



FABULOUS FISHING, BEAUTIFUL BEACHES AND FINE DINING

MAKE FOR A PERFECT TEN VACATION FOR THE FAMILY

Top 10 things to do in Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands

CHARLOTTE HARBOR & THE GULF ISLANDS, Fla. – Off the beaten track on the Southwest coast of Florida, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands offers secluded beaches, fine art galleries, picture perfect scenery and wildlife encounters. From exploring the outdoors and the water, taking in the arts and music to shopping and dining in eclectic spots, here are ten ways the locals suggest for visitors to enjoy this unique vacation getaway:

Discover a Secluded Beach:

Water-lovers seeking a respite from the crowds will delight in more than 30 miles of pristine beaches for fishing, walking and wildlife-viewing. Five barrier islands, two state parks and miles of beaches offer access to delightfully open stretches of sand, sun and surf. **Stump Pass State Park** is ideal for shelling and gathering fossilized shark's teeth. True adventurers will enjoy the wildlife on **Don Pedro Island State Park**, accessible only by private boat or a guided kayak tour.

Paddle Paradise:

Charlotte County's nearly 200 miles of kayak- and canoe-friendly **Blueway Trails** are heralded for their excellent backwater fishing, colorful birds, dolphin and manatee sightings, mangrove tunnels and 53 easily accessible canoe and kayak trails that appeal to novice and expert paddlers alike. <http://www.charlottecountyfl.com/communityservices/blueway.asp>.

Fish the Alphabet:

Sport fishermen know the area as "the Tarpon Capital of the World," but "T" is just one letter in the alphabet of fish that flock here – Amberjack, Bluegill, Cobia, Redfish, Snook, Tarpon – and the list goes on. Some are deliciously edible and easily found in this fishing mecca. Those who want to eat their hard-earned catch can take it to the **Village Fish Market at Fishermen's Village** in Punta Gorda where they'll prepare it any way you like.

Make Tee Time:

Named among the "best places in America to live and play golf" by *Golf Digest*, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands offers year-round play on more than 20 courses ranging from executive to championship level. Scenic vistas and spectacular landscapes provide the backdrop on courses that include two ranked 4½ stars by *Golf Digest* and three certified by Audubon. The Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau regularly posts special golf vacation packages at www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com.

Watch a Kaleidoscope of Color in the Sky:

Englewood Beach on Manasota Key is the locals' favorite spot to watch the sun slip into the Gulf of Mexico. A popular sunset scene is atop Punta Gorda's newest boutique hotel, **The Wyvern**, where guests and locals enjoy panoramic views of Charlotte Harbor from the rooftop.

Be seen sipping a signature martini and nibbling on tapas by the pool as the sun sets, www.thewyvernhotel.com.

Dine Like James Beard:

Yes, fine dining exists in this off-the-beaten track Florida getaway. Jeanie Roland, Chef of Punta Gorda's **The Perfect Cap**, has been nominated multiple times for a prestigious James Beard Foundation "Best Chef in the South" award. Palate-pleasing dishes fuse European flavor with Asian accents, www.theperfectcaper.com. Laishley Crab House, is not only the largest restaurant in Southwest Florida, it offers stunning architecture and beautiful views overlooking the Laishley Park Marina in Punta Gorda. www.laishleycrabhouse.com

Mingle with the Locals:

Historic **Punta Gorda**, with its original Florida architecture, streetlamps and cobblestone walkways, turns on the charm every third Thursday from 5pm until 8pm. **Gallery Walk** is a feast for the eyes, ears and palate as residents and visitors stroll or ride an old-fashioned trolley to explore the town's galleries, boutiques and restaurants while listening to live music and enjoying libations and appetizers.

Rated by TripAdvisor.com as the Number 2 emerging travel destination for 2009, **Englewood** boasts a lively downtown historic district with charming gift shops, galleries, jewelry and clothing boutiques. On the first Saturday evening of the month, most are open late to accommodate the crowds **Cruizin' on Dearborn**, admiring the show of antique autos, muscle cars, hot rods and live music.

Rev Your Engine:

For full immersion in auto memorabilia, Rick Treworgy's **Muscle Car City Museum** features more than 200 automobiles of every era dating back to the 1920s. One man's collection over 40 years, the museum's major focus is on the "muscle cars" of the mid 60s to early 70s – the Pontiac GTOs, Chevy Corvettes, Oldsmobile Cutlass 442s, Chevelles, Camaros and high-horsepower Impalas that revved up the imaginations of teens and young adults all over America, www.musclecarcity.net.

Take in the Arts Scene:

Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands are home to a thriving arts scene that infuses these laid-back communities with bold splashes of color. Here, art literally spills outdoors – more than 20 professionally-executed historic and decorative murals adorn buildings throughout Punta Gorda's historic commercial district. www.puntagordamurals.com Festivals and galleries draw residents and visitors, while renowned arts centers offer hands-on workshops. More than 600 unique artists display their talents throughout Charlotte Harbor.

Join a Jam Band:

Guitar Army Jam Sessions in Gilchrist Park, Punta Gorda are another treat not found just anywhere. Each Thursday evening a crowd of musicians (known locally as the Guitar Army) show up to entertain, often playing late into the evening. The impromptu "bands" play in genres – acoustic old rock, new rock, country, blues, bluegrass; the spectators (and sometimes the players) travel from group to group through the evening. On Wednesday nights, head to **The Bean Depot** in El Jobean, (941-627-3344), for hamburgers and bluegrass jams in an historic restored post office and general store.

From Blueways to blues, to green getaways and green fairways, to fine dining and fine arts, Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands is an undiscovered paradise where there's always something fun for families, couples and active outdoor types. For more vacation ideas, visit www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com

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 was 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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CONTACTS: Jennifer Huber
Tourism Public Relations Manager
Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau
(941) 743-1900
Jennifer.Huber@CharlotteFL.com

Mary Jane Kolassa / Cindy Dobyns
Above Water Public Relations & Marketing
(407) 463-0040 / (239) 596-9149
MKolassa@AboveWater.com / CDobyns@AboveWater.com

Charlotte Harbor Visitor & Convention Bureau
18500 Murdock Circle, Suite B104, Port Charlotte, FL 33948
941-743-1900, FAX: 941-764-4932
www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com