

Southwest Florida

Egmont Key State Park

A refuge for wildlife and people

Real Fun in the Real Florida

Welcome to Egmont Key State Park, an island park at the entrance to Tampa Bay. Although primarily a wildlife refuge, this park can also be a personal refuge - a place to relax while collecting shells or walking along secluded, pristine **beaches**.

Whether you are interested in nature or Florida history, it can be found here. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the U.S. Coast Guard cooperatively administer this island. Egmont Key is a federal wildlife refuge protecting populations of gopher tortoises and box turtles, and several species of nesting birds, as well as being a state park. The U.S. Coast Guard maintains the lighthouse.

Egmont Key has an interesting history that includes an 1858 **lighthouse**, built to aid ships entering Tampa Bay. **Gun batteries**, built to

defend Tampa Bay following the Spanish-American War of 1898, stir the imagination. One hundred-year old brick roads remind visitors of the days when the island was the site of Fort Dade, a military community of 300 residents.

After touring the **historic sites** and **trails**, visitors can enjoy **swimming, picnicking, wildlife viewing** and **fishing**. **Shell collecting** along the beaches is a favorite activity year-round.

Collecting of live shells is prohibited. The island is accessible only by private boat. There is no drinking water on the island and there are no stores, so please remember to bring water, food and sunscreen when you visit.

History & Nature

Named in honor of John Perceval, the second Earl of Egmont and member of the Irish House of Commons in 1763, Egmont Key has had Spanish conquistadors and nuclear submarines pass its shores as they entered Tampa Bay.

In the 1830s, as shipping increased, so did the number of ships that were grounded on the numerous sandbars around Egmont Key. Congress

authorized funds to construct a lighthouse on the island. When completed in 1848, it was the only lighthouse between St. Marks and Key West. When the Great Hurricane of 1848 struck in September, tides 15 feet above normal washed over the island and damaged the lighthouse. Another storm did additional damage, prompting Congress to appropriate funds to rebuild the lightkeeper's residence and the lighthouse. In 1858, the lighthouse was reconstructed to "withstand any storm."

During the late 1850s, at the end of the Third Seminole War, the island served as a camp for captured Seminoles and was later occupied by the Union Navy during the Civil War.

In 1898, as the Spanish-American War threatened, Fort Dade was built on the island and remained active until 1923.

The Tampa Bay Pilots Association set up operations on the island in 1926. A pilot's skill and knowledge is needed to guide ships safely in and out of the harbor. When ships approach Tampa Bay, a pilot boards that vessel and takes it to the docks. As the vessel leaves the dock, a pilot guides it out again. The pilots' skill and knowledge helps guide the ships safely in and out of the harbor. This in turn

protects the bay from environmental damage that could result from groundings and/or collisions.

Directions

Located at the mouth of Tampa Bay, southwest of Fort DeSoto Beach. Access by private boat only.

Park Guidelines

- Hours of operation are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is not required. Portions of the island are a wildlife refuge and access is not permitted.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected.
- The collection, destruction or disturbance of plants, animals or park property is prohibited.
- Pets are not permitted in the park.

- Fishing, boating and swimming are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- For information about joining the Egmont Key Alliance, Inc., call (727) 893-2627.
- 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 the ranger station.

Contact Information

Florida State Parks
Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Recreation and Parks
Egmont Key State Park
4905 34th Street South, #5000
St. Petersburg, FL 33711

Page 6 of 6

(727) 893-2627

www.FloridaStateParks.org