



IF YOU GO

What: St. Augustine Alligator Farm

Where: 999 Anastasia Boulevard

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 7 days / week

Admission: Adults: \$24.99
Children 3-11: \$13.99

One Wild Place

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm is an exciting day-trip destination.

By KAYLA LOKEINSKY | Photos by KATRINA POGGIO

Being surrounded by hundreds of alligators and crocodiles might seem scary, but at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, it has never been more fun.

From baby albino alligators to one of the largest crocodiles in the world, there is no shortage of exciting things to see at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. This zoological park is located less than two hours from Columbia County, which makes it the perfect day-trip destination.

The Alligator Farm is a great place to take the kids for a fun day in St. Augustine. Think of this park as a zoo, but a zoo that just features over 800 alligators and crocodiles, other reptiles and birds. All the shows and exhibits are focused on these animals, and there are plenty of activities for both children and adults.

The St. Augustine Alligator Farm was founded over 120 years ago in 1893. It is one of Florida's oldest continuously-running attractions, and since its founding it has grown to now house every species of crocodylian in the world.

When you first walk into the Alligator Farm, you are surrounded by pools of baby alligators (don't worry, they're behind glass.) This is great for young kids, who will love seeing these seemingly scary animals shrunk down to their size.

After walking past the baby gators and albino alligator exhibit, you come across the Alligator Lagoon: a large river-like exhibit practically overflowing with alligators.

At the Alligator Lagoon, there are several shows that take place throughout the day, including the Realm of the Alligator Show, an exciting presentation filled with little-known facts about Florida's most interesting and sometimes dangerous animal, and, probably the most highly-anticipated show of the day: Alligator Feeding.

Now, sometimes feeding time takes place the Alligator Swamp & Wading Bird Rookery, located at the back of the park. In my opinion, this is the best place to watch the alligators and the feeding time. A long wooden boardwalk wades through the swamp,



Noah, a trainer at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm, touches the nose of one of the alligators during the Realm of the Alligator Show. During the show, the trainers teach guests about alligators and show what these popular Florida animals can do.

and hundreds of alligators swim underneath. Visitors can get right above the gators and feed them pellets, which are available for purchase on the boardwalk. It's definitely worth the 25 cents to see the excitement on your kids faces when they get the chance to feed a real alligator.

During feeding time at the swamp, one of the park's employees will toss some food in the water from a platform located in the middle of the swamp, and hundreds of alligators will swim to the middle. It's one of the most amazing sites you'll see at the Alligator Farm, so make sure you get a good spot. If you stand on the boardwalk directly across from the platform 10 minutes before the feeding starts you'll have a great seat!

What's great about the Alligator Farm is its show areas, including the swamp, the lagoon and the theatre. They have plenty of open seating and open viewing areas, making it easy to get a good view. Also for their exhibits and for the lagoon, the walls are made of glass, so the little ones won't have a hard time seeing the action.

Some of the other shows at the Alligator Farm that are perfect for young ones are Florida's Forest Friends, a fully-interactive nature show; Scales and Tales, a show highlighting some of the most misunderstood animals on the planet, including snakes

and lizards; and Rainforest Review, which teaches about the rainforest ecosystem. All of these shows take place at the park's theatre.

There are shows scheduled every hour at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Some of the shows play twice during the day, so don't worry if you miss one. In place of a show or even in between shows, there are plenty of exhibits to see.

Walk along the park's boardwalk and see the Birds of Africa, Lemurs of Madagascar, the Land of Crocodiles or the Anastasia Island Conservation Center.

If you're looking for something that will really amaze you, make sure you visit Maximo, the 15-foot-6-inch, 1,250-pound crocodile that calls the Alligator Farm his home. You can get just inches away from this mammoth animal at the underwater viewing window, or get an ariel view from the deck above.

There are lots of interactive exhibits for children at the Alligator Farm as well, including a fossil-digging experience and a kids zone playground. But don't worry, there are also some fun adult-only activities as well.

If you're looking for a serious adventure, Crocodile Crossing is the experience for you. This aerial obstacle course allows you to climb, clip and zip over seven acres of live alligators, crocodiles, birds and lemurs. There are two course routes: the Sepik course and the Nile course. The Sepik course takes you over the Land of Crocodiles, while the Nile course takes you over that plus the Birds of Africa, Lemurs of Madagascar and Alligator Lagoon.

There are several important rules for the zip course, including being over 10 years old, a height and weight limit, and you must be physically fit.

If you meet all the requirements, the zip course is a great way to see the park in a new, thrilling way. The zip courses cost an additional fee, and prices are available at the front entrance.

However, if you're a real thrill-seeker, you can take it one step further with the Python Challenge: a 40-foot controlled free fall and climbing wall adventure utilizing the newest technology in adventure challenge courses.

If you choose to do this course, it is recommended that you make a reservation, which can be done at www.alligatorfarm.com.

When you get tired from your hours of thrill-seeking and exploring, there are plenty of shady spots to take a break and grab a snack or cold drink. The Alligator Farm has the Toucantina Snackbar, which serves meals, snacks, drinks and alcohol.

Alligator Farm admission costs \$24.99 for adults and \$13.99 for children ages 3-11. Children under 3 get in free. There are 10% discounts for AAA members, military and senior citizens.



The boardwalk that goes through the Alligator Swamp & Wading Bird Rookery allows visitors to feed alligators and get a great view of the wildlife at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm.

There are also family passes and annual passes available for purchase. The park is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

If you're looking for other activities to do nearby after you've explored the Alligator Farm, there are plenty of restaurants and shops nearby. Located just a few minutes away from Historic Downtown St. Augustine, you and your family can visit the famous Castillo de San Marcos, stroll through the cobbled streets of downtown and also walk over to the port and watch the boats sail by.

There is no where else in the world where you can see every living species of crocodylian. With over 800 of them swimming through the swamps and habitats of the Alligator Farm, you are surrounded by some of Florida's most iconic and fascinating creatures. The St. Augustine Alligator Farm is a great trip to take on a tank of gas.



Maximo, a 15 foot 6 inch Australian crocodile, swims in his exhibit at the St. Augustin Alligator Farm. Maximo is 1,250 pounds and is the largest crocodile at the St. Augustine Alligator Farm.