

Safari spotlights tribal history: Re-enactment one of the reasons to visit Billie Swamp.

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Turn your vehicle into a time machine this winter and travel to the Big Cypress Shootout Feb. 26-28 at Billie Swamp Safari in southwest Florida.

The Big Cypress Shootout celebrates the struggle of Seminole Indians who fought successfully against capture by American troops in the late 18th century, and features battle re-enactments, authentic weapons displays, period costumes and crafts and archery competitions.

Located on the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation about halfway between Fort Myers and Palm Beach, Billie Swamp Safari includes 2,200 acres of the Everglades that can be explored by airboats and swamp buggies and by foot on the walking trails.

If that doesn't provide enough excitement for one weekend, check out Billie Swamp Safari's wildlife shows featuring alligator wrestling and venomous live snakes.

Don't miss

View the swamp from an airboat

Climb onto an airboat and "fly" along the top of Florida's swampland. With the breeze in your hair, the sun on your face and the quiet glide of the boat, you will be able to get up close and personal with the plants and wildlife. Photograph a lazy armadillo, a scurrying skunk or gliding alligator in their environment. A new ride starts every 30 minutes between 10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. for a cost of \$15 each.

Narrated Swamp Buggy eco-tours

Join your master captain as he takes you through the swamp, describing the history, habitat and makeup of the area. Flying through the tall reeds of grass and then gliding over the marshlands will give you a first-hand understanding of life in the swamps. The tours leave on the hour and half-hour between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. \$25 adults, \$23 seniors 63 and older, \$15 children 4 to 12.

Watch handlers of snakes and alligators

Be sure to check out the 45-minute Snake and Alligator Show. Be prepared to gasp as handlers lead snakes and alligators through some amazing feats. \$8 adults, \$4 children ages 4 to 12.

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki

Museum

Be sure to step into the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum for a glimpse of the tools and equipment used by the tribe for daily life activities throughout history. Settle in for a short film that depicts the Seminole culture, as explained by tribe members. Then stroll through the 60-plus acres of natural foliage to the living village, where you will get to witness an average living situation for Seminoles of the past. Admission for adults is \$9; students, senior citizens and members of the military pay \$6.

Day package: Sample all of the features, attractions and fun at Billie Swamp Safari for one price: \$30 for children, \$41 for seniors and \$43 for adults. The day package lets you enjoy each of the rides and spend the day in an unhurried fashion, stepping back in time in the swamp.

If you go

Billie Swamp Safari, Clewiston, Fla., 1-800-949-6101, Ext. 12125, www.semtribe.com. Big Cypress Shootout is \$7 adults, \$5 children. Cash only.

Getting there

Take I-75 south to Exit 49 and follow signs for 19 miles to park entrance.

Where to stay

Gigi's Resort by the Beach. Gigi's was built more than 60 years ago and is within walking distance of the ocean. Rooms average \$125 per night. 3005 Alhambra St., Fort Lauderdale. 954-463-4827, 1-800-910-2357, www.gigisresort.com

The Atlantic Hotel. Features include ocean views, a five-star restaurant and lounge and penthouse suites. Average nightly room rate \$319-\$379. 601 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, 954-567-8020, www.atlantichotelfl.com

Where to eat

Smokin' Oyster Brewery. A fun feature of the brewery is that they will cook what you catch for \$8.95 per order (8 to 10 oz.) and side dishes. Entrees range \$21-83. 340 Old San Carlos Blvd., Fort Myers Beach. 239-463-3474, www.smokinoyster.com

Ruth's Chris Steakhouse. The restaurant boasts a casual/elegant atmosphere. Entrees average \$20-\$32. 2525 N. Federal Highway, Fort Lauderdale. 954-565-2338, www.ruthschris.com/Steak-House/3824/ Ft-Lauderdale

Information: Lee County Visitors and Convention Bureau. 239-338-3500, www.fortmyers-sanibel.com

