



**CHARLOTTE HARBOR & THE GULF ISLANDS
FACT SHEET**

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Description: Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands is a collection of nine charming coastal communities and four barrier islands clustered around the state's second-largest harbor. As Florida's premier eco-tourism destination, the area is known for its unspoiled beauty and is an outdoor enthusiast's haven. 830 miles of shoreline defines this expansive estuary-based escape which includes 28 miles of sandy beaches and nearly 200 miles of the Charlotte Harbor Blueway Trails. Charlotte Harbor offers undeveloped vistas where 84 percent of the shoreline is protected preserve. Activities and festivals make year-round use of this beautiful setting and encourage families, couples, groups and individuals to relax and explore.

Location: Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands are nestled along Florida's Southwest Gulf coast, about 50 miles south of Sarasota and 30 miles north of Fort Myers. The area is served by five airports for travel convenience: The Charlotte County Airport (PDG) with private and charter air service, Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (SRQ), Southwest Florida International Airport, Ft. Myers, (RSW), St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) and Tampa International Airport (TIA).

The entire area is also reachable via U.S. Highway 41 or Interstate 75 exists, both major north-south arteries in Florida.

Accolades: Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands has received recognition for its lifestyle and expansive natural settings:

- "Best Places to Live in the South," *Money* magazine
- "Best Place to Retire," Port Charlotte - *Money* magazine
- "One of the top ten sailing destinations," *SAIL* magazine
- "Best in America," by *Golf Digest*, ranked *third in nation for place to live and golf.*
- "One of the most popular sport-fishing locales in Florida," National Wildlife Federation and the Florida Wildlife Federation, June 2006
- The City of Punta Gorda, "Best Healthy Place to Retire," *U.S. News & World Report* October 2008
- Englewood, Fla. was named as #2 of the Top Ten emerging travel destinations in the U.S. for 2009 by TripAdvisor.com.
- "Yachting's Top 50 Best Towns," Punta Gorda – *Yachting Magazine*
- National Register of Historic Places lists 16 Charlotte County properties
- Seven feature films have been shot in Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands

Recreation: The natural setting invites exploration

- 28 miles of sandy beaches for strolling, swimming, jogging and birding
- Nearly 200 miles of Charlotte Harbor Blueway Trails for kayaking and canoeing; local outfitters can supply all gear and guides
- Birding with more than 330 species recorded by the Peace River Audubon Society,
- Fishing: 830 miles of shoreline, two dozen marinas and boat ramps give visitor's access to the Gulf of Mexico, Charlotte Harbor and the Peace and Myakka rivers for some of Florida's most diverse salt- and fresh-water fishing.
- Golf: Year-round golf on 20 courses ranging from executive to championship level, each with scenic vistas and spectacular landscapes.
- Hiking and bicycling trails, running tracks, tennis course and more can be found among over 70 parks scattered throughout Charlotte County.

The Beaches: The beaches of Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands include four barrier islands and two state park beaches. Easily accessible, yet quiet and remote enough to attract abundant birds, dolphins, sea turtles and other wildlife, they are a local treasure. There are no big crowds here, just plenty of sand lapped by gentle waves from the Gulf of Mexico and decorated with colorful shells.

Natural Appeal: Nearly 84 percent of the Charlotte Harbor shoreline is protected from development providing vistas with broad appeal. With more than 70 parks, preserves and recreational areas – including four state parks – Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands encourages inland exploration, as well as waterfront strolling. Nature enthusiasts will want to hike and bike along park paths for expectant encounters with birds of almost every feather including red-cockaded woodpeckers, Osceola turkeys, swallow-tailed kites, ospreys, roseate spoonbills, and the seasonal white pelicans. Diverse local wildlife viewing by land and by sea includes gopher tortoises, otters, dolphins, and manatees. Several area environmental centers offer guided tours and educational programs.

Climate: The area rises only 5 to 25 feet above sea level, which equates to a sub-tropical climate where temperature in both summer and winter are tempered by the gentle breezes of the Gulf of Mexico. Mild winters, from January to March, draw many visitors from colder climes.

Communities: Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands ranges from Englewood on the northwest side of Charlotte Harbor to Punta Gorda on the south. Four barrier islands along the Gulf of Mexico include quaint and charming Boca Grande, secluded Don Pedro Island, accessible-only-by-ferry Palm Island, and alluring Little Gasparilla Island. An artsy and cultural personality distinguishes Punta Gorda, Englewood Beach, Placida and areas of Port Charlotte. Surrounded by nature and water, the picturesque fishing communities of El Jobean, Manasota Key, Cape Haze, and Placida beckon in the soft, warm Gulf winds.

Accommodations: Whether visitors come to Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands for fishing, kayaking, golfing, the beaches, shopping, or just plain relaxing, there are accommodations for every taste and budget. From waterfront resorts to a quaint bed-and-breakfast to hotels and motels to rental condominiums, homes, and vacation villas, the range of accommodations runs the gamut from budget to luxury. And, with many visitors opting to take their recreational vehicles on the road, warm and friendly RV parks and campgrounds await.

Dining: Visitors will find catch-of-the day dining and fresh seafood straight from the Gulf on most menus here. Favorites include waterfront ambience with an ever-growing selection of chef-owned and fine dining restaurants complementing elegant steakhouses, ethnic cuisine and cozy bistros. Of special note, the selection of restaurants and pubs offering entertainment ranging from jazz to reggae to country and everything in between, makes dining out in Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands a cultural experience.

Shopping: Fishermen’s Village (www.fishville.com), a waterfront mall, resort and marina in Charlotte County boasts a selection of boutique retailers and restaurants right on the harbor. It is the crown jewel of a shopping scene that offers an endless supply of choices. To complement waterfront boutiques, stroll historic downtown Punta Gorda for specialty shops including fine jewelry and Swiss chocolate delights (www.puntagordashopping.com). As a bonus, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands is a haven for artists, so there are plenty of galleries featuring local artwork offering tropical landscapes and collectibles.

Cultural Attractions: Anchored by the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, the Charlotte Performing Arts Center, and the Visual Arts Center, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands offers a profusion of art galleries, festivals and exhibits, theatrical productions, museums, and historical sites. Specialty museums include Rick Treworgy’s Muscle Car City, The Military Heritage Museum, the Blanchard House Museum of African-American History & Culture and the Charlotte County Historical Center.

Film Industry: It’s all about “location, location, location,” and Charlotte Harbor, with its dedicated full-time film office, myriad natural environments, diverse architectural and geographic spectrum, acknowledged “film friendly” reputation and entertainment industry incentives, is ideal for filmmaking, television, or even print production. Portions of *HOOT*, *Out of Time*, *Tale of Two Buds*, *Palmetto*, *Gone Fishing*, *Just Cause*, and *Pink Cadillac* were filmed in Charlotte County.

Visit www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com for additional information.

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