



MILES FROM
PALM BEACH
247



COURTESY OF PLANTATION ON CRYSTAL RIVER



STAY

Plantation on Crystal River (plantationoncrystalriver.com) stands as a beacon of Southern hospitality in this quaint city. Situated on 232 acres and surrounded by Kings Bay, the resort delivers everything one could want in a Crystal River vacation—and then some. Given the destination’s eco-adventure reputation, you won’t be spending too much time in your hotel room, but rather putting on the Plantation’s golf courses or partaking in water-bound activities, such as boating, fishing, and scalloping.



EAT

After a full day outdoors, indulge in a down-home feast at Plantation on Crystal River’s West 82° Grill. This casual eatery puts its own twist on fresh local ingredients, like shrimp and grits starring Gulf Coast shrimp and a signature bouillabaisse boasting grouper, clams, and alligator. Other area highlights include downtown Crystal River’s Highlander Café and The Back Porch Garden Wine and Tea Bar, where you can savor made-from-scratch scones and an endless variety of teas.

Crystal River

SERENE SPRINGS

Centrally nestled on the state’s Gulf Coast, Crystal River offers a glimpse of ancient Florida. Here, Spanish moss and solitary egrets cast an enchanting silhouette across clear spring waters, where sea cows play below the surface. The Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1983 to protect Florida manatees, and it is the only place in the state where swimmers can passively observe these gentle giants. (discovercrystalriverfl.com) —Mary Murray

SEE + DO

Crystal River’s most famous resident is the Florida manatee, and the opportunity to swim alongside these creatures is the reason to visit. Plantation on Crystal River hosts snorkeling tours throughout the year, though you’re most likely to see the greatest number of manatees during colder months (November through March), when they retreat to the temperate springs. But regardless of the season, your expert guide will scour the springs in search of these friendly marine mammals. Once he spots one (or more), he’ll lead you and your tour-mates on a dive to put those passive-observation skills to the test. The manatees are used to humans, so don’t be alarmed if one swims right underneath you. You might even hear the playful squeaks of two manatees in communication.



SHOP: FOR A TASTE OF LOCAL COLOR, STOP BY THE SHOPPES OF HERITAGE VILLAGE (theshoppesofheritagetown.com) TO PERUSE VINTAGE STORES LIKE SUN COAST VINTAGE GOODS AND PICK UP A MINI “LUCKY” MANATEE—AMONG OTHER MANATEE-THEMED GOODS—AT WILLOW CREEK’S SECRET GARDEN.



HOT TIP: BOOK YOUR MANATEE TOUR FOR THE MORNING BEFORE THE SPRINGS GET TOO BUSY. THE EARLIER YOUR OUTING, THE FEWER TOURISTS VYING FOR THE MANATEES’ ATTENTION.