

Southwest Florida

Gasparilla Island State Park

World famous tarpon fishing

Real Fun in the Real Florida

This 127-acre park, located at the southern tip of Gasparilla Island, is one in a chain of barrier islands that extend along the gulf coast of Florida. Charlotte Harbor and Pine Island Sound separate the island from the mainland. A 1890s **lighthouse**, outstanding fishing and superb beaches are part of this island park's charm.

Recreational activities offered at Gasparilla Island State Park include **swimming, fishing, surfing, picnicking, shelling** and visiting the Boca Grande Lighthouse Museum. Please contact the park office for **museum** hours.

Two **beach** areas, Sea Grape and Range Light, provide year-round swimming in the Gulf of Mexico and excellent saltwater fishing in the waters adjacent to the park and in the deep waters of

Boca Grande Pass. Surfers can launch their boards from the Sea Grape or Dune beach areas. *Tidal flows can cause dangerous currents. Caution should be observed when swimming or surfing as lifeguards are not provided. Advisory signs should be obeyed. Swimming and surfing is at your own risk.*

Two picnic areas are located in the park, one at the northern end of the park and one adjacent to the lighthouse. Both areas offer scenic views of the surrounding water. Shelling is particularly good during winter; however, visitors are reminded that collecting live shells (i.e. hermit crabs, sand dollars, etc.) is prohibited.

History & Nature

Fish were and continue to be an important part of the cultural history of Gasparilla Island. The Calusa, a mound-building culture centered in Charlotte Harbor when the Spanish first arrived in Florida, likely fished area waters for a living. In the 1700s, Spanish fishermen arrived and established camps along the shore where fish were shipped to Cuba.

In the 1800s, American settlers were attracted to Charlotte Harbor by its rich bounty of sea life. By the 1900s, Gasparilla Island was seasonal host to many prominent sport anglers who fished for tarpon in Boca Grande Pass. This water, which separates Gasparilla and Cayo Costa islands, became known as the *Tarpon Capital of the World*.

The oldest structure on Gasparilla Island and one of the oldest in Lee County is the Boca Grande Lighthouse, built in 1890. The U.S. Coast Guard operated the lighthouse until 1966. After 20 years of abandonment, and a major renovation, the lighthouse was rededicated in 1986. It is listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*. The State assumed ownership of the property and opened it to the public as a state park in 1983. The lighthouse contains a museum and visitor center depicting the history of the lighthouse and Boca Grande.

Several imperiled species inhabit the park and its waters, such as gopher tortoises, manatees and turtles. A variety of shorebirds, including herons and egrets, can also be seen at the park.

The fish and shellfish resources of the waters surrounding Gasparilla Island are among the richest in the state. Some of the fish caught in this

area include redfish, trout, cobia, snook and tarpon.

Directions

U.S. 41 to County Road 776 to Englewood. Placida Road (County Road 775) to Boca Grande Causeway (toll bridge). Causeway to Fifth Street and turn right. Turn left on Gilchrist Road (Gulf Blvd), which will dead end at the park.

Park Guidelines

- Hours are 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year.
- An entrance fee is required.
- All plants, animals and park property are protected. The collection, destruction or disturbance of plants, animals or park property is prohibited.
- Pets are permitted in designated areas only. Pets must be kept on a leash no longer than 6 feet and well behaved at all times.

- Fishing, boating, swimming and fires are allowed in designated areas only. A Florida fishing license may be required.
- Fireworks and hunting are prohibited.
- Alcoholic beverage consumption is allowed in designated areas only.
- Become a volunteer. Inquire at the ranger station.
- To join the Barrier Island Parks Society, Inc. call (941) 964-0375.
- 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

Gasparilla Island State Park

880 Belcher Road

Boca Grande, FL 33921

(941) 964-0375

FloridaStateParks.org