



Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park/ Collier-Seminole State Park Real Florida Guide

Note: Colored numbers correspond with numbers on the map.



Choose from the options below to plan your trip in parts of Collier County or plan your own day-long adventure or a multi-day stay in the area, ideally from November to April, as the bugs will be bad in the warmer months. Always be prepared for weather changes, including full sun and afternoon rain, so be prepared with hats, sunscreen, bug spray, and water.

You are about to explore a very unique and special place. The Everglades is a 1.5 million acre tropical wetland system that reaches from Orlando to Florida Bay. The Everglades is known as the “Amazon of North America” and recognized as an international treasure – a [World Heritage Site](#), [International Biosphere Reserve](#), and a Wetland of International Importance. The Everglades was immortalized in 1947 by Marjory Stoneman Douglas’s book, Everglades: River of Grass.

Use the [Tamiami Trail Scenic Byway](#) (U.S. Highway 41) to explore the western piece of the vast Everglades in Collier County. Explore the public lands accessed by the byway, including Collier-Seminole State Park, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park, Big



Cypress National Preserve, Everglades National Park, and Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge. Everglades City is a small fishing town just south of Tamiami Trail on State Road (S.R.) 29 about 35 miles south of Naples and 80 miles east of Miami. Make Everglades City your home base for the area.

Day 1 - Everglades City

[Everglades City](#) (1) proclaims itself as the Gateway to the Ten Thousand Islands, and for paddlers that is most certainly true. It is the best place in the region to rent canoes or kayaks, hook up with a guided paddling excursion, or find a comfortable room from which to base your explorations of the area. Visit the historic [Everglades Rod and Gun Club](#) or [Ivey House](#) for lodging, adventure planning, a meal, or just drinks. Everglades City even has a tiny airport, so you can fly in or book a float plane tour to get a bird's-eye view of the islands before putting your paddle to the water. Everglades City is the base for many stone-crab fishermen, so it's a good place to indulge in [seasonal seafood](#) (October 15 to May 15). If you love seafood, head to Everglades City on the first weekend of February for its very popular annual [Everglades Seafood Festival](#).



The [Museum of the Everglades](#) (2), located at 105 West Broadway, in Everglades City offers a unique look at Collier County's development in the early 1920s. Originally built as a laundry to serve workers on the Tamiami Trail, the building is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Hours: 10 am-4 pm, Tuesday-Saturday. Suggested donation \$2.





[The Gulf Coast Entrance & Visitor Center \(3\)](#) to [Everglades National Park](#) is also located in Everglades City. The visitor center offers educational displays, orientation films, informational brochures, and backcountry permits. Restrooms, [boat tours and canoe rentals](#) are available.

Other options in the area: See the multi-day itinerary Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park for even more adventure options in this region.



When visiting Everglades City, consider driving five miles south on S.R. 29 to the [Smallwood Store Museum \(4\)](#) in Chokoloskee. The Smallwood Store opened in 1906. This wooden building on an island was a Seminole trading post, post office and general store to a small community of hardy individualists. Not only has Smallwood Store been preserved, but it is still owned and loved by descendants of the family that founded it. The store was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. Today, this museum serves as a time capsule of

Florida pioneer history. Admission is \$3.

Day 2 - Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

The ranger station for the 85,000-acre [Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park \(5\)](#) is located four miles north from Everglades City in Copeland. This is Florida's

largest state park, so there is a lot to see. However, the easiest access feature is the [Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk](#) off Tamiami Trail, located 10 minutes east and south of Everglades City. The 1.2 mile boardwalk winds through an old growth cypress swamp forest, providing an opportunity to see rare plants, nesting American bald eagles, and Florida's largest stand of native royal palms co-existing—unique to Fakahatchee Strand—with bald cypress under the forest canopy.

After walking the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk, drive three-quarters of a mile north of Tamiami Trail on S.R. 29 to the ranger station and take the 12-mile (one-way) W. J. Janes Memorial Scenic Drive, (\$3 payable at the state park's honor box; have exact change). Hike the drive's spur trails if you have time. Gate 7 is 4.5 miles up from the ranger station on the left and leads to West Main Tram. Gate 7 is a good spot to walk a little way in to get a feel for what the interior of Fakahatchee is like. (Park well clear of gate and stay on the main trail.)



At mile 6.5 on the right, you'll find Gate 12 for the East Main tram — a good place to park and hike or bike. Down this trail you'll pass through one of the park's largest stands of native royal palms. Approximately 40 miles of multi-use unpaved trails run through the Fakahatchee, the vestige of a railroad system used to haul out bald cypress trees in the 1940s. Keep alert for white-tailed deer, Florida black bears, bobcats, and the Florida panther. Numbered gates at trailheads along the Janes Scenic Drive serve as reference points for hikers and sloggers alike.

What is slogging? It is the best way to experience a swamp. Slogging in the Fakahatchee Strand means wading waist-deep in bourbon-colored water, trudging past monster cypress trees and dangling webs of Spanish moss, ducking under pond





apple branches festooned with air plants, and craning your neck at royal palms rising above the canopy like telephone poles. The Fakahatchee Strand, about 20 miles long and five miles wide, elevates the practice of slogging to an art form. It is also the orchid and bromeliad capital of the continent with 44 native orchids and 14 native bromeliads, many blooming most extravagantly in hotter months. It's particularly famous for its rare ghost orchids as featured in Susan Orlean's novel, *The Orchid Thief*.



From November through April, the [Friends of Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park](#), the non-profit organization which supports this state park, offers two-and-a-half hour Ghost Rider Tram Tours, guided hiking tours, naturalist and biologist led swamp walks, moonlight swamp walks, and Fakahatchee Island Coastal Cruises. All adventures require reservations. Go [online](#) or call 239-695-1023.

Canoe or kayak the Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park's [East River Paddling Trail](#), accessible from the East River launch. The East River launch is on the south side of Tamiami Trail, 5.2 miles west of S.R. 29, and about one mile east of the Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk. The East River is a 5.6 mile brackish waterway consisting of mangrove tunnels and lakes, ending at Daniel's Point in Fakahatchee Bay. This trail is recommended for intermediate or advanced level paddlers. Before paddling, check the tides as the waterway is heavily influenced by tides. There are no trail markers, so bring a map AND a GPS/compass.

Day 3 – Collier-Seminole State Park

The 7,271-acre [Collier-Seminole State Park](#) (6) is located about 20 miles north of Everglades City and 17 miles south of Naples. The state park lies partly within the great



mangrove swamp of southern Florida, one of the largest mangrove swamps in the world. Although rare elsewhere, the park has one of three original stands of royal palm trees in Florida.

The park is the site of a National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark, the last existing [Bay City Walking Dredge](#). Built in 1924, it was used to build the Tamiami Trail through the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp, linking Tampa and Miami and opening southwest Florida to travelers.



The park's campground sites have electricity, water, a grill and picnic table. There are 120 campsites that accommodate all campers, from tents to large motor homes. The restrooms have hot showers and one has a laundry facility. A centralized dump station is available for RV campers. Make camping reservations through [Reserve America](#).

Park programs are offered from December to March. Park rangers present programs on a variety of topics about the park's plants, animals and history.

Visitors can experience this park's remarkable wilderness on three trails. Trails offer opportunities for bicycling, hiking and nature observation. [Royal Palm Hammock Nature Trail](#) is just under one-mile long and provides a gentle introduction to the habitats of the park. The trail includes a board walk and observation platform. The 6.5-mile [Hiking Adventure Trail](#) is a wet (expect to wade ankle to knee deep) hike through pine flatwoods and a cypress swamp. The trailhead is located on the Tamiami Trail a short distance outside the park's entrance. Give yourself about three or four hours to enjoy the entire trail. There is a primitive campsite for backpackers along this trail. Also, make sure to bring plenty of drinking water and some bug spray with you. The 3.5-mile



Off Road Bike & Hiking Trail is located about a half mile west of the main park entrance on the historic Marco Road. Bring your own bike or rent one at the ranger station.

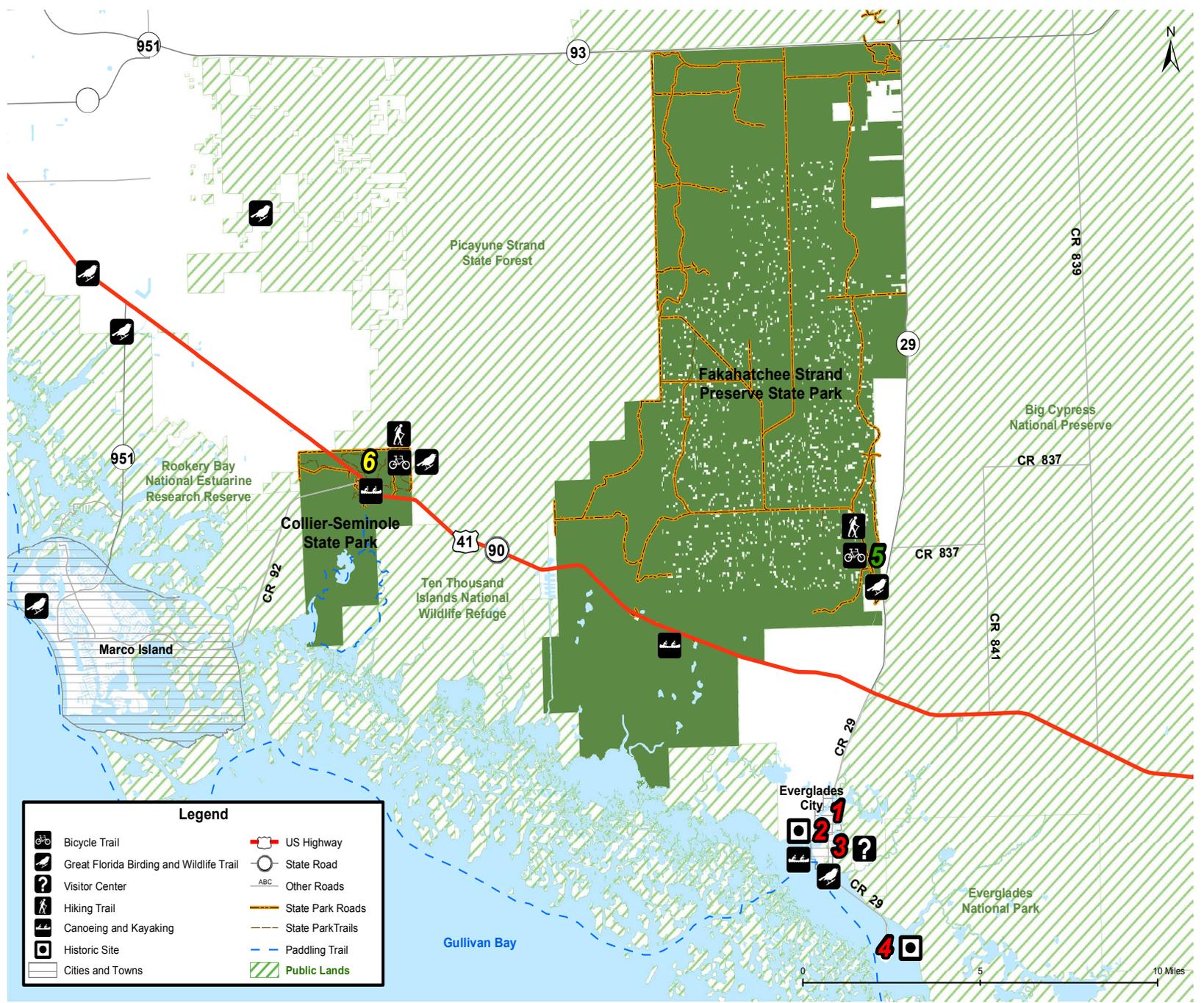
The park has canoe rentals along with a boat ramp that provides access to the Blackwater River. The Blackwater River originates in the park and meanders several miles through the mangroves to Blackwater Bay and the Ten Thousand Islands. The [Blackwater/Royal Palm Hammock Paddling Trail](#) is a 13.6-mile state designated paddling trail.

Other options in the area:

Hike or bike the unpaved 2.4-mile [Ten Thousand Islands Marsh Trail](#) located in the [Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#). The parking area is on the Tamiami Trail just north of the Collier-Seminole State Park entrance and Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park entrance.

Also, see the multi-day itinerary for the Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park, Gulf Coast Area.





Legend

	Bicycle Trail		US Highway
	Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail		State Road
	Visitor Center		Other Roads
	Hiking Trail		State Park Roads
	Canoeing and Kayaking		State Park Trails
	Historic Site		Paddling Trail
	Cities and Towns		Public Lands

