

Hit the Trail

If you are looking for a good morning getaway, hit the trail at Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, located on the shores of St. Petersburg's Lake Maggiore. A favorite destination for trail runners and day hikers, Boyd Hill is a wilderness oasis in one of Florida's most densely populated areas. This 245-acre preserve has three miles of nature trails and boardwalks that will give you a glimpse of how the St. Petersburg area, and most of Florida, must have looked when the Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto first gazed upon its shores. Start at the Lake Maggiore Environmental Education Center, where exhibits preview the environments you'll soon traverse. Don't be surprised if, upon exiting the building, a long-legged great white heron strides across your path – you're in its territory now. Home to a small group of permanently injured birds, a small aviary between the Education Center and trails affords close encounters with hawks, owls and a bald eagle. Begin your hike in a hardwood hammock, then continue on through the sand pine scrub and pine flatwoods. The trail also skirts the willow marsh and lakeshore, where you'll see a large variety of water birds, before returning to the starting point. But Boyd Hill is home to more than just birds--it's a stunning example of biodiversity. Some come to see the viceroy butterflies, whose orange wings seem to light up in the sun as they dance across the willow marsh. Others enjoy seeing the various lizards and snakes living amid the thick fern forests nourished by Lake Maggiore. The flatwoods and scrub have a beauty all their own--you'll find box turtles and gopher tortoise here, as well as 90 different butterfly species.

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