HISTORY & NATURE

The park was created to protect and preserve a portion of the only living coral reef in the continental United States. The park extends three miles into the Atlantic Ocean, is approximately 21 miles in length and is adjacent to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

John D. Pennekamp was one of the early proponents for the preservation of the park's reef and the park was named in his honor. Pennekamp was a Miami newspaper editor who also helped establish Everglades National Park.

The coral reefs are among the most beautiful and diverse of all living communities. Coral reefs are made of tiny animals called polyps. Stony corals, such as star coral and brain coral, secrete a limestone skeleton around their bodies. These skeletons remain after death and provide the foundation for new polyp growth. Octocorals, such as sea fans and sea plumes, are flexible and sway gracefully in the ocean current as they feed on plankton.

Sponges, shrimps, crabs, turtles, lobsters and hundreds of species of fish live among the corals. These reefs occur only in shallow oceans having clear, warm waters. It took approximately 5,000 years for this coral reef to form.

At the reef, snorkelers may delight in seeing many colorful tropical fish and corals, and anglers can fish for a wide variety of species in diverse habitats.

Touching or standing on corals may kill them and is therefore prohibited. Anglers will need a saltwater fishing license and spearfishing is prohibited. Collection of tropical fish is not allowed and no lobster may be harvested from or within any coral formation.

PARK GUIDELINES

Please remember these tips and guidelines and enjoy your visit:

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- The collection, destruction or disturbance of plants, animals or park property is prohibited.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than six feet and well behaved at all times.
- Fishing, boating, swimming and fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida saltwater fishing license is required unless exempt by law. Snorkelers and scuba divers should always use Diver-Down flags when in the water.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- For camping information, contact Reserve America at 800-326-3521 or 866-I CAMP FL or TDD 888-433-0287 or visit ReserveAmerica.com.
- Florida's state parks are committed to providing equal access to all facilities and programs. Should you need assistance to enable your participation, please contact staff at any ranger station or call 850-245-3076 (Voice) or 711 (Florida Relay Service).

FloridaStateParks.org
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Trips to the coral reef are conducted daily aboard a high-speed, stable, air-conditioned, glassbottom catamaran. Snorkeling boat trips are also offered daily. Daily scuba dive trips and certified diver instruction are also available.

A boat ramp and motorboat rentals are available at the marina. Marina slips, and Largo Sound moorings may be rented overnight. To protect the coral, day-use moorings are provided as an alternative to anchoring at the reef. For additional information, please call 305-451-6300. Reservations can be made for all boat trips at www.PennekampPark.com.