

Destination DADE CITY

BY ADAM PORTER, PHOTOGRAPHY JEFF FAY

Planning a visit to Central Florida and looking for something to do that will not leave you with sore feet and a light wallet?

What about a pleasant day trip to a friendly town with a hardscrabble frontier history and a refined, hospitable present?



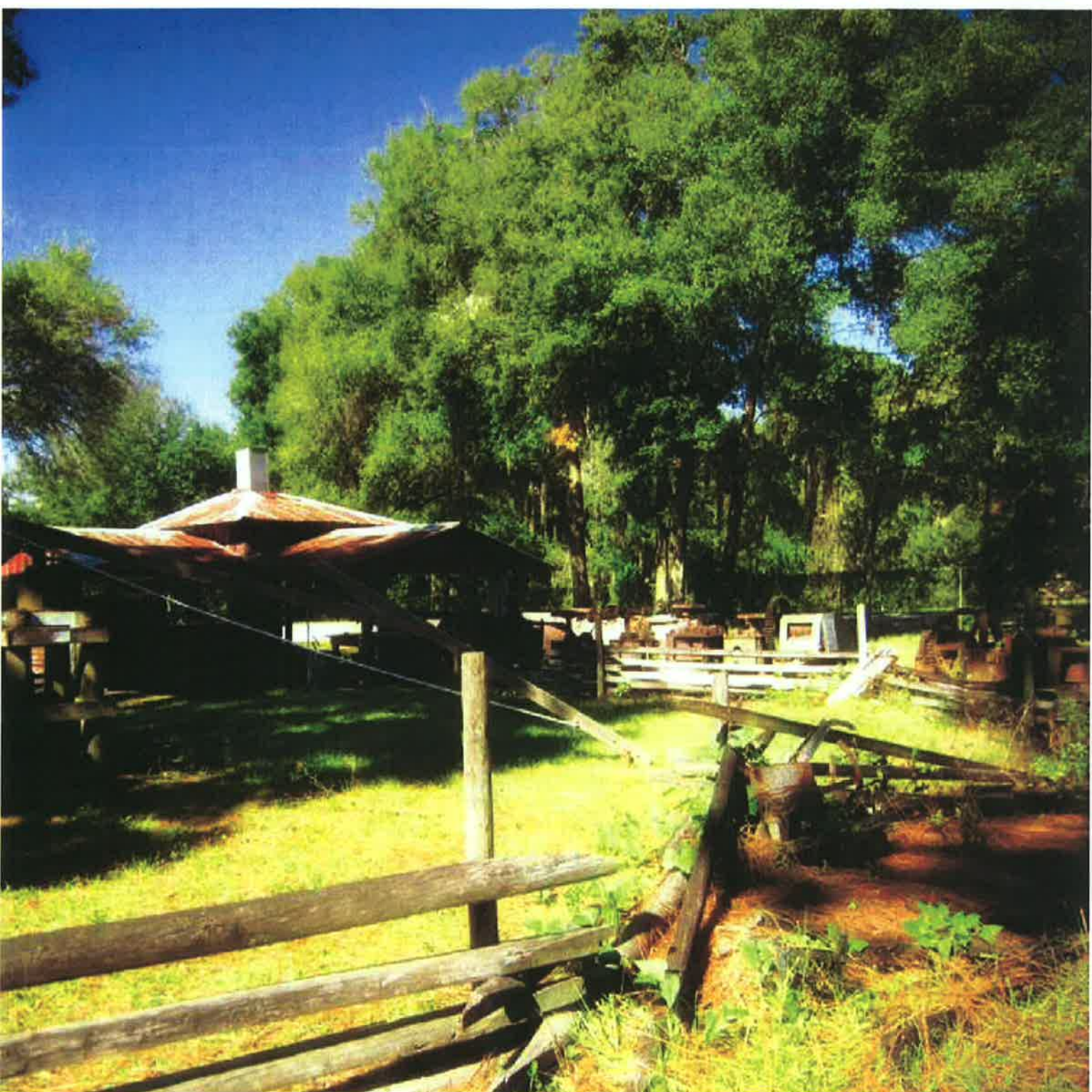
An easy drive from Orlando or Tampa Bay, Dade City and its quiet charms offer a refreshing change of pace from the crowded theme parks and big-city bustle of Florida's tourist meccas. It's the kind of town where people visit once and then come back later to stay forever. Where locals treat you like a neighbor, even if you're just passing through, and every sidewalk seems to end with a warm smile and a welcome mat.

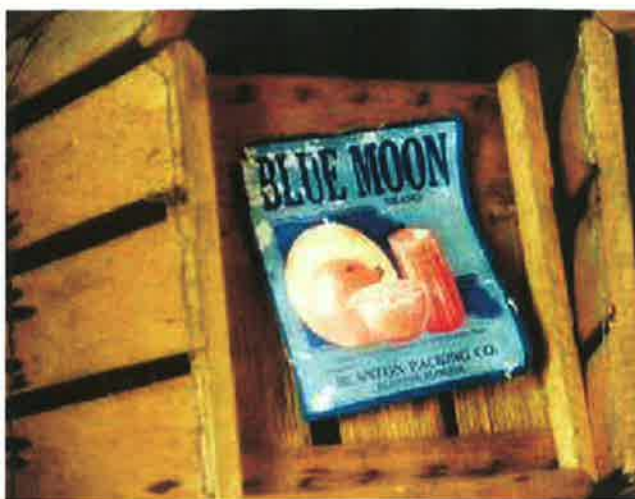
But scratch the surface of Dade City's relaxed country lifestyle and you'll find a wealth of fun activities for visitors of every age — from art and antiques to exciting wildlife encounters. When planning your trip, be aware that Downtown Dade City all but rolls up its sidewalks on Sunday and Monday; so your best bet is to visit between Tuesday and Saturday.

Once you arrive, stop by the Chamber of Commerce (www.dadecitychamber.org) at 14112 Eighth St. to pick up a handy map of the local shops and restaurants, as well as a self-guided walking tour of the historic downtown area.

To help you get the most from your visit, we've put together a pair of day trip itineraries: one is focused on family-friendly outings, while the other offers a sampling of retail, cultural and culinary delights. Of course, you can always do both and make it an overnight trip, or mix and match activities to customize your own day out in Dade City.







DAY TRIP 1

Wild & Countrified Family Fun

Begin your day at Hillbilly Farms (www.hillbilly-farms.com). Enjoy fresh fruit smoothies and breakfast sandwiches in the pastoral "Garden of Eaten." Then pack your picnic basket with deli sandwiches, fruits, veggies and homemade jams, jellies and sauces. Situated about three miles southeast of downtown at 10325 U.S. Highway 98; call 352.567.7475.



At Dade City's Wild Things (www.dadecityswildthings.com), you can meet lions and tigers and bears (and more) without ever setting foot on a yellow-brick road. Ride the trolley to where the wild things are, then hop off and your guide will introduce you to some of the more than 170 resident animals. Reservations are recommended; call 352.567.9453. Located at 37245 Meridian Ave.

Next, take a step back in time at the Pioneer Florida Museum, and picnic under the shade trees. Spread your blanket beneath a canopy of leaves or seat yourself at one of the picnic tables in the grassy center of this historic village. (See the sidebar on page 14 for address and details.)

Not planning on a picnic? Then take a culinary world tour at A Matter of Taste Cafe (www.amatteroftastedc.com). Enjoy American, Cuban and Greek specialties such as gyros, arroz con pollo, gator gumbo and the best rice pudding this side of Havana; just steps away from Courthouse Square at 14121 Seventh St. Call 352.567.5100.



Find something for kids of all ages at the Wee Grow'd consignment store. Owners Sue Knowlton and Grace Johnson decided to "open a little shop for something to do" when they retired. That "little shop" has since expanded into three separate outlets at 14012 Seventh St., where you'll find clothes, toys and furniture for kids from newborns to teens. Call 813.766.5036 or 352.206.6411.

After a full day of exploring Dade City's attractions, grab dinner at Tom's Real Burgers or Tommy's Steak & Seafood — two locations, same great food. The steaks are flame-grilled over local orange wood, and the burgers are amazing. Seafood includes fresh catfish, grilled salmon and gator bites. Tom's is located at 15323 U.S. Hwy. 301; call 352.567.2011. Tommy's can be found at 14016 Seventh St.; call 352.567.3300.



If your visit falls between September and June on the first Saturday of the month, your family can end the day at the Dade City Cruise-In car show. Antique and classic cars start lining up at 3 p.m. near the historic courthouse in Downtown Dade City, and the show runs until 8 p.m. Sponsored by the Dade City Chamber of Commerce; call 352.567.3769 for details.

◀ Various elements of the wide collection at the Pioneer Florida Museum.

KUMQUAT

FESTIVAL

Late January may be a great time to stay indoors in most of the country, but not in West Central Florida. Sunny skies and crisp air beckon as many as 40,000 visitors a year to Dade City's Annual Kumquat Festival.

On January 28th, you'll find endless opportunities to sample the featured fruit, which has been called "the little gold gem of the citrus family." While many fans prize the kumquat's lip-smacking tartness, others prefer the slightly sweeter taste of kumquat jams, jellies and marmalades.

Browse more than 350 booths offering, among other things, just about any kind of kumquat treat imaginable. Pies, cookies, smoothies and ice cream will have you singing the praises of the cute fruit with the funny little name.

Of course, kumquats are just the tart tip of the iceberg at this annual event. The festival gives proud Dade City locals a reason to celebrate and showcase everything they love about their hometown. Many of the entertainers and vendors are from the area, and festival-goers can ogle classic cars and shop for arts and crafts that have been lovingly restored or created by homegrown talent. The festival ends, as it should, with a finger-licking BBQ dinner.

history & culture

The area that would become Dade City was homesteaded in 1842, three years before Florida was granted statehood. Early settlers battled natives and outlaws, building lives that could easily fill the pages of Louis L'Amour or Zane Grey novels. But one news item, recorded in 1888, was stranger than fiction. A man killed a 14-foot alligator and found, while cleaning it, that the huge beast had eaten a 6-foot alligator. Talk about a tummy ache!

The population boomed in the early 1900s when the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad made Dade City a stop along a rail line that ran all the way from Tampa, Fla., to Norfolk, Va. A century later, Dade City is a refined, welcoming town justifiably proud of its pioneer past.





DAY TRIP 2

Relaxing & Refined Downtown Culture

Your taste buds will thank you for starting your day at Olga's Bakery & Deli (www.dadecitydeliandbakery.com). The aroma of homemade donuts grabs you before you even walk through the door. If you get into town just in time for an early lunch, you will find the fresh-baked bread sticks, soups and tasty deli sandwiches the perfect way to start your day. The pressed Cuban is a personal favorite — tasty even by Ybor City standards. Located at 14117 Seventh St.; call 352.458.4256.

Step back outside and you'll find yourself surrounded by enough unique shops, galleries and antique dealers to keep you busy for a week, let alone all day. A sampling of popular spots includes: The collection at the HiBrow Gallery (www.thehibrowgallery.com), anchored by Stuart Marcus' eye-popping wildlife photography, also includes impressive watercolors, art deco, surrealism and many other styles by local artists. Something Special on 7th is exactly that; a gift shop that defies description, filled with an ever-rotating selection of curiosities. Visit Church Street Shoppe to deck out your RV with flags, chimes and other decorative knickknacks. Quilts on Plum Lane (www.quiltsonplumlane.com) is heaven for quilters. You can find fabrics, supplies and answers to all your quilting questions at the "friendliest quilt shop in Florida."

When you're ready to fortify yourself after a morning of retail therapy, Lunch on Limoges (www.lunchonlimoges.com) is revered by both locals and repeat visitors who appreciate the classy atmosphere and excellent food. Just be sure to come hungry — they expect you to order a full meal. This quirk surprises many first-timers, but forewarned, you can prepare to tuck in to a first-class dining experience. Located at 14139 S. Seventh St.; reservations are recommended; call 352.567.5685.

Spend the afternoon antiquing and enjoy the terrific variety in the shops as well as the refreshing camaraderie of the Dade City shopkeepers. You'll find most of the town's antique stores along Seventh St. within four blocks of the city center:

If you visit on a Friday, you may want to end your day trip listening to live jazz or blues during the weekly "Wine Down" at the Garden Café (www.dineinthegarden.com) on 14227 Seventh St.; call 352.567.7277. Or, if you happen to be visiting on the third Saturday of the month, check out "Movie in the Park" at Agnes Lamb Park, located on the corner of Meridian Ave. (Highway 52) and Ninth St.



PIONEER

MUSEUM

Just north of the city center, you will find a town out of time, a captured snapshot of frontier life in Florida waiting to be explored. Visitors can visualize the backbreaking work and ingenuity the pioneers used to build a life amid daily struggles against the environment, natives and outlaws.

The museum began in 1961 as a single building showcasing pioneer tools, clothing and culture. In subsequent decades, the museum and its mission continued to grow. Today, in addition to the expanded museum display and gift shop, the pioneer village features a number of buildings, including Trilby Depot, Enterprise Methodist Church, Blanton Packing House—Citrus Plant, the one-room Lacoochee schoolhouse and John Overstreet House, as well as a collection of vintage and antique vehicles.

Tree-shaded picnic tables on the grassy village center offer an inviting place to spread out a blanket and enjoy lunch. Pioneer Florida Museum is located at 15602 Pioneer Road, Dade City, GPS: 28.385729, -82.191101. For more information, call 352.567.0262.



PIONEERFLORIDAMUSEUM.ORG

For the History Buff

Nazi POW Markers Reveal Forgotten Local History

BY ADAM PORTER

During World War II, personnel demands put an enormous strain on American agriculture. The Prisoner of War (POW) Special Projects Division solved this problem by putting German POWs to work. These prisoners were housed in 500 camps across the United States. Camp Number 7, located in Dade City, housed 250 members of Rommel's infamous Afrika Korps. Though American guards patrolled the camps, the prisoners lived together under the command of their own officers. The Dade City POWs worked at Pasco Packing and a local cypress mill, manufacturing limestone bricks, building warehouses and making boxes.

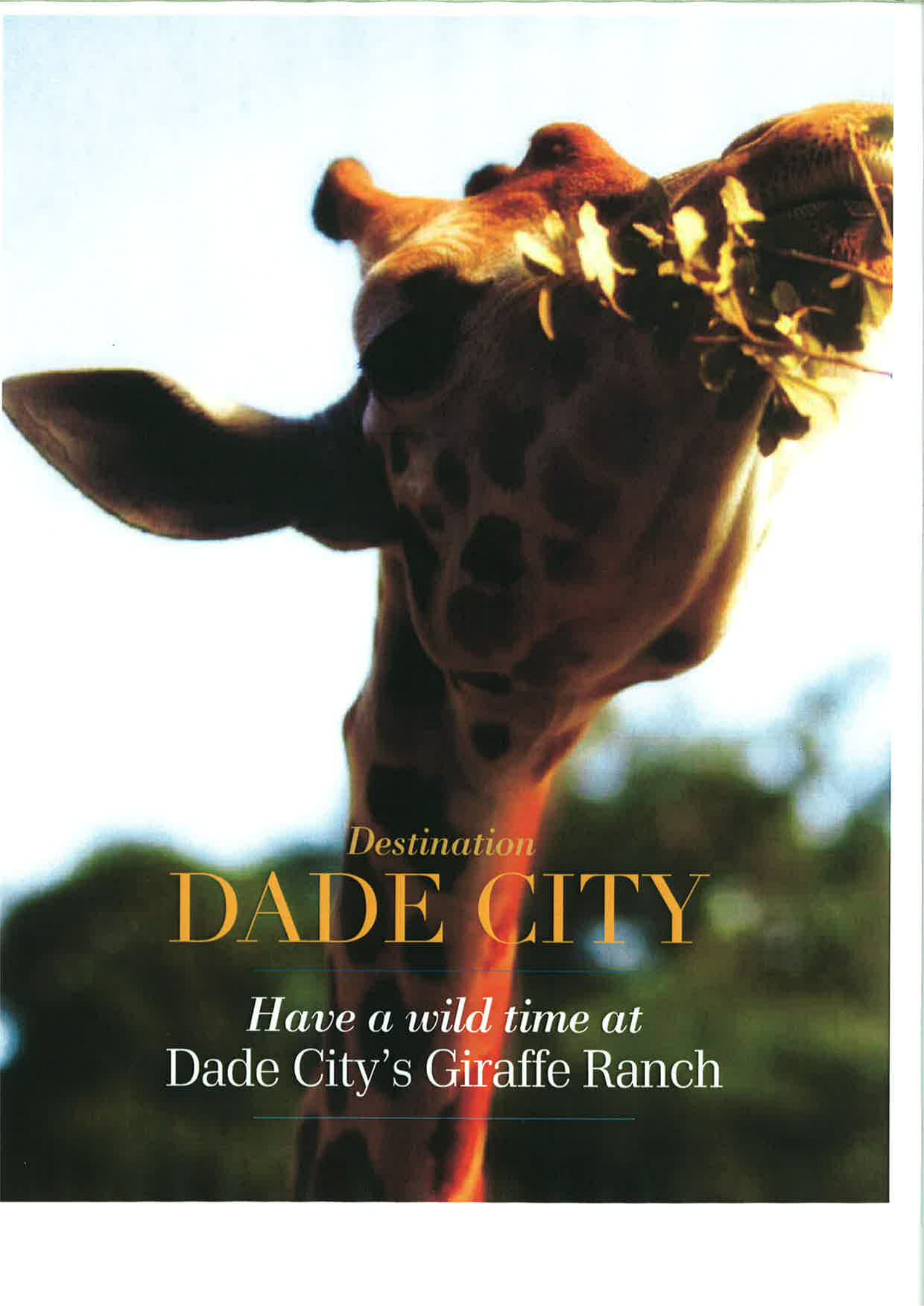
Life was much different in this camp than in those housing Jews and others considered political dissidents in Germany. The camp had a large mess hall, which was also used for church services, and offered classes and movies as well as a rec room with a piano and ping-pong tables. Treatment at these camps was so good and the Dade City residents so hospitable that many former POWs even returned to town after the war. A marker commemorating this camp is located at N 28° 22.118 W 082° 11.082.

Catholics and Catts

BY ADAM PORTER

One of the wackiest moments in the history of this area came courtesy of former Florida Governor Sidney J. Catts. Mr. Catts, who served from 1917-1921, was convinced that the monks at St. Leo were stockpiling an arsenal of weapons and planning to provoke a Catholic insurrection. Sidney was widely quoted warning anyone who would listen that the St. Leo monks were scheming to install Kaiser Wilhelm II as ruler of Florida. However, according to Catts, this was only Step One of the monks' master plan. Step Two would give the Pope political control of Florida and pave the way for the imminent transition of the entire Vatican State to San Antonio. Catts used his political influence to inflame anti-German and anti-Catholic sentiment throughout Florida. Despite the spurious nature of these allegations, the resulting ethnic and religious backlash prompted a mass exodus of German settlers from Florida. A vocal minority of both Catholics and Protestants challenged the attacks and the resulting cultural divides. Abbot Charles of St. Leo published a series of gracious responses, and many prominent local Protestants made it a point to be seen in public with their Catholic neighbors.





Destination

DADE CITY

Have a wild time at
Dade City's Giraffe Ranch



One of the most unique attractions in all of West Central Florida, Giraffe Ranch proudly offers something very different from the typical zoo experience. Owner Lex

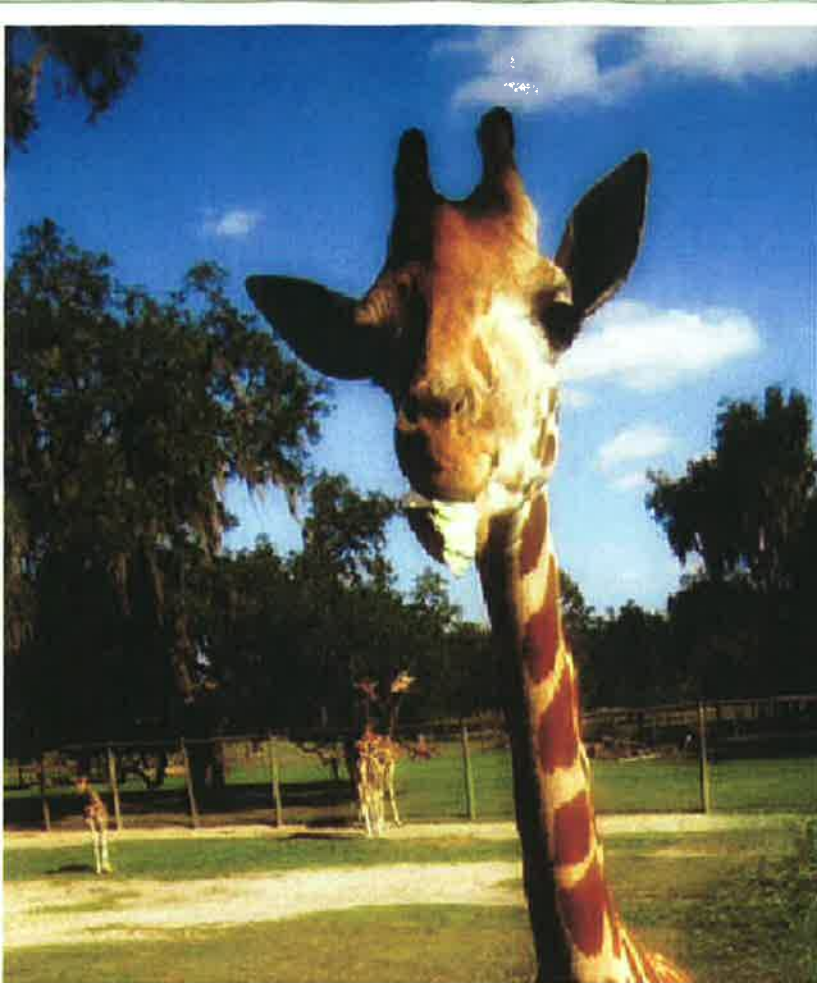
Salisbury, the former director of Tampa's renowned Lowry Park Zoo, wanted to give the animals at his new project room to roam. He designed Giraffe Ranch to be a working farm and wildlife preserve — and a place you and your family will never forget.

Instead of walking past rows of cages and small "habitats," Giraffe Ranch guests can get up close and personal with exotic creatures. You may tour the ranch via safari vehicle or opt to ride on camel-back. Either way, you'll have the opportunity to feed giraffes, zebras and lemurs and view gazelles, hippos, Austrian Haflinger horses, Irish Dexter cattle and the fan-favorite zedonk. This rare zebra/donkey crossbreed is the result of a persistently amorous donkey and a pair of deep tire tracks that allowed the stubby little fellow to finally measure up to his striped dream girl.

Two hands-on Giraffe Ranch tours are offered daily, at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Each tour is strictly limited in size to give guests the ultimate fun and educational safari experience. Of course, no visit is complete without stopping by the gift shop. Browse T-shirts and other souvenirs, and let your little ones pick out a small, cuddly version of their favorite Giraffe Ranch resident. You can even decorate your RV with a mini mobile or restock your fridge with free-range eggs and grass-fed beef.

The ranch offers ample parking for RVs. But keep a sharp lookout on your way in, or you might miss the entrance. Book your tour online or call **813.482.3400**.

Located at 38650 Mickler Road, Dade City. GPS: 28.447614, -82.177171. GIRAFFERANCH.COM



Giraffe Ranch Fun Facts

- Measured by the ratio of eye size to head size, giraffes have the largest eyes of any mammal on the planet. In fact, the only other creature with a bigger eye-to-head ratio is the squid.
- On an average day, giraffes sleep for less than half an hour.
- The oldest camel fossils in the world, that of a prehistoric giant camel known as Aepyacamelus, have been found in the American west.
- Standing only 13 to 15 hands, Haflingers are sometimes mistakenly called ponies. However, these rugged mountain horses, traditionally used for Alpine farming, were crossbred with Arabians in the late 1800s, giving them the distinctive wide eyes and delicate muzzles of that breed.
- The first Dexter cattle were brought to the United States from Ireland in the early 1900s. These smaller, multipurpose cattle were perfect for small family farms, offering good sources of both milk and meat.



Good connections are a necessity for RVing.

Once upon a time . . . there was a place where people gathered.
It was the original social network and it was called . . . the table.
Folks just like you got together around tables and shared stories
and pictures of places they'd been and people they'd met.

Come in and join our social network.



live well. eat well. travel well.



Exit 10 is located at Lazydays RV Campground | 800.905.6627 | Open 11am to 9pm Mon.-Sat. and 11am to 6pm Sun.