

Shells.Guide Explorida.Vacations Magazine

ISSUE 3

FLORIDA
FEATURESAGRO
TOURISMSOME
ECO TRIPS

WHY EXPLORIDA.VACATIONS?

LESS VISITED PARKS

Include and discover plans to vacation a spot that is rarely visited, also on National Geographic's top 25 places to venture.

DUDE RANCH

E.Discover a hot spot that will recreate an adaptation of the Old West was like. Come play the family adventures in this issues featured attraction.

AQUATICS- ABOVE OR BELOW

Hurry! Venture underwater life with some of the hottest scuba destinations & glass boat voyeurism in the US.

ABOUT...



RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIPS TO FOSTER EDUCATION

www.Explorida.Vacations supports under-educated students who challenge themselves with reading & researching anthropological studies of their native home state & environment, for cultural enrichment and self purpose.

Florida's beautiful ecosystem is under threat from invading species, disease & frequent disasters. Its native culture and the historical legends that shaped Florida as the tourist destination of the US continent and home to famous pioneers that established it, are slowly disappearing into forgotten history.

To keep tourist destinations open for business, **Explorida.Vacations Magazine** familiarizes tourists of Florida's wonders and "non-theme park" adventures and naturistic attractions in Atlantic Ocean's eastern sand-jewel of the US Continent, through excerpts and articles submitted by qualifying students. We need to raise funds for our 501c3 publicly funded charity. Call [754-225-3255](tel:754-225-3255) or "Contact Us" from our website at Explorida.Vacations to find out how to donate. We have a registered State Tax Certificate of Exemption provided for your donations and IRS filing purposes.

THANK YOU.

WESTGATE RIVER RANCH



Dude Ranch in Florida?

Native Indians, Ranchers, Cowboys, Cattle, and Horses....all part of the Wild West, a terrain east of Rockies nestled way south and east in Central Florida.

This Rodeo and Resort awaits those that don't necessarily want a theme, just a taste of time warp, back to the time of campfires, wagons, and teepees.

The only thing missing from this settlement is you and your family.

But what is, you ask, is a Dude Ranch? According to the Dude Rancher's Association, ([What is a Dude Ranch? | The Dude Ranchers Association](#)) based in Wyoming, is another name for 'Guest Ranch', an old form of hospitality extended to city folk, much like portrayed in the movie, "City Slickers", who wanted to get away from the stresses of concrete and chaos, to more quiet and landscapes.

With all due respect, it goes far back to the late 1800's when, according to the

association, "Ranches quickly became a 'home away from home' as returning guests became lifelong friends with the staff and guests. It's a quality that still exists today, as dude ranch vacations continue to provide that special brand of Western hospitality that nourishes body and soul.....this is an all-inclusive immersive vacation that includes lodging, meals, horseback riding, fishing, hiking and more."

This ranch provides a time capsule of dining, family activities, and creative accommodations.

And just like any other resort, it did not leave out Event Planning amenities.

Visit [Florida Dude Ranch & Glamping Resort | Westgate River Ranch Resort & Rodeo](#) or call today to book your reservation.

Don't forget to mention you viewed this featured article in Explorida.Vacations.
Yeehaw!

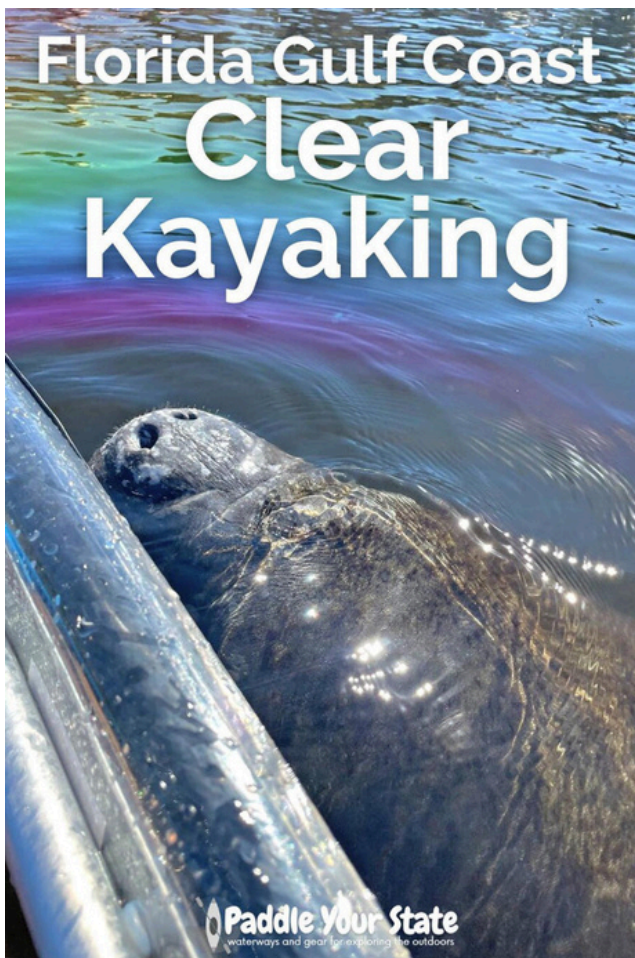
[Click here to reach Westgate River Ranch website.](#)

[The Dude Rancher's Association](#)

ABOVE...

GLASSBOAT & KAYAKING

Independent Editor, Rob Taylor, has picked 5 Best Tours for Unique Paddling and Wildlife for Clear Kayaking on the Florida Gulf Coast.



“Clear kayaking on the Florida Gulf Coast is becoming more and more popular, and now there are several places to do clear kayaks from Naples up to the start of the Panhandle. While there are 8-10 different clear kayaking tours to choose from on the Gulf Coast of Florida, we’ve picked the five we love the most. Each is very different from the next and all are 30 minutes to an hour off I-75, so each is very easy to add to a Gulf Coast road trip.

We’ve done it for bioluminescent kayaking at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge also, and each experience is unique with surprises with each paddle. The transparent kayak helps paddlers see the wildlife that exists below the surface and observe the underwater world in a totally different way.

Yes, you’ll find clear kayaking all around Florida, including on the Atlantic, down in the Florida Keys and at several springs.

What are clear kayaks?

Clear kayaks are constructed of the same material as bulletproof glass and submarine portholes. This means they're sturdy and let you see straight through them. Being able to see all the wildlife underneath the kayak, unobstructed, is what makes them such unique watercraft. They are typically more difficult to steer than a standard kayak or inflatable, but they do the trick and give you a great view of the underwater world.

Wildlife You'll See Clear Kayaking on the Florida Gulf Coast

Depending on which Florida Gulf Coast clear kayaking tour you choose, the wildlife will vary. If you're paddling through the estuaries or the gulf islands, no doubt you'll come across dolphins and sea turtles.

The mangroves bring all kinds of fish, sharks and birds. As you get inland, the manatees are the really find, particularly in the winter months. But my favorite Roseate spoonbills are one of the prettiest animals you'll see when you're clear kayaking on the Florida Gulf Coast. While the Roseate Spoonbill wades in the water to feed, they also hang out in the mangrove branches.

You'll be mesmerized by how pink they are. They're not related to the flamingo but get their bright pink hue in the same way, from the crustaceans they eat.

- **Clear Kayaking to Shell Key Preserve, Tampa Bay**

The clear kayaking tour to Shell Key Preserve is a very unique kayaking trip, as it crosses a fair amount of open water to get to the main paddling destination. Starting at the edge of Tampa Bay proper in Tierra Verde, just south of St Pete Beach, you'll paddle out through some of the most gorgeous turquoise water on the Gulf Coast. This is a fine paddle for experienced OR beginner paddlers. Because it's a combination of open water and mangrove islands, you'll get a broad view of Florida's ecosystems and completely varying nature. Really cool and fun!

The entire tour is about 3 miles. It was a little overcast and windy the day we went. The overcast skies were appreciated though – the average temperature in St. Petersburg in July is 91-degrees Fahrenheit with a lot of humidity.

- **Tarpon Springs Clear Kayaking**

Tarpon Springs isn't one of the most famous places on the Florida Gulf Coast, but it's one of the most special. The shape of the bay and the fresh water flowing in from the inland freshwater springs make for a beautiful place for clear kayaking. Tarpon Springs is a wonderful place for kayaking with manatees.

Starting in November and lasting into early spring, the manatees make their way into the springs inland from the coast and then back out to the bays as the temperatures fluctuate. Tarpon Springs is the perfect spot to observe this, and how cool for manatees to swim under you while enjoying clear kayaking!



‘The highlights of visiting tarpon springs is’... Tarpon Springs is really fun to explore on foot. Being the sponge diving capitol of Florida and a very strong Greek community, it's one of the most unique towns in

Florida. After your morning of clear kayaking with manatees, wander the waterfront eating Greek pastries and gyros, shopping for sponges and art. It's a great day trip from Tampa Bay.

- **Clear Kayaking in Crystal River with Manatees**

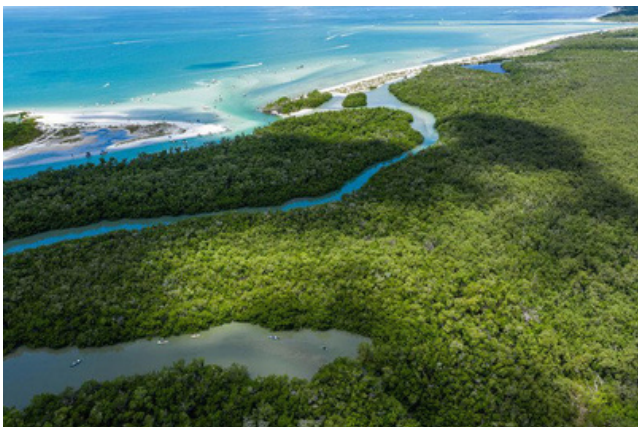
Crystal River is a famous spot to see manatees. It's the only place in Florida where you can legally swim with manatees, but truly you shouldn't. Swimming with manatees teaches them to come close to humans and not fear them, thus having long-term negative effects. But doing clear kayaking in Crystal River where there are so many manatees and you are NOT willfully interacting with them, that's a great idea!

If you're thinking that clear kayaking with manatees won't be as good or as special as swimming with them, don't worry. Because manatees are such large creatures, so people who swim with them get very nervous and even panic when in the water. And although manatees don't have hands, they will sometimes hug people in the water which can be either special or terrifying. Clear kayaking with manatees gives you a remarkable view and experience, without the uncertainty of being in the water.

- **Naples and the Estuaries for Clear Kayaking**

Naples is a beautiful town and is one of the best places to kayak in South Florida.

Just to the north is Bonita Springs, which is where you'll find Lovers Key State Park and countless mangrove island and passes. This estuary area is one of the best for clear kayaking on the Florida Gulf Coast. With the sheltered waterways and preserves all around, kayaking in the Estero Bay Aquatic Preserve is awesome! This is a particularly good place for wildlife watching, including dolphins, nurse sharks, rays and so many different types of birds. Clear kayaking in Estero Bay is an easy day trip from both Naples and Fort Myers. The winding paths are really cool to explore.



What makes this Florida Gulf Coast clear kayaking so different from the other places we've shared is the sheltered mangrove tunnels.

There are a few really magical things about Florida and mangroves are one of them. They filter out millions of gallons of water each day and they are a unique habitat for many creatures... and they also look like they're straight out of a mystical nature fantasy novel.

Within the quiet mangroves you can often spot sharks, iguanas, rays and more wildlife. You'll love clear kayaking through the tunnels surrounding Estero Bay. Such a fantastic Naples / Fort Myers excursion!

'Things to do in Naples and Fort Myers'...

Naples is almost like the gateway to Everglades National Park on the Gulf Coast. It's the perfect combination of Florida nature in the Glades and the countless islands of the Gulf. In addition to there being several kayaking spots in Florida's National and state parks close to Naples, the beaches and town are wonderful on their own. Check out the Naples Botanical Garden and Celebration Park to get a feel for the town and then end the day at the beach. The Naples Pier is a long one stretching out into the Gulf and it's a great place to both watch for dolphins and catch the sunset.

One of the highlights of Fort Myers Beach is the sandbar that forms about thirty feet out in the water. Watch for conchs, crabs and more when you're on the sandbar. It's a different sort of Gulf Coast experience from the clear kayaking.

Also in Fort Myers Beach is the Matanzas Pass Preserve. If you don't get enough of the mangroves that you kayak through, there are actually boardwalks and trails here where you can explore the mangrove islands on foot.

• **Rainbow River Clear Kayaking**

This is one of the prettiest places in Florida, and to get to explore Rainbow Springs State Park via clear kayak is really cool. The Rainbow River is known for being one of the most colorful waterways on the Gulf Coast, with an incredible combination of limestone, bubbling spring areas, unique underwater vegetation and beautiful riverbanks.

The cypress trees and oaks that line the Rainbow River are full of birds, from ibises to herons and egrets of every sort.

The Rainbow River is also known for have a solid alligator population. WHAT?! Yes, but don't worry about that, here's why:

- alligators are NOT interested in people and will sooner stay asleep or swim away than approach



- you're in a clear kayak, so you can safely observe from a distance
- alligators like to preserve their energy so seeing them laying in the sun or swimming slowly is 99.9% of the time as exciting as an alligator encounter will get.

Paddling on the Rainbow River is one of the most beautiful kayaking experiences on the Florida Gulf Coast. You'll love it.

• **Where else can I do clear kayaking in Florida?**

There are actually a surprising number of clear kayaking spots from different tour companies all around Florida. On the Atlantic Coast at Titusville is our favorite: Bioluminescent Clear Kayaking. In Key West you'll find glass bottom kayaking, which is slightly different and you can only see through the bottom. From Miami to Silver Springs, you'll find even more."

Editorial by Rob Taylor,
Clear Kayaking on the Florida Gulf Coast: 5 Best Tours for Unique Paddling and Wildlife

BELOW...

SCUBA DIVING & SNORKLING

For snorkeling or scuba diving, there are many spots in Florida to find coral beauty and gentle sea creatures. Below is the spotted bat fish and the red cushion sea star.



UNDERWATER SNORKELING TRAIL

The Blue Heron Bridge area is internationally recognized by scientists, scuba divers, underwater photographers, and snorkelers for its abundance of unique marine life. Squid, octopus, spotted rays, and starfish are regularly seen. A snorkel trail made of limestone boulders and prefabricated reef modules spans a two-acre area in 6 to 10 feet of water. 600 tons of rock were used to build this artificial reef!

COLLECTION AND POSSESSION OF TROPICAL FISH AND AQUARIUM SPECIES

While sport fishing is permitted within park property in accordance with Florida law, it is prohibited to harvest or possess any tropical fish or any tropical ornamental marine plant within Phil Foster Park and all waters lying within the boundary as listed in Rule 68B-42, F.A.C. Snorkelers and divers are welcome to enjoy the park's exceptional and extraordinary resource and help preserve tropical fish and marine life for others to enjoy. Use of knives or spear guns to capture fish in County park waters is not permitted. (Palm Beach County either owns or has management rights for most of the submerged area around the Blue Heron Bridge. Boundaries)

Any organization or individual requesting to remove tropical fish or invasive species that are otherwise prohibited per Rule 68B-42.001 F.A.C. must first obtain a Special Activity License (SAC) from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Commission (FWC). FWC will then contact the Department Director for final approval. The Department Director has the right to approve or deny any SAC on park property.

Diving is permitted from sunrise to sunset outside of the guarded swimming area. For information on how to obtain a permit for group night dives, call **561-966-6623**.



DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK - FLORIDA

For those who are keen on snorkeling, scuba diving, and kayaking, this island will feel like a little piece of heaven on earth. It's abundant with many different reefs and species of unusual fish

You will enjoy the underwater beauty and the mysterious creatures such as stingrays, sea turtles, lobsters, grouper, snapper, octopus, tarpon, and even little sharks. Don't worry though if you don't aggravate them, they won't bother with you either.



Jupiter Inlet

Jupiter and West Palm Beach offer some of the best drift diving in the world. The Jupiter Inlet is the closest inlet in the US to the Gulf Stream, and our beautiful reef and ledge systems provide depths ranging from 60-100 feet, making them suitable for divers of all levels. From drift dives and shark encounters to spearfishing and lobster hunts, we have a trip for every level of experience.

We typically enjoy visibility of 40 feet or more and moderate to warm temperatures, ranging from 75-85 degrees in the



summer and 72-78 degrees in the winter. Wetsuits are recommended for warmth and exposure protection.



For instance, a thrilling adventure of SCUBA diving sharks! Lemon Drop, is a favorite site and as its name suggests, sees an influx of lemon sharks in the early months of the year.

Lemon sharks are migratory and visit the waters off Jupiter from January through to March. Known for their color, Lemon sharks have a pale lemon brown hue to their skin. There may be as many as two dozen of these large, impressive sharks circling over the sand and returning again for another go-around. Mature lemon sharks typically measure around 10.5 feet. They make the reef sharks appear very small!

These are just a few destinations, that are popular and frequented. So, whether you are a beginner or experienced, Don't delay. Dive in to planning your aquatic excursions by early next year before you miss that window.





Ocala National Forest

“Nestled between well-known theme parks and white, sandy beaches, the jewels of the Ocala National Forest attract visitors from around the world.

A travel destination in its own right, the Ocala features more than 600 lakes and rivers where visitors enjoy swimming, fishing, snorkeling, canoeing and boating. From migratory birds and playful manatees to delicate freshwater springs and some of the world's rarest plants, the Ocala is a haven where people (and animals) escape to one of Florida's remaining wild places. Here, opportunities abound for all to bask in the wonders of Mother Nature 365 days a year.

[OHV Video in Ocala National Forest - Click here.](#)

Ocala National Forest Springs Hopper Pass: This day-use pass is \$75 + tax per person and is good for 12 months from the date of purchase. It provides entrance to recreation areas managed by Naventure, which includes: Juniper Springs, Alexander Springs, Silver Glen Springs, Clearwater Lake and Wildcat Lake. Available for purchase at Alexander Springs, Juniper Springs, Clearwater Lake and Silver Glen Springs.

Dogs are welcome in most areas, but must be leashed at all times. They are not allowed on the beach at swimming areas.

Family Activities...
...include: Mountain Biking, Road Bicycling, Camping or Cabin Rental, Fishing, Hiking, Horseback, Plant & Wildlife Viewing, Off Highway Trails, EcoTour, Scenic Drive, Boating, Canoeing, Scuba Diving, Water Skiing, Swimming, and more.”

[Official Website of US National Forests](#)

Know.... Then GO!!



Adventure Without Theme