



News

Photos:

<https://www.cleanpix.com/cleanpix/portal/WCZ8-137-SZ5>

GET OUTDOORS TO FIND ADVENTURE ON FLORIDA'S PARADISE COAST *Naples, Marco Island and the Gulf Coast Everglades*

(March, 2018) – Just a short drive away from the resort cities of Naples and Marco Island, both lined with beautiful white sand beaches and boasting diverse dining and cultural scenes, there is a huge expanse of wilderness just waiting to be discovered.

Hiking trails, nature boardwalks, scenic drives and paddling routes provide excellent access to the cypress swamps, upland prairies and mangrove-lined saltwater wilderness of the western Everglades. Take a Ten Thousand Islands guided paddling adventure through America's only subtropical mangrove wilderness within both Everglades National Park and the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge. An excellent selection of guide services and outfitters may be found in the area to help you discover this spectacular wilderness region, and perhaps, a lot more about yourself along the way.

There's no doubt you'll encounter wildlife. While biking or hiking within Big Cypress National Preserve, the Picayune Strand State Forest or Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, keep a keen eye out for the elusive, endangered Florida panther. Other species you may spot include Florida black bear, white tailed deer, bobcat, otter and hundreds of species of birds, both migratory and year-round native species.

One of the best aspects of the Gulf Coast Everglades region is that it tends to be filled with somewhat offbeat and quirky surprises, some of which take you beyond your normal vacation activities.

Unusual Sights

The nation's smallest post office, you say? Yes, you'll find it right alongside U.S. 41, also known as the Tamiami Trail, just east of the road to Everglades City. The [Ochopee Post Office](#), at 8 feet, 3 inches by 7 feet, 4 inches, is a former tool shed pressed into service as a U.S. Post Office after a fire destroyed the previous Post Office in 1953. If you blink you'll miss it, so watch for it on the south side of the highway just east of Wooten's, home to the area's original airboat and swamp buggy tours.

Speaking of [Wooten's](#), if you haven't seen enough alligators and crocodiles already in the wild at one of the roadside viewing areas or from a kayak or airboat, you'll get up close to over 200 huge ones at Wooten's Alligator Park & Animal Exhibit. You can hold a live baby alligator for a souvenir photo if you are so inclined, or just marvel at all the reptilian flesh in such close proximity.

Another good place to view alligators as well as other wildlife is on the [Airboats & Alligators](#) tour at Lake Trafford in Immokalee. This 1,500-acre shallow freshwater lake is an important part of the Corkscrew Swamp and the Imperial and Cocohatchee River watersheds, along with the Camp Keais Strand and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge watershed that drains into the Ten Thousand Islands.

Lake Trafford is the largest lake south of Lake Okeechobee and serves as an important ecotourism resource. The lake has the highest density alligator population in the state of Florida. Other common sightings include wild boar, deer, wild turkey, cattle, and many species of wading birds and birds of prey. Take an airboat ride with Airboats & Alligators to view the wildlife. After an extensive environmental restoration process, Lake Trafford's largemouth bass population has rebounded. Freshwater fishermen also

love the lake for catching bluegill and crappie. Adjacent to the lake is the expansive and unspoiled [Pepper Ranch Preserve](#) with [multiple trails](#) for off road biking, hiking and horseback trail riding.

Along the Tamiami Trail you'll find plenty of scenic spots to pull over and hopefully pull off an extraordinary Everglades photograph. Watch the sky. As clouds build vertically in the sky it makes a dramatic counterpoint to the vast horizontal landscape. Another tip – emulate the mastery of famed large-format photographer Clyde Butcher by trying some Everglades landscape photography in black and white. Drive east on Tamiami Trail and stop at Butcher's [Big Cypress Gallery](#) for inspiration. The gallery also hosts guided swamp walk adventures.

Janes Scenic Drive, Turner River Road and Loop Road in the Everglades area all make for wonderful scenic driving tours. Drive slowly and pull over often. Wildlife sightings include raccoon, black bear, deer, birds, butterflies and even the extremely rare and endangered Florida panther. One of the more unusual stops along Loop Road on the eastern side closer to Miami is the homestead and outdoor photography studio of [Lucky Cole](#). Lucky specializes in Everglades and biker-themed glamour photos, all shot outdoors. He invites his clients to be as tame or wild as their hearts desire.

At [Trail Lakes Campground](#) on Tamiami Trail within Big Cypress National Preserve, the gift shop and welcome centre is dedicated to the mythological Skunk Ape, long rumoured to be the Yeti of the Everglades. Known as [Skunk Ape Headquarters](#), you'll find souvenirs and information on reputed sightings. It is also home base for [Everglades Adventure Tours](#), featuring mesmerizing trips through the swamp prairies on a native Gladesman-style pole boat and other adventures.

At [Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary](#), you never know what you might see. A 2.25-mile boardwalk winds through the nation's last old growth virgin bald cypress forest as well as several other habitats. The sanctuary is a magnet for bird and animal species, many of them rare, threatened or endangered. Volunteers and visitors identify all the species spotted each day on a board at the beginning of the trail. In summer months, an extremely rare ghost orchid with multiple blossoms often thrills visitors with multiple blossoms viewable by spotting scope from the public boardwalk.

Paddling Can Be a Life Affirming Adventure

Kayaking is one of the fastest growing outdoor activities, and it is something that all ages are pursuing with great enthusiasm. This makes it a wonderful choice for a multigenerational family excursion. Several of the outfitters in Everglades City, such as [Everglades Area Tours](#), use motorboats to ferry passengers and kayak to remote regions, putting paddlers in the best spots for a memorable eco tour of the Everglades' labyrinthine mangrove creeks and rivers, renowned as some of the most beautiful wilderness in the world. Spend half a day exploring or embark on a multi-day wilderness camping expedition, and bring a fishing rod, since the area is spectacular for kayak fishing.

The [Everglades Wilderness Waterway](#) is often thought to be the paddling experience of a lifetime if explored from start to finish. Paddlers must allow 7-9 days to go from Everglades City to Flamingo, with all gear, food and water packed in and packed out. [Everglades Rentals & Eco Adventures](#), based at The Ivey House in Everglades City, offers guided waterway trips along the entire route with a shuttle ride back to Everglades City. [Everglades Area Tours](#) offers guided, multi-day kayak camping adventures taking you deep along the Wilderness Waterway with camping on deserted beach islands, then back to Everglades City.

Angling Adventures

Fishing the near-coastal estuaries of the Ten Thousand Islands is nothing short of spectacular. Every day brings a new adventure, with multiple species in abundance. These backcountry trips offer excellent fishing for popular Florida gamefish including tarpon, snook, redfish, seatrout and more. Offshore adventures await from numerous boats docked at Naples City Dock, Rose Marina and others. Try your luck targeting grouper, snapper, cobia, permit and more.

Fish, Dive or Spearfish on the Artificial Reefs

Thirty-seven new [artificial reefs](#) built from over 18,000 tons of clean concrete area creating new aquatic wildlife habitat off the coasts of Naples and Marco Island. Anglers from amateur to expert level can catch their limit while fishing from charters boats or spearfishing with [Offshore Naples Fish & Dive Charters](#).

There is a wide variety of excellent local guides for both backcountry and offshore angling. Check the [fishing guides & charter listings](#) at www.ParadiseCoast.com.

You've Always Wanted to Be a Dolphin Naturalist

Spend a few hours doing what marine researchers do while on board the [Dolphin Explorer](#) out of Rose Marina on Marco Island. Guests volunteer as citizen scientist dolphin researchers during the sightseeing cruise. Lead by dolphin researchers, passengers participate in the 10,000 Islands Dolphin Project, a 12-year scientific research study to identify and track the movements of resident dolphins in the Marco Island and Naples areas. Children may complete tasks on board to complete the Dolphin Challenge nature survey and a survey team patch. Group team experiences are available with advance notice, as are more intensive full day volunteer experiences.

Shelling Adventures

The main beaches of Naples and Marco Island are usually strewn with beautiful shells. Die-hard shell collections can up their game by taking a guided shelling tour by boat to some of the nearby deserted islands and sandbars. Your mind will be blown by the vast array of beautiful, and sometimes rare collectible shells strewn across the deserted sands. Try a trip with [Marco Island Boat Tours](#) or [Reel Kind Fishing & Tours](#) from Marco Island.

Get Out There and Get Fit

During the winter season, rangers at [Big Cypress National Preserve](#) offer free guided swamp walks as well as guided bicycle rides and canoe trips. [Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park](#), the native orchid capital of North America, offers ranger guided swamp walks and canoe tours, usually between November and April for a small charge. Both offer excellent and invigorating experiences deep within the cypress forests of the western Everglades.

Sporting Clays in the Everglades

[Gulf Coast Clays](#), located in the Everglades just outside the boundary of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, offers unrivalled scenery for clay shooting on trap and skeet ranges as well as a 15-stand sporting clay course accessed by golf cart.

For more information on **Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades – The Paradise Coast**, call 1-800-688-3600 for a free visitors guide or go at the area's official visitor information Web site, www.ParadiseCoast.com.

About Florida's Paradise Coast

Whether travellers are looking for a romantic escape or family getaway, Florida's [Paradise Coast](#) — Naples, Marco Island and the western portion of the Everglades — has an array of vacation options year-round. With more than 30 miles of soft, white sand beaches, a thriving art and culture scene, distinctive dining, family attractions and the best of outdoor adventure, the Paradise Coast is truly a destination with it all. Located just two hours from Miami, four hours from Orlando and three hours from Tampa, the Paradise Coast is easily accessible from some of Florida's largest cities. Travelers outside of the Sunshine State can fly into Southwest Florida International Airport, which provides nonstop service to 49 destinations on 15 different air carriers. For more information about the Paradise Coast, visit www.ParadiseCoast.co.uk . Follow the destination on Twitter @ParadiseCoastUK and #ParadiseCoast, and on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Paradise-Coast-UK-400213546659311/>

###

UK Media contacts:

Oonagh McCullagh oonagh@ommac.co.uk

Will Hall willatommac@fourcommunications.com

Lesley Davidson lesleyatommac@fourcommunications.com