

ARE WE THERE YET?



A Leap of Faith

in Crystal River, Florida

On a recent trip to Crystal River, Fla., self-dubbed manatee capital of the world, I had the pleasure of visiting the Faith Haven Christian Retreat Center and meeting owner Scott Baggerly. Baggerly purchased the 65-acre property in 2001 and began the transformation into a Christian retreat center complete with a zip line adventure course, stables, and more.

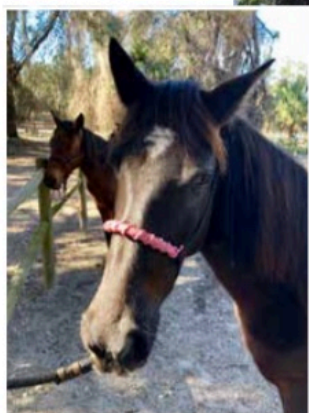
Just a short drive from Crystal River, I arrive at the entrance and am greeted by Baggerly and several staffers to begin our tour of the facility. His enthusiasm is contagious, and I'm quickly led over to the Tree Top Adventure where I receive safety instruction, including how to clip in and out at the transition areas.

My fearless leader climbs the ladder to the first challenge, and I follow along with equal parts excitement and trepidation. The trepidation quickly vanishes as we leapfrog across wooden platforms, walk tightropes, and zip through the trees. Push boundaries while enjoying a birds-eye view. An excellent confidence builder!

Next up, we walk through the low-ropes course, an activity that's all about team-building. Communication and trust are critical components to completing this course and Baggerly coaches from the sideline. The activities are perfect for all ages; youth groups will especially enjoy the challenges in the natural Old Florida setting.

Faith Haven Retreat Center is also home to Soquili Stables, housing original Florida Cracker Horses. The descendants of horses brought to the area by the Spanish, this breed is known for agility, speed, and a smooth ride.

I'm introduced to Bella and take a few minutes getting to know the horse I'll be spending the next couple of hours with on the trail. I enjoy a lovely afternoon under clear blue skies on the trail; this is the real Florida. Following the ride, we tour the stables and visit the miniature horses which they use in the equine therapy programs offered through Horses and Healing at the barn.



After lunch, we take a look at the Retreat Center scheduled for completion this year. The center will consist of two bunkhouses, a community house with a heating kitchen, and a bathhouse. An outdoor chapel is in the plan as well.

Baggerly has worked with church youth groups for over 25 years, and it's his mission to facilitate community, team building, and education in a Christian-based environment. "This is my passion. We decided to do something for Citrus County. It's not what you do in this world but what you leave in the world," says Baggerly.

Faith Haven is a terrific destination for families and a great way to spend a day if you're visiting the Crystal River area. It would also make a fabulous destination for youth groups. There's plenty to do onsite, and kids will be entertained and challenged. For added adventure, Crystal River offers a myriad of activities including kayaking, swimming, a wildlife park, and yes, they even have some manatees!

Find out more at faithhavencrc.org. For area information visit DiscoverCrystalRiverFl.com

— Tami Brooks

Tami Brooks is the owner of Brooks Consulting Services, LLC and publisher of *The Field Trip Field Guide*. She completed a 52 week, 52 hike project in 2016 and writes the blog *Tami's Trippin'*. When she's not busy with work, you can find her on the trail, in the kayak, or on the deck planning her next adventure. Visit Tami-Trippin.com to read more and be sure to sign up for post notifications and newsletter while you're there. You can also follow Tami's Trippin' on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

