

Back by Popular Demand – Anastasia State Park

Monday, March 18th, 8:30am – 8:30pm

In April, 2023 we visited this beach for the first time. It was such a huge hit that we are repeating it this year due to requests to return.

Anastasia State Park is about 2 ¼ hours from The Villages on the Atlantic side of the state. This unspoiled, beautiful park sits about one mile off Highway A1A. The beach is fairly deep....not as deep as Siesta Key, but it's a trek to the edge of the water. However, in March, the Atlantic temps won't encourage you to swim here....and the currents can be significant. It is, however, a magnificent beach to sit and appreciate the magnificence of the Atlantic Ocean.

The **St. Augustine Lighthouse and Maritime Museum** is adjacent to the state park. We'll make tour reservations for those of you who wish to visit the museum and/or climb the lighthouse. It is only 219 steps (14 stories), and offers a view of the Atlantic and the nation's oldest city – St. Augustine. You'll have approximately one hour to tour the museum and browse the museum gift shop. We have a discounted group rate of \$11 per person. Our bus will take you to the museum and pick you up at the end of your time there. <https://store.staugustinelighthouse.org>

Just south of the St. Augustine Lighthouse lies one of the area's most beautiful, untouched beaches inside Anastasia State Park. During walks on the beach at certain times of year, you can find starfish, shells, crabs and other creatures in the tidal waters and sand along the coast. There are four (4) miles of beach for strolling, sandbars and shallows for swimming.

In addition to the beach, there are a number of other activities that may interest you. Salt Run, a 2-mile long pond, offers a sheltered spot for **kayaking, paddle boarding or canoeing**. A journey on **Salt Pond** will be filled with native wildlife, iconic sights of St. Augustine and the sounds of gentle ocean waves. Equipment can be reserved/rented through www.anastasiaswatersports.com. Rental rates are shown on the website, so we will not restate them here. If you decide to rent equipment the day of the trip, it can be secured at The Island Grill. Chair & umbrella rentals are also available, although their supply is limited and more importantly, you have to tote your chair & umbrella to the beach and set it up yourself.

We'd recommend **The Island Grill** for lunch or a snack, as opposed to beach equipment rentals. They serve a variety of foods, including sandwiches, quesadillas, chicken tenders, fish tacos, nachos, beer, wine & assorted frozen drinks. You can, of course, bring your lunch from home.

In addition to the beach, the park has opportunity of biking, kayaking, canoeing, hiking and birding. The park has 195 identified bird species, sometimes visible on any one of the

three (3) hiking trails in the park. One of these trails, **The Spanish Quarry**, begins near the park entrance. It leads to a spectacular view of the old coquina quarry that dates back to the 1500s and was in use until the turn of the 20th century. We missed this last year because of the distance from the beach to the park entrance, but will be sure to have our trusty bus take us there and retrieve us on this trip.

The **Ancient Dunes Trail**, at 0.7 miles long, starts at the back of the campground and takes @ 12 minutes. It is considered an easy walk.

The **Anastasia State Park Marsh Trail** is considered an easy route at 0.9 miles, taking @ 16 minutes to complete.

Around **3pm**, **Briskey's BBQ Catering** will arrive with their incredibly tender been brisket, pulled pork, BBQ beans, coleslaw, potato salad, green beans and rolls. We thoroughly stuffed ourselves last year and everyone commented that it was the best BBQ they had ever eaten. We'll enjoy this feast again this year in the **Sea Turtle Pavilion** which is near the Island Grill. And again this year, the price per person is only \$12.00. The Club will provide utensils, plates and napkins and will subsidize the Pavilion rental.

But the day is not quite over yet. At **4:30pm**, we'll depart from Anastasia and head to **Buc-ees** for dessert. It is about 30 minutes away on World Commerce Parkway and is the perfect place to shop for dessert. If you've not yet been to a Buc-ees, you'll want to explore this newcomer as it is a totally different kind of "travel stop". There are about 104 fuel pumps....but only for cars. No semi-trucks are allowed. And it only gets more interesting from there: <https://buc-ees.com/>.

If this will be your first visit to a Buc-ees, we recommend this light reading: <https://www.mashed.com/1081624/mistakes-people-make-at-buc-ees/>.

We'll spend around 45 minutes at Buc-ees, re-board our bus and make our way back to The Villages, arriving before 8:30pm.