



**BY LAND, AIR AND SEA, CHARLOTTE HARBOR & THE GULF ISLANDS
OFFERS AN UNRIVALED ECO-EXPERIENCE**

From sea turtles to sea otters, from swamp buggies to sand dunes, from white pelicans to Roseate Spoonbills, nature lovers love nature in Charlotte Harbor

CHARLOTTE HARBOR & THE GULF ISLANDS, Fla. — Since the 1990s, nature-based tourism has skyrocketed in popularity as more and more travelers seek to learn about the environment, become stewards of it and are in need of it to counter life's stresses. Perhaps no place better presents a firsthand look at nature and the environment than Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands, with its 830 miles of shoreline incorporating barrier islands, salt marshes, unspoiled beaches, mangrove habitats, pine flatwoods, meandering rivers, canals and creeks, all outlining Florida's second largest marine estuary.

Charlotte Harbor is a place of ecological and ornithological wonders where there's practically no such thing as rush hour with almost unlimited opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts to see nature in its undisturbed state. Ideal for photography, shelling, hiking, bicycling, canoeing, and kayaking, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands beckons fans of the natural environment to come play in their backyard. In addition to hundreds of bird species such as osprey, bald eagle, anhinga, cardinal, wood stork, white pelican and Roseate Spoonbill, a veritable patchwork quilt of biology, zoology, and oceanography abounds with 256 fresh and saltwater fish species, 39 species of mammals, 67 species of reptiles, and 27 species of amphibians.

Of particular interest to nature lovers, kayaking and canoeing the Peace or Myakka rivers and throughout the expansive aquatic preserves of the Charlotte Harbor watershed offer a special, up-close look at the unique features of an estuarine ecosystem. Experience mangrove canopies while kayaking among secluded, hidden coves of Coral Creek & Gasparilla Sound along the Intracoastal Waterways with Grande Tours of Placida. Nearly 200 miles of the Charlotte Harbor Blueway Trails have been mapped out identifying 53 trails rated for access, experience level and scenic value. Using only the quietness of human-powered paddles, kayaking or canoeing is a favored way to experience a naturally orchestrated symphony of sights and sounds: a choir of frogs as they greet the morning; a manatee coasting tidal waters; a sun-bathing turtle lumbering slowly along a creek; or a pod of dolphin breaking the surface of the water.

For further exploration, King Fisher Fleet offers inshore and deep-water safaris. The

long-time tour operator also does sightseeing cruises into Charlotte Harbor, Florida's second largest estuary, which is legendary for its fish, scenery, dolphins and birds. Quiet and antithesis to the crowds and commotion of the Florida most families know, it boasts vast expanses of water and land protected from development.

Inland, Babcock Wilderness Adventures takes its visitors on an entertaining, educational 90-minute swamp buggy adventure through the woods and pastures of the 90,000-acre Crescent B Ranch, a working cattle farm, and Telegraph Cypress Swamp. Sightings of wildlife such as the Southern cougars, alligators, whitetail deer are not uncommon.

Complementing Babcock Wilderness Adventures is the Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center (CHEC), a 3,000-acre nature center with four miles of nature trails. Visitors will get to know the nature of Charlotte County up close through free interpretative programs including a Wading Adventure, where participants don waders and go out into the estuary with dip nets in search of the cool, gross and bizarre: sponges called Dead Man's Fingers, sea cucumbers that eject their stomachs, worms that decorate their own homes, shell cases shaped like ice cream cones and an abundance of fish that are just starting off in life here in nature's nursery. The Peace River Wildlife Center, an active wildlife rehabilitation center and park; and the Gasparilla Island-Boca Grande and Cape Haze Pioneer Trails, two former railroad-turned-bicycle trails, also offer diversions of the natural order.

Florida is certainly well known for its potpourri of state recreational areas, and Charlotte County contains four of them, each different from one another and offering even greater opportunities for naturalists to explore the wild side of the Sunshine State. From Babcock/Webb Wildlife Management Area and Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park to Don Pedro Island State Park and Stump Pass Beach State Park, the area is host to a plethora of nature programs and events and provides exceptional recreational opportunities that include plenty more opportunities for bird watching, bicycling, hiking, swimming, and more.

With more than 330 spectacular, colorful species of birds migrating to and inhabiting about 70 parks, preserves, and natural areas and roughly 830 miles of shoreline edging Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands on Florida's Southwest coast, bird watching here is at a premium. Lemon Bay Park, Cedar Point and Alligator Creek are just three of 26 sites recognized by the Peace River Audubon Society for excellent birding. Endangered wood storks with their four-foot wingspan, the rare white pelican and the purple gallinule are part of the extensive Southwest Florida Bird List.

About Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands

Located halfway between Tampa and Naples on the Southwest Florida Gulf coast, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands is a charming collection of nine coastal communities surrounding the state's second largest harbor. Florida's premier year-round eco-tourism destination, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands offers a pristine unspoiled beauty that has served as the backdrop for seven major feature films as well as countless memorable vacations. A haven for outdoor enthusiasts, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands has been named to *SAIL* magazine's "10 Greatest Places to Sail in the United States," ranked by *Golf Digest* as "Third Best Place to Live and Play Golf in America," and rated by *MONEY* magazine as one of the "Best Places to Live in the South." The city of Punta Gorda was named in one of "Top Ten Places to Retire Healthy" by U.S. News & World Report. Englewood, Fla. was just named as #2 of the Top Ten emerging travel destinations in the U.S. by TripAdvisor.com.

For information about area events, activities and attractions, contact the Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau, 18500 Murdock Circle, Suite B104, Port Charlotte, FL 33948; 941-743-1900, or call toll free at 1-800-652-6090 for a free Visitor's Guide; or visit the Web site at www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com.

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