

Central Florida

# Washington Oaks Gardens State Park

*Home of formal gardens and coquina rock*

## Real Fun in the Real Florida

Although the formal gardens are the centerpiece of this park, Washington Oaks is also famous for the shoreline of *coquina rock* formations that line its Atlantic beach. Nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Matanzas River, this property was once owned by a distant relative of President George Washington.

Extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Matanzas River, Washington Oaks Gardens State Park preserves 425 acres of Florida's original coastal scenery.

**Scenic, self-guiding trails** leads park visitors along the marsh and through a pristine Maritime Hammock. **Ranger-guided walks** are provided by request.

**Picnicking** and **fishing** are popular activities. A **picnic** area is located in a shady hammock south

of the gardens. Fishing areas are provided along the parks seawall and west of the picnic area along the Matanzas River.

**Beach Activities** - Sunbathing, beachcombing, and bird watching are activities that are enjoyed by many park visitors. No formal swimming area is provided due to the coquina rock formations along the beach.

**Formal Gardens**- A portion of the hammock contains a formal garden where many species of exotic plants from around the world are displayed along footpaths and around reflecting ponds. The gardens are well known for their azaleas, camellias, and roses.

## **History & Nature**

This land is part of Bella Vista Plantation owned by General Joseph Hernandez, a Floridian of Minorcan descent. Hernandez was a militia general who commanded troops in this part of Florida during the Second Seminole War. A surveyor named George Washington, a relative of the first President of the United States, married Hernandez's daughter in 1845.

In 1818, Jose Mariano Hernandez, a native of "St. Augustine", bought the land, and named it "Bella Vista." Hernandez' career as a planter was typical for many in northeast Florida. He was a citizen of a Spanish colony, owning lands granted by Spain. In 1821, Florida became a U.S. territory. On his several land holdings, Hernandez raised cotton, sugar and crops to feed the family, workers and slaves. Bella Vista adjoined his cotton plantation to the south, but was apparently never developed as a separate farm itself.

Much of what you see in the Park today was left by Mr. Owen D. Young and his wife Louise. Mr. Young bought the property in 1937 and they enjoyed it for many years as a winter retreat. Mr. Young helped found the RCA Corporation and became Chairmen of the Board of the General Electric Co. in 1922. Mrs. Young donated the property to the State of Florida in 1964 following the death of Mr. Young.

## **Directions**

Washington Oaks Gardens State Park is located two miles south of Marineland, off A1A.

## Park Guidelines

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is required. Additional user fees may apply.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected. Collection, destruction or disturbance is prohibited.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and well behaved at all times.
- Fishing, boating, swimming and fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited in all Florida state parks.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- For information about joining the friends of Washington Oaks, call (386) 446-6783.

- Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact the ranger station.

## **Contact Information**

Florida State Parks  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Division of Recreation and Parks  
**Washington Oaks Gardens State Park**  
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