

ADVENTURE GIRL

Going Segway

BY ERIN THURSBY



Looking for a fresh way to explore the outdoors? Nature bike tours are so yesterday. Today's tourist opts for something with more novelty: the Segway. It's not just for mall cops! I know what I'm talking about because I took an EcoMotion Tour (www.ecomotiontours.com) on Fort George Island through wildlife trails to Kingsley Plantation.

Unlike a bike, which is surprisingly easy to crash, it takes special effort to crash a Segway. Even if you can't ride a bike or anything else that requires natural balance, it's very likely that you'll be able to maneuver a Segway without taking a tumble. After all, this is a vehicle that can be easily maneuvered by those with Parkinson's disease and even stroke victims. It should be noted, however, that the most dangerous thing to a Segway is another Segway. Our single mishap occurred during picture time, when one of the tourists lined up a little too close to her friend's Segway. The wheels got caught

and she took a spill. She was right back up again in moments and none the worse for it.

Lean forward to move forward, lean backward to move backward and use the handles to steer. Instinctively, I did try to lean left or right to turn at first, but soon learned to use the handles instead. Because of the gyro tech inside it, the Segway always tries to balance you as you stand on it. You don't have to stand stock still though. As the guides explained, that's a rookie mistake that will make you sore the next day. Instead, you can stand as you normally would, shifting your weight naturally.

As I was filling out the paperwork and donning my helmet, it was apparent that legions of mosquitoes had been informed that I was in the area. I had to stop and spray myself down with my all-natural repellent. EcoMotion also had a basket of bug spray for the ill-prepared tourist. I felt a little smug since I was so prepared *and* using something organic. The smugness didn't last for long though; while fewer mosquitoes were sampling my DNA, I was still a banquet for those mutants who were undeterred by anything less than a liberal coating of industrial-strength DEET. Not far into the tour, the guides were spraying down our legs with the good stuff as we stood on the Segways. I was happy to be in the woods with people who knew what they were doing.

EcoMotion tricked us out with headsets so we could hear the tour guide and gave us a tutorial in an open field. Once we got on the trail, under the canopy of the trees, it didn't seem so hot. That, and the movement of the Segways, kept us cool. The Segway adventurers on the tour ranged from grandmas and Midwesterners on vacation to young locals looking for something interesting to do.

We learned about Spanish Moss, which is neither Spanish nor a moss, native Indian uses for local plant life, and some of the local history. The thing we saw the most of were gopher tortoises. The tour guides had given each one an amusing name. Despite being toward the back, I periodically got a face full of spider web. I remedied the problem by following the person in front of me more exactly rather than at an angle. We learned about the spiders too, which the guide said were particularly docile.

At the midpoint, we stopped at Kingsley Plantation. The peace of Kingsley is difficult to express. I could imagine it bustling with people in the 1800s, but even in my imagination, with commotion, talk and work happening all around me, I felt as though the land itself has an underlying harmony. Inside the whitewashed houses, we learned about the clever ways people did everyday things. Outside, cicadas sang in the moist Florida heat, and by the shore, I saw the paw marks of a raccoon. A breeze made things sweeter.

When we came back to the Segways after our walking tour of the Kingsley Plantation, our guide informed us that the governor on our Segways had been set for a higher speed. Ten miles an hour doesn't seem fast unless you've been previously maxing out at five—and let me tell you, Segways feel fast. As I was doing donuts in the practice field before setting out, I wondered why it felt so darn dangerous, even if it wasn't. It wasn't because we were wearing helmets; it was because we were standing and moving, without walking. That's a novel sensation to be feeling on land. So, yes, I was thrilled by a vehicle with a max speed of five to 10 miles an hour.

NEED TO KNOW:

Max weight: 260 pounds. Minimum age: 13.

No flip-flops or curved-sole shoes such as Shape-Ups.

Tips are appreciated; bring cash to tip the guide.

You can bring a camera, but you can't use it while on the Segway.

Reservations recommended: 251-9477. Cost: \$65-\$95.

www.ecomotiontours.com

ECO EVENTS



BROUGHT TO YOU BY TREE HILL NATURE CENTER

Ah, July, you're so wacky! The CDC's fruit and vegetable of the month are nectarine and garlic. So if you're heading west to Cali, check out the 34th annual Gilroy Garlic Festival. They have garlic ice cream...because isn't that on everyone's bucket list? It's also National Park and Recreation Month and Smart Irrigation Month. For some great tips for saving water, irrigation and otherwise, visit www.theorganicadventurer.com. July 7 is also Father-Daughter Take a Walk Together Day. So, Dad's, teach your daughter how to adjust the sprinklers, and then take a walk with her in the park while the two of you share a nectarine!

Local veggie co-op business, the Veggie Bin, is in the middle of fundraising for an ambitious Slow Food Incubator project that could benefit local food artisans, farms and Jacksonville as a whole. Their goal is to raise \$15,000 to build a small commercial kitchen. They will then "adopt" a minimum of five local artisans. In addition to kitchen time (access to commercial kitchen space is a barrier for many food artisans in making the leap from cottage industry to full-time business), these folks will get matched with local farmers for ingredient sourcing, get access to business consultants, get help with distribution and more. Get involved by donating at www.indiegogo.com/VeggieBin-Jax?c=home and follow Veggie Bin's progress on this project at www.facebook.com/VeggieBin. **BY ANNA RABHAN**

July – Looking for a romantic, eco-adventurous activity or a great summer educational opportunity for the kids? The Georgia Sea Turtle Center offers twice-a-night (except July 4) **Evening Turtle Walks** beginning at 8:30 and 9:30 pm. A 30-45-minute presentation about the natural history of sea turtles is followed by an hour-long guided beach search for a nesting turtle. The cost is \$12 for nonmembers and \$6 for members (not including admission to the GSTC - see website). Children must be at least four years old; anyone under 18 must be with an adult. Advance registration is required; call 912-635-4444. For more information, visit www.georgiaseaturtlecenter.org. The GSTC also offers **Morning Nest Walks**; contact them for details.

July 2 – This month's Sierra Club program, from 6-8 pm at the Ponte Vedra library, features the **documentary *John Muir in the New World***. The film details the life of the famed naturalist who was instrumental in establishing such national parks as Yosemite and the Grand Canyon. The program is free, children are welcome and snacks will be provided, but please bring your own beverage. For more information, visit the Sierra Club's Meetup page at www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Northeast-Florida-Group.

July 12 – Stop by the North Florida Land Trust office, at 10036 Sawgrass Drive West, from 4-7 pm for an **open house**. Enjoy some wine and cheese and see the projects they're working on. Meet the board, interns and staff. (Did you know they have a new director?) The event is free, but call 285-7020 for a reservation.

July 14 – Learn more about Jacksonville's downtown landmarks from a different perspective—the water! Join the Riverkeeper's

young professionals group, the Rising Tides, and First Coast Outfitters for a **sunset paddle** (exact time depends on tides) along the Southbank, keeping an eye out for bottlenose dolphins and manatees. Stop for a snack and a discussion of the St. Johns' ecosystem on Exchange Park Island. For more information, visit www.firstcoastoutfitters.com/kayak-tours/downtown-jacksonville or www.facebook.com/SJRK.Rising.Tides. Limit 20 people, so contact Alicia Smith to register: alicia818@hotmail.com.

July 15 – Beat the heat and join the Sierra Club for an 8 am **kayak trip** leaving from the Six-Mile Landing boat ramp. This trip is great for photographers and wildlife lovers. The group has previously seen deer, feral hogs, an eagle's nest with young eagles, turtles and lots of wading birds in and around Guana Lake. For directions and a list of items to bring, visit the Northeast Florida chapter's Meetup page at www.meetup.com/Sierra-Club-Northeast-Florida-Group.

July 17 & 23 – Have land in your family that you don't know what to do with? The North Florida Land Trust hosts two free workshops titled "**Keys to Keeping the Farm (and other preservation properties)**" from 6-7:30 pm. The July 17 workshop will be held at the IFAS/Baker County Extension Auditorium at 1025 W. Macclenny Ave. in Macclenny, and the July 23 workshop will be at the IFAS/Clay County Extension Auditorium at 2463 State Road 16 W. in Green Cove Springs. Contact the Land Trust at info@northfloridalandtrust.org or 285-7020 if you need more information.

Please email listings for consideration to anna@eujacksonville.com by the 15th of each month.