

December 2014



## DINING & ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

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### Florida Strawberry Festival Announces Headliners



“Come Join the Party” is the theme of this year’s Florida Strawberry Festival. The theme is in honor of the festival’s 80<sup>th</sup> year. The festival will run February 26 through March 8 and will include 24 headline acts on the Wish Farm stage.

“We have a wider variety of entertainment this year than we have ever had before,” said Florida Strawberry Festival General Manager Paul Davis. “We have classic country, today’s country, Christian, 60s, R&B, rock, pop and even an Academy Award winner.”

The 2015 headline entertainment lineup is as follows:

#### Thursday, February 26

10:30 a.m. Jimmy Sturr and Orchestra  
3:30 p.m. Bobby Vinton  
7:30 p.m. Alabama

#### Friday, February 27

3:30 p.m. Mel Tillis  
7:30 p.m. Scotty McCreery

#### Saturday, February 28

3:30 p.m. MercyMe  
7:30 p.m. Kevin Costner/Modern West

#### Sunday, March 1

3:30 p.m. “Brett Eldredge”  
7:30 p.m. Hunter Hayes

#### Monday, March 2

3:30 p.m. Sawyer Brown  
7:30 p.m. Happy Together Tour

#### Tuesday, March 3

3:30 p.m. Ronnie Milsap  
7:30 p.m. Sara Evans

#### Wednesday, March 4

3:30 p.m. Ricky Skaggs  
7:30 p.m. Craig Morgan

#### Thursday, March 5

10:30 a.m. Tommy Dorsey Orchestra  
3:30 p.m. Oak Ridge Boys  
7:30 p.m. Newsboys

#### Friday, March 6

3:30 p.m. Loretta Lynn  
7:30 p.m. Boyz II Men

#### Saturday, March 7

3:30 p.m. Dan + Shay  
7:30 p.m. John Legend

#### Sunday, March 8

3:30 p.m. Parmalee  
7:30 p.m. REBA

Advance tickets for admission and for headline entertainment shows will go on sale Thursday, December 4, 2014 at 8 a.m. and can be purchased online at [www.flstrawberryfestival.com](http://www.flstrawberryfestival.com), at the Amscot Main Ticket Office located at 2209 W. Oak Avenue in Plant City and over the phone at (813) 754-1996. Free seating for each concert is also available in the Morrow Steel Free Grandstand located at the back of the Wish Farms Soundstage and is available on a first come, first seated basis.

“Our 80<sup>th</sup> birthday is going to be a big party,” said Davis, “and we have a great lineup of entertainers to help us celebrate such a monumental occasion.”

## Just a Thought...



By: Christine Wynne-Andrade,  
Editor



It's that time of year again. It is time for all of us to hunt through shopping centers, catalogues and websites to find the perfect gifts for our loved ones.

Yes, I know that Christmas isn't all about presents. I also know that you shouldn't need a special occasion to spoil the ones you love. But, sometimes picking out gifts proves to be just plain fun.

Christmas is my favorite holiday. In a world where everything constantly changes, Christmas is still the pinnacle of our winter delight. I love the smell of cookies baking in the oven, decorating the house with twinkle lights and homemade ornaments, and finding the perfect gift. The point of Christmas is the holiday spirit and not the actual physical gifts. But the gifts do help us create memories and capture that holiday spirit.

Christmas is the perfect time to gather friends and family and spend some quality time together. In a close-knit community like ours, it is also the perfect time to enrich and illuminate this festive season by giving back to our community.

May the blessings of the season bring peace and joy to you and your family.

I'm only a few keystrokes away by email at [editor@plantcityguide.com](mailto:editor@plantcityguide.com).



Lights of Love Tree Lighting  
sponsored by South Florida  
Baptist Hospital

- Thursday, December 4th
- 6:45 P
- McCall Park

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## CANDLELIGHT PROCESSIONAL AT EPCOT

One of the most popular events of the Christmas season at Walt Disney World is the Candlelight Processional at Epcot. The highlight of the show is a celebrity narrator who reads the story of the birth of Jesus from scripture. The readings are interspersed with music that celebrates the section just read. The music is provided by a 50 piece orchestra and a 500 member choir. Disney cast members try out to be a part of the Christmas Tree (in the middle of the choir) and high school and college choirs from around the country are invited to join.

Three performances are held per night at 5:00pm, 6:45pm and 8:15pm in the American Gardens Theater across from the American Adventure in the World Showcase.

The celebrity narrators for this year are as follows:

Neil Patrick Harris	November 30 to December 2
Jonathan Groff	December 3 and 4
Whoopi Goldberg	December 5 and 6
LeVar Burton	December 7 to December 9
Edward James Olmos	December 10 to December 11
Joe Morton	December 12 to December 14
Chita Rivera	December 15 to 17
Ana Gasteyer	December 18 to 20
Marlee Matlin	December 21 to 23
Isabella Rossellini	December 24 and 25
Blair Underwood	December 26 and 27
Steven Curtis Chapman	December 28 to 30

While the theater can seat over 1,000 guests per performance, between 50% and 75% of these seats are reserved for guests who purchase dinner packages. All of these dinner package guests are guaranteed seats in one of the three nightly Candlelight Processional performances. The remaining seats are complimentary on a first come, first served basis.

This means that the standby line for most performances can get ridiculously long, especially when a popular narrator is presenting. When Neil Patrick Harris presented last year, we saw people lining up for the 5:00 pm performance around noon!

The dinner packages include a meal consisting of an appetizer, entree, dessert, and non-alcoholic beverage (or full buffet "experience," where applicable), reserved seating at the show and access to an exclusive fireworks viewing area. For what you get, the dining package is not that expensive, and your time on vacation is definitely worth the price.

If you elect not to do the dinner package, and do not want to wait in the standby line, there is always a chance of standing in the walkway behind the theater.



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## AREA FESTIVITIES



The chill of winter will soon be in the air. As if on cue, the heat and humidity of our long summer will give way to cooler weather. This is the time of the year when we share our incredible state with many tourists and snowbirds. Why let them have all of the fun?? From the Gaylord Palms Resort's ICE in Kissimmee, to Busch Gardens Winter Town, the possibilities for winter fun are endless. These winter traditions, and others like them, can be found throughout our region during the month of December. Here is a sampling of events in our area.

### Gaylord Palm's ICE



Grab your winter coats, hats and gloves and drive over to Orlando's coolest one of a kind Christmas attraction ICE! Celebrating its 12<sup>th</sup> year, ICE is exhibiting more than 20,000 square feet of hand-carved ice sculptures including three two-story ice slides.

This year's theme centers around the holiday classic "The Nutcracker." Though featuring this snow-colored character, ICE still promises a colorfully frozen retelling of the classic Christmas tale through more than two million pounds of hand-carved vibrant ice sculptures. As always the exhibit ends with the Reason for the Season: a traditional nativity scene in ice.

ICE is kept at a chilling nine degrees Fahrenheit, so be sure to dress appropriately: Closed-toe shoes and long pants are required. Everyone is fitted for a parka before entering to ensure your comfort and safety while inside.

ICE is open daily from November 15, 2014 to January 4, 2015, including holidays. Ticket prices start at \$22.99. For more information and to purchase tickets, go to [www.ChristmasAtGaylordPalms.com](http://www.ChristmasAtGaylordPalms.com).

You and your family will love our Chill Pass, which includes Priority Access and a cup of hot cocoa.

### Busch Gardens Continues Family Tradition with Christmas Town

Christmas Town is returning to Busch Gardens this year and is now included with any annual pass, Fun Card or daily admission to the park. "When Christmas Town opened in 2012, it quickly became a unique holiday tradition for Tampa Bay area families," says Jim Dean, Busch Gardens park president. This year's event will transform the park into a nighttime holiday wonderland of wintry surprises and all things Christmas, filling guests' senses with seasonal sights, sounds and flavors. Guests can look forward to special entertainment, live music, festive treats, holiday shopping and over a million twinkling lights around every turn.

Christmas Town is open 23 select dates from Nov. 28 through Dec. 31. Guests can experience all of the Christmas celebrations throughout the day, and park closing times will range from 8pm to 9pm throughout the event. Visit [ChristmasTown.com](http://ChristmasTown.com) for dates, times and event details.

Christmas Town will also offer some magnificent new opportunities for groups looking to book a unique holiday party. For details, call the Busch Gardens Events Team at 813-987-5523.

Be the first to know about new events, special deals and future announcements by following the park's blog at [BuschGardensTampaBlog.com](http://BuschGardensTampaBlog.com), or "Like" the *Busch Gardens* Facebook page, and follow @buschgardens on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

### Tampa's Downtown on Ice

Enjoy ice skating in 80 degree weather under the palm trees seasonal ice rink. Tampa Downtown on Ice is the Bay area's only outdoor ice skating rink. The rink is open daily (except Thanksgiving) from November 20 - January 4. Skating is still only \$10 for 90 minutes of skating and includes skates. Concessions are available to purchase along with Tampa Downtown on Ice T-shirts and ornaments, socks and hats.

Where: Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park, 600 N. Ashley Drive, Tampa, FL 33602

Hours: Monday-Thursday: 4:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Friday: 4:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Saturday: 10:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Sunday: 12:00 p.m. - 9 p.m.

For more information, visit [www.tampasdowntownonice.com](http://www.tampasdowntownonice.com)



## Spotlight on Entertainment



Charles Dickens' timeless tale of hope and redemption comes to life in an enchanting production filled with the electrifying arrival of ghosts, jubilant musical numbers, plenty of "Bah Humbugs" and Scrooge's joyful discovery of love.

A Christmas Carol is about Scrooge, a stingy, miserable, old miser, who has no regard for the poor and lives a lonely life. His heart doesn't seem to grow warm for anyone or anything- until he is visited by his dead as a door-nail business partner Jacob Marley- who warns him of his pending doom- and that he will be visited by three spirits who are on a mission to change his heart before it is too late!

A Cast of 9 Actors will portray 25 different characters. The cast includes professional actors who are highly experienced as well as middle and high school students who have little to no experience- All of these actors will play 3-4 different parts as well as sing their way through Dickens classic tale of transformation, reformation, and enlightenment!

Enjoy a delight cup of coffee or tea while you partake in our dessert spread! Bring your friends and family! This will be an enjoyable evening just for you! Show opens December 5<sup>th</sup> Don't miss it!

Cast members will bring the story to life at 7:00 p.m. on December 5, 12, 19, 20, 26 and 27, and at 2:00 p.m. on December 7, 14, 20, 21 and 27.

Tickets are \$16 for adults, \$25 for couples, included in the price is a dessert and coffee, tea or water. Reservations are recommended and can be purchased in advance online at by calling 727-944-6442.

2<sup>nd</sup> Stage Studio Theater is located at 200 S. McMullen Booth Road, Clearwater, FL 33579. For more information, visit [www.2ndstage77.com](http://www.2ndstage77.com).

## MOSI's IMAX® DOME Theatre Premieres National Geographic's "Mysteries of the Unseen World"



*Mysteries of the Unseen World*, a new giant screen film adventure, debuted on November 21 in the Florida Hospital IMAX® DOME Theatre at MOSI. This film takes

audiences on an extraordinary journey into unseen worlds and hidden dimensions.

*Mysteries of the Unseen World*, an original production by National Geographic and Days End Pictures and narrated by Forest Whitaker, uncovers the mysteries of things too fast, too slow, too small or simply invisible. Created by an award-winning veteran film team, the new 40-minute large format experience is produced by Jini Dürr ("Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure") and Lisa Truitt ("Mysteries of Egypt"), and directed by Louie Schwartzberg ("DisneyNature: Wings of Life"). "Mysteries of the Unseen World" uses innovative high-speed and time-lapse photography, electron microscopy, and nanotechnology, to transport audiences to an enthralling secret world of nature, events, and breathtaking phenomena not visible to the naked eye.

*Mysteries of the Unseen World* moves from the familiar events of everyday life to the building blocks of matter itself. The filmmakers worked with a 3-D medical animation company to depict the atom-scale realm of nano-science and potential innovations in nanotechnology. In a complex zoom sequence, the shot moves in on a spider, then a strand of its silk, then into the silk itself where audiences see a bacterium. The camera then zooms even deeper, in on a virus on the bacterium, then into the DNA of the virus and finally into the actual atoms of the DNA.

"The premise of this new giant screen film experience is looking at the world through a variety of imaging technologies that allow audiences to see beyond what they can with the naked eye and gain a new vision of the world around them," said producer Jini Dürr.

*Mysteries* is funded in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation and generous support from Lockheed Martin and FEI, a manufacturer of electron microscopes.

For information on tickets and show times, call 813-987-6000 or visit the website at [mosi.org](http://mosi.org).

## CHEATING DEATH IN THE ELBE SANDSTONE MOUNTAINS

By: Christine Wynne

German airline Lufthansa will start flights between Tampa International Airport and its hub in Frankfurt, Germany on September 25, 2015.

Through Frankfurt, Tampa Bay will be linked to 147 cities in 65 countries around the world. Lufthansa is the fourth foreign airline to plant a flag in Tampa Bay since 2011.

Germany is Tampa Bay's third-largest international tourism market. In 2013, the most recent full-year data, Germans accounted for 11.6 percent of Tampa Bay's foreign visitors.

"This is another huge win for Tampa Bay," Visit Tampa Bay President & CEO Santiago Corrada said. "It will go a long way toward showing visitors from Central Europe and around the world the treasures Tampa Bay has to offer. It will also help boost Tampa Bay toward our goal of \$30 million in county bed taxes by 2018."

By reaching \$30 million in hotel bed taxes, Tampa and Hillsborough County will join the ranks of Florida's eight high-impact tourism counties. That list includes Pinellas County along with Duval, Volusia, Orange, Osceola, Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe counties.

Let's not let the Europeans have all of the fun. This is a great opportunity for Hillsborough County residents to visit Germany. The following is a story I wrote about my trip to Germany several years ago.



As we drove along the Elbe River in the early hours of the morning I kept my doubts to myself. Having never climbed before, I was a little nervous. Since I had already committed to the trip, I couldn't back out now. Not to worry though, our group would be led by two experienced climbers from Kreisel Outdoors, so there was nothing to be nervous about. What a terrific opportunity to

actually climb real rock, up in the mountains rather than some climbing gym in the city. And I wasn't afraid of heights at all - or was I? As I saw the large rock towers looming in the distance I couldn't remember.



Tucked away in the eastern corner of Germany lies one of the largest climbing areas in Europe. The breathtaking Elbe Sandstone Mountains in Saxon Switzerland National Park feature free climbing on over 1,100 free-standing sandstone towers embedded in a fairy-tale like, picturesque landscape. The area encompasses nearly 15,000 climbing routes in all grades ranging between 30 to 300 feet. The countless routes covering a wide range of difficulty levels make this the perfect adventure destination for both beginners and hard climbers.

Located in the heart of former East Germany, the Elbe Sandstone Mountains have been virtually unchanged throughout the 20th century. It was only after the wall came down in 1989 that visitors have rediscovered this treasure. The Elbe River cuts deeply through the sandstone formations creating a canyon that stretches from the town of Torgau in the north to Bad Schandau in the south. The river meanders majestically through a region of sandstone gorges and cliff top mountains with a sprinkling of castles and cozy inns along the way. The splendor of the rocks is amplified by the green depth of the surrounding forests. High upon the ridges lay the intriguingly poised pine trees, while tall spruce and beech trees grow in the dark gorges. A glimpse of the rocks from the valley, which is interlaced with the cascade of wild rivers, one can observe huge slabs of sandstone piled high one above the other. In places the slabs seem to be rounded off like a mesa, elsewhere they are jagged creating the appearance of a castle's turret.

When we first arrived in Saxon Switzerland National Park I glanced up at the sandstone towers surrounding us. While squinting to see the top, I wondered if these were the rocks we were going to climb. I mean, the tallest thing I had climbed recently were the stairs to my apartment. Perhaps in the climbing world these rocks

weren't very tall, but in my world, they were awfully intimidating. After all, we weren't in the safe confines of the climbing gym; we were in the place where free climbing had originated!

In the sport of free climbing, the climber uses equipment for safety purposes only. To free climb, the climber uses their arms and legs as they would to climb a ladder, except they carry gear to help protect them from a fall. One such piece of gear is a piton, which is a metal spike that is hammered into a crack in the rock so that the climber can secure a rope in the event of a fall. This is considered free climbing because the items that the climber uses to keep from falling are not pulled on or clung to in order to help their upward progress. Many of the climbing routes and hiking trails in Saxon Switzerland National Park have metal ladders and permanent pitons attached to the rock to aid climbers to the summit, thereby revealing spectacular views of the countryside and nearby towns.



At the trailhead entrance, our energetic, multi-lingual guides Manfred and Roman addressed us with confident ease: "You don't need to know anything about climbing, all of the equipment and experience are provided. You get to jump right in and give free climbing a try in a natural environment that's extremely safe. And if you happen to learn just a little bit along the way,

then you can take that home with you along with the memories." Lead by Roman, we set off along a hiking trail as the sun peaked in a clear blue sky. The beginning of the trail was more like a walk in the woods than a climb. It ran along a brook before gradually ascending towards the rock towers. The first rock face on our journey was rather easy to climb. It was a short ascent that consisted of a series of ladders built into the rock. We scrambled up the ladders with confidence and a renewed sense of excitement for the more challenging climbs to come. That wasn't so bad, maybe I would be able to do this free climbing after all, I thought. Before too long, as we rounded a corner on the trail, we were faced with a much more daunting rock tower. In front of us was a 200 foot sandstone rock face that would require the use of a sit harness and ropes that would be attached to a permanent metal rung.

Roman began the climb by shuffling his feet onto a small vertical feature on the right side of the rock. He then moved his hand up and grasped a horizontal hand hold and then continued climbing until he came to a ledge where he hooked his harness onto the metal rung. The ledge was

approximately fifteen feet long and ten inches wide. Without the aid of the harness, one false move would send him falling a distance that seemed unfathomable. It was my turn and I wasn't feeling very good about this climb. It wasn't that the route was too difficult. I just didn't feel right, I was losing confidence. Manfred helped me fasten my harness to the rung since I was so distracted with fear. Even though I tested the system and felt sure it was safe, my legs were still quivering. With a deep breath and words of encouragement from the group, I pulled back onto the ledge and continued my ascent upward, anxious to finish the climb.

Upon completing the climb, we had a few minutes to relax and take in the breathtaking views before continuing on to our next challenge. After a mile of hiking, the trail seemed to end as a towering rock wall appeared before us. There was a much smaller trail that curved to the left, giving the appearance of the road less traveled. At this point our guides stopped and teasingly asked us how we planned on getting around the rock wall that stood before us. It seemed quite obvious to us that we would be taking the smaller trail to the left. We stopped in our tracks when we were told that instead we would be going up and over the wall! Upon further inspection of the wall, I soon realized that there was a crevice in the center approximately 20-24 inches wide that vertically rose 100 feet to the top of the rock formation. At that point, we questioned our presence there - what were we trying to prove? Roman demonstrated how we would use the metal pitons and rungs built into the rock to pull ourselves up to the top. He definitely resembled Spider Man as he seemingly floated up the rock face. His climbing was quick and fluid, like water flowing uphill. The crazy part was that we were going to accomplish this without the help of any harness or rope. I had serious thoughts of turning back. As we squeezed through the crevice one by one, there was a real spirit of camaraderie. We all shared the same goal - reaching the top.

In spite of our fears, we survived the climb. We relaxed and basked in the sun on the summit, amazed and relieved by our accomplishment. The afternoon trek was a meandering downhill stroll, complete with a rustic picnic including local wines, meats, breads and cheeses the guides prepared for us. That was the one surprise of the day we didn't mind.

#### Getting There:

Lufthansa Airlines offers flights into Dresden. From Dresden, take the regional train ("S-Bahn") towards Schona. Stations that are closest to major climbing areas are Rathen, Bad Schandau and Schmilka.

Kreisel Outdoors - [www.outdoor-kreisel.de](http://www.outdoor-kreisel.de)