line Tour. You'll get a bird's-eye view of the park's alligators, including a wild ride over the 'gator mating marsh. A trip to Gatorland promises to take the bite out of boring vacations.

For adventure lovers who have had their fill of roller coasters, iFly Indoor Orlando treats visitors to the ultimate indoor skydiving experience. Learn what it really feels like to skydive without having to jump out of a perfectly good airplane. Safety instruction and gear are all included in the price of admission.

Captain Memo's Pirate Cruise in Clearwater Beach



Wild Florida Airboat Tours at the headwaters of the Everglades in Central Florida



Ready for a little less adventure and a little more mind-sharpening time with the family? WonderWorks in Orlando turns your vacation upside down with more than 100 hands-on exhibits that tweak the mind and pique interests. Experience an earthquake, feel the chill of the water the night the *Titanic* sank, muscle up the brain to move a ball across a table, and build the theme park ride of your dreams, then ride it using virtual technology. After nourishing your brain with a day of wonder, feed the tummy and giggle at the Outta Control Magic Comedy Dinner Show (reservations recommended).

If you have more time to spare, consider the Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens in Sanford, Ripley's Believe It or Not! in Orlando, flip for fun on a flying trapeze at the Orlando Circus School, or get back to nature aboard an airboat tour with Boggy Creek Airboat Rides.

CENTRAL WEST

If your kids are dolphin crazy, or perhaps just crazy for Winter, the beloved dolphin of the movie, *Dolphin Tale*, they will flip over meeting the star face to face at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium. Get up close and feed the stingrays, wade with Atlantic bottlenose dolphins (additional fee) and get to know all of the rescued dolphins, sea turtles, otters and sharks at the aquarium for an afternoon of heart-warming delights.

What's a trip to Florida without a little pirate adventure? Captain Memo's Pirate Cruise in Clearwater is the original pirate adventure in Florida and worth its weight in gold. You'll get lost in pirate antics of treasure hunts, face painting and dancing as the ship sets sail in search of bountiful dolphins during the cruise.

Wild water life is all the rage in Central West Florida so check out Crystal River Tours to snorkel with wild manatees, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo and The Florida Aquarium.

NORTHEAST

Northeast Florida offers great history, shopping and fantasy for all. America's oldest city, St. Augustine, is an historical gem. Tour Castillo de San Marcos, a fort built between 1672 and 1695 by the Spanish. Try to reclaim your youth at Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth and get schooled at the Oldest Wooden School House, constructed more than 200 years ago. Beyond history, St. Augustine

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: V&V HOSPITALITY & MEDIA SERVICES; VISIT ORLANDO.

FLORIDA STATE PARKS



National Gold Medal
Florida State Parks - America's First Three-Time Winner

more than sea shells by the sea shore



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