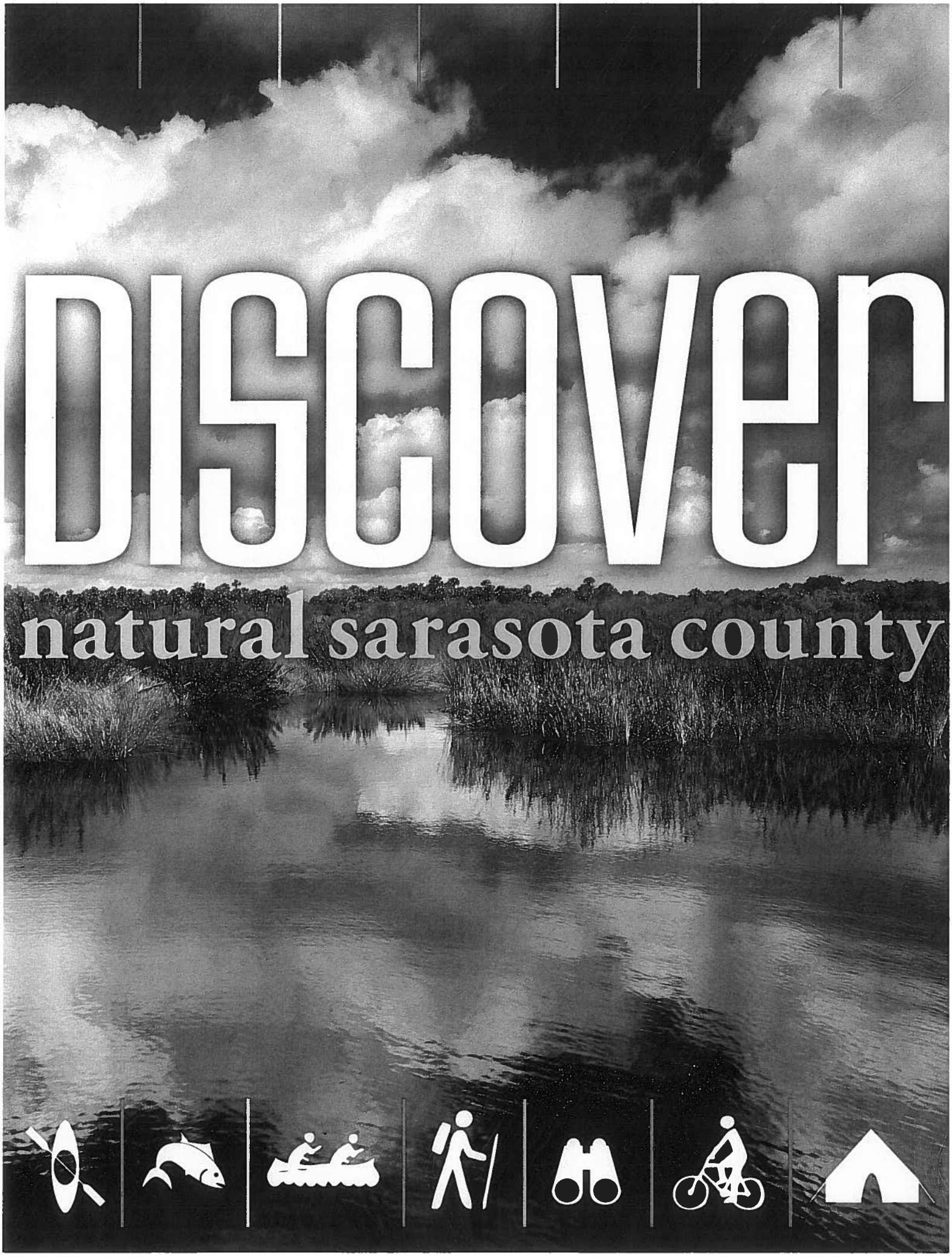
DISCOVER

natural sarasota county



DISCOVER THE NATURAL HABITATS OF

Discover the natural habitats of Sarasota County—an eclectic environment to hike, paddle, bike, fish or sit back and enjoy the scenery. Parks, preserves, beaches, bays and waterways span the county, offering an array of ways to enjoy your preferred nature activities.

While barrier islands with miles of beaches nestled among majestic bays provide more than enough coastal pleasures to fill any length of stay, Sarasota's inshore destinations are treasures in their own right. Wetlands, lakes and a river interconnect throughout Myakka River State Park, one of the state's oldest and largest parks. The Celery Fields offer exceptional opportunities to observe more than 300 species of birds nesting and foraging in their natural habitat.

This guide is your first step toward experiencing all that natural Sarasota County has to offer.

How to use this guide:

This guide features information on hiking, walking, running, paddle sports, cycling, wildlife viewing, birding and fishing. Also featured are parks, preserves and other natural places to discover and explore.

top spots | Q&A | LOCAL

Each section includes an overview, top spots, frequently asked questions, and an "Ask a Local" section. Additional resources, safety tips and contact information are included in the guide as well.

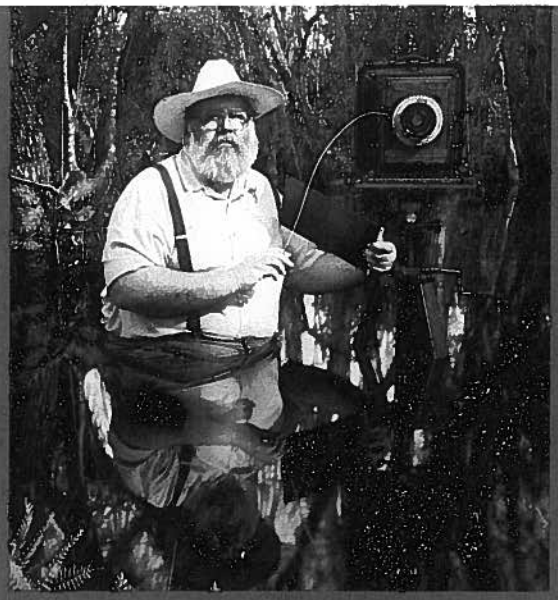
For more information:

Visit discovernaturalsarasota.org, floridastateparks.org, email info@visitsarasota.org, or call 800.800.3906 or 941.706.1253.
You can also visit the Official Sarasota County Visitor Information Center at 701 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34236.

SARASOTA COUNTY

safety tips

- When exploring an unfamiliar place it's best to travel with a guide or a friend for companionship and safety.
- Always be prepared with sunblock, insect repellent, a snack, and plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Respect the habitat of animals, and do not feed any wildlife! Feeding animals puts you, them and future visitors to the area at risk.
- Keep our natural areas beautiful for everyone to enjoy. Take out what you bring in.
- If you do get lost, keep calm and remain aware of your surroundings. Refer to a trail map, kiosk map, trail markers, or ask other visitors for help. In case of an emergency, call 9-1-1.
- Don't drink unfiltered water from rivers, lakes and ponds.
- Take breaks, and never push yourself to exhaustion. Fatigue can dull your sense of awareness and put you at risk.



Clyde Butcher

Our special thanks to internationally renowned photographer, environmentalist and local resident Clyde Butcher, whose exquisite photograph of Myakka River State Park graces our cover.

Butcher's work has been compared to that of Ansel Adams, not only because he also produces large black and white photographs, but because of the details their work unveils, and the emotion it evokes in the viewer.

Museums across the world display Butcher's work, but visitors to Sarasota County can experience his lush images up close at his Venice Gallery and Studio. The gallery features a rich selection of his award-winning, limited-edition photographs; each is hand printed by the artist, mounted and matted to archival standards, signed, and issued a limited edition number.

Get to know more about Butcher and his work at clydebutcher.com.

WALKING, RUNNING

Miles of beaches, parks and preserves make Sarasota County's natural lands a perfect place to walk, hike or run. Myakka River State Park alone offers nearly 40 miles of loop hiking trails maintained by the Florida Trail Association. Catch the sunrise as you jog over the John Ringling Causeway Bridge, or jog around the Celery Fields, a parcel totaling more than 300 acres of wetlands that features a diversity of birds and wildlife. Wherever you stay, a trail is never far away and features a great way to experience Sarasota County.

top spots

MYAKKA RIVER STATE PARK

Myakka River State Park is one of Florida's oldest state parks. The 57 square miles of nature serve as popular hiking, fishing and camping destinations.

LEGACY TRAIL

The Legacy Trail offers a paved, multi-use trail more than 10 miles long, connecting Sarasota and Venice, for biking, walking and running.

JOHN RINGLING CAUSEWAY BRIDGE AND BAYFRONT PARK

John Ringling Causeway Bridge was named after John Ringling of circus fame who commissioned the first bridge connecting St. Armands/Lido Key and the city of Sarasota in 1925.

CARLTON RESERVE

The T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve has more than 80 miles of hiking and biking trails through dry prairie, pine flatwoods and seasonal wetlands.

RED BUG SLOUGH PRESERVE

Red Bug Slough Preserve features shaded nature trails underneath pines and palmettos dwarfed only by oaks coated in Spanish moss.

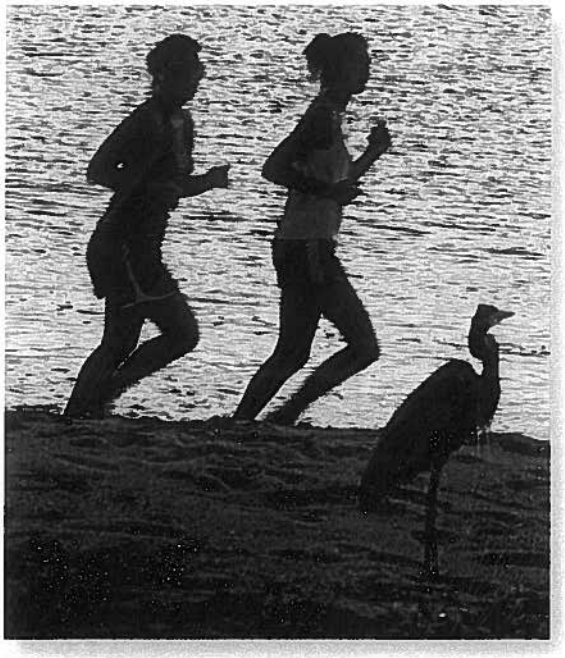
RRCA RUNNER FRIENDLY COMMUNITY

AND HIKING

ask a LOCAL

"For a good five-mile run, park at the Lido Beach Pavilion and run from there through St. Armands Circle (I recommend the early morning before the crowds get there), over the Ringling Bridge and back. The view, the fresh air—everything is fantastic."

—Tommy Klauber, an avid triathlete and owner of Polo Grill and Pattigeorge's



Q&A

Is there a cost to hike at these areas?
There are no entrance, user or parking fees at any county or city park, preserve or beach. There is a small entrance fee at Myakka River State Park and Oscar Scherer State Park.

What should I bring?
For the best experience, wear proper footwear. Be prepared for extreme heat, rain and insects occasionally. Bring drinking water, sunblock, a rain jacket and insect repellent.

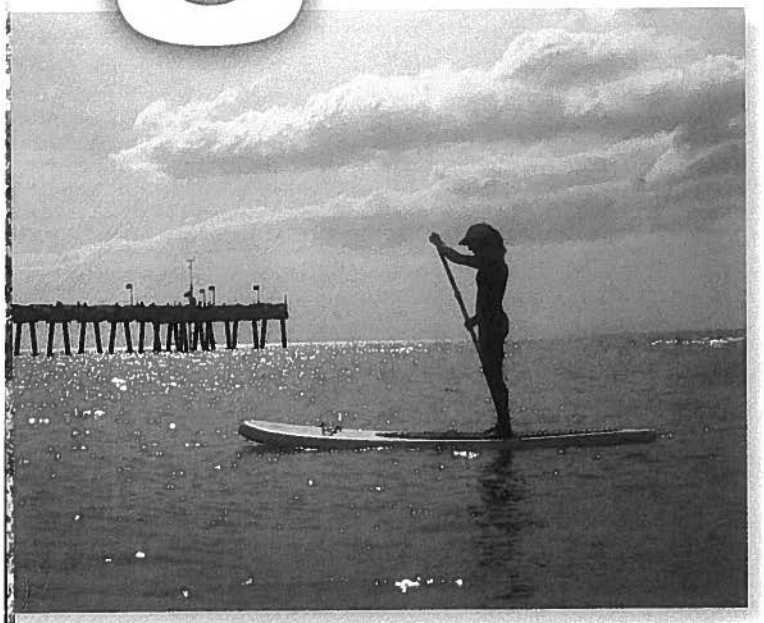
Is there dangerous wildlife?
Florida's parks are home to an entire ecosystem of diverse species including insects, snakes, rodents and alligators. Be aware of your surroundings and always stay on the trail.

What other activities are available at these parks?
Some parks offer watersports such as canoeing, kayaking and fishing, and land-based activities such as biking, camping, concerts and bird watching.

For more information see page 2.

KAYAKING, CANOEIN

Sarasota County's beaches and waterways have an abundance of places to partake in paddle sports. Whether upright on a paddleboard or sitting in a canoe or kayak, these sports will give you a thrill and a great workout as you immerse yourself in beautiful, natural Sarasota County. Paddle as the sun slips beneath the horizon over the Gulf of Mexico. Bring a rod and do some bay fishing from the shoreline or in a boat. Fish Lemon Bay for snook, redfish and sea trout or fish the Gulf for grouper, snapper and Spanish mackerel. Spend the day fishing with a local guide and learn about all the hot fishing spots. Hire an outfitter to paddle through a bayou and enjoy the beautiful mangrove habitat. With azure blue waters and scenic views all around, it's hard not to have a great time paddling in Sarasota County.



top spots

SIESTA KEY

Siesta Key is a perfect spot to try stand-up paddleboarding. Standing upright or kneeling, paddleboarding is a great workout and lots of fun. Prerequisite: good balance!

NEVILLE MARINE PRESERVE TRAIL

The Neville Marine Preserve Trail, located in Little Sarasota Bay, winds around the 118-acre preserve between Siesta and Casey Keys. This trail is perfect for novice paddlers.

MYAKKA RIVER/CARLTON TRAIL

This trail extends the entire length of the state-designated Wild and Scenic Myakka River while passing the T. Mabry Carlton, Jr. Memorial Reserve and Snook Haven Park. Myakka River State Park, one of Florida's largest and most diverse state parks, serves as a primary launch.

CASPERSEN TRAIL

Caspersen Trail launches at Caspersen Beach Park, looping through the park and south along the Intracoastal Waterway, offering two creeks to explore along the way.

SOUTH LIDO PARK

Ted Sperling Park at South Lido Beach is located at the southernmost tip of Lido Key. The park trail includes seagrass beds, mangrove tunnels and a shallow water bayou popular among foraging wading birds.

AND PADDLEBOARDING

ask a LOCAL

"I like North Creek and South Creek in the central part of the county. North Creek runs through The Oaks development. It's easily accessible and has some mangrove tunnels. South Creek, which runs through Oscar Scherer State Park, is absolutely beautiful and unspoiled."

—Jon Thaxton, Gulf Coast Community Foundation and local environmental advocate

Q&A

Where can I rent canoes, kayaks and stand-up paddleboards?
Numerous businesses in Sarasota County offer rentals with convenient drop-off and pick-up services, as well as guided tours of some of the area's best blueway trails.

What wildlife should I look out for?
Florida's Gulf Coast is home to diverse species of marine life, shorebirds and seabirds. Manatees, dolphins, sea turtles and pelicans can often be spotted in the bays and the Gulf.

What should I bring?
Many marinas and watersport outfitters rent boats, kayaks and other gear by the hour, half-day or full-day. (Life jackets and paddles are always included.) Bring sunblock, a hat, sunglasses and drinking water as you will be exposed to the sun.

I've never gone canoeing or kayaking before. Should I be concerned about waves and currents?
An introductory lesson is recommended for any novice paddler. It's always best to bring a friend along for safety and enjoyment.

For more information see page 2.

CYCLING

With miles of scenic beauty along the coast and inland trails, cycling is a great option for traveling and sightseeing around Sarasota County. Cruise along Longboat Key and enjoy an ocean breeze as you pedal. If you want an "Old Florida" adventure, take a ride on the Legacy Trail connecting Sarasota to Venice, designated a Bicycle Friendly Community. Whether you're a competitive cyclist or looking for a leisurely ride, Sarasota County offers the opportunity for both. Bike rentals are available at businesses throughout Sarasota County.

Bicycle Friendly Community

Q&A

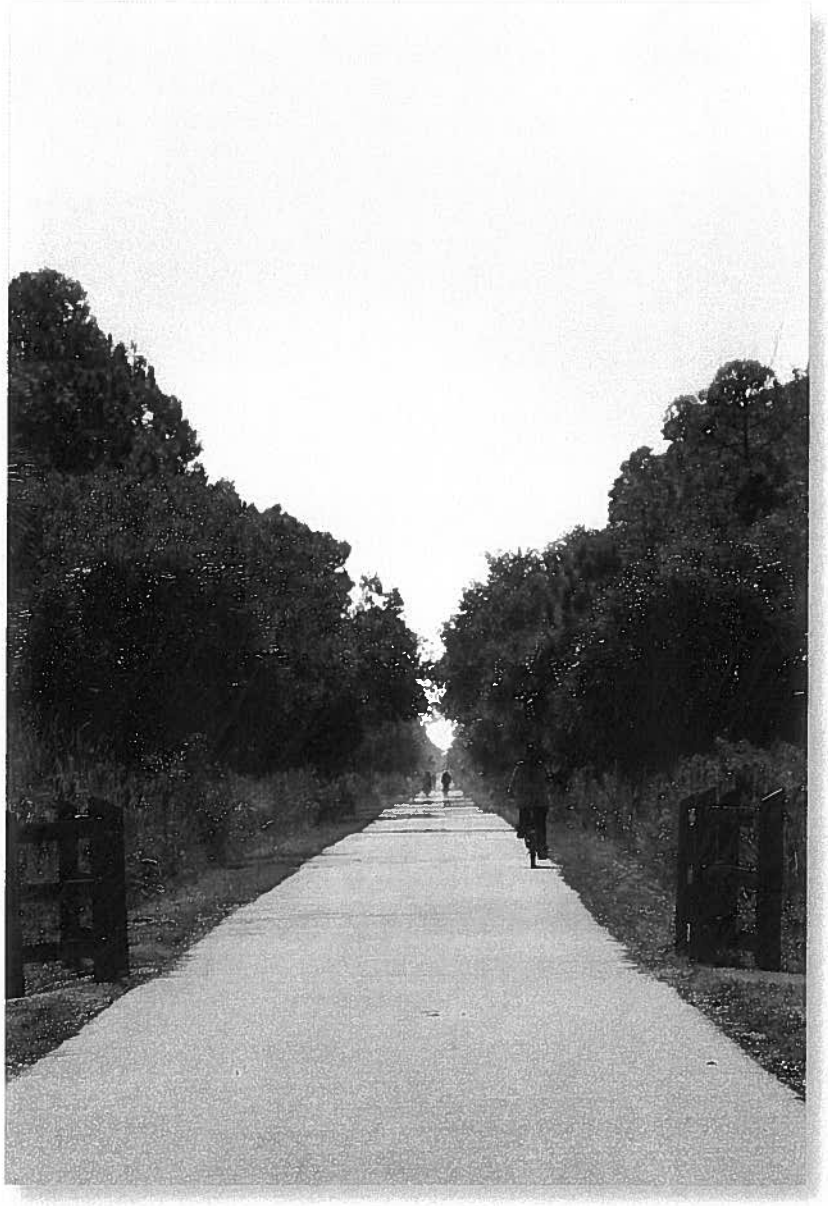
How difficult are the trails?
Sarasota County and most routes have minimal elevation, making trips accessible for everyone. However, not all trails are paved so street bicycles may not navigate well over grass, dirt, and mulch trails.

What should I bring?
Heat and sun can be extreme, especially during the summer. Always apply sunblock and bring drinking water.

Can I bike on the road?
Cyclists must obey the same traffic laws as motorists. Many roads have designated bike lanes, however, beginners and first-time visitors might want to stay on trails and areas of less traffic.

Are there other rules?
Bicyclists cannot wear headsets other than hearing aids. By law, cyclists under 16 years of age must wear helmets. However, it is highly recommended that everyone wear helmets.

For more information see page 2.



top spots

SIESTA KEY

Siesta Key has multiple bike rental businesses and is a perfect place for a leisurely ride through Siesta Key Village, on the beach and around the island.

LONGBOAT KEY

Longboat Key offers Gulf views as well as sightseeing of some of the most luxurious homes and resorts in the area.

LEGACY TRAIL

The Legacy Trail, a paved linear park along a former railway corridor, stretches approximately 10 miles connecting Sarasota and Venice, traveling through Osprey and Nokomis. This trail has numerous interpretive and educational signs about the history of the railway, the early pioneers of the area and the native habitats and wildlife.

VENETIAN WATERWAY PARK

Venetian Waterway Park is a 10-mile linear trail along the Intracoastal Waterway in Venice. It connects to the Legacy Trail at the Venice Train Depot.

OSCAR SCHERER STATE PARK

Oscar Scherer State Park has 15 miles of biking trails and hiking trails, meandering along South Creek and Lake Osprey, a swimming destination.

ask a LOCAL

"My favorite bike ride is the Legacy Trail from the McIntosh Road parking lot down to Laurel Road and then out to Casey Key. You get the fun of the trail and the prettiness of Casey Key. The Legacy Trail is such a nice amenity; bike from Venice to Sarasota without having to deal with traffic."

—Jon Robinson, park manager at Myakka River State Park

BIRDING AND WILDLIFE VI

Florida's natural habitats provide shelter and food for many mammals, reptiles, birds and fish. Along the beach, one can witness stingrays sail across the Gulf's surface, bottlenose dolphins leap out of the water, and fish jump into the air. Take an inland trip to one of many natural areas and enjoy wonderful birding hotspots that also play home to a bevy of other wildlife. Sarasota County offers opportunities to see rare and protected species such as sea turtles, scrub jays and gopher tortoises. Educational opportunities are available at area institutions such as Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium, Big Cat Habitat and Gulf Coast Sanctuary, Save Our Seabirds, and the Wildlife Center of Venice.

top spots

CELERY FIELDS
The Celery Fields have more than 300 acres of wetlands and upland habitat, making it a perfect place to go birding.

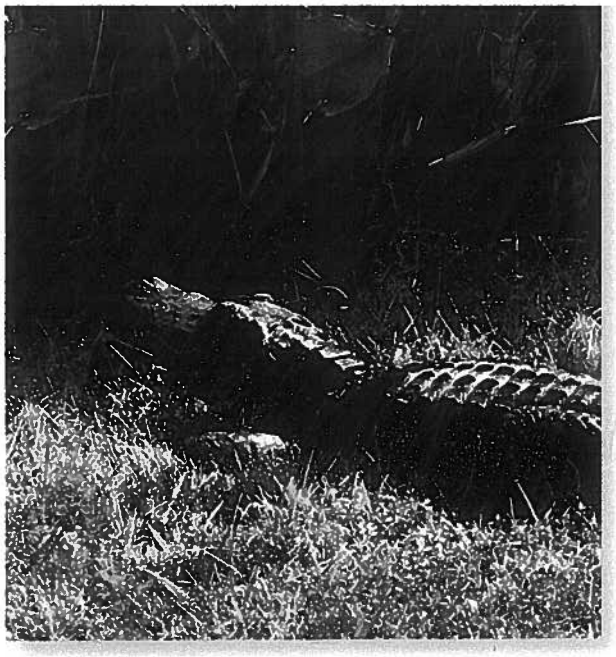
JIM NEVILLE MARINE PRESERVE
This 118-acre preserve, made up of mangrove islands and tidal flats, features ideal bird watching and a maze of waterways. The preserve is only accessible by water.

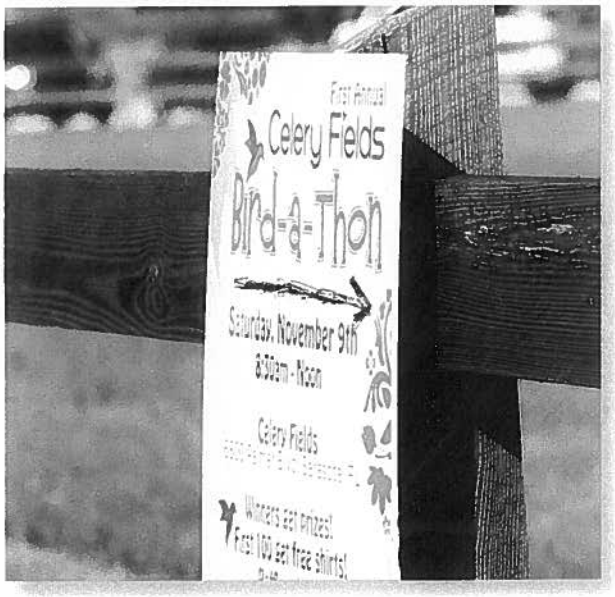
LEMON BAY PARK AND ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
This park includes nature trails, a butterfly garden, eagle nest viewing areas and an environmental center to learn about the area.

RED BUG SLOUGH PRESERVE
Red Bug Slough Preserve is a 72-acre preserve featuring a diverse natural environment. Visitors may see marsh rabbits, river otters, an occasional alligator and an assortment of songbirds.

PINELANDS RESERVE
The Pinelands Reserve is a 6,151-acre reserve that is home to gopher tortoises, bald eagles, roseate spoonbills and many other species of birds.

WING





ask a LOCAL

"Visit the Celery Fields to see marsh birds and typical Florida wading birds like herons and egrets. At least 100 acres of wetlands there have been restored. It's also a good place to see butterflies. We haven't done a butterfly count yet, but I would expect there are 30 to 40 varieties there."

—Jeanne Dubi, president of the Sarasota Audubon Society

Q&A

Where can I learn more about birding?
Sarasota County has two local Audubon Society chapters, Sarasota Audubon (sarasotaaudubon.org) and Venice Area Audubon (veniceaudubon.org). Both are great resources for birding information. Be sure to also check out Save Our Seabirds to learn more about bird rescue and rehabilitation.

Is there an admission fee to these places?
There are no entrance, user or parking fees at any county or city park, preserve or beach. There is a small entrance fee at state parks, the state forest and non-profit attractions such as Mote Marine Aquarium, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Historic Spanish Point and Crowley Museum and Nature Center.

Are any animals in the area dangerous?
It's important to respect the habitat of other animals. Be aware of your surroundings and keep a safe distance from wildlife.

What should I bring?
Wear sunblock and bring binoculars, drinking water and a rain jacket.

For more information see page 2.

FISHING

With its healthy bays, inlets, creeks and river, Sarasota County is an excellent place for fishing. Recreational fishing guides offer a number of fishing trips including offshore, inshore, tarpon, and night snook trips. You don't need a boat to fish, but you may need a fishing license. Fishing can be done on beaches, piers and bridges. Another great way to go fishing is in a canoe or kayak. Fishing is an excellent way to enjoy Sarasota County's waterways and habitats while also offering the chance to learn about local marine life.

top spots

TONY SAPRITO PIER

The Tony Saprito Pier is adjacent to the John Ringling Causeway Bridge and a popular pier for fishing. Hart's Landing offers rental equipment, tackle and bait.

VENICE FISHING PIER

Venice Fishing Pier is a popular destination at Brohard Beach Park on the south end of the island of Venice.

CITY ISLAND

City Island provides good bay and inlet fishing all around the park. Check out New Pass Grill & Bait Shop for bait and a bite to eat before you go out.

TURTLE BEACH PARK

Turtle Beach Park has a tidal lagoon connecting Little Sarasota Bay. The park is named for its sea turtle nesting and gopher tortoise habitats.

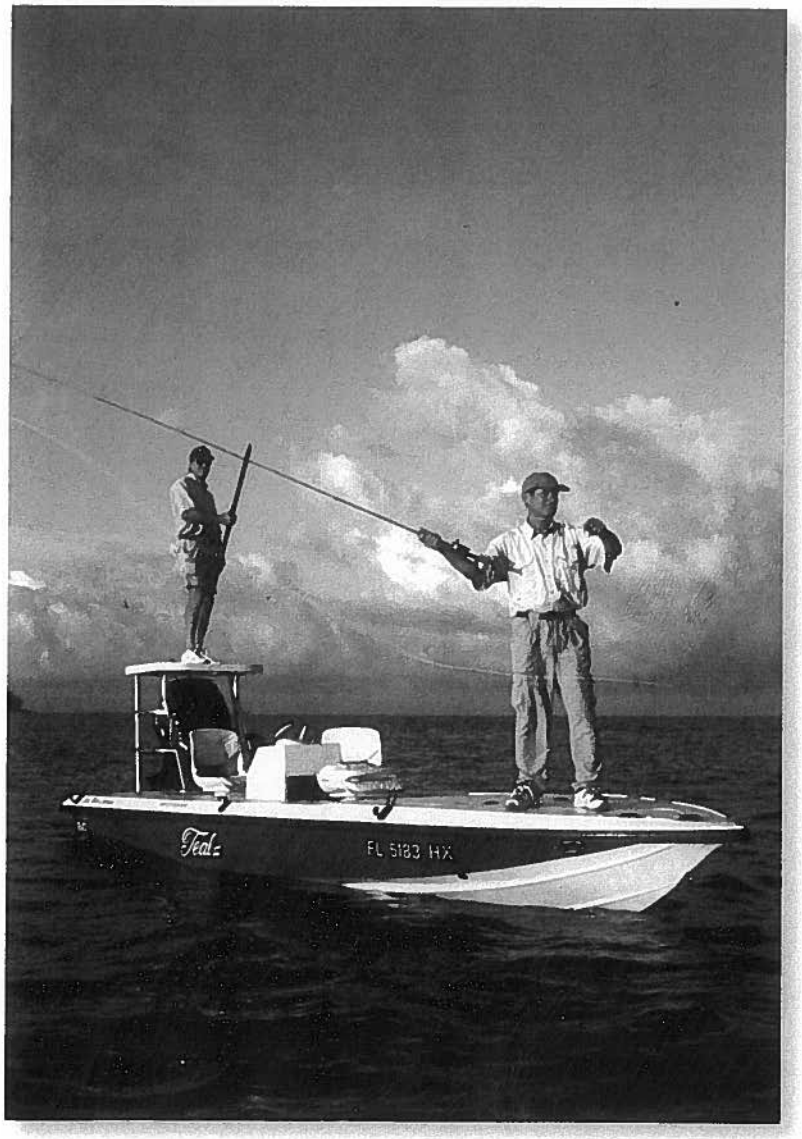
MYAKKA RIVER STATE PARK

Myakka River State Park offers freshwater fishing from bridges, platforms and wading from the shore. Fish include gar, bass, sunfish and more.

ask a LOCAL

"Point of Rocks on Siesta Key is good for fishing most of the year, because the fish come in to the rocks to feed. Things vary depending on the temperature of the water, but you may get snook, bluefish, Spanish mackerel, and even flounder. And during the summer, people fish by boat for tarpon there."

—Aledia Tush, owner of CB's Saltwater Outfitters



Q&A

How do I get a fishing license?
Licenses can be purchased online at myfwc.com, over the phone at 1-888-FISH-FLORIDA, or often at bait and tackle shops and marinas. Fishing licenses are not required when fishing with a licensed guide.

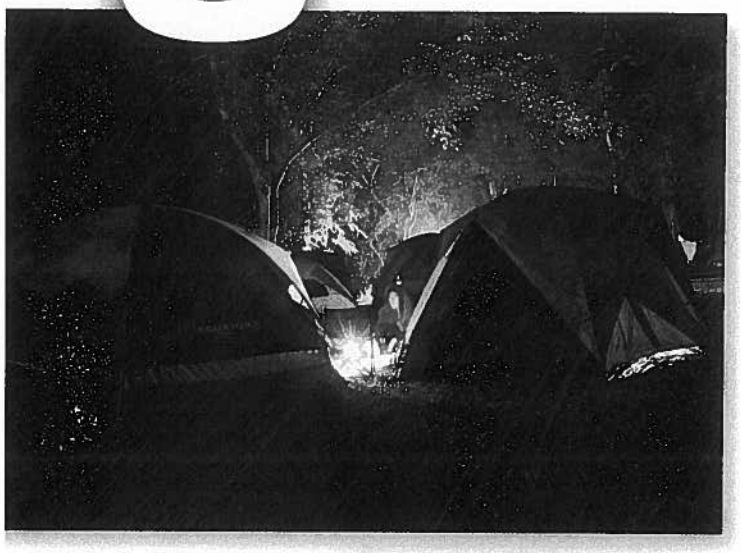
Can I keep what I catch?
There are various regulations for each species. Consider purchasing a reference guide or visit myfwc.com for more information.

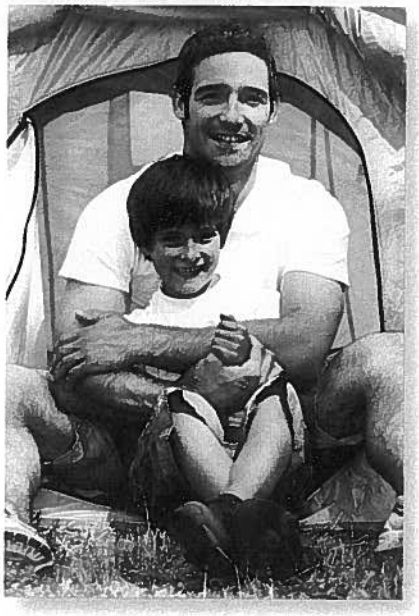
What can I expect to catch?
Different species of fish can be found in different habitats throughout the creeks, bays and Gulf. Common shore fish include snook, sheepshead, sea trout, flounder, Spanish mackerel and redfish.

For more information see page 2.

CAMPING

Camping can be a fun family activity and a wonderful way to experience parks in the early morning hours. Oscar Scherer State Park and Myakka River State Park are great options to experience "wild" Florida in all its beauty. Other options include camping at Turtle Beach Campground — where you really can spend a night on the beach — and Sun-N-Fun Resort and Campground, offering both tent and RV camping — conveniently located close to a popular nature area, the Celery Fields. The range of camping options is diverse enough to please the extreme adventurer and the casual observer.





top spots

MYAKKA RIVER STATE PARK

Myakka River State Park offers everything from fully equipped cabins to simple camping sites. Bike and canoe rentals are available at the park, as well as wildlife tours. Climb up to the canopy walkway for great views day or night.

OSCAR SCHERER STATE PARK

Oscar Scherer State Park is a popular camping spot located in Osprey in South Sarasota County. Activities at the park include fishing, swimming, bird watching, biking, canoeing and more.

TURTLE BEACH CAMPGROUND

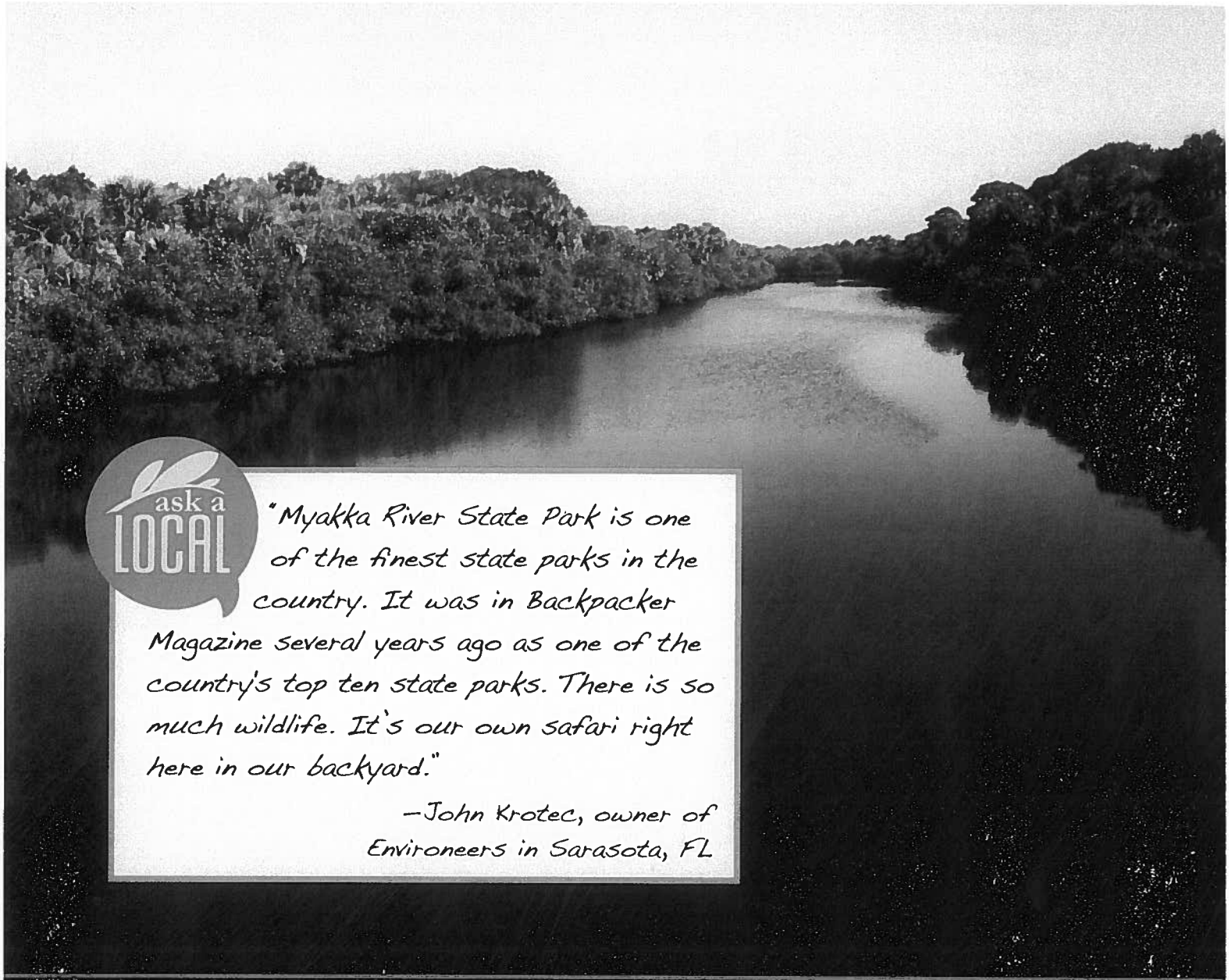
Turtle Beach Campground is at the south end of Siesta Key. It's a perfect place to spend the night on the beach, wake up and swim, kayak, go fishing or just take a stroll on the beach.

SUN-N-FUN RESORT AND CAMPGROUND

Sun-N-Fun Resort and Campground offers RV camping all year round, and tent camping May through October. The resort itself has a number of activities and amenities, including a giant pool.

KNIGHT TRAIL PARK

Knight Trail Park is located in Nokomis and offers archery, hiking and shooting sports. The park has primitive camping available. Reservations and camping permits are required.



ask a LOCAL

"Myakka River State Park is one of the finest state parks in the country. It was in Backpacker Magazine several years ago as one of the country's top ten state parks. There is so much wildlife. It's our own safari right here in our backyard."

—John Krotec, owner of Environeers in Sarasota, FL

Q&A

How much does it cost to camp?
Cost varies for camping sites, but can be as low as $5 per night at Knight Trail Park and $70 for cabins at Myakka River State Park.

Are any animals in the area dangerous?
Remember that you are in the habitat of many animals. It's important to respect all park rules and to keep a safe distance from wildlife.

Is group camping available?
Group camping is available at Myakka River State Park and Oscar Scherer State Park.

What should I bring?
Depending on where you decide to camp and for how long, you'll need to rent or purchase any camping supplies. It's always important to have plenty of water, insect repellent and sunblock.

For more information see page 2.

DISCOVER

natural sarasota county

LONGBOAT KEY
SARASOTA
LIDO KEY
SIESTA KEY
VENICE
CASEY KEY
MANASOTA KEY
ENGLEWOOD
NORTH PORT

additional resources

Additional resources for all activities are available at:

Official Sarasota County Visitor Information Center
701 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34236
discovernaturalsarasota.org
floridastateparks.org

Email: info@visitsarasota.org
Call: 941.706.1253

Other great brochures and information are available at the Visitor Information Center, including other Sarasota County and municipal parks, where to stay and where to rent or purchase equipment for your outdoor activities.

If you're planning activities at county-owned parks, call 941.861.5000 for more information, or visit scgov.net.

VISIT SARASOTA COUNTY FLORIDA'S GULF COAST

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