



GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

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TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE: ENJOYING MIAMI'S NATURAL WONDERS

(MIAMI) – Miami may be best known as a sexy and sophisticated international city, but a natural oasis that is a world away from the glittering lights exists less than an hour from the heart of the action. A peerless and wondrous environment, the Florida Everglades and Biscayne National Parks draw more than a million visitors each year to explore Florida's breathtaking wilderness. For travelers who would just as soon paddle a canoe down a silent waterway as ride a jet ski in Biscayne Bay, a walk on the wild side is in order. Whether it's a bicycle ride along back roads or a hike to a pond where wading birds gather, matchless opportunities to get back to nature exist mere minutes from civilization. Here, on the lookout for manatees and sea turtles, cameras click not for divas and movie stars, but for more than 300 varieties of birds and glorious sunsets over the River of Grass.

Eco-adventure tourism is becoming an important force in Miami. Myriad opportunities for responsible interaction with nature enhance vacations for travelers who increasingly want to make enrichment and adventure part of the package. As a stand-alone vacation or as part of a broader exploration of all of Greater Miami's charms, an eco-adventure provides an exciting venture into Florida's unparalleled ecosystems.

Everglades National Park

Covering 1.5 million acres, Everglades National Park is the third largest in the U.S. National Parks system. Made up of sawgrass prairies, mangrove swamps, subtropical jungle and the warm waters of Florida Bay, the park and its seemingly endless grassy waters are home to a rare community of plants and endangered animals.

Visitors to the park can enjoy self-guided and ranger-led tours and activities from the Main Visitor Center at the Park's southeastern entrance, or journey deeper into the Everglades for a more extensive experience in the Florida wilderness. The town of Flamingo, 38 miles from the park's main entrance, boasts a colorful history as the home to hardy pioneers and shady characters who spent many years trying to settle the beautifully remote but challenging area. Today, Flamingo is home to manatees, dolphins, sea turtles as well as more than 300 species of birds identified within the park, including pelicans, egrets, cormorants, bald eagles and ospreys. And, the combination of fresh, salt and brackish waters makes Florida Bay the only place on earth where alligators and crocodiles (in this case, the rare American crocodile) live together.

World-class fishing is one of Flamingo's irresistible lures. The park's waters provide thousands of acres for fishing: shallow water flats channels, and mangrove keys are home to snook, redfish, snapper, trout, largemouth bass, and sea catfish.

For those who long to go natural, backcountry camping in the park is an unforgettable experience. Visitors traveling along the 99-mile Wilderness Waterway can paddle all day without seeing another soul, and spend the night camping out on remote chickees -- raised platform campsites accessible only by water. Permits and reservations are required, but advance notice of only 24 hours is necessary.

To the north, the Shark Valley entrance to the Park offers one of the best places to observe wildlife. Take a tram tour or rent a bike to traverse a 15-mile route. A 65-foot observation tower gives you a bird's eye view of the River of Grass.

Biscayne National Park

A rarity among national parks, Biscayne National Park is primarily aquatic. Of its 173,000 acres, 95 percent are under water. Teeming with sea life and plants, the park encompasses the turquoise waters of Biscayne Bay, the longest stretch of mangrove forest left on Florida's east coast, living coral reefs and 40 of the northernmost Florida Keys. Getting out on the water is the key to discovering the wonders of Biscayne National Park. At the Dante Fascell Visitor Center, it is possible to join glass bottom boat tours, snorkeling and dive trips and island excursions, as well as to rent canoes and kayaks. Fishing is excellent, with snapper, snook and barracuda among the most common catch.

Patch reefs provide a snorkeler's paradise. In shallow waters less than 10 feet deep, the living coral is home to a variety of sea life including tropical fish, sponges and the spiny lobster. Manatees, dolphins and five species of sea turtles call the waters of

Biscayne Bay home, as do moray eels, stingrays, squid, starfish and hundreds of varieties of fish, large and small.

Wreck Diving

Closer to civilization, divers can enjoy the bounty of one of the largest artificial-reef programs in the world. Fish flock to the more than 30 ships, tanks, concrete, limestone and other structures have been sunk over the past 20 years off Miami's coast, as far south as Florida City and north to Sunny Isles Beach. Most are located just a few miles offshore, in less than 130 feet of water, providing great diving for all levels. One of the most popular routes is the **Wreck Trek**, located off Miami Beach, just north of the Art Deco District. Here, divers can explore the 85-foot tug *Patricia*, the 100-foot steel fishing vessel *Miss Karlina*, and an old radio antenna welded into 19 pyramids. Part of Hollywood history, the nearby 180-foot freighter *Tortuga* was sunk for the movie "Fair Game," while the 1989 sinking of the *Rio Miami* was filmed for ABC's 20/20. In shallow waters off of Key Biscayne, the *Half Moon* and *Germania* form a fabulous underwater archeological preserve. Natural reefs are also found off Key Biscayne, Miami Beach, Surfside and Sunny Isles Beach.

The Redland and Homestead

Just 40 minutes south of the hustle and bustle of the city lies the Redland. Here, in this agricultural paradise, visitors can spend an entire day sampling fresh-from-the-farm produce and savoring the exotic fruits and vegetables that have become the foundation for "Floribbean" cuisine.

Exploring the back roads by bicycle, locals and tourists line up at **Burr's Berry Farm** for delicious strawberry shakes or at quaint **Knauss Berry Farm** for their sticky-sweet cinnamon rolls. All roads lead to **Robert is Here**, a popular pit stop for visitors en route to Everglades National Park. For over 40 years, Robert has offered guava, lychee, mamey, mangos and other exotic tropical fruits along with his famous fresh fruit shakes and homemade key lime pies. In season, visitors can harvest their own vegetables, loading up on fresh tomatoes, strawberries, zucchini, cucumbers and other produce at the many U-Pick farms that line Krome Avenue and the surrounding streets.

Open daily, the **Fruit and Spice Park**, a one-of-a-kind 35-acre tropical botanical garden has more than 500 varieties of fruit, nut and spice trees on property. Or, by appointment, one can arrange to visit orchid groves or check out small boutique farms that grow specialties like baby lettuce and exotic fruits like papaya. At the end of a

long day of wandering through bird and butterfly sanctuaries, tropical nurseries and fruit groves, charming bed and breakfasts, such as the lushly landscaped Grove Inn or Ten Oaks, provide respite.

Schnebly Redland's Winery, the southernmost winery in the Continental U.S., uses local tropical fruits from Redland's orchards to produce an array of wines made from lychee, passion fruit, carambola, guava and mango, just to name a few. Visitors are offered tours and wine tastings around natural coral waterfalls surrounded by lush tropical foliage.

On the way back north, eco-adventurers will want to tour the 450-acre **Deering Estate**, located at the edge of Biscayne Bay. A wealth of natural and archaeological resources, thrive at this site, including forests of hardwood hammocks, globally endangered pine rockland, mangroves and salt marshes and rare and native plants like orchids, bromeliads, ferns and more than 40 types of trees. A variety of wildlife such as the gray fox, spotted skunks, squirrels, butterflies and birds can be found here.

Parks and Recreation

The Miami-Dade Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of **naturalist-led eco-adventures** to residents and visitors. Key Biscayne, the tranquil island paradise located just five minutes from downtown Miami, is the setting for a wide range of tours – with hammock walks, kayak, snorkel and canoe trips, and bike trips for all age groups and skill levels. Canoe trips are popular – and there seems to be one for every conceivable interest – along the Coral Gables Waterway, at sunrise, sunset or by moonlight, along the historic Oleta River and through the hidden waterways of Key Biscayne.

Sea turtle release programs take place on coastal beaches from Key Biscayne to Sunny Isles, with educational opportunities focused at Crandon and Haulover Parks during the height of the April through September hatching season. The Key Biscayne Nature Center, housed in a beautiful new building at Crandon Park, offers a year-round program of aquatic and land-based adventures. At the tip of Key Biscayne, more snorkeling, fishing and nature walks are on tap at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park, a perennial on renowned Dr. Beach's list of the top ten beaches in America.

Surrounded by water, blessed with great weather and unparalleled natural beauty, Miami offers the sophisticated traveler the chance to take a quiet moment to recharge, relax and unwind. Just minutes away from the city's pulsating rhythms, a different beat beckons. Why choose? Enjoy all Miami has to offer: expand your horizons

with a walk on the wild side. For information on naturalist tours available through Miami-Dade Parks and Recreation, visit the eco-adventures section at www.MiamiDade.gov/parks/ecoadventures.asp.

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau (GMCVB) is an independent not-for-profit sales and marketing organization whose mission is to attract visitors to Greater Miami and the Beaches for leisure, business and conventions. For a vacation guide, visit our website at www.MiamiAndBeaches.com or call 1-888-76-Miami (US/Canada only) or 305-447-7777. To reach the GMCVB offices dial 305-539-3000. Meeting planners may call 1-800-933-8448 (US/Canada only) or 305-539-3071 or visit www.MiamiMeetings.com.

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