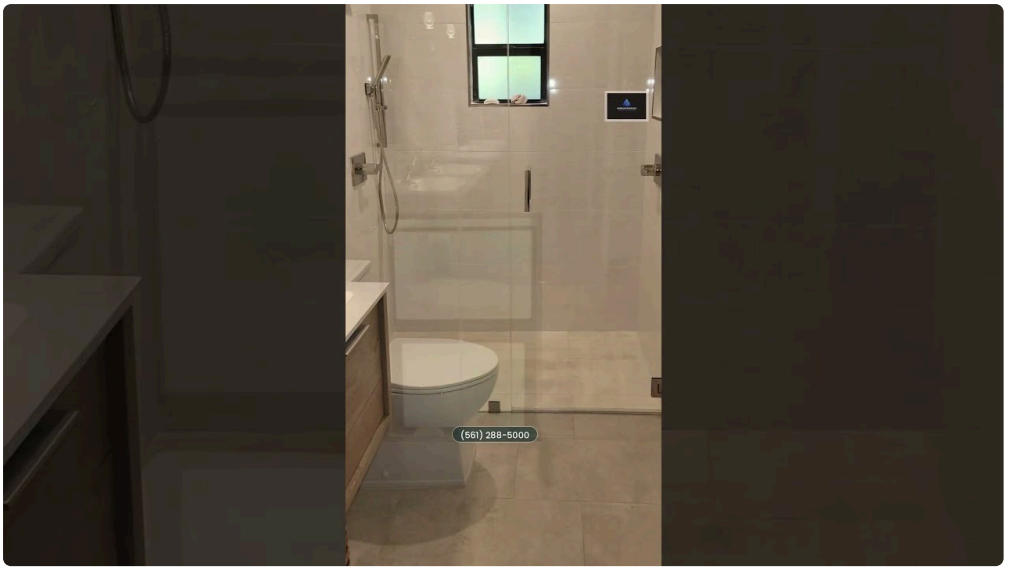
Get Lost in a Japanese Garden (Seriously)

It sounds incongruous: a slice of Kyoto in South Florida. But the **Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens** is one of the most quietly remarkable attractions in Palm Beach County. The story behind it is just as unexpected. In the early 1900s, a colony of Japanese farmers attempted Delray Beach apartments for rent to grow pineapples in the area. The venture failed, but one farmer, George Morikami, stayed. He eventually donated his land to the county, and in 1977, sixteen acres became the gardens and museum that exist today.



The result is a place that feels genuinely removed from the Florida bustle. Six distinct garden styles unfold along winding paths, with tranquil lakes and authentic architecture at every turn. The museum itself hosts rotating exhibitions from Japan, and the on-site café serves a small menu of Japanese fare. Admission is $18 for adults, and the site is closed Mondays. Give yourself at least two hours—longer if you plan to linger by the water.

Wander a Warehouse Full of Working Artists

The **Pineapple Grove Arts District**, one block north of Atlantic Avenue, is where the city's creative identity lives. The anchor is **Arts Warehouse**, a 15,000-square-foot converted warehouse that functions as part incubator, part gallery. Resident artists keep studios in the building, and rotating exhibitions occupy the front and rear galleries. Admission is free, and the space reopened in mid-2026 after a full renovation.

From there, the district rewards aimless wandering. Addison Gallery shows contemporary painting with a serious exhibition program. Independent studios and design shops fill the gaps between storefronts. And the murals—more than forty across greater downtown—are curated into a self-guided **Delray Art Trail** with an online map. It costs nothing and takes as long as you want it to. Keep an eye out for the Dancing Pineapple mural, the district's unofficial mascot and one of the most photographed walls in the city.

Confront a Part of Delray Most Visitors Never See

Six blocks from the restaurant crowds on Atlantic, the **Spady Cultural Heritage Museum** occupies a 1926 Mission Revival home that belonged to Solomon D. Spady, one of Delray's most prominent Black educators. Founded in 2001, it's the only museum in Palm Beach County dedicated to the history and heritage of the African diaspora in Florida and the U.S.

The exhibitions are worth the visit, but the neighborhood itself is the real artifact. The surrounding **West Settlers district**—known locally as The Set—still retains its original frame vernacular and Bungalow houses, several built by the community's own early residents. Historical markers along NW 5th Avenue explain what stood where: the doctor's offices, the pharmacy that was the only one serving the Black community. It's a fifteen-minute walk from the beach end of Atlantic, and it tells a story the postcards don't.

Walk a Boardwalk Over a Living Wetland

About fifteen minutes west of downtown, the **Wakodahatchee Wetlands** are easy to miss and impossible to forget. Constructed on fifty acres of former wastewater utility land, the site is now a functioning ecosystem: treated water flows through the wetland, which acts as a natural filter before returning to the water table.

A three-quarter-mile boardwalk crosses open ponds and nesting islands. Over 178 bird species have been identified here, along with turtles, alligators, rabbits, and the occasional raccoon. It's part of the Great Florida Birding Trail, and admission is free. A few practical notes: no pets, no food, no drones, and no jogging. The wetland closes periodically for maintenance, so check ahead. If the parking lot is full—common in late winter and spring— **Green Cay Nature Center** is a few minutes away with triple the parking and a similar boardwalk experience.

Browse a Campus That Used to Be a School

Old School Square is exactly what it sounds like: a cluster of restored early-20th-century school buildings, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, repurposed into a cultural campus. The centerpiece is the **Cornell Art Museum**, housed in the 1913 schoolhouse. Its curation is more adventurous than a small-city museum has any right to be—recent shows have included Italian mosaic portraits and surrealist Florida landscapes tied to the Highwaymen movement. Admission is free, though donations are welcome.

One honest caveat: the **Crest Theatre**, the 323-seat auditorium that once hosted cabaret and touring plays, is not currently staging performances while it awaits a major restoration. The surrounding classrooms and campus arts school are very much alive, but if you find an old listing promising a show, check the date before you plan around it.

Eat and Drink Like You Mean It

Atlantic Avenue gets most of the culinary attention, and rightly so—close to a hundred bars and restaurants line the main drag. But the real pleasure of Delray's food scene is its density. You can start with a coffee at **Coffee District** in Pineapple Grove, a chill indie café that transforms into a craft beer and sake bar by night. Lunch might be a duck confit flatbread at **Brulé Bistro**, or something seasonal and quietly excellent at **The Grove**, a tiny spot with a tasting-menu feel and none of the pretension.

For dinner, **Olio** serves contemporary American in a setting that encourages lingering, while **Elisabetta's** handles Italian and **Rocco's Tacos** covers the loud, lime-scented end of the spectrum. And if you're there on a Saturday morning, the **Delray GreenMarket** at Old School Square draws over fifty vendors with local produce, baked goods, and prepared food—the kind of market where lunch happens by accident.

A Note on Timing

Delray runs on a seasonal rhythm. The high season, November through April, brings the liveliest crowds and the longest waits. Weekdays are calmer, better for strolling or a quiet lunch. The **First Friday Art Walk** anchors the

monthly calendar, but the city's cultural institutions keep their own hours—Morikami closes Mondays, the Cornell has shifted its schedule, and Wakodahatchee posts maintenance closures in advance. A little planning goes a long way.

The beach will always be there. The sand isn't going anywhere. But the version of Delray Beach that exists a few blocks inland—the one with working artists, a Japanese garden, a century of Black history, and a boardwalk full of birds—that's the one worth getting to know.