

Nature grabs your attention in Crystal River

Hop in for a dip with manatees in sparkling blue waters

Few counties in Florida combine ingredients to create a masterpiece like Citrus County. It takes aspects of nature, shakes them in a bag and – *voila* – a delectable destination is waiting to be explored.

The location boasts seven rivers, a chain of freshwater lakes, the Gulf of Mexico and a web of islands, marsh and mangrove to present endless opportunities to experience the outdoors in and out of water.

Native Americans laid the foundation for Citrus County more than two millennia ago. The vestiges of their culture are displayed at the Crystal River Archaeological Site. The six-mound complex is a National Historic Landmark and a visitors center/museum holds artifacts excavated from the site.

Countless miles of undisturbed islets, channels, streams and rivers bless the Citrus County shoreline. Located 70 miles north of Tampa, it's a place where fresh water and saltwater meet in the gulf. Native plants, birds and marine life enhance the intimacy of Fort Island Beach, turning it into a secluded getaway.

Crystal River is labeled "The Manatee Capital of the World" and is one of Florida's top eco-tourism hotspots.



MARINE LIFE – A West Indian manatee lifts its snout out of the water at Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park in Citrus County, Florida.

Image: Sunshower Shots. Adobe Stock.

Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge encompasses more than 70 springs. Each winter, warm, spring-fed waters attract North America's largest manatee population.

Hundreds of manatees gather in Three Sisters Spring from January to

March. It's also the only place in the U.S. where visitors can swim with the endangered Florida Manatee. These gentle giants measure more than 13-feet long and weigh as much as 1,300 pounds. Guided tours are recommended to guests who might want

to take a dip.

Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park resides in a historic fishing village and is believed to be the only place in the world to see West Indian manatees year-round. Pontoon boats take visitors to an underwater observatory, where they can see the manatees' slow-moving water ballet without getting wet. A manatee's nose and nostrils often are its only parts visible above the water. Other native wildlife includes black bears, Florida panthers, bobcats and river otters, which can be seen along paved walking trails and boardwalks.

Floral City is nestled in Citrus County's peaceful southeast corner. It's famous for its Florida charm, beautiful older homes and the Avenue of the Oaks, which is covered by a canopy of oaks and draped in Spanish moss.

It also is the opening to the Sunshine State's longest paved recreation trail. Withlacoochee State Trail offers 46 miles for hiking, biking and horseback riding. Withlacoochee State Forest is considered one of the "10 Coolest Places You've Been in North America" by the World Wildlife Fund.

Citrus County is sweet, adventurous and charming. It's a recipe for good times and lasting memories.

It's good to be king at regal residences

Take a peek inside Britain's favorite royal haunts; see history

Have you ever wondered how Princess Diana lived, or where Henry VIII shared quality time with his six wives?

The private homes and haunts of Britain's royal family are not as private as you might think. Many are open to the public. Have a look inside some of Britain's most celebrated royal residences and attractions and make yourself at home.

One of Britain's most recognizable landmarks, *Buckingham Palace*, is the official residence of the King. Every August and September, His Majesty opens his home to visitors, giving you the chance to tour the lavish State Rooms and Garden. You'll also see incredible treasures from the Royal Collection along the way. And don't forget to catch the spectacular *Changing of the Guard* ceremony — daily from May to July, and on alternative days for the rest of the year.

Kensington Palace has been home to many members of the Royal Family, including Queen Victoria, Diana, Princess of Wales, and **now** the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. It was also the birthplace and childhood home of Queen Victoria. Kensington Palace recently added a pair of



MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME – Visitors can tour State Rooms and Garden at Buckingham Palace. Image: Visit Britain.

permanent exhibitions. *Victoria: A Royal Childhood* is a reimagined visitor route through the State Rooms, where the princess spent her formative years. *Victoria: Woman and Crown* in the Piggott gallery examines her later life and legacy.

Hampton Court Palace, about 35 minutes south of London,

illustrates the magnificence of the Tudor era. Step back in time for a taste of Tudor life in Henry VIII's kitchens or lose yourself in the famous Hampton Court Maze. The Hampton Court gardens are internationally renowned for being among the most beautiful in the world.

With a stunning ceiling painted

by Rubens in 1635, *Banqueting House* at Whitehall, is all that remains of the 1,500-room Whitehall Palace, home of British monarchs from 1530 until 1698. In 1649, King Charles I was executed on a scaffold built outside the building.

Legend has it that if the ravens ever leave the *Tower of London*, both the tower and the monarchy will crumble. One of the world's most famous fortresses, the Tower has seen duty as a royal palace, prison, armory and even a zoo. Today, it's a World Heritage Site, and prepare to be dazzled by the Crown Jewels, the world-famous collection of 23,578 gemstones. Stand on the spot where Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard lost their heads. The Yeoman Warders or Beefeaters have been guarding the Tower since 1485.

Windsor Castle, an hour outside of London, is where the Royal Family heads for weekend retreats, state visits and special events. A royal residence more than 900 years, visitors can tour the State Apartments, furnished with treasures from the Royal Collection, including paintings by Holbein and Rubens, and a suit of armor made in 1540 and worn by King Henry VIII.

Tricks to keep windshield free of ice

Ways to possibly skip scraping and see road ahead

Waking up to a frost-laden windshield is a disheartening way for commuters to begin a day — particularly if they're running late.

It's a scenario too familiar. The windshield is covered and the wiper blades are stuck to the glass. It's a hinderance that's going to take ample time to clear. Driving with iced-up windows is dangerous and against the law in many states.

Removing the ice is a two-step process. Turn on the vehicle's defrosters and begin scraping the windshield, back window, door **and** windows and rearview mirrors.

Auto-glass experts recommend using a proper ice scraper or deicer to avoid damaging the glass. Use a pump-oriented deicer spray rather than an aerosol if it's a commercial brand.

Only use the ice scraper on the windows. You risk damaging the finish and exposing metal surfaces on any surface other than the windows. You also could damage the finish and expose metal surfaces to corrosion by trying to scrape snow or ice off painted surfaces.

It's unwise to attempt to melt the ice from your windshield by pouring



FRIGID CONDITIONS – Drivers should make sure they pull the wiper blades from an ice-covered windshield before turning on the wipers. Image: remik44992. Adobe Stock.

hot water on it. Glass has a hard texture, but it's not flexible enough to permit rapid uneven expansion. Thermal shock could shatter it. And always avoid turning on the windshield wipers before they are freed of snow and ice.

Drivers also could cover the windshield. It's an alternative to scraping. The shrouds are relatively inexpensive and many are durable enough

to handle anything that is dumped on them. Some have magnetic edges that quickly attach. Others, like FrostGuard, feature a security panel that can be dropped between the doorjamb and window to prevent theft, making it ideal for parking lots and public places. Try placing a piece of cardboard or a plastic tablecloth over the windshield and secure it with the wipers.

Scraping ice off the side mirrors can be challenging. Cover them with large zip-lock bags or a plastic grocery bag to prevent ice from forming.

The most irritating frost forms inside the windshield. It's caused by humid air inside the vehicle that comes in contact with a cold windshield. Frost easily can form. Wet clothing, a steaming mug of coffee or tracking snow or water into the vehicle all contribute to the issue.

Regulating the temperature and humidity inside the vehicle are key to preventing it. Be sure the intake vents at the base of the windshield are free of ice and snow and lower a window to allow cold, dry air into the car. Brush off as much snow and ice as possible before entering the vehicle and remove wet mats and let them dry overnight. Turn off the HVAC system's recirculating setting and set the vents to the fresh-air position when driving to keep the windows from fogging.

Don't forget to remove any snow that's on top of your vehicle and on the hood. Snow can fall onto your windshield or could blow onto other vehicle's windshields, decreasing visibility. Keeping your windshield clean will make it easier to see road conditions ahead.