

TRAVEL

Spring Break Road Trips

Five drive-to destinations for family fun on a tank of gas

By Beth Luberecki

Need some last-minute spring break travel ideas? That's the beauty of living in a state as large and varied as Florida, where there are so many great places to visit.

Here are five spring break road trip ideas the whole family will love that should only require about a tank of gas. So fill up and hit the road for some fun.

Make memories in the Middle Keys

Families can choose their way to stay at La Siesta Resort & Villas on Islamorada in the Florida Keys, which offers guest rooms, suites, beachfront cottages and vacation home rentals. No matter which option you choose, the whole family can take advantage of resort amenities: a walk-in heated pool, private beach and complimentary kayak, paddleboard and bicycle rentals.

La Siesta is part of the Islamorada Resort Collection, which also includes Amara Cay Resort, Pelican Cove Resort & Marina and Postcard Inn Beach Resort & Marina. That means there are even more accommodation choices to best match families' needs and vacation timing. A free shuttle runs among the four sister properties in Islamorada, and guests of one can enjoy access to the amenities and restaurants at all the others, as well. A sure kid-pleaser? Feeding the tarpon at the Postcard Inn's marina.

There's lots of family-friendly adventure to be had in the village of Islamorada, which is actually a collection of islands spanning about 18 miles. Book a private dolphin or sea lion encounter at Theater of the Sea, sink into the world of undersea exploration at the History of Diving Museum or stroll the trails at Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park, a former quarry that played a role in building the Overseas Railroad in the early 1900s. And booking a fishing charter is always a good idea when you're in the "Sport Fishing Capital of the World."

Go to Walt Disney World in style

You've probably been to Disney's Magic Kingdom Park or EPCOT before. But you may not have done it the Four Seasons way.

Book a room at Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort for a theme park vacation with a luxury touch. The resort makes it easy to enjoy Walt Disney World, with an on-site Disney Planning Center, complimentary motorcoach transportation to the parks and early theme park entry.



La Siesta Resort & Villas is part of the Islamorada Resort Collection. Contributed photo

But you don't even need to leave the resort for some Disney magic: Its Ravello restaurant hosts a "Good Morning Breakfast" with Goofy and pals on Thursday and Saturday mornings (and some Tuesdays), and some guest rooms and suites offer views of theme park fireworks.

And despite all the thrills that await on Space Mountain or The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror, it might be hard to get the kids to leave the hotel. They'll want to spend lots of time at the five-acre Explorer Island water park, featuring a lazy river, zero-entry pool, fun-filled splash zone and two waterslides. The all-day, complimentary Kids for All Seasons kids club (for ages 4 to 12) and The Hideout for teens also prove draws for young guests. But that's good news for the grownups, who can squeeze in a spa treatment, a swim at the adults-only pool or a bite to eat at the resort's Michelin-starred rooftop restaurant Capa Steakhouse while the kids are otherwise occupied.

See what's new in Boca Raton

Start by checking in at The Boca Raton Tower, a 27-story luxury hotel at The Boca Raton private club and resort that recently underwent a major transformation. The 224 new guest rooms and suites can be configured as families need, including the option for connecting rooms or entire floor takeovers for multi-generational families or groups.

Guests can enjoy amenities like the resort's Harborside Pool Club, which features three pools, a 450-foot-long floating river, wa-

terslides, a new FlowRider surf simulator, the Banyan Bunch kids club and The Break hangout spot for kids ages 11 to 15. Wow the kids by having the tower's two robot butlers, Johnnie and Ethel (named after the pet monkeys belonging to The Boca Raton's original owner, architect Addison Mizner), deliver snacks to your room.

New exhibits on view in Boca Raton include "Whitfield Lovell: Passages" (Feb. 15-May 21) at the Boca Raton Museum of Art, which displays the artist's work exploring lost African American history, and "Zoo in You" (Jan. 28-May 14) at the Children's Science Explorium, which focuses on the fascinating world of the human microbiome. Free daily presentations introduce visitors to the current patients at Gumbo Limbo Nature Center's Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Facility, and there's always something new to see on Gumbo Limbo's Ashley and Boardwalk Trails. In the evening, stroll Mizner Park to discover the new shops and restaurants that have opened recently.

Explore the artsy side of Sarasota

Sarasota is a great place to explore some arts and culture in a totally kid-friendly way. At The Ringling, for example, family guides help kids explore both the lavish waterfront mansion where circus magnate John Ringling once lived and his impressive collection of European paintings, sculptures and decorative objects at the Museum of Art. But squeezing into a clown

car and other interactive activities at the site's Circus Museum should come pretty easily to the kiddos.

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens' downtown Sarasota campus hosts an annual exhibit that explores well-known artists' connection to the natural world, and this year's "Tiffany: The Pursuit of Beauty in Nature" (Feb. 12-June 25) puts a colorful, stained-glass-style spin on the entire site.

Public art can be found all over the city, from large-scale sculptures rising from the middle of roundabouts to eye-catching murals adorning local buildings, and there's always an interesting play or concert taking place at one of the city's many theaters.

Stay at Art Ovation Hotel to further immerse the family in the creative world. Located in the heart of downtown Sarasota, the hotel features rotating art exhibits, performing artists in the lobby and weekly guest artists who showcase their process for visitors, along with creative room amenities like sketchpads, coloring pencils and ukuleles guests can strum.

Stay along the Kissimmee River the Old Florida way

At the Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo, the family can bunk down in unique lodging options including modern versions of Conestoga wagons and glamping tents, along with more standard but still cool cottages and cabins. The resort provides a camping kind of vibe, without any actual roughing it.

The 1,700-acre Polk County dude ranch hosts a weekly Saturday night rodeo and offers a slew of outdoor activities that families can add on to their stay, from horseback riding and archery to airboat rides and rock climbing. Its new S'mores n Pours package (available through August) makes a spring break getaway even sweeter. Families who book one of the resort's Luxe Conestoga Wagons, Luxe Teepees or Glamping Tents receive two complimentary s'mores kits and a complimentary bottle of Buffalo Trace bourbon, perfect for an evening around the campfire.

If everything on site doesn't provide enough activity for the family, the resort sits at the edge of the KICCO Wildlife Management Area. Hiking and biking trails travel through the expansive preserve, where visitors might see wild turkeys, white-tailed deer and other wildlife.

Directory

La Siesta Resort & Villas

Islamorada
305.664.2132
888.313.6200

Theater of the Sea

Islamorada
305.664.2431

History of Diving Museum

Islamorada
305.664.9737

Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park

Islamorada
305.664.2540

Four Seasons Resort Orlando at Walt Disney World Resort

Lake Buena Vista
407.313.7777

The Boca Raton

Boca Raton
855.874.6551

Boca Raton Museum of Art

Boca Raton
561.392.2500

Children's Science Explorium

Boca Raton
561.347.3912

Gumbo Limbo Nature Center

Boca Raton
561.544.8605

Mizner Park

Boca Raton
561.362.0606

The Ringling

Sarasota
941.359.5700

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens

Sarasota
941.366.5731

Art Ovation Hotel

Sarasota
941.316.0808

Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo

River Ranch
888.779.4104

KICCO Wildlife Management Area

River Ranch
800.250.4250



Guests of the Boca Raton Tower can enjoy the Harborside Pool Club, which features three pools, a 450-foot-long floating river, waterslides and a new FlowRider surf simulator. Contributed photo