

Welcome to the Friendship Force Florida Suncoast Club Located in Pinellas County, Florida

Our Club is based in the Clearwater/St. Petersburg area of Pinellas County on the west coast of Florida known as the Suncoast. Our area is a major tourist destination known for its favorable climate, world-class museums, cultural offerings and miles of award-winning white sand beaches as well as nature parks, lush gardens and year-round activities on water and land. We are fortunate to live in one of the most beautiful parts of Florida and promise you a warm reception and itinerary suited to your members' interests.

Airports

Most Ambassadors arrive at Tampa International Airport (TIA) located about 20 miles (32.1km) west. Another option is the nearby St. Pete/Clearwater Airport (PIE). Our club will help arrange your transportation to your home hosts.

Nearby Orlando, Theme Parks, Space Center & Cruise Ports

Often our Ambassadors visit the Orlando area or take a cruise before or after their home stay with our club, arriving or departing from the Orlando International Airport (MCO). The distance between Clearwater and Orlando is about 105 miles or a 2-hour drive. There is a shuttle bus between Tampa International Airport TIA and MCO but renting a car is the best option. Many cruise ships leave the Tampa port for 3-7-night cruises to the Caribbean.



Best Times to Visit Us

We are most anxious to host your club and we will let you know if there are any conflicts with your preferred Journey date. Although museums and such are air-conditioned, we don't strongly recommend visiting us in June or first half of October as that's our hurricane season and also very hot. March destinations tend to be busy and crowded because families spend spring break in our area. Our area hosts many outdoor festivals throughout the year, and we try to include those in a Journey itinerary when possible. We highly recommend the St. Petersburg International Folk Festival which showcases the many different ethnic groups in our area. It is held the fourth weekend in October each year.

*Optimum times to visit us	High	Low	Rain days
January	66	55	6
February*	67	58	4
March*	71	62	4
April*	76	68	4
May*	80	73	5
October	81	71	4
November*	73	63	3
December	70	60	3

About the Journey

Typically, our inbound Journeys are for 5-7 nights. We always customize the itinerary to your group's interests and let you know of any special cultural event occurring during your visit. Although each itinerary is customized, a typical inbound Journey would always include a welcome party, farewell party, dinners in our members' homes and, traditionally, one night when the Ambassadors take their home

hosts to dinner. And because of popularity from previous visitors, our Journeys typically include one or two days in St. Petersburg, one day in Tampa/Ybor City and one day in Tarpon Springs.'

Check out the things that we offer and let us know which ones you would like us to plan for your club's Journey. The following destinations are those that our previous Ambassadors have enjoyed the most. We invite you to choose the activities that your club would find most interesting. We've provided a brief description; you can read more about each online. The Journey cost depends upon the activities you choose, but most of our incoming Journeys cost \$200.

St. Petersburg (usually 1 or 2 days): Downtown St. Petersburg is vibrant with waterfront parks, walkways, museums, outdoor restaurants, entertainment venues, shopping and mural walls. It's also fun to just sit with an ice cream cone and people watch. In addition to the destinations noted below, Downtown hosts a Saturday Market from October-May (biggest in SE USA), a visitor's trolley, history museum, dolphin boat rides, Segway and bike rentals, and much more.

- **Dali Museum**

This is one of the "must see" museums in our area. People come from around the world to see this very extensive collection of Dali's work. In the past few years, this museum moved from a warehouse to a state-of-the-art facility designed to weather very strong hurricanes. You may tour the museum with headphones, a docent, or simply on your own if this is your preference. The docents are very well informed and have stories to tell that you might not hear about when using headphones. Click on the link for more information about this museum. We recommend that you spend at least two hours when visiting this venue. www.thedali.org



- **The James Museum**

This is one of the newest additions to St. Petersburg. It is a collection of Western art that was collected by the owners, Tom and Mary James of Raymond James Financial Services. When the James traveled out West, they were enchanted by the wildlife, the art, and the landscape. In order to have memories, they helped the local artists in the West earn a living by purchasing the art that depicted what they saw in order to have memories. They wanted to captivate the frontier they had grown to love so much. Much of this art was displayed in their corporate offices, but the space became too small, so a museum was built for the James collection. You may visit this new museum and experience this collection and the vision of the James. We offer this as an alternative to the Dali Museum for those who have been to the Dali in the past or are not fans of Surrealist Art. www.thejamesmuseum.org



- **The Imagine Museum**

Many cities have hidden gems that many have never heard of; even those who live nearby. The Imagine Museum has a collection of very unusual glass pieces that will have you wondering; how can that be done. Corey Hampson, who worked with the benefactor, assembled the collection to show a story. According to her, "Studio glass in America developed into the worldwide exchange of ideas,

techniques, and concepts that it is today.” You will remember this unusual collection for many years to come. www.imagemuseum.com/exhibitions/the-collection

- **Duncan McClellan Gallery**

Another hidden gem in St. Petersburg is the Duncan McClellan Gallery. It features various glass artists from around the world. Here you can see how glass blowing is done when you visit. Not only can you purchase glass pieces here, but there are many comfortable places in the garden to sit and enjoy the peaceful site. You may also like to walk through the 5,000 square feet of courtyard to see the sculpture gardens. You will probably meet some of the artists while here as well. dmglass.com

- **Dr. Carter Woodson African American Museum**

This museum is of historical and cultural importance to the community of St. Petersburg. Named after the African-American historian and civil rights activist who is best known as the founder of Black History Month, the Museum is located in what was once a vibrant entertainment district during the era of segregation, showcasing performers such as Ray Charles, Ella Fitzgerald, Cab Callaway and many more who came to perform there. In addition to housing memorabilia from that era, the museum hosts special events and rotates exhibits of historical, cultural and artistic significance. With advance notice we can usually arrange for a special program and sample authentic soul food.

- **Sunken Gardens**

This is a lush botanical paradise in the midst of a bustling city and it's on the National Register of Historical Places. As St. Petersburg's oldest living museum, it features more than 50,000 plants and flowers on over 4 acres and is also home to flamingos. We can arrange guided tours. www.stpete.org/attractions/sunken_gardens/index.php



Tampa (usually 1 day): Other than Busch Gardens, the most popular attractions in Tampa are located on, along or near the Hillsborough River Walk that is dotted with skyscrapers, entertainment venues, museums, and parks.

Tampa Bay History Center

Located right on the Riverwalk, the Center (a Smithsonian Affiliate Museum) highlights over 12,000 years of Florida's history and heritage. Through hands-on experiences and immersive theatre, you will learn about the pirates and Buccaneers, Cuban immigrants, early pioneers, native Americans and African slaves who contributed to Tampa's rich history. The museum is also known for its map collection, many original, and its charts, totaling over 8,000. Some of the original documents date back to the New World. **NOTE:** Many of our Ambassadors choose to visit the History Center in the morning and early afternoon, and then to visit Ybor City in the afternoon and finish the day at the Columbia Restaurant and the show. www.tampabayhistorycenter.org



- **Hop on, Hop off Water Taxi**

Another favorite of our Ambassadors is the Hop On, Hop Off water taxi in Tampa. We may hire that taxi for a private River/sightseeing tour for our group, however, it doesn't make the 15 stops that the taxi normally makes. Some groups like to visit the History Center and then spend the rest of the day on the water taxi, getting on and off where they please. Your day ticket allows you to do this. It is not possible to do all three events in Tampa in one day because of time constraints. Your club would have to make this decision. www.piratewatertaxi.com



- **Ybor City**

One of the gems of Tampa is Ybor City, known as the historic area of Tampa or "Cigar City". It has a rich Cuban history which remains vibrant today. It was founded by Vicente Martinez-Ybor more than a century ago as a place to make cigars. Many immigrants came from Cuba to work in this industry. They built homes, restaurants, and shops and a city within a city was born. We take our Ambassadors to this



area to see the original homes, and the Ybor City Museum that was once a bakery where the famous Cuban bread was baked. Here you learn the history of Ybor and see dioramas and early pictures to further understand what went on here. NOTE: If you would like to enjoy a great dining experience, the original **Columbia Restaurant**, featuring the Cuban food of yesterday, is a place that we can take you for a meal. In the evening there is an outstanding **Flamenco Show** at the Columbia Restaurant that we usually include in your visit. ybor.org

Tarpon Springs (Usually 1 day): Known as the "Sponge Capital of the World," Tarpon Springs is a community about 10 miles north of Clearwater. It is situated on the Anclote River where Greek immigrants settled during the early 1900's and built a thriving sponge industry. The Greek heritage is still very strong here. Many of our visitors like to visit the **Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral** that resembles the Hagia Sophia, a Byzantine church that dates back to 46 AD in Istanbul, Turkey. A local guide tells the history of the church and tells how the early Greek residents built this church brick by brick with their earnings. We can also suggest a restaurant where you can enjoy some famous Greek food; and then a boat ride to see how a sponge diver earns his living. There are some small museums where you can learn more about sponge diving on the main street of this quaint city. Many like to have some free time here to shop in the art galleries and specialty shops in buildings dating from the late 1800s. There is also a beautiful park in Tarpon Springs called Sunset Beach where you may experience one of the beaches on the Gulf of Mexico. www.visitflorida.com/en-us/cities/tarpon-springs.html



Other Interesting & Fun Experiences We Can Share With You

- **Clearwater Marine Aquarium**

Another popular attraction in our area is the Clearwater Marine Aquarium. This opened in 1972 as a place to rescue, rehabilitate, and release injured or ill marine animals. It was a place where school children could visit and see many marine animals up close. It also taught them to respect and animals that they saw in our area. One of the animals rescued in 2005 was a dolphin caught in a crab trap and eventually lost her tail. To keep her alive, a prosthetic tale was designed by scientists, so that she could swim properly. A book was written about Winter and then a movie was made. The movie became a hit; its theme is never to give up. People come from far and near to visit Winter and her companion, Hope, who had a movie made about her. You may see the dolphins if you visit and other animals being rehabilitated. This is a must to visit if you have time. Clearwater Beach is nearby, and we usually visit the beach if we see the aquarium. Some ambassadors ask us if we can stop for lunch at one of the popular restaurants on the beach. www.seewinter.com

- **Jungle Prado Park**

For those who like history, we can visit the Jungle Prado Park. The Spanish explorer Panfilo de Narvaez was thought to have landed in this area in 1528. A family owns this private site; however, there is an archeological dig to check out, and artifacts from the site are on display in a green house. A guide will tell you about the history of the native Americans in this area. www.jungleterrace.org/Data_Files/Jungle_Prada.pdf

- **Weeden Island Culture Center**

For our visitors interested in Florida and its history, we recommend a visit to Weeden Island Cultural Center. There is a museum on the premises where you can see various kinds of pottery found in this area as well as other artifacts. What is most important is that the Native Americans in this area homesteaded; they were not the wanderers that we think of in this period of history. They even gardened which proved that they were year-round visitors. You may also walk around on these 3190 acres and observe birds, the coast with its plants and animals indicative to this area, and even fish native to this area. It is called "A Place to Remember". weedonislandpreserve.org

- **Heritage Village**

Another attraction in our area is Heritage Village, a 21-acre living history museum located in the heart of Pinellas County. Nestled among natural pine and palmetto are 33 historic buildings that have been moved to these premises to show the buildings of the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Without air-conditioning, the building had to be built in a certain style to take advantage of the breezes that provided coolness. There are two schools, a railroad depot, a general store, church, and furnished homes for you to visit. We can often arrange a docent tour. We recommend this to our visitors who have extra time. www.pinellascounty.org/heritage Heritage Park



A Few Special Destinations A Bit Further Away

- **Myakka River State Park**

If you are interested in native landscapes and wildlife, we highly recommend spending a day at Myakka River State Park or Homosassa State Park. Myakka is an hour's drive south of us (near Bradenton/Sarasota) and our members usually carpool. The scenic Myakka River flows through a vast expanse 55+ unspoiled wetlands, prairies, hammocks, and pinelands that make up Myakka River State Park. Activities at the park include a narrated boat trip (you'll see plenty of alligators and wildlife), a bird walk, nature trails, interpretative center, a unique canopy treetop trail (first in North America), gift shop for unique Florida gifts, and a café where we often arrange for box lunches. With advance notice we can often arrange an official welcome and education by a park ranger. <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/myakka-river-state-park>



- **Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs State Wildlife Park**

This state park is located about 75 miles north of Clearwater, about a 90-minute ride. Depending on the number of Ambassadors, we often rent a bus. With admission you enjoy a narrated boat tour, daily manatee program, underwater observatory, and wildlife encounter and education programs led by rangers. The park has excellent amenities and features elevated boardwalks from which you can view a variety of captive animals indigenous to Florida such as alligators, black bears, red wolf, key deer, flamingoes, and whooping cranes as well as a hippopotamus in captivity. It's a delightful day, enjoyed by all but does involve a lot of transportation time. <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/ellie-schiller-homosassa-springs-wildlife-state-park>

