



Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park Real Florida Guide

Note: Colored numbers correspond with numbers on the map. GPS coordinates are in decimal-degrees.

Choose from the options below to plan your trip in the Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park in Collier County, Florida or plan your own day-long adventure or a multi-day stay in the area. [Everglades City](#), Florida (1) is a small fishing town about 35 miles south of Naples and 80 miles east of Miami. The city 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 this [seasonal seafood](#) (October 15 to May 15). If you love seafood, you also might want to head to Everglades City on the first weekend of February for its very popular [annual Everglades Seafood Festival](#). The city is the best place to rent canoes or kayaks, hook up with a guided paddling excursion, or find a comfortable room from which to base your explorations of Big Cypress National Preserve and Everglades National Park.



Day 1 - Big Cypress National Preserve

From Everglades City the [Big Cypress National Preserve Welcome Center](#) (2) is approximately nine miles located at 33000 Tamiami Trail East, Ochopee, Florida 34141 and the Oasis Visitor Center (3) is approximately another 20 minutes south, located at 52105 Tamiami Trail East, Ochopee. The Big Cypress is 729,000-acres, providing regularly



scheduled ranger-led swamp walks, guided canoe/kayak trips, bike rides, night sky and astronomy programs and other events from November through April. Check the [Big Cypress National Preserve website](#) for information or call the Big Cypress Welcome Center at 239-695-4758 to make reservations. Big Cypress is home to seven established campgrounds, five of which are open to tent or vehicle camping (RVs, etc.), and three of which can only be used by tent campers. To make camping reservation go to [Recreation.gov](#).



There are two popular [scenic drives](#) within Big Cypress National Preserve. The Loop Road (4), otherwise known as County Road 94, is a 24 mile drive paralleling Tamiami Trail US 41. It travels through dwarf cypress forest, pine forests and deep cypress strands. The eastern seven miles are paved and after that gravel or dirt. [The Loop Road guide](#) provides useful mile-by-mile information, history, and background. Be sure to stop at the Loop Road Education Center, operated by Everglades National Park, and enjoy the short walk on the easy Tree Snail Hammock Trail.

Turner River/Wagonwheel/Birdon Road Loop Drive (5) is 17 miles that takes you to wide open views of prairies and popular wading bird feeding areas. A [drive guide](#) provides information about roadside parks and the diversity of wildlife viewing.

Depending on the time of year hiking trails may be submerged and can be waist deep, but navigable. Hiking trails can be designated trails, many of which are just off Tamiami Trail US 41, or through unmarked territory. The [Florida National Scenic Trail \(FNST\)](#) stretches approximately 1,300 miles across Florida. The FNST's southern terminus is the Big Cypress Oasis Visitor Center. The trail heads north for 30 miles through the



Preserve's cypress swamps, pine islands, hardwood hammocks, sloughs, wet prairies, marshes and mangrove thickets.

The Gator Hook Trail (**6**), a 5 mile hike, is a nice family day trip. The trail is a raised berm off of the Loop Road, which runs along the remains of one of the many tram rail ways built by logging companies from the 1930s through the 1950s. The trail was named for the nearby Gator Hook cypress strand.

Other opportunities for hiking include the Fire Prairie Trail (**7**), 5 miles round trip, beginning 14 miles north of Highway 41 on Turner River Road (County Road 839). The trail is elevated off normal grade and is dry most of the time, making it an excellent option for hikers, bikers and birders when other places are covered in water.

The [Kirby Storter Boardwalk](#) (**8**), 1.0 miles round trip, is an excellent gentle introduction to the wilds of Big Cypress National Preserve as it is accessible year-round by wheelchairs and children. The boardwalk takes your through open wet prairie, floodplain forest and a cypress slough. Then, it opens to a pond along a sluggish river.

Bicycles are welcome on any of the Preserve's off-road vehicle trails, but Bear Island is a particularly good place to ride. Bear Island is accessible via the Turner River Road or by going through a gate adjacent to State Road 29 about 4.5 miles north of I-75 (Alligator Alley).



Day 2 – Everglades National Park



[Everglades National Park](#) protects the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States. The park spans 1.5 million acres. Visitors can enjoy a multitude of activities such as hiking, canoeing, biking, camping, ranger-led programs, tram tours and boat tours. For outdoor activities in the Everglades preparation is a must. You will be exploring a sub-tropical environment and terrain and need to be aware it can be very hot and humid, especially from April through October. Always bring water, insect repellent, sunscreen, and proper clothing for the activity you will be doing. Familiarize yourself with the trails before hiking, biking, or paddling. You should know how long the trail is and the approximate time it takes to do a certain trail. The national park is accessible from the City of Homestead (Main Entrance), Miami (Shark Valley Area), and Everglades City/Naples in the Gulf Coast area.



The Everglades National Park's [Gulf Coast Visitor Center](#) (9) is located at 815 Oyster Bar Lane, Everglades City, Florida 34139. Educational displays, orientation films, informational brochures, boat tours and canoe rentals are available. There are no hiking trails from the visitor center, although for nearby areas that offer hiking and biking opportunities see the multi-day itinerary for Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park and Collier-Seminole State Park. For boaters the visitor center is one end of the [Wilderness Waterway Trail](#), the famous Everglades backcountry 99-mile route linking Everglades City to the town of Flamingo, Florida. This water trail is used by canoers, kayakers, and power boaters. Most paddlers allow at least eight days to complete the trip.

Day 3 - Paddling in the Everglades and Big Cypress



The following three trails can be difficult at times for inexperienced paddlers or under certain conditions. Paddling against the tide, fighting a headwind, or being unprepared for the weather or mosquitoes can make for a strenuous paddle. You can get information about the weather, tides, and conditions of the trails by calling the Everglades Gulf Coast Visitor Center at 239-695-3311 or the Big Cypress Welcome Center at 239-695-4758.



The three paddling trails are:

[Halfway Creek Loop Paddling Trail](#) (3.7 miles) is located in the extreme southwest corner of Big Cypress National Preserve and can be accessed about two miles east of the State Road 29 and US 41 junction. Access is via Seagrape Drive located just to the west of the Preserve headquarters. As a kayak trail, Halfway Creek has a lot going for it. It is very well marked, with an excellent trail map available from nearby Big Cypress Welcome Center and corresponding sign posts along the way. It is pristine and has among the most scenic mangrove tunnels you'll find. Another advantage of Halfway Creek is it is deep enough to be passable even in the dry days of late spring when Turner River is not. This trail offers great flexibility: You can do Halfway Creek as an afternoon paddle, or add a loop that includes the Barron River for an all-day outing, or arrange with an outfitter to make a one-way paddle to Everglades City.

[Lefthand Turner River Paddling Trail](#) (3.6 miles) in Big Cypress Preserve and Everglades National Park is a three to four hour trip up the Turner River to a fork. The right hand takes you to a pull-out on Tamiami Trail US 41, while the "Left Fork" loops into the Halfway Creek and returns to the Gulf of Mexico.



[Turner River Paddling Trail](#) (9.5 miles) in Big Cypress Preserve and Everglades National Park. This is one of the best paddling trails in the Big Cypress as it is hard to beat the beauty and wildlife of the Turner River. There are many different ways to kayak the Turner River. Be aware that it is impassable when the water becomes low beginning in February and March. Similarly, it is not a good trip for summer, when swarms of no-see-ums and mosquitos will greet you. However, November to February offer more ideal river conditions. Here are a few options to enjoy this river:

- Bring your own canoe or kayak, put in at the launch on the Tamiami Trail US 41, paddle north and/or south and return to your car. (There's not much current so paddling upstream is not an issue.)
- Bring your own canoe or kayak. Arrange to be picked up at the Gulf Coast Visitor Center at Everglades National Park, shuttled to the launch site and then paddle back to your car. [EvergladesAdventures.com](#), which operates out of the Ivey House Bed and Breakfast in Everglades City, will provide this transportation service for one boat and two people for \$26.
- [Rent a kayak or canoe](#) from one of several outfitters licensed to provide service in the wildlife refuge.
- Go on a guided adventure with an outfitter.

Other options in the area:

Visit Clyde Butcher's [Big Cypress Gallery](#) (10) located at Tamiami Trail US 41, Mile Marker 54.5 in Ochopee. The gallery features 40 years of this famous photographer's black and white fine art work. Behind the gallery visitors can schedule a photo safari, slogging (off-trail hiking in the swamp) adventure, or find lodging.

[Skunk Ape Headquarters and Campground](#) (11) is located at 40904 Tamiami Trail E., Ochopee, Florida 34141, and five miles east of Everglades City. You may be surprised to learn that the most likely place to see an American bigfoot, outside of the Pacific



Northwest, is in the Florida Everglades. The region around the tiny town of Ochopee is particularly favored by smelly, hairy bipeds, and it is here that the Shealy brothers - Dave and Jack - have opened the world's only Skunk Ape Research Headquarters. And don't miss the Everglades Skunk Ape Festival held every June and the Miss Skunk Ape contest and Skunktoberfest in October.

Ochopee Post Office (**12**) is officially the smallest U.S. post office in the nation. The building was formerly an irrigation pipe shed. It is a one floor frame 8'x8' building... barely enough room for the stamps.

Geocaching is a popular sport/game in many areas of Florida, including the Big Cypress and Everglades. Hidden treasures are sought by participants using handheld GPS receivers. See the website www.geocaching.com for locations of local treasures all over the world, and for more information on the sport.



