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Three Sisters Springs draws tourists to Crystal River



Some of the many people floating peacefully in the water and looking through waterproof facemasks at manatees underwater, are seen in the outlet area from Three Sisters Springs in Citrus County on Saturday (Jan. 12). It was very good weather for visitors to the springs. At this point, between 10 a.m. and noon, it felt like about 71 degrees Fahrenheit.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 13, 2019 at 11:38 a.m.

Video By Sharon Hardison

CRYSTAL RIVER – With 150 manatees in one area reported by the tourist attraction known as Three Rivers Springs in the city of Crystal River, it's no wonder the trams running every half-hour from City Hall were relatively full on Saturday (Jan. 12).

https://youtu.be/_FvJGOEQ1yc

In this video, there is a panorama view of the springs with some of the many manatees in the springs.

Video by Sharon Hardison © Jan. 13, 2018

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A very large manatee floats in the springs.



A manatee comes up for a breath of air. The red thing in the photo is a leaf floating on top of the water. Manatees are mammals and they breathe air and have warm blood.

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Here are some of the 150 manatees counted in the Three Sisters Springs are on Saturday.



A big manatee takes a breath through its nose as it pokes up out of the calm spring water.

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This view shows where the spring empties into another body of water, leading eventually to the Gulf of Mexico.



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A relatively smaller manatee is seen near the surface as it gets a breath of air.



This picture gives a perspective of the size of the smaller, and probably younger manatee.

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Kayakers are seen in the water near the outlet from the springs.



Here is a view of kayakers and a tour pontoon boat seen with beyond the shoulders of the many tourists at the site on Saturday.

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This drone or unmanned aerial system is noticed above the park. If the park is within a certain distance from an airport, the operator may be violating federal law. However, there are methods to legally fly a UAS. Drone operators should communicate with the Federal Aviation Administration to learn the best flight methods.



This plant is among the various forms of flora found at the park on Saturday. It was sending its airborne seeds through the air – where they floated like many tiny parachutes, landing on land and water.

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Here, the lovely and talented Sharon Hardison models next to a bluebird (of happiness) nesting box at the park. There are also bat boxes on the property.



The crystal-clear water of the springs allows viewers to see the fish in the area. Dust, pollen and other floating objects floating on the top of the water are not crystal clear.

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One of the trolleys used to deliver visitors to the site departs to collect more people. The trams ran every 30 minutes, and there was even a shuttle van for express delivery to the City Hall parking lot, where the trolleys also offered stops at other tourist sites in the immediate area.



This red blooming plant was among the flora of the area.

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It looks a little bit like a traffic jam in the river with the many people viewing manatees. However, no humans or manatees were reported to be hurt; and, a good time probably was had by all.



These are some of the manatees in the area closer to where the people in the water were located on Saturday.

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The Three Sisters Springs Center is the official concessionaire for land access to Three Sisters Springs a unit of the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge.

Parking to get on the trolley is at City Hall for the City of Crystal River, and that address is 123 U.S. Highway 19 N. in that city. (That is on the east side of the highway, south of the mall and north of the turn to get on State Road 44 in the city of Crystal River).

In addition to trolley tours to Three Sisters Springs, there is walk-in/bike access at the front gates of the property. There is no vehicular parking at the site, though.

For the people with snorkels, masks, fins, as well as the canoeists and kayakers, Three Sisters Springs has open water access from April 1 through Nov. 14.

During this time of year, people can dive, snorkel, and kayak the springs as long as they enter from the water access. There is no access into the springs by land, ever.

During the colder times, like Saturday, there are limited methods to float near the manatees at the outlet from Three Sisters Springs.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, The Crystal River and Kings Bay area is the only area in Florida where swimmers are monitored around manatees.

The FWC notes the following:

The West Indian manatee is an imperiled species and is protected by state and federal law.

Avoid harassing or disturbing manatees whenever you discover that manatees are in the water near you. Harassment is defined as any activity that alters the animal's natural behavior.

By altering the manatee's natural behavior, you may create the likelihood of danger that is bad for the animal and against the law.

The FWC further notes:

BEING NEAR MANATEES

- Look, but don't touch manatees. Also, don't feed manatees or give them water. If manatees become accustomed to being around people, they can alter their behavior in the wild, perhaps causing them to lose their natural fear of boats and humans, which may make them more susceptible to harm.

- Do not pursue or chase a manatee if you see one while you are swimming, snorkeling, diving, paddling or operating a boat.

- Never poke, prod or stab a manatee with your hands, feet or any object.

- If a manatee avoids you, do not chase the animal for a closer view.

- Give manatees space to move. Avoid isolating or singling out an individual manatee from its group and do not separate a cow and her calf.

- Keep hands and objects to yourself. Don't attempt to snag, hook, hold, grab, pinch, hit or ride a manatee.

- Avoid excessive noise and splashing if a manatee appears nearby. The manatee may be resting and may surface without being aware of your presence. Noise and activity may startle the animal awake, which may put it in harm's way if it is frightened and leaves the area.

- If the site you visit allows in-water activities near manatees, use snorkel gear and float at the surface of the water to passively observe manatees. The sound of bubbles from SCUBA gear or other devices may cause manatees to leave the area.