



FLORIDA

STATE OF THE ARTS



**Meetings Florida,
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By Lisa Simundson



HOLD THAT SUNSET CRUISE! WITH SO MANY OPTIONS IN FLORIDA'S ART DEPARTMENT, YOU CAN GET A LOT MORE CREATIVE WITH AFTER-HOURS FUN

Class Action Art Classes Can Draw Groups Together

When it comes to group activities, the choices aren't always black and white. Sometimes what you want is color, and lots of it, to lighten the load of a busy day. That's where Florida's art museums come in. Many offer group classes and hands-on art encounters that get the creative juices flowing while building rapport among attendees.

"Painting is one of the few things you do that demands total concentration, when you have to focus on one thing," says Maria Barry, president of the Kissimmee-based artists' co-op, Gallery One Artists. "It's therapeutic because you're brain's not all over the place. And when you're detached from daily life, it's refreshing."

Your group can enjoy that refreshment at the following venues.

Visual Arts Center, Punta Gorda

The traditional arts of watercolor, drawing, pencil and sculpture are only the beginning here. The center also has a state-of-the-art pottery studio with 11 wheels, a computer studio with 11 stations, a jewelry and stained glass studio and specialty classes in decorative painting and basket-weaving.

"The group can come in for everything from an hour-long demonstration by someone at the wheel to a three-day workshop," says Michele Valencourt, executive director. "We can pretty much arrange anything with enough advance notice." visualartcenter.org





Tampa Museum of Art

There are virtually no limits on what groups can do at this riverfront facility showcasing a collection of contemporary and classical art, sculpture and acclaimed traveling exhibits. "The beauty of our museum is that we have a lot of flexibility," says Leslie Langford, director of external affairs. "We can arrange classes in chalk drawing, painting or clay, we can take a group on a sketching tour through the galleries... we can create a theme night with music and dining, whatever." In fact, past group activities here have included everything from a jazz band to Cirque du Soleil dancers.

Doris Bardon Community Cultural Center, Gainesville

A striking geometric exterior distinguishes this new center for the arts, which houses a gallery, classrooms and a clay studio, and welcomes artists-in-residence who also teach community art classes.

The center is open to customizing group experiences; for example, classes of up to 20 could be accommodated if 10 worked with ceramics while the others did print-making, says Director Lytha Nicholson. "If they're in town for a few days, they could come here, make something in ceramics, we could fire it up and deliver it to their hotel," she says. thedoris.org

ArtsPark at Young Circle, Hollywood

This 10-acre circle in the middle of busy Hollywood Boulevard is home to a 9,750-square-foot amphitheater with a lawn that seats 2,500, as well as a Visual Arts Pavilion where regular glass-blowing demonstrations draw curious crowds. Groups can schedule a private lesson with the artist, "learning the basics of how to blow glass and getting an overview of how glass is made," says Karl Chuck, park manager. "It can be tailored to specific groups, and we can schedule sessions on weekdays or weekends, based on the artist's availability." hollywoodfl.org



Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville

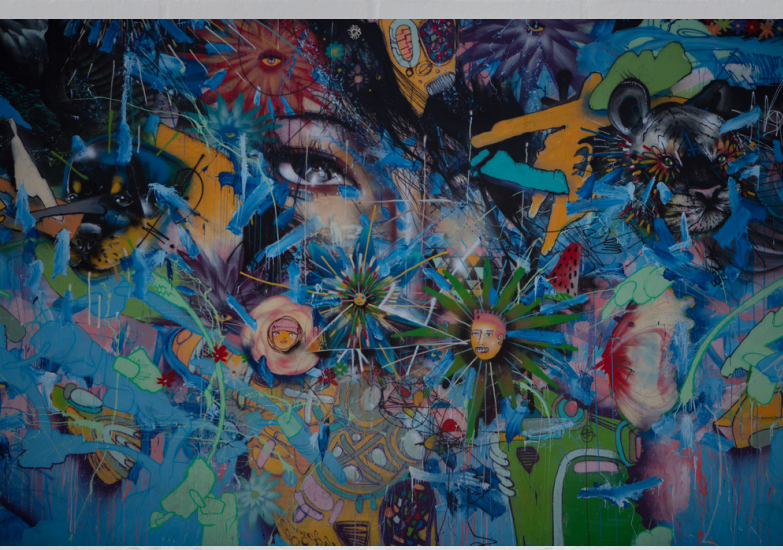
Home of Art Connections, an interactive learning center where visitors paint on digital canvases and create self-portraits on computer screens, the Cummer leaves the tools of artistic creation at the door. Literally. Art boxes containing paint (or pencil) and paper are available in the lobby, and guests are free to take them and use them at their leisure. Many people end up painting or drawing in the gardens, says Maggie Reynolds, associate director of education. cummer.org

Gallery One Artists, Kissimmee

Maria Barry travels for her art. As the president of Gallery One Artists and a member of other Central Florida art groups, Barry has brought artistic teambuilding to various venues throughout the region. A former sales and marketing exec herself, Barry says she's experienced at gauging the mood of the group and knows how far she can push inexperienced students.

"We've had groups that were a mix of management and lower-level employees, and usually the lower-level do better," she says. "The higher-ups would get frustrated and quit. I try to make it as non-intimidating as possible," she adds, noting that budding artists in her classes start with a stencil, "so all the hard work of the drawing is taken away from them."

Barry also encourages an informal atmosphere and says that for an evening class, groups are free to bring wine and a snack. galleryoneartists.com



Wall-to-Wall Art

In Lake Placid, a nimble Florida panther makes its way along a tree branch. In Palatka, the Hiawatha steamboat churns its way up the Ocklawaha River. And in DeLand, a mother bear and her cubs stroll through the morning mist. You haven't gone back in time, but Florida's murals do. Once the domain of creative graffiti artists making political and social statements, murals in Florida have become outdoor canvases reflecting the history, cultural and natural beauty of the towns and cities surrounding them.

"We have visitors come in and they're surprised to discover our murals," says Dena Scroggins, marketing and projects manager for Visit West Volusia, whose county is just inland from Daytona Beach and whose downtown district of DeLand is home to 14 colorful murals, including scenes of the town at the turn of the last century and a mural depicting DeLand's role as a Naval Air Station during WWII.

The bureau offers a pamphlet detailing murals and locations, and a PDF can be emailed to planners interested in group walking tours, Scroggins says. "We have a lot of cultural activities here," she adds. "Every fourth Friday, we have an art walk through our Artisan Alley, and we're also home to the Museum of Florida Art."

Murals are also a big attraction in the Central Florida town of Lake Placid, set midway between Sarasota and Port St. Lucie and home to 44 murals, "soon to be 45," says Harriet Porter, president of the Lake Placid Mural Society and Tourlakeplacid.com, who says that \$6/pp mural tours hosted by the society take about an hour and a half. "We have a very walkable downtown area, very friendly and safe," she says.

But murals are only part of the public art that groups will see on walking tours here, because even the trash cans are themed, and there are bird and clown sculptures positioned throughout the downtown area, the latter in recognition of the fact that Lake Placid is home to Toby's American Clown Museum & School, which claims to have graduated more than 1,500 clowns since 1993.

Other mural cities in Florida include Punta Gorda on the southwest coast, Lake Wales and Gainesville in Central Florida, and Brooksville on the central west coast.



Florida's Literary Map

Past and Present Writers Calling Florida Home

Whether they were born here, or chose to live and work here, a number of acclaimed authors have churned out their masterpieces in the Sunshine State.

Mentioning “writer” and “Florida” in the same breath usually brings a few names to mind, including **Ernest Hemingway**, who lived for a time in Key West, where he wrote a number of classics, including *To Have and Have Not*; and **Tennessee Williams**, another Key West resident who wrote *Summer and Smoke* and *Night of the Iguana*, among other works, from his cottage at 1431 Duncan St.

Hemingway’s home operates as a museum today and is available for special events; while a new exhibit honoring Tennessee Williams was just unveiled by the Key West Business Guild and includes personal photos of the playwright at home with his partner and friends, as well as books of poetry and drama, playbills and a typewriter he used.

Away from the free-spirited ambience of Key West, another writer found inspiration in the swampy scrublands of north-central Florida – **Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings**, a former New York journalist who chronicled the hardscrabble life she encountered in the tiny town of Cross Creek, shaping her experiences into several acclaimed novels, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Yearling*. Today, Rawlings’ cracker-style homestead is preserved at Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.

In addition to literary giants past, writers still living and working in Florida today include **Carl Hiaasen**, who was born and raised in the state; humorist **Dave Barry** and crime novelist **Edna Buchanan**, both Miami residents; “Dexter” creator **Jeff Lindsay**, who lives in Southwest Florida; and that master of horror, **Stephen King**, a seasonal resident of the Sarasota area.



The Hemingway Home, Key West



Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' home in the North Florida town of Cross Creek

Meanwhile, Naples holds bragging rights to being the home of novelists **Robin Cook** and **Janet Evanovich**. They share what they love about living in Florida below.

The Doctor is In Robin Cook

He single-handedly invented the “medical thriller” genre, starting with his breakthrough novel, the blockbuster book-turned-movie *Coma* and rolling through 28 New York Times bestsellers, including *Outbreak*, *Vital Signs* and *Contagion*. Columbia University Medical School graduate, Harvard Medical School faculty member, practicing physician... it might be tough to picture Robin Cook tramping through the Everglades.

But that’s exactly where the author was recently, searching for just the right setting so that the naturalist painter who accompanied him could transfer it to a canvas.

“I don’t know why, but the Everglades has always been an attraction for me,” he says. “It’s a mysterious place, and has things that are not part of your daily routine... like alligators.”

Happily for Cook, he can go to the Everglades whenever he wants because as a Naples resident, it’s basically in his back yard.

In a recent conversation, the native New Yorker and former New Jersey resident explained how he found his way to the Sunshine State.

Robin Cook: It was 1981 and I heard Marco Island was a place where it might be good to invest a little money. So I got on a plane and flew down to Naples, got off the plane and looked around, and never made it to Marco.

Meetings Focus: What was it about Naples?

RC: It was a fun, sleepy little town full of nice people, right on the water, and I’ve always liked the water. And I realized that since it was sleepy, I might be able to write some books. [By his own reckoning, Cook has written at least 20 books in Florida]

M: Is there anything about Florida you found surprising?

RC: Well, I’d never met anyone from the Midwest until I went to Florida. I grew up in New York and I thought everyone in the world was a New Yorker. I think that when you live in Florida, you’re going to meet people from lots of different places. For me, that was very stimulating.



M: Can you tell us about your next book?

RC: I’m working on it right now. It’s going to be my 32nd book, believe it or not, and I think it’s going to be my best book. I finally figured out a way to write about a very important issue that usually puts everyone to sleep. It’s a thriller about health care reform. And I think it’ll be very fun to read.



She’s Just Warming Up Janet Evanovich

The Naples resident and best-selling author of the *Stephanie Plum Series* and *The Husband List* (coauthored with Dorien Kelly), tells us what she really thinks of Florida.

M: Why did you choose to reside here?

JE: I chose Florida because it’s a beautiful state. When there’s snow up to my armpits in the north, I can look out at the sparkling water and take a walk on the beach. What’s not to love?

M: What is about Florida that inspires you?

JE: I love the bright, blue water and the sand. Also, it’s nice not to have to wear gloves and a hat six months out of the year.

M: Is there a particular experience you would recommend to groups visiting Florida?

JE: I know it has the reputation of being a place for kids, but you can’t top Walt Disney World. I get there two or three times a year and love it. Our family loves the place so much, my daughter got married there.

