



News

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2016 Destination Fact Sheet Florida's Paradise Coast: Naples, Marco Island, Everglades

OVERVIEW:

Florida's Paradise Coast – Naples, Marco Island and the western, Gulf Coast portion of the Everglades – provides travelers an array of vacation options year-round.

Naples is a charming resort city on the coast, offering the ultimate in luxury, fresh local cuisine, great shopping, a thriving arts and culture scene, and much more. Naples was named the #1 Best Destination for Luxury Travelers by editors and readers at USA TODAY's 10Best travel section and has been named the #1 Small Art Town in the country (John Villani, *The 100 Best Art Towns in America*, 2005), and America's Best All-Around Beach (Travel Channel 2005), and #2 on Trivago.com's list of Top 10 U.S. Cities for Quality Accommodations in 2015. For the past two years, Naples has been listed in the Top American Cities for Food by readers of Conde Nast Traveler. Naples is also on the Conde Nast Traveler readers' choice list at #20 on the list of 30 Best Small Cities in America.

Slightly more relaxed than Naples, **Marco Island** is the largest of the area's "Ten Thousand Islands," and is surrounded by the Gulf of Mexico on one side and pristine mangrove estuaries on the other. Visitors to Marco Island can enjoy beautiful, white-sand beaches, fresh seafood at local restaurants and a variety of water activities including backcountry and offshore fishing, boating and paddling. Marco Island was named the #1 Island in the U.S. and the #4 Island in the World in the 2014 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Islands awards.

Located just south of Naples and Marco Island, **Everglades National Park** is the only subtropical preserve in North America and is part of the largest wetlands ecosystem in the United States, and it is one of 21 World Heritage Sites in the USA. The Gulf Coast Visitor Center, one of three main entrances to the park, is located in Everglades City, a quaint Old Florida style small town on the edge of the wilderness. It provides access to the beautiful Ten Thousand Islands and Wilderness Waterway sections of the park, where visitors can access this saltwater wonderland area by boat tours, fishing trips and guided paddling adventures. Alligators and crocodiles aren't the only wildlife you might spot. Bottlenose dolphins, manatees and sea turtles along with a large variety of birds of prey and wading birds are on display in the Gulf Coast Everglades. Just outside Everglades City is the expansive **Big Cypress National Preserve**, which provides even more and varied outdoor recreational opportunities than Everglades National Park, including hunting, off-road vehicle access, hiking, paddling, biking and several long wilderness drive areas. Big Cypress was the first to receive the National Preserve designation in the U.S. National Park system.

More than 80 percent of Florida's Paradise Coast, within Collier County, Fla., is dedicated to parks and nature preserves, with much of this area covered by the Everglades ecosystem and its many inhabitants, including hundreds of species of colorful birds, fresh and saltwater fish, alligators, bobcats, Florida black bear and the endangered Florida panther.

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LODGING:

Accommodations in Florida's Paradise Coast range from luxurious Gulf front beach resorts to historic inns along with excellent choices for mid-range and cozy value-priced hotels, trendy boutique hotels, vacation rental homes and condos and outdoor camping sites. For the eco-minded, 19 hotels in the Paradise Coast have received the official Florida Green Lodging designation from Florida's Department of Environmental Protection.

BEACHES:

With more than 30 miles of soft, white sand beaches, visitors to Florida's Paradise Coast can enjoy the fun of a crowded shore or find that perfect secluded spot. Favorite options include Naples Beach with its iconic pier stretching 1,000 feet into the Gulf of Mexico, Barefoot Beach Preserve, ranked #2 on Dr. Beach's Top Ten USA Beaches for 2015; and Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, ranked #9 on that same top ten list; as well as Tigertail Beach and South Beach parks on Marco Island, and many nearby island beaches accessible by boat including Keewaydin Island and the many deserted beach islands within the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park.

DINING:

Named by Conde Nast Traveler as one of **America's Best Food Cities** in its annual survey for the past two years, foodies can take advantage of the many distinctive dining options throughout the Paradise Coast including fresh-off-the-dock seafood at waterfront cafes, sophisticated cuisine at five-star restaurants and numerous locally-owned, independent restaurants. Known as the **Stone Crab Capital of the World**, Everglades City provides restaurants throughout Florida with this fresh delicacy from October 15 through May 15 of each year, Florida's official stone crab season. About forty of the area's locally-owned restaurants belong to the **Naples Originals**, an organization that promotes the concept of locally owned and operated restaurants.

ANNUAL FESTIVALS:

Downtown Naples New Year's Art Fair, January 2-3, 2016
Southwest Florida Nature Festival – January 15-17, 2016
Naples Winter Wine Festival, January 28-31, 2016
Everglades Seafood Festival, February 5-7, 2016
Naples National Art Festival, February 20-21, 2016
Downtown Naples Festival of the Arts, March 19-20, 2016
Naples Craft Beer Festival, March 5, 2016
Naples St. Patrick's Day Parade, March 12, 2016
Marco Island Seafood Festival, March 18-20, 2016
Great Dock Canoe Race, May 14, 2016
ArtsNaples World Festival, April 25-May 8, 2016
Marco Island Seafood Festival, March 18-20, 2016
Mercato International Food Festival, April 3, 2016
Great Dock Canoe Race, May 14, 2016

Summer Jazz on the Gulf Free Concerts – one each in June, July, August, Sept. 2016
 Naples July 4th Parade – July 4, 2016
 National Parks Service Centennial, August 25, 2016
 BrewHaHa Craft Beer Festival, October 2016
 Marco Island Craft Beer Festival, November, 2016
 Stone Crab Festival, October 28-30, 2016
 Florida Panther Festival, November 5, 2016
 Celebrate the Arts Month, November 1-30, 2016
 Naples International Film Festival, November 10-13, 2016
 Christmas on Third Street South, November 21-26, 2016
 Christmas Walk & Tree Lighting on Fifth Avenue South, early December, 2016
 Swamp Heritage Festival, December 3, 2016
 Naples Christmas Parade, early December, 2016
 Naples Christmas Boat Parade, December 2016

ARTS & CULTURE:

Visitors can enjoy the Paradise Coast's thriving arts scene which features exciting exhibits at institutions such as **The Baker Museum at Artis—Naples** (the new name for the **Naples Museum of Art**), renowned Everglades photographer Clyde Butcher's **Big Cypress Gallery**, the **von Liebig Art Center** and the **Marco Island Center for the Arts**, or head to **Artis—Naples**, (the new name for **The Philharmonic Center for the Arts**), **Sugden Theatre**, home of the Naples Players, **TheatreZone** and **Gulfshore Playhouse** for musical and dramatic performances. **Opera Naples** performs between November and May. The rich history of the region, from the ancient Calusa civilization to turn of the century Gladesmen and pioneers is on display at the area's many historical museums. The Naples Botanical Garden, the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and the Rookery Bay Environmental Learning Center are brightened by regular and traveling art displays.

Each November is designated as **Celebrate the Arts Month**. The growing **Naples International Film Festival** the first weekend in November kicks off a month packed with arts and cultural activities and performances.

SHOPPING:

From historic districts to waterfront plazas, the Paradise Coast offers visitors a variety of shopping options, including:

- Trendy **Third Street South** has art galleries, fashion houses and boutiques, antiques, jewelry, home décor and outdoor cafes and restaurants, all within walking distance of the beach. This area includes **Gallery Row**, a collection of art galleries located near the intersection of Broad Street and Third Street South.
- **Fifth Avenue South** is a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly area featuring a variety of art galleries, as well as clothing, gift and design boutiques, restaurants and bars, the Sugden Theatre and the von Liebig Art Center. The Street was named the #2 Best Alfresco Dining Neighborhood in the U.S.A. by editors and readers at USA TODAY's 10Best travel section.
- Located on the Gordon River leading into Naples Bay, **Tin City** is an eclectic, tin-roofed shopping area featuring nautical and nature-themed gift shops, clothing and souvenir shops and casual seafood restaurants on the water.
- **Waterside Shops** is a beautiful, upscale center accented by flowing water and fountains that is anchored by Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom. Top brands with stores at Waterside Shops include Hermes, Gucci, Tiffany & Co., Cartier and many more, including the USA's first Escales Paris shop.

- Naples' **Treasure Trail** along Tenth Street in the **Naples Design District** is a collection of consignment and resale shops often featuring top-name designers.
- Other shopping options include **Bayfront, Village on Venetian Bay, Mercato, Coastland Center Mall, the Naples Outlet Center** and just north of Naples and south of Southwest Florida International Airport, **Miromar Outlets, Gulf Coast Town Center** and **Coconut Point Mall**.
- Locals know some of the best shopping in the area can be found at the **gift shops at several area attractions and at resort hotels**. Nature and animal-focused children's games, stuffed animals and toys can be found at the gift shops for Naples Zoo, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. You can shop at all three without having to pay an entry fee. Another "insider" shopping tip: the gift shops at several resorts can be gold mines for unique gifts and clothing. Check out the shops at both Ritz-Carlton resorts in Naples; The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, featuring the colorful pottery of Jim Rice – known for his fish plates and much more; and the shops at the Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort.

FAMILY FUN:

Multi-generational families can enjoy the array of activities, attractions and events throughout the Paradise Coast, such as the **Naples Pier, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens, the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples, The Conservancy of Southwest Florida** and the **Naples Botanical Garden**.

One of the most interesting activities for families is a cruise on the **Dolphin Explorer**, which allows passengers to serve as "Citizen Scientists" assisting dolphin researchers with the ongoing **10,000 Islands Dolphin Project**. This experience was recognized in the 2013 National Geographic book "100 Places That Can Change Your Child's Life."

In addition to the beautiful beaches lining the Naples and Marco Island coastlines, there are numerous boat and Waverunner tours for dolphin watching, shell collecting and sightseeing, as well as airboat rides in the Everglades and a thrilling jet boat ride on Naples Bay.

The Sun-n-Fun Lagoon water park at **North Collier Regional Park** offers water slides and a lazy river for tubing through the park.

Author and photographer Karen T. Barlett's "**A Mostly Kids Guide to Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades**" is out in 2015 filled with recommendations for family fun.

SPORTS ACTIVITIES:

Baseball lovers can take advantage of the Paradise Coast as a spring training location, as the ballparks hosting the Boston Red Sox and the Minnesota Twins are just a short distance north of Naples near Southwest Florida International Airport. The Paradise Coast is a popular destination for sports league events and tournaments for kids as well as seniors, with many events hosted at North Collier Regional Park. The area is also home to annual professional beach volleyball and stand up paddleboard events. In addition, two new events will premiere in the area. The Pro Watercross Tour featuring high-speed jet skis along with the 2016 U.S. Open Pickleball Championships are both highly anticipated events for sports enthusiasts to enjoy.

GOLF:

There are 91 18-hole golf courses in Florida's Paradise Coast, which has placed the area as the destination with the most golf holes per capita in the U.S. Close to two-thirds

of those courses are private; however, several area resorts allow their guests to play at their private courses. Golf enthusiasts can select from multiple resorts with their own courses, stay in accommodations that have affiliate relationships with private clubs or choose from the area's excellent public golf courses. Resorts with courses include LaPlaya Beach & Golf Resort, Naples Grande Beach Resort, Marco Beach Ocean Resort, The Ritz-Carlton, Naples and The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples, The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, Marco Island Marriott Beach Resort, Golf Club & Spa, GreenLinks Golf Villas at Lely Resort and Quality Inn & Suites Golf Resort. Top public courses include the TPC Treviso Bay, the Flamingo Island and Mustang courses at Lely Resort, Panther Run, Arrowhead, The Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club's course (the oldest in Naples) and more.

The International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO) named Florida's Paradise Coast the **Golf Destination of the Year – North America for 2014**.

Three professional tournament events are held in the area each year. Greg Norman's PGA-sanctioned specialty team play tournament, The Franklin Templeton Shootout – also known as the Shark Shootout – is held at Tiburon at The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples in December; The ACE Group Classic PGA Champion's Tour Tournament is held each February at TwinEagles in Naples; and the CME Group Tour Championship, the season ending event for the LPGA Tour, comes to Tiburon Golf Club at The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples in November.

NATURE:

The beautiful waters of the Paradise Coast offer a variety of activities for visitors. In January of 2015, the **largest artificial reef in the hemisphere** splashed down in Collier County. Thirty-six artificial reef modules make up six reef complexes offshore from Marco Island, Naples and northern Collier County. With time, these structures will mature developing an ecosystem filled with marine life and even more opportunities for fishing and diving in the Gulf waters.

In addition to miles of oceanfront, the area's many bays and rivers provide a network of waterways for boat cruising, kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding, fishing or relaxing. The Paradise Coast is a paddler's heaven, featuring a variety of easy to tough waterways for adventurers to navigate. The **Wilderness Waterway** is a 99-mile waterway from Everglades City to Flamingo, and takes at least one week to traverse, with no civilization to be found along the course.

From backcountry flats fishing to offshore charters into the Gulf of Mexico, fishing is an incredibly popular activity throughout the Paradise Coast. Professional fishing guides provide private or group boat charters, offering anglers a chance to catch tarpon, snook, redfish, grouper, kingfish, snapper, grouper and other popular game fish. The renowned waters of the Ten Thousand Islands are perfect for kayak fishing, with a number of multi-day fishing and camping eco-trips available in the winter season.

Marco Island's beach and the surrounding deserted barrier island beaches sand bars offer some of the best **shelling** in the world, with prizes such as whelks, olive, scallops, and hundreds of other varieties of shells. A number of tour operators provide short boat trips to deserted sand bars and beach islands that are covered in shells and free from crowds, providing a relaxed atmosphere to search for these treasures.

The Ten Thousand Islands stretch endlessly from Marco Island's southern edge, winding past Everglades City and Chokoloskee all the way down to Flamingo at the southern tip of Florida's mainland. A large percentage of the Ten Thousand Islands is located within

the boundaries of either the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge or Everglades National Park, providing a haven for numerous rare and endangered animal and bird species. Area parks include **Everglades National Park's Gulf Coast Visitor Center** in Everglades City and the **Shark Valley** entrance on the Tamiami Trail halfway to Miami; **Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve**; **Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge**; **Collier-Seminole State Park**; **Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park**; **Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park**, with a beautiful white sand beach named as the #9 beach in the U.S. for 2014; **Picayune Strand State Forest**; **Big Cypress National Preserve** and the **Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge**.

Audubon's **Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary** provides access to the world's only remaining old growth bald cypress forest. For visitors looking to explore these parks and preserves, there are many ranger-led and self-guided tours, in addition to paddling, hiking and swamp buggy excursions.

Everglades National Park, with its Gulf Coast Visitor Center entrance in Everglades City, contains both temperate and tropical plant communities, including sawgrass prairies, mangrove and cypress swamps, rare orchids, pinelands and hardwood hammocks, as well as marine and estuarine environments. The park is known for its rich bird life, particularly wading birds such as the roseate spoonbill, wood stork, great blue heron and egrets, as well as birds of prey including ospreys, bald eagles, swallow-tailed kites, Everglades snail kites and more. It is also the only place in the world where alligators and crocodiles exist in the same habitat. Everglades National Park has been designated a **World Heritage Site**, an International Biosphere Reserve, and a Wetland of International Importance.

MEETINGS:

Meeting planners are increasingly sold on Florida's Paradise Coast as a location for meetings, conferences and incentive gatherings. The beauty of the destination and its diverse range of locations, services, support and activities for attendees set the stage for picture perfect events. The Naples, Marco Island and Gulf Coast Everglades area provides the perfect backdrop for groups, conferences, association meetings, family gatherings and more. Planners are attracted to the many values available at the area's excellent hotel and resort-based conference facilities, and the area's small city charm is enhanced by world class amenities often found only in much larger destinations. Begin planning at www.ParadiseCoast.com/meetings.

GETTING HERE:

Air: Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW) provides nonstop service to 47 destinations on 17 air carriers. J.D. Power's 2015 North American Airport Satisfaction Study shows RSW ranks as the #1 medium size airport in the country. The study, in its 10th year, measures overall traveler satisfaction in the areas of terminal facilities, airport accessibility, security check, baggage claim, check-in/baggage check and terminal shopping. RSW's score was 792, the highest in the entire study for 2015 – the average was 752 for medium and 719 for large airports. There is now direct air service between Naples Municipal Airport (APF) and Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) as well as flights to Portland, Maine (PWM), and in-state flights to Vero Beach and Melbourne

Highways: Located just two hours from Miami and Ft. Lauderdale, four hours from Orlando and three hours from Tampa, Florida's Paradise Coast is easily accessible from some of the state's largest cities via I-75, including the Alligator Alley portion between Naples and Ft. Lauderdale, and U.S. 41, the Tamiami Trail that provides a scenic route through the Big Cypress portion of the Everglades between Naples and Miami.