



**nileGUIDE**

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



Thomas Jung

## Head outdoors

### **Orlando, 3 Days**

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# Guide Description

**AUTHOR NOTE:** Orlando has more to offer than theme parks. Check out some of the beautiful scenery, hang out with the manatees, and enjoy what natural Florida has to offer

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - Orlando



### Blue Spring Fishing Site

Great fishing and other activities



### Blue Spring Wildlife Observation Site

See the manatees!



### Blue Spring Campground

Blue Springs State Park accommodates a large number of overnight quests at three separate locations.

## Day 2 - Orlando



### Discovery Cove

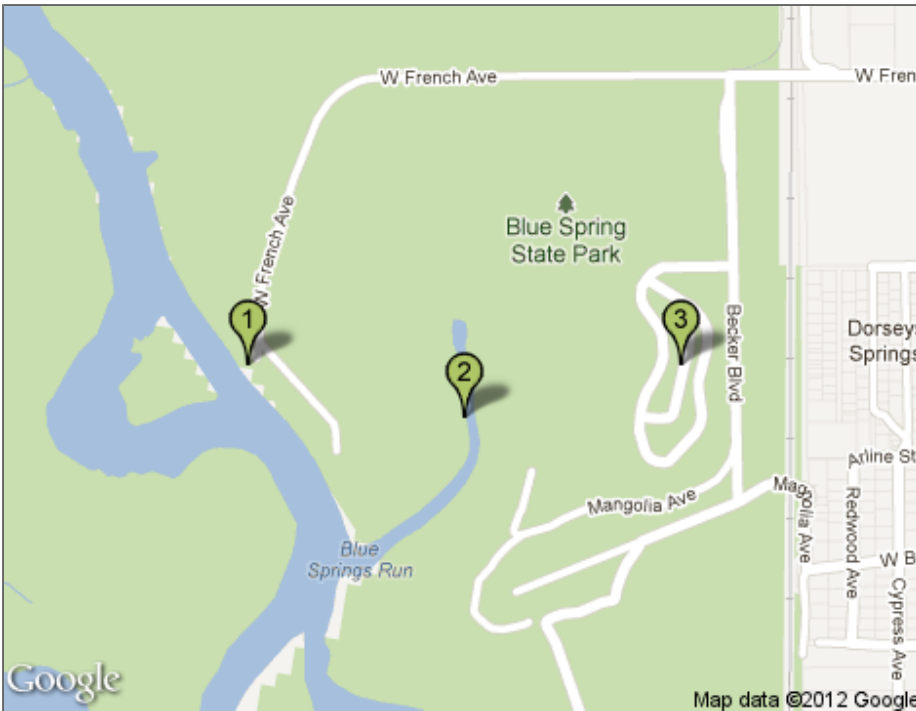
Swim in tranquil waters among dolphins, tropical fish, and rays



### Roy's

Honolulu at your doorstep!

# Day 1 - Orlando



## QUICK NOTE

**contact:**  
fax: 904-775-3663  
<http://www.floridastateparks.org/bluespring/>

**location:**  
FL 32763

## 1 Blue Spring Fishing Site

**DESCRIPTION:** A handicapped fishing pier is one of the most popular areas for catching fish at Blue Springs State Park. The other popular location is launching a boat or canoe and venturing out into the St. Johns River. Many restricted areas apply due to the presence of endangered manatees sharing the water. From the pier, anglers will find an abundance of bluegills and blue cats, in addition to largemouth bass, shellcrackers and speckled perch. Gazing into the waters, you might see the prehistoric-looking gar fish which sometimes reaches 5 feet long. A Florida freshwater fishing license is required for individuals age 16 years and older. Canoe rentals are available at the concession area that also offers limited snacks, camping supplies, trinkets, T-shirts, and groceries. Visitors to Blue Springs State Park may also be interested in knowing that the park offers a tour boat that follows a 2.5-hour route that travels from the mouth of Blue Springs Run and through a canal that leads to Dead River. At Dead River, the tour boat picks up more tourists as it passes Hontoon Island State Park then circles back to Blue Spring Run. The trip includes a restaurant stop. Reservations can be made by calling the park office. Historians will find it interesting to learn that three-story Thursday House is located at the park. Before settling at Blue Springs, Louis Thursday abandoned New York to become a soldier in the Mexican War. After the war, he became one of the first successful citrus fruit growers and tradesman from Central Florida.



Photo courtesy of Florida Park Service

Directions: Take exit 114 off Interstate 4 and follow the signs. Go south on 17/92 to Orange City, about 2.5 miles. Make a right onto West French Avenue.

**contact:**  
fax: 904-775-3663  
<http://www.floridastateparks.org/bluespring/>

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FL 32763

## 2 Blue Spring Wildlife Observation Site

**DESCRIPTION:** The 2,600-acre site supports an abundance of wildlife due to the subtropical hardwood forest and the huge Blue Springs Run where 55 thousand gallons of water per minute flow 2,200 feet to the river. There are plenty of opportunities for viewing wildlife at Blue Springs. One in particular is the lengthy handicapped accessible boardwalk paralleling Blue Spring Run. At the western end of the boardwalk is a large ADA fishing pier. From the boardwalk, you can see the bubbling cavernous spring where scuba divers venture into the dark turquoise depths. This is the perfect location for viewing the graceful manatee. Even though the park indicates there is no swimming with the manatees, scuba divers frequently share the same waters. Our visit rewarded us with sights of 13 endangered manatees peacefully enjoying the tepid waters. They come so close to the boardwalk that you can see their scared heads and bodies from where motorboats blazed their flesh. We shared our visit with many visitors, but I have to believe that this pristine environment affords sights of alligators, river otters and a variety of wading birds during the quiet morning or evening hours. The park opens at 8 A.M. and closes at sunset. However, if camping, you can always venture to the boardwalk when day use hours are not in effect. Sometimes feeding at waters' edge, you'll see limpkins, white ibises, crowned-herons and if you visit in winter or spring, be sure to gaze overhead for bald eagles. The rare Florida scrub jay is known to live at the park as well. To highlight your wildlife expedition, enjoy the manatee slide program or a ranger-guided boat tour that follows a 2.5-hour route that travels from the mouth of Blue Springs Run and through a canal that leads to Dead River. At Dead River, the tour boat picks up more tourists as it passes Hontoon Island State Park then circles back to Blue Spring Run. The trip includes a restaurant stop. Reservations can be made by calling the park office. Historians will find it interesting to learn that the three-story Thursby House is located at the park. Before settling at Blue Springs, Louis Thursday abandoned New York to become a soldier in the Mexican War. After the war, he became one of the first successful citrus fruit growers and tradesman from Central Florida.

Directions: Take exit 114 off Interstate 4 and follow the signs. Go south on 17/92 to Orange City, about 2.5 miles. Make a right onto West French Avenue.



Photo courtesy of Blue Spring Wildlife Observation Site

**contact:**  
fax: 904-775-3663

**location:**  
32763

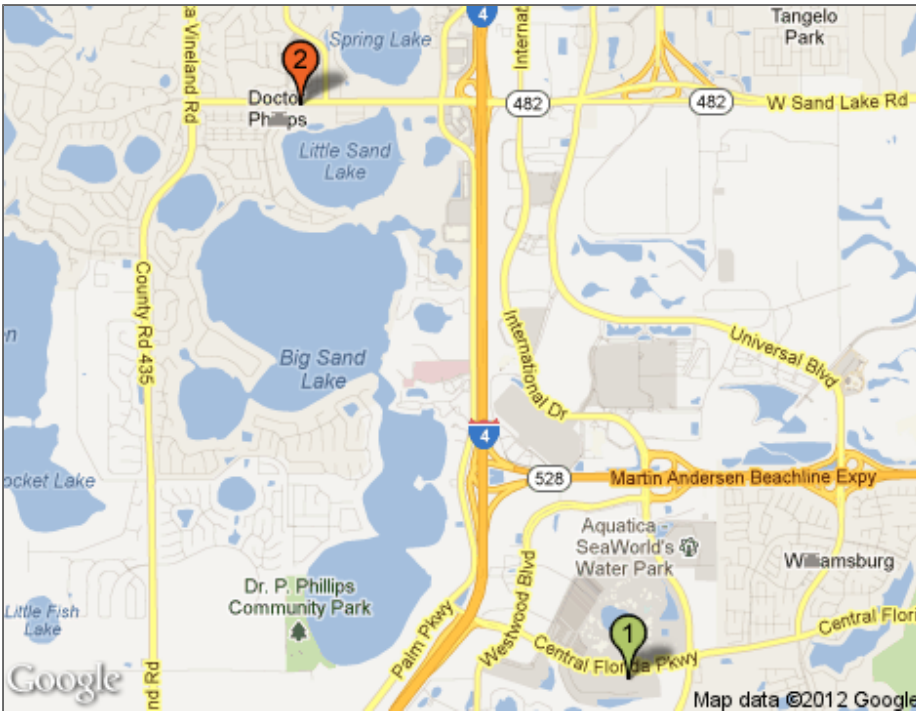
## 3 Blue Spring Campground

**DESCRIPTION:** Blue Springs State Park has three separate overnight locations; a campground, a cabin community and a primitive waterfront site. As soon as you enter the park, take the first road on the right to enter the main campground where you will find 51 tent and RV sites. Twenty-seven

hours:  
[www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/)

of the sites have electric hookups. Each site has a picnic table, grill and fresh drinking water. No sites have a their own dump station, however, there is one within the park. There are only a few sites that are of sufficient size to accommodate today's larger camping rigs. The campground offers accessible bathhouse facilities. Reservations are taken on 90% of campsites, and 100% for cabins. The reservations can be made up to eleven (11) months in advance from the day you wish to arrive. A convenient feature of the park service is that they accept American Express credit cards. The campground is located in a pine forest within walking distance of the river and spring run. This is a wonderful feature if you enjoy early morning or late evening walks in hopes of spotting some of the park's unique wildlife including river otters and alligators. Manatees may be seen throughout the day during the winter months. Primitive camping is available to registered backpackers at the end of Pine Island Trail, which is a 4-mile hike-in site along the banks of St. Johns River. Visitors to Blue Springs State Park may also be interested in knowing that the park offers a tour boat that follows a 2.5-hour route that travels from the mouth of Blue Springs Run and through a canal that leads to Dead River. At Dead River, the tour boat picks up more tourists as it passes Hontoon Island State Park then circles back to Blue Spring Run. The trip includes a restaurant stop. Reservations can be made by calling the park office. Historians will find it interesting to learn that three-story Thursby House is located at the park. Before settling at Blue Springs, Louis Thursday abandoned New York to become a soldier in the Mexican War. After the war, he became one of the first successful citrus fruit growers and tradesman from Central Florida.

# Day 2 - Orlando



## QUICK NOTE

**contact:**  
tel: +1 407 370 1280  
<http://www.discoverycove.com>

**location:**  
6000 Discovery Cove Way  
Orlando FL 32821

## 1 Discovery Cove

### OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The park stays open late in the summer offering a twilight rate that includes dinner.

**DESCRIPTION:** In July of 2000, Discovery Cove opened its gates and began providing a unique theme park experience that is nothing short of extraordinary. With a maximum of 1,000 guests per day, the park has managed to create an intimate feel – more like you're visiting a swanky resort in the Caribbean than visiting a theme park in the middle of Orlando. The admission price, though hefty, includes all of your needs... towels, wet suits, lockers, snorkels, masks, sun tan lotion, souvenir photos and parking.

Meals and snacks are included as well (and not just hot dogs and hamburgers either). You'll start the day with a continental breakfast (pastries, muffins, fresh fruit, juices and coffee). You can have a hamburger for lunch if you'd like, but Discovery Cove also offers such items as grilled salmon and pasta primavera. Unlimited snacks such as chips, pretzels, nachos, ice cream and smoothies are available all day. You can also enjoy as much bottled water, soda, beer, and cappuccinos as you like.

If you've booked yourselves into the Dolphin Encounter, the friendly concierge will schedule your time in the Dolphin Lagoon when you arrive. During the 30-minute encounter, you and 5-7 other guests will wade into shallow water and get up close and



by Kristen Manieri

personal with a very sociable and playful Atlantic Bottlenose Dolphin. Your trainer will guide the dolphin through a series of activities, allowing you to touch and instruct the dolphin. You'll also be able to experience a dorsal tow ride. For dolphin lovers, the extra admission price to include this encounter is definitely worth it.

When you arrive, you'll also want to check on the feeding times at Ray Lagoon so you can make sure to schedule that into your day. You can interact with dozens of rays of all sizes, some up to four feet in diameter. It's an amazing experience to be amongst these gentle and graceful creatures. The Coral Reef is where you'll really get to test your snorkeling skills as you float along amongst the hundreds of brilliantly colored tropical fish and rays. Make sure you find the shark encounter. Don't worry... they're behind thick glass.

You'll want to make several trips down the warm Tropical River, drifting in the slight current, under waterfalls, and through an underwater cave. The river also takes you through the Aviary, where you can hop out of the water and interact with over 250 exotic birds, none of which are caged. Having a toucan land on your arm is an interesting experience. Discovery Cove's beach is a great feature as well. Along the huge expanse of white, sugary sand, you'll find hammocks, umbrellas, and cabanas for your use. When all the swimming and snorkeling leaves you exhausted, grab a beach lounger and have a nap.

To avoid disappointment, reservations are a must!

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**contact:**

tel: 1 407 352 4844

fax: +1 407 352 3733

<http://www.roysrestaurant.com/>

**location:**

7760 W. Sand Lake Road  
Orlando FL 32819

**hours:**

Dinner: daily 5:30p onwards

**2 Roy's**

**DESCRIPTION:** Roy Yamaguchi's eatery serves delicious seafood that is the result of fresh ingredients blended sinfully with Hawaiian recipes. Try some of the classic items like Roy's Canoe Appetizer, Yellow Fin Ahi Poketini and Original Hawaiian Blackened Island Ahi. While relishing your food, do yourself a favor and remember to leave room for the Melting Hot Chocolate Soufflé – it's simply divine! The wine list is equally impressive, with a huge variety of sparkling wines, white wines, chardonnays and merlots to choose from. © wcities.com



wcities

# Orlando Snapshot

## Local Info

Think of Orlando and the picture of an iconic, cheerful mouse is sure to come to mind. Disney World not only sprawls across hundreds of acres of land in Lake Buena Vista, located in Orlando's southwest, its impact on Orlando tourism has been even more sweeping. If not for the explosion of Disney World, perhaps neighboring megaparks like Universal Studios and SeaWorld may never have been born.

No doubt, most vacationers come to Orlando for the theme parks, and for good reason. There is more family fun packed into every square inch of Orlando than possibly anywhere else on the planet. From heart-dropping roller coasters to unforgettable live shows, Orlando's expansive parks are worth every penny of their admission price. Orlando offers an easy vacation for families- it's easy to get around, easy to find something to do, and easy to fly in and out of.

The standard week-long vacation is not even close to enough time to truly experience Orlando. A family could spend their entire stay within Disney World and still would only uncover a fraction of the delightful diversions available. Besides days spent inside Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Animal Kingdom, and the recently renamed Hollywood Studios (formerly MGM Studios), visitors can also book themed dinners with beloved characters, rent watercraft for

traversing Disney's inner waterways, visit two Disney water parks, and take behind-the-scene tours... and this still would only scratch Disney's surface. You wouldn't want to miss shopping and dining at Downtown Disney, as well as shows like Cirque du Soleil's La Nouba and the House of Blues's Gospel Brunch.

Those who manage to break from Disney's tender grip are quickly swallowed up at Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure. These two parks are packed with spectacular rides as well as a huge entertainment, shopping and dining complex known as CityWalk. And the fun doesn't stop there.

Yet, there is life beyond the theme parks. While it's difficult to compete with the color and gusto of Disney and its neighbors, there's actually a lot happening outside of the theme park zone. Downtown's walkable streets offer a robust dining and nightlife scene as well as some unique boutiques and a handful of theaters and museums.

When the locals grow weary of the theme parks, which they quickly do, they're more likely to be found strolling around Lake Eola Park that boasts the famed fountain and amphitheater. Here you'll find a few popular eateries hugging its shores, a place to rent swan boats, and an awesome Sunday farmer's market crowded with downtown hipsters enjoying its beer garden and live bands.

Winter Park, with its posh boutiques, million-dollar homes, and chic cafes and restaurants is also a superb spot for an afternoon of strolling, shopping and snacking. Even non-shoppers love Winter Park thanks to its museums, scenic boat tours, and well-manicured park spaces.

Wherever you spend your time during your Orlando visit, you'll likely describe Orlando locals as friendly and unpretentious. Orlando isn't a big city like New York or LA, and it knows it. Sure, Orlando people glam it up at nightclubs and can spend wads of cash like any big city slicker, but they're not a snobby bunch. They're used to sharing their space with visitors and can be amiable and obliging if you're ever in need of a local tip.

Besides theme parks, I-Drive, and a handful of quaint urban corridors, the beach is just over an hour away. Cocoa and New Smyrna are closest and both are great for families, couples, and singles. Drive an extra hour west and you'll be at the Gulf. In fact, Orlando is one of the best starting off points for any Florida-exploring vacation. The airport is a direct flight from every major city in North America and there is so much more to see within a two to three hour drive of this great city.

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