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The Daytona Beach Area: A Unique Fusion of History And Nature

Daytona Beach, Fla. -- The Daytona Beach area is home to many points of interest that provide a unique fusion of history and nature. Visitors can explore an extraordinary mix of botanical gardens, historic ruins, state parks, waterways, and nationally recognized landmarks that serve as bridges to the area's colorful past.

Completed in 1887, the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of only a handful of lighthouses in the United States to have all its original buildings still standing. The 175-foot structure is the second tallest lighthouse in the U.S. and still serves as a faithful guide to Atlantic coast mariners. Located in Ponce Inlet, the Daytona Beach area's southernmost point, the lighthouse also features one of Florida's largest maritime museums. The grounds include historical displays, a video depicting lighthouse history, a rare Fresnel lens exhibit, and a gift shop full of treasures. A 203-step climb of the lighthouse provides a panoramic view of the north and south arteries of the Intracoastal Waterway and the surrounding area. Picnic facilities and nature trails are available nearby at Lighthouse Point Park. Lighthouse hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. daily with extended summer hours.

Tomoka State Park, located at 2099 North Beach Street in Ormond Beach, was once the site of the Timucuan Indian Village of Nocorocco. It later became the Mount Oswald Plantation in 1766. Today, the 1,540-acre park offers camping, fishing, nature trails, picnic areas, a boat launch and canoe rentals for access to the beautiful Tomoka River. Park hours are 8 a.m.-dusk daily. Museum hours are 9:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.

Stroll amid 12 acres of vibrant, dense botanical gardens at Sugar Mill Gardens, located on Herbert Street in Port Orange. The gardens surround the ruins of a 19th century English period sugar mill. The gardens are also home to 50-year-old dinosaur statues erected when the site was known as the Bongoland amusement park. In addition, Sugar Mill Gardens features a unique human sundial. When standing on the sundial, visitors can determine the time of day by their own shadow. Sugar Mill Gardens is open daily from dawn to dusk.

Located on Old Dixie Highway, north of Ormond Beach, Bulow Plantation Ruins State Historic Site is the remains of what was once known as Bulowville. Founded in 1821, the plantation cultivated sugar cane, cotton, indigo and rice before its destruction in the Seminole Indian War. Bulow Plantation is one of the area's few preserved coquina-rock sugar mill ruins. The once cleared fields have been reclaimed by the forest, and the area looks much as it did in the 1800s. Also included is a spring house, an open-air museum featuring Seminole

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Indian relics and artifacts, canoe rentals, and picnic facilities. Hours are 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily.

Visitors can also discover the Daytona Beach area's rich history via a leisurely river cruise. Passengers aboard one of the area's many river boat tours and sailing charters can explore the region's scenic stretch of the Intracoastal Waterway, as well as other pristine inland waterways, and view magnificent riverfront homes, beautiful parks, islands, and marinas. Passengers also get the chance to see and experience an assortment of wildlife such as pelicans, herons, egrets, and other waterfowl. Lucky passengers may even spot a manatee or dolphin.

Spruce Creek Park is located south of Daytona Beach off U.S. Highway 1. Once the home of a Timucuan Indian civilization, Spruce Creek Park is the site of several Indian mounds that contain rare monarchial tombs. Set along the banks of beautiful Spruce Creek, one of Florida's few undisturbed blackwater streams, visitors can explore scenic bluffs, picnic and playground areas, and hiking trails. Primitive camping is available through the park ranger's office. Gamble Place at Spruce Creek Preserve is a 150-acre facility that is home to hundreds of native flora and fauna, including beautiful cypress trees, alligators, pileated woodpeckers and osprey. The grounds also feature historic buildings including a "cracker-style" house built in 1907 by James Gamble (of Proctor and Gamble), the Snow White House, modeled after the Walt Disney animated film, and a citrus packing house. Pontoon boat trips and historic tours are available by appointment.

Fun, environmental learning opportunities can be found at the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet, which is located at the southernmost tip of the Daytona Beach area's barrier island. The center sits in the shadows of the historic Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse, the tallest lighthouse in Florida. With interactive exhibits on the area's marine environment, a seabird sanctuary and sea turtle rehabilitation facilities, the center provides a unique and entertaining learning experience for young and old.

The Tusawilla Preserve Discovery Center located at the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach allows visitors to follow a network of boardwalk trails leading to interactive, outdoor exhibits. Learn about local flora and fauna, environmental protection, wetlands and non-native plants.

The Daytona Beach area is just minutes away from the St. Johns River, one of only 16 rivers in the U.S. designated as an American Heritage River in 1997. The St. Johns River stretches almost the entire length of the state from Indian River County to Jacksonville. From the Daytona Beach area, it can be reached by traveling west on Interstate 4.

Located west of the Daytona Beach area in DeLand, the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge features acres of secluded walking paths and boardwalks which offer visitors rare views of birds, turtles, raccoons and other wildlife. Heading west from DeLand on Interstate 4 just off the Orange City exit, nature lovers can get an up-close-and-personal view of Florida's manatee population at Blue Spring State Park and recreational area. The age-old Blue Spring maintains a constant temperature of 72 degrees year-round, attracting scores of the beloved manatee in search of warmer waters during the winter months. Visitors can enjoy camping, hiking, fishing, boating, scuba diving, and a visit to a historic on-site southern home. Raised wooden boardwalks along the riverbank allow gazers a chance to spot alligators,

turtles and other wildlife.

Other must-see eco-gems to visit while in the area include Lyonia Preserve – home of the Florida scrub jay – and DeLeon Springs State Park, where guests can enjoy a day of snorkeling, canoeing, kayaking, hiking and more. While at DeLeon Springs, guests can also have fun making their own pancake breakfast at the park's popular Old Spanish Sugar Mill Restaurant and take a guided eco-history boat tour through the Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge aboard Fountain of Youth Tours.

To receive more information on Daytona Beach area attractions, events and accommodations, contact the Daytona Beach Area Convention and Visitors Bureau at 1-800-854-1234 (U.S. and Canada), 386-255-0415 or visit www.DaytonaBeach.com.

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