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## Destinations around Florida



Rick Treworgy's Muscle Car City in Punta Gorda features nearly 200 automobiles, with a focus on the muscle cars' of the '60s and '70s. DAVE HAVERFORD

BY WIRE AND STAFF REPORTS

### FLORIDA AND ARIZONA: PLAY BALL!

Opening day for Major League Baseball is April 6, but you don't have to wait that long to see your favorite teams. Spring training games begin Wednesday and run through April 5 for Florida's Grapefruit and Arizona's Cactus leagues. One hot ticket this year may be March 12 face-off in Port Charlotte between the 2008 World Series rivals, the Tampa Bay Rays and the Philadelphia Phillies.

**Details:** For schedules, ticketing and other details visit <http://floridaspringtraining.com> and [www.cactusleague.com/c--about.php](http://www.cactusleague.com/c--about.php). Packages and details on related attractions can also be found

on the state tourism websites, [www.visitflorida.com](http://www.visitflorida.com) and [www.arizonaguide.com](http://www.arizonaguide.com). The Major League Baseball website, [www.mlb.com](http://www.mlb.com), also has spring training information.

-- ASSOCIATED PRESS

### GULF COAST: COOKIN' GOOD

The nation's top Rib Masters from Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Ohio and Florida will serve their award-winning specialties as they compete for this year's coveted 2009 Gulf Coast BBQ Champion award at the Gulf Coast Rhythm and Ribfest March 13-15 in Palmetto. Entertainment includes a variety of local, regional and national bands, and for children, there's the Interactive Kid Challenge Fun Zone.

**Details:** At the Manatee County Fairgrounds. 941-746-7470 or [www.gulfcoastribfest.com](http://www.gulfcoastribfest.com).

### ORLANDO: OL' BLUE EYES

The cold-blooded stare of alligators has an even icier look at Gatorland with the arrival of four new reptilian residents there stand out: Ghostly white alligators -- with steely blue eyes for extra eerie -- are on exhibit at the Orlando attraction. They're more rare than they are spooky-looking. It's thought that a mere dozen of their kind survive out of a total population of 5 million alligators in the United States. These are not the more common pink-eyed albino gators, but are called leucistic (loo-SIS-tic), which is basically a genetic defect. Leucistics sport some pigment -- and legend has it that good fortune awaits to those who can make eye contact.

**Details:** The four brothers, who each have individual bachelor pads in a structure called the White Gator Swamp, will be on display through Labor Day. Admission is \$22.99 for ages 13 and older, \$14.99 for ages 3-12. 407-855-5496, 800-393-5297 or [www.gatorland.com](http://www.gatorland.com)

-- ORLANDO SENTINEL

### PUNTA GORDA: CLASSICAL GAS

Set to open March 1 just off Interstate 75 in Punta Gorda is Rick Treworgy's Muscle Car City featuring nearly 200 automobiles of every era dating back to the 1920s. The main focus, though, is on the "muscle cars" of the mid '60s to early '70s -- Pontiac GTOs, Chevy Corvettes, Olds 442s and the like that revved up the imaginations of teenage boys all over America. If all the horsepower makes your mouth water, there's also a Motor City diner serving up the tasty treats we used to order from the car hop at a drive-in.

**Details:** Admission will be \$10 onetime pass, \$30 annual pass. Children under 12 free with adult. 941-575-5959 or [www.musclegarcity.net](http://www.musclegarcity.net).

### MOVIE MAGIC IN FLORIDA

Missed the Academy Awards? You can find plenty of movie magic in Orlando.

Though Florida's version of Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure haven't had as much screen time their Hollywood cousin, you'll still have plenty of chances to "ride the movies" at Universal Studios with the newly opened Simpsons Ride, Revenge of the Mummy and Men in Black Alien Attack. At Islands of Adventure, attractions include the Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man ride, Jurassic Park River Adventure and the delightful Cat in the Hat ride. Studios also offers non-ride movie attractions including the Horror Make-up Show and Animal Actors on Location. Universal Studios' annual nighttime Mardi Gras celebration runs select dates through April 18.

Florida residents get a variety of discounts, including a two-park, two-day pass for \$75 when purchased online, and extra-value weeks April 19-June 10 when kids eat free when staying three nights at specified hotels. A three-night package vacation includes two extra nights for free (total of five nights) plus park passes for four people begins at \$711; packages must be booked by March 29 for travel through Oct. 8.

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Disney's Hollywood Studios isn't a place for making movies but for reliving them through live street performances (such as High School Musical), shows (such as Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular), behind-the-scenes glimpses (backlot tour), memorabilia displays, children's play areas and rides (including Twilight Tower of Terror and Toy Story Mania!) The big news here: The recent opening of the American Idol Experience, where audience members ages 14 and over can audition and perform. (As on TV, it's the fans -- ie, audience members -- who vote on winners.)

Current packages include Buy-4-Get-3 packages that include theme park tickets and lodging for seven nights when you pay for four nights; some dates are blacked out. This year, visitor to all Disney parks get in free on their birthday (you must register in advance online); they can also get two one-park, one-day tickets for \$99 ages 10 and up, \$83 ages 3-9, through May 20. For other Florida resident deals, see [www.disneyworld.com](http://www.disneyworld.com).

-- JANE WOOLDRIDGE

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