

## Travel Resources

Home » Travel » Guides » Baseball Spring Training Guide: 13 Quirky Florida Road Trips

## Baseball Spring Training Guide: 13 Quirky Florida Road Trips

Published Mar 10, 2016

by **Kenny Gallo**



To a baseball fan, nothing warms a cold winter's heart more than Spring Training, where eternal optimism rules, the games mean nothing, and the players let down their guard to the fans. But, if you were to bore of infield practice, scrimmages, and sunshine, what else could you do in Florida? Let's go off the grid in the Grapefruit League to find the road trip gold away from your team's Spring Training complex.

### Kissimmee/Orlando – Houston Astros

After you catch some Astros action, make a trip to the most appropriately named theme park in the Sunshine State: Gatorland. It's here where you can see alligators in their natural habitat wrestling with people. Ok, it might not be too natural. Gatorland, founded in 1949, is both theme park and wildlife preserve that is home to some of the rarest gators in the swamp. Gator wrestling and the opportunity to get super close to these gigantic reptiles will surely keep you on your toes. If you're feeling brave, you might also care to hook up to the "Screamin' Gator Zip Line," a heart-pounding zip above the gators' breeding ground.

14501 S. Orange Blossom Trail  
Orlando, FL 32837 ([website](#))

### Viera – Washington Nationals

A destination for the fossil freak is [The Dinosaur Store](#) in Cocoa Beach, a short drive from the Nationals complex and just south of Cape Canaveral and the Kennedy Space Center. The Fossils are in spades at this Jurassic museum that features the skulls, bones, teeth, etc. of all sorts of prehistoric and modern creatures, some pieces dating 200 million years in the wayback machine. For viewing AND purchase. Some Megalodon teeth would really tie your living room together, right? If you know what those are, you are already ahead of the game.

250 W. Cocoa Beach Cswy  
Cocoa Beach, FL 32931 ([website](#))

### Port St. Lucie – New York Mets

If you ever wanted to play conductor for a day, in the heart of Port St. Lucie (where the New York Mets train ..... "train" is the operative word here) is every child's and child-like adult's dream: Treasure Coast Model Railroad Club. The Club is a labor of love for many of the Club members. It's there that miniature trains chug through miniature towns with miniature town folk going about their daily business. Tours are offered twice a week and open houses are available throughout the month. Be sure to check their schedule.

273 S.W. Becker Road  
Port St. Lucie, FL 34953 ([website](#))

### Jupiter – St Louis Cardinals, Miami Marlins

Burt Reynolds Park. Because, Burt Reynolds Park. There's a park named after Burt Reynolds, Florida's Native Son (star of 1977's Gator!). Do you need a reason to NOT visit this little piece of real estate in Palm Beach County? Boat ramps, picnic areas, horseshoe pits, and sand volleyball courts also available.

805 N. U.S. Highway 1  
Jupiter, Florida 33477 ([website](#))

### Fort Lauderdale – Baltimore Orioles

Mermaids galore at [The Wreck Bar](#) in Fort Lauderdale where you can get an adult beverage and catch a mermaid show through the porthole windows at the same time. The Wreck Bar and its mermaid show, one of the US's dwindling few if you were a historian, is a local institution and premier roadside attraction. For a truly authentic experience, belly up to the bar and order a martini while you gaze at a smiling mermaid.

1140 Seabreeze Blvd  
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316 ([Facebook](#))

### Fort Myers – Boston Red Sox, Minnesota Twins

You were just thinking: where can I eat a steak and solve a murder at the same time? Right? In Fort Myers, home to the Red Sox and Twins camps, [Seminole Gulf Murder Mystery Dinner Train](#) is your answer. Your inner gumshoe can experience the interactive experience of mystery dinner theater on a train. How close is it to Murder on the Orient Express? You be the judge.

2805 Colonial Blvd, Colonial Station  
Fort Myers, FL 33916 ([website](#))

### Port Charlotte – Tampa Bay Rays

Need a new ride? [Muscle Car City](#), just across the Peace River in Punta Gorda, has that '66 Chevelle with the chrome detailing and 350 Rocket underneath the hood you've been looking for. Over 99,000 square feet of classic cars make this museum destination a must see for the classic car enthusiast. Bring some extra cash just in case you want to make an investment, get some customizing done, or buy a burger at the on-site diner.

3811 Tamiami Trail  
Punta Gorda, FL 33950 ([website](#))

### Sarasota – Cincinnati Reds

Florida is home to many a miniature golf course to be sure. But in Sarasota, the off-season home of the Reds, there is one that is a little different. At [Smugglers Cove Adventure Golf](#) you can get your putt-putt on alongside live gators and they'll even let you feed them. Feed them what? They would probably eat anything. (Note: there are many gator related activities in Florida, if you didn't know)

3815 N. Tamiami Trail  
Sarasota, FL 34234 ([website](#))

### Bradenton – Pittsburgh Pirates

Desoto [Speedway](#) in Bradenton is like every other race track in Florida, except it isn't. Ever see School buses race? You can here. If you happen to be there in February, you might also attend The St. Valentine's Day Massacre, a demolition derby to share with that special someone. Check the schedule for events throughout the spring.

21050 State Road 64E  
Bradenton, FL 34212 ([website](#))

### Tampa – New York Yankees

Just up Interstate 4 from Tampa, where the Yankees train, is a mesmerizing piece of roadside art that deserves a look: [Airstream Ranch](#). Built by Frank Bates in 2008, the seven silver upended airstream trailers jut from the earth for seemingly no reason but to evoke conversation. Isn't that what art does? You may recognize the style from Amarillo Texas's "Cadillac Ranch" (which features upended Cadillacs in the same half-buried stylings), but Airstream is all Florida with its surreal beauty and tacky charm.

I-4, Seffner  
FL 33584 ([web info](#))

### Clearwater – Philadelphia Phillies

A visit to Clearwater beach will not be complete without a stop at [Hogan's Beach Shop](#), which is owned by wrestler-turned beach bum - turned reality-tv star Hulk Hogan. You can't miss it because there is a life size statue of The Hulkster himself out front waiting to give you a body slam. If you have some extra cash, you can purchase a replica title belt to go with your Hulkmania t-shirt.

483 Mandalay Ave, Ste 108  
Clearwater, FL 33767 ([website](#))

### Dunedin – Toronto Blue Jays

Nearby Tarpon Springs, 10 miles north from Dunedin where the Jays train, is the natural sea sponge capital of the world. Who knew? At [Spongeorama's Sponge Factory](#), not only can you purchase an authentic loofah for the best scrub you will ever have, but you will learn everything you need to know about the history of sponges, sponge harvesting, and the sponge industry.

510 Dodecanese Blvd  
Tarpon Springs, Florida 34689 ([website](#))

### Lakeland - Detroit Tigers

Winter Haven, FL is home to the second largest Legoland theme park in the world. (145 acres. The largest is in the UK) It's a 30-minute drive from the Detroit Tigers' Lakeland camp among the many lakes in central FL. Legoland features a water park, Lego New York, Lego Las Vegas, Lego Star Wars, Lego everything. If you were so inclined to go all Lego, you could stay a few nights at the Legoland hotel. The bed is a people bed, not a Lego person bed. Phew.

1 Legoland Way  
Winter Haven, FL 33884 ([website](#))

Those are just a few of the activities that might tear you away from watching your team prepare for the upcoming season. Be sure to check schedules of all the destinations before you visit and get some [trip insurance](#) before you hit the road. Have a safe road trip!

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*Kenny Gallo is a writer living in Richmond, VA.*

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