



Self-Guided Walking Tour Vizcaya's Gardens



GETTING READY

Originally Vizcaya was the private winter home of James Deering. Today the estate—the house, property and all of the objects in the museum—belongs to Miami-Dade County for the public to visit and enjoy.

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens has compiled this resource to help educators navigate and explore the Formal Gardens and grounds, including a suggested path and questions adults might pose to students. Numbers refer to highlights marked on the estate map and legend. Estate maps are available at the Main House and Ticket Booth.

All visitors should be aware and cautious of the many steps, uneven floors, and terrain throughout Vizcaya’s Main House, Formal Gardens, and grounds. Not all areas of the Main House and Formal Gardens are wheelchair accessible. The suggested route allows for wheelchair access to all areas, except the Mound and Casino.

We ask you to help us preserve Vizcaya for future generations by looking, rather than physically touching, the fragile architectural elements throughout the grounds. For full guidelines please consult the *School Group Behavior Guidelines* brochure available in English and Spanish at the Main House and Ticket Booth.

It is the responsibility of the teachers and chaperones to supervise students at all times during guided or self-guided visits in all areas of the estate.

Vizcaya is excited to announce that the restoration of this National Historic Landmark has begun. Every effort has been taken to minimize the impact of the restoration process and to ensure that your visit is pleasant and safe.

Vizcaya is home to a diverse array of wildlife. For your safety and theirs, please be respectful of the many habitats throughout the Formal Gardens and grounds.

WALKING TOUR

Deering and his family had a successful business in Chicago, developing and manufacturing mechanized farm equipment. About 100 years ago the Deerings visited Coconut Grove during the winter and grew fond of the area. Mr. Deering spent winter seasons at Vizcaya from 1916 until he died in 1925.

James Deering chose this waterfront site to construct his winter home in the style of an old Italian villa. Vizcaya has been designated a National Historic Landmark because the property is an outstanding example of design and construction, and it played an important role in the history of Miami. When built, Vizcaya was 180 acres (more than 100 football fields).

Vizcaya is the result of European traditions combined with an American context. Though inspired by gardens found in old Italian villas, Vizcaya's Formal Gardens include tropical and native plants as well as local materials. The Formal Gardens were intended to be an extension of the main house with specific areas similar to rooms in a building.

There are three primary natural environments at Vizcaya:

- Formal Gardens
- Rockland Hammock or Native Forest
- Mangrove Shore

These natural areas, combined with designed elements, draw visitors through the expansive grounds encouraging them to discover each area. This kind of Italian-inspired garden was meant for the purposes of leisure and diversion.

When entering Vizcaya today you walk through the **Rockland Hammock or Native Forest (22)**.

Typically Italian villas similar to Vizcaya would not have been built on the water. Instead, Mr. Deering built his home right along Biscayne Bay, and therefore was able to preserve the inland Rockland Hammock (Native Forest), one of only a few in South Florida today. In creating Vizcaya a goal was to disturb the original site as little as possible, and to enhance its natural beauty.

Making your way from the **Ticket Booth (21)** to the Main House, walk down the path lined with fountains and small, low lanterns into the Forecourt. Vizcaya was fully electrified when it was built and these lanterns would have provided much needed lighting in the evenings.

Fountains are found throughout the Formal Gardens, each designed in a different way to incorporate water and sound into the outdoor experience.

As a private home in historic Miami, visitors arriving by car would have driven down to the Forecourt upon arrival. Today Vizcaya only allows pedestrians along this route in order to help preserve the estate.

From the Forecourt walk through the south gates (on the right) towards the restrooms. Begin the walking self-guided tour on the **South Terrace (7)**.

From the South Terrace you can see the Formal Gardens designed by Landscape Architect Diego Suarez. Walk down the steps and follow the [West Statuary Walk \(10\)](#) to your right.

The Formal Gardens are designed and planned. The jasmine **Parterres (24)**, low, trimmed shrubs planted in patterns, serve to decorate the landscape, but also organize and separate the space geometrically. (Please do not walk in the parterres.)

The [Statuary Walks](#), located on the east and west sides of the Formal Gardens, feature sculptures from Northern Italy (specifically the Veneto region) in the 1700s. The statues are figures from classical mythology and personifications of the seasons. The raised Statuary Walks help enclose the center area of the gardens.

The Statuary Walks have a good view of the **Center Island (8)** surrounded by live oak trees, which today provide ample areas of shade. Imagine these gardens almost 100 years ago with young trees and less shade.

Walk down the steps from the Statuary Walk to see one of the **Grottos (11)** on either side of the **Water Stairway (11)**.

Many laborers originally from the Bahamas worked on the construction of the gardens, lending a tropical quality to the Grottos. Walk into a grotto to experience a cool space away from the hot sun. The grottos feature shell mosaics, a common practice in Italy during the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Construction crews collected the shells locally and in the Keys.

Much of the construction on the site made use of local stone. Mr. Deering purchased land and quarried stone from the Keys and Coconut Grove. This local stone contains coral as well as fossils, and Vizcaya's creators liked that it looked old and rustic. These examples demonstrate the mixture of inspirations for Vizcaya—elements of European and tropical Miami styles.

Walk up the **Water Stairway (11)** onto the **Mound (12)** to view the **Casino (13)**. The live oak trees on the Mound were planted as mature trees in 1917 and are now more than 150 years old. In addition to preserving the architecture and collections in the Main House, Vizcaya preserves historic living collections.

In Italian, *casino* translates as little house. Vizcaya's includes a fireplace and restrooms, and would have provided sweeping views of southern lagoon gardens that no longer exist

today. The Casino and Mound originally marked the end of the north-south axis connecting the Main House with the end of the Formal Gardens.

“At Vizcaya the casino with its lively loggia, its shell grotto below and its rich little rooms was Mr. Deering’s favorite end for journeys by boat on the lagoons...”

- Paul Chalfin for *The Miami Herald*, 1934-35

A loggia is a room that is open to the outdoors. While standing in the loggia of the Casino, look up.

- *What’s going on?*
- *How does the idea of the painting connect with the idea of the Casino?*
- *What is the relationship between the designed and natural environments?*

Walk down the east stairs of the Mound to the **Fountain Garden (14)**.

Mr. Deering and Paul Chalfin, the Chief Designer for Vizcaya, traveled through Europe together purchasing items for Vizcaya. This fountain is originally from the town of Sutri in Italy, just outside of Rome. In 2008 Vizcaya received a substantial grant to restore and preserve this fountain and surrounding sculptures, which includes returning it to working order.

Initially Mr. Deering hoped that roses would grow on site. The Fountain Garden was intended to be the Rose Garden, modeled after a garden in Florence, Italy. However, the roses chosen did not grow well in the subtropical climate.

Peacock Bridge (15) seen to the south in the Fountain Garden was so named because there were columns with large peacock sculptures on top of them. Originally the bridge led to the tennis courts, boat house, and the lagoon gardens. Mr. Deering enjoyed the water, and had two yachts, which he frequently took out for excursions to the Florida Keys. Mr. Deering would store his fishing catch in the pools on either side of the bridge, at least until the next meal!

Exit the Fountain Garden onto a fern-lined sidewalk, which leads to the **Maze Garden (16)**.

An example of a diversion or folly (a destination designed to lure guests through the expansive gardens) the Maze Garden has been replanted on many occasions due to storm damage. After the hurricanes in 2005, the Maze Garden was replanted with shrubs that can survive being immersed in saltwater. Students may walk through the Maze, but please be mindful of the fragile, growing plants.

From the Maze Garden the **Mangrove Shore (6)** is easily visible. The Mangrove Shore serves as a barrier between Biscayne Bay and the Formal Gardens, protecting them from erosion and wind. The stilt-like roots help to stabilize the plant, preventing it from being washed away by the ocean. Look up. Often the roots which have not yet reached the

ground are clearly visible. There are three species of Mangroves at Vizcaya: Red, Black, and White.

- *What can we learn about South Florida's environment from Vizcaya's landscapes?*

Continue walking north on the path to the **Theater Garden (17)**.

To the best of our knowledge the Theater Garden was never used for a performance in Mr. Deering's lifetime. The statues are Arlecchino and Pulcinella, well-known Italian comedy theater characters, and ancestors of the more recent Punch and Judy.

Follow the stairs up and turn right towards the Gazebo. Walk through the Gazebo into the **Secret Garden (18)**.

Originally Mr. Deering intended for orchids to grow in pots built into the walls of the Secret Garden. Unfortunately, the location was too exposed. Today Vizcaya cultivates orchids in several on-site greenhouses for displays in the house and throughout the grounds. Take a moment to climb up the stairs for a bird's-eye view of the Formal Gardens, and South and East Terraces.

Exit the Secret Garden and turn right towards the eastern shore and follow the sea arm path to the **Tea House (5)**.

The Tea House on the end of the southern sea arm provides views of the Mangrove Shore and Key Biscayne. The sea arms were inspired by similar designs in Venice, Italy; Vizcaya includes Venice-colored blue and yellow striped pilings as well.

Vizcaya staff clean the trash from **Biscayne Bay (4)** and in the mangroves regularly, though tides constantly move trash into the area. This trash is a reminder of everyone's responsibility to dispose of waste appropriately at Vizcaya and elsewhere.

Walk along the eastern shoreline.

The **Stone Barge (3)** was designed as a breakwater in the shape of a ship and as an island destination. Originally lush with plantings, a fountain, and gazebo, the Stone Barge has suffered significant hurricane damage since 1926.

Also visible is Deering Channel between the orange and green markers. This channel was dredged in shallow Biscayne Bay during Vizcaya's construction so boats could deliver equipment and supplies. The channel is one mile long and seven feet wide.

- *How do you think Biscayne Bay has changed in the last 100 years?*

Looking at the **East Terrace (2)** and east façade, you'll see a weathervane above the balcony and below that a sundial. The weathervane tracks the direction of the wind, and

features the seahorse, one of the symbols of Vizcaya. A sundial shows the time of day by the position of the shadow cast by the sun.

Continue walking north along the sea arm path to the **Yacht Landing (19)**.

When Mr. Deering was in residence boats could dock or land at the yacht landing. Originally there was a boathouse on the estate where Mr. Deering's senior boat captain, Joseph Santini, lived. The boathouse and yachts were destroyed in the hurricane of 1926, the year after Mr. Deering's death, and were never replaced or rebuilt.

Leaving the Yacht Landing retrace your steps back along the sea arm and turn right to continue on to the **Swimming Pool (20)**.

The pool was both indoors and outdoors with shell work and frescoes on the ceiling. The pool could be filled with fresh or salt water. The design of the pool was a reminder of Italian homes on the canals of Venice, again demonstrating how Vizcaya is a combination of European inspirations in an American, and specifically Miami, context.

The north façade overlooks remnants of the original Rockland Hammock or Native Forest and Mangrove Shore.

Walk across the path to enter the **David A. Klein Orchidarium (23)**.

Mr. Deering intended for orchids to grow at Vizcaya, and to continue this tradition the David A. Klein Foundation provided funding for the Museum to construct the Orchidarium. The displays change to feature examples of many kinds of orchids and bromeliads.

This concludes the walking tour.

- *How did the map help you navigate the gardens today?*
- *What didn't the map provide you with?*
- *What did you experience that can't be contained on a map?*

PICNIC LUNCH

The Picnic Area for school groups is located next to the Orchidarium. Please send a select group of students and necessary chaperones to the front entrance of the Main House where Security staff or Volunteer Guides can help you retrieve your lunches.