

Southwest Region

Alafia River

This park offers some of the most challenging off-road bicycling trails in Florida. Once the site of a phosphate mine, the reclaimed land has topography with radical elevation changes.

Equestrians and hikers can explore 20 miles of trails that travel through mixed hardwood forests, pine flatwoods and rolling hills. Bird-watchers and nature enthusiasts will delight in the abundance of wildlife along the trails. Scattered lakes and the south prong of the Alafia River provide opportunities for canoeing and fishing. Picnic pavilions and a playground are available. For overnight stays, the park has a full-facility campground and equestrian-friendly campsites. Camping reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. Annual special events include Carriage Mobstacle in February, Talon Adventure Race in May, FL Championship Race, Alafia Fat Tire Festival and X-Country Marathon, Half Marathon, 5K & 10K in October. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located 10 miles southeast of Tampa on County Road 39.

**14326 South County Road 39, Lithia, FL
33547 (813) 672-5320**

Anclote Key Preserve State Park

Blue-green Gulf waters lap gently along the preserve's beautiful four mile beach. Located three miles off the coast of Tarpon Springs, this park is accessible by private boat or ferry service leaving from the Anclote River. Visitors must bring water and supplies; there are no provisions on the island. The park is home to at least 43 species of birds, including the American oystercatcher, bald eagle and piping plover. A picturesque 1887 lighthouse stands as a sentinel on the southern end of the island. Visitors can swim and sunbathe at the beach, then fire up a grill and enjoy a picnic at the pavilion on the north end of the island. There is no charge for overnight stays in the primitive campground, but campers must check in by calling the park before arrival. For ferry information and fees, call Sun Line Cruises at (727) 744-4468 or Sponge-O-Rama at (727) 943-2164. Located three miles off the coast of Tarpon Springs.

**For more information or to visit this park,
contact: Honeymoon Island State
Park, #1 Causeway Boulevard, Dunedin, FL
34698 (727) 469-5942**

Beker

The Beker property has not yet been developed for recreation, but consists of two parcels that are accessible to the public. The Wingate Creek property is available to the public for hiking, birding and nature study. Access to the South Fork property is difficult and requires extensive walking. Plans are underway to improve future access. **For more information or to visit this park, contact: Lake Manatee State Park, 20007 State Road 64, Bradenton, FL 34212 (941) 741-3028**

Caladesi Island State Park

One of the first in a chain of barrier islands along Florida's Gulf Coast, Caladesi's white sandy beach has been consistently ranked among the nation's best. In 2008, it was named the Best Beach in North America. The park is accessible only by private boat or ferry from Honeymoon Island State Park. Beach lovers can enjoy swimming, sunbathing and beachcombing. Saltwater anglers can fish from their boats or throw a line out into the surf. Nature enthusiasts watch wildlife while hiking the three-mile nature trail through the island's interior or paddling a three-mile kayak trail through the mangroves and bay. Picnic tables and

shelters are located near the beach; picnic pavilions can be reserved for a fee. The park has a marina with electric and water hookups for boaters. The park also has a snack bar and gift shop. For ferry information call (727) 734-5263. Annual special events include Great American Cleanup in March. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located one mile west of Dunedin off the Gulf.

For more information or to visit this park, contact: Honeymoon Island State Park, #1 Causeway Boulevard, Dunedin, FL 34698 (727) 469-5918

Cayo Costa State Park

With nine miles of beautiful beaches and acres of pine forests, oak-palm hammocks and mangrove swamps, this barrier island park is a Gulf Coast paradise. The park is accessible only by private boat or ferry. Visitors may see West Indian manatees and dolphins in the waters around the park, as well as a spectacular assortment of birds. On the island, visitors can swim and snorkel in the surf, enjoy the sun and picnic in the shade. Shelling is especially good during the winter months. Nature trails provide opportunities for hiking and off-road bicycling. Saltwater anglers can fish from their boats or from shore. Park rangers

use an amphitheater to provide educational programs about the island's ecology and history. For overnight stays, the park offers primitive cabins and tent camping. Reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. For ferry and rental information, call (239) 283-0015. Located directly south of Boca Grande.

For more information or to visit this park, contact: Gasparilla Island State Park, 880 Belcher Road, Boca Grande, FL 33921 (941) 964-0375

Charlotte Harbor Preserve State Park

Comprised of 42,000 acres and protecting 70 miles of shoreline along Charlotte Harbor, this park offers hiking, fishing, paddling and wildlife observation in the park's many natural communities, including mangrove forests, marshes, scrub habitats and pine flatwoods. Portions of two paddle trail systems wind through the park. Hikers and bird-watchers can access Charlotte Harbor's upland areas at pedestrian walkthroughs available in each section of the park and explore the wildlife found along three marked

trails. The Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center offers a visitor center, environmental education programs, interpretive guided hikes and six miles of marked trails. More information can be found at www.checflorida.org. Visitors are welcome to explore other areas of the Preserve, unless posted as closed, but should be aware that these areas are a remote and primitive wilderness. Visitors should take a compass, a map and sufficient water for their trip. No restrooms or drinking water are available. Annual special events include Matlacha Pass Estuary Day Paddle in September and Coral Creek-Cape Haze Estuary Day Paddle in October. Other events and ranger programs are available.

**12301 Burnt Store Road, Punta Gorda, FL
33955-9204 (941) 575-5861**

Cockroach Bay Preserve State Park

Horseshoe crabs were once so abundant along the shores of Florida's west coast that early Spanish explorers called them cockroaches, believing them to be seagoing cousins of the insects. Many people believe that is how Cockroach Bay received its unlikely name. The preserve is made up of islands scattered from Little Manatee River along the shore of southeast Tampa Bay and into Cockroach Bay. A

haven for bird-watching and fishing, the preserve is accessible by kayak or canoe. Located west of U.S. 41 about four miles north of the Manatee County line.

For more information or to visit this park, contact: Judah P. Benjamin Confederate Memorial at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park, 3708 Patten Avenue, Ellenton, FL 34222 (941) 721-2068 or (941) 723-4536

Collier-Seminole State Park

This park features a wealth of vegetation and wildlife typical of the Everglades, along with a forest made up of tropical trees. Although rare elsewhere, the Florida royal palm is a common tree here. The park is also the site of a National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark, the Bay City Walking Dredge. Built in 1924, it was used to build the Tamiami Trail highway (U.S. 41) through the Everglades, linking Tampa to Miami. Hiking, bicycling and canoeing trails offer opportunities for visitors to explore the park's remarkable wilderness. The park offers canoe rentals along with a boat ramp that provides access to the Blackwater River where anglers can enjoy both freshwater and saltwater fishing. Campers can spend the night in a full-facility campground. Camping reservations may be made by visiting

ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287.

Youth/group and primitive campsites are also available. The picnic areas have pavilions and grills for use on a first-come, first-served basis. Annual special events include Native American/Pioneer Heritage Days in January and Bluegrass Festival in February. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located on U.S. 41, eight miles south of County Road 951 (Collier Boulevard).

**20200 E. Tamiami Trail, Naples, FL 34114
(239) 394-3397**

Dade Battlefield Historic State Park

The battle that started the Second Seminole War is commemorated in January each year under the oaks of Dade Battlefield. On December 28, 1835, Seminole Indian warriors ambushed 108 soldiers at this site - only three soldiers survived. The park protects not only a historic battlefield, but also the natural communities as they existed when the soldiers and Seminoles battled long ago. Strolling a half-mile nature trail through pine flatwoods, visitors might see gopher tortoises, woodpeckers, songbirds, hawks and indigo snakes. The park has a playground, picnic area with covered shelters

and a recreation hall. The visitors center has information and displays about the battle and visitors can watch a 12-minute video history, *This Land, These Men*. The center is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Annual special events include Reenactment and Trade Fair in January and WWII Commemorative/Salute to Veterans in August. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located off I-75—exit 314—west of U.S. 301.

**7200 County Road 603, Bushnell, FL 33513
(352) 793-4781**

Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park

One of the most popular seashore destinations in Naples, this park's mile-long stretch of sugar white sand has been rated as one of the best beaches in the nation. The beach is popular for sunbathing, swimming, beachcombing, snorkeling and picnicking. Fishing at the beach along Wiggins Pass, where swimming is not allowed, is another popular activity. For saltwater or freshwater fishing, boaters can launch their vessels into Water Turkey Bay and travel to the Gulf or up the Cocohatchee River. Kayakers can enjoy paddling through estuaries; scuba divers can explore the hard bottom reef in the Gulf. At the north end of the island, a tower gives visitors a bird's-eye view of Wiggins Pass and the surrounding coastal

habitat. NOTE: To avoid overcrowding during the busy winter season, the park closes its gates when it reaches maximum capacity. Annual special events include Wildlife & Wildlands Art Show in January, Nature Festival in March and Resident Artist Show in December. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located in North Naples five miles west of I-75—exit 111.

**11135 Gulfshore Drive North, Naples, FL
34108 (239) 597-6196**

Don Pedro Island State Park

This beautiful little island is part of an extensive chain of barrier islands extending along the Gulf Coast. Between Knight Island and Little Gasparilla Island, Don Pedro is accessible only by private boat. Boaters can tie up at the dock on the bay side of the island which is lined with mangroves. Access to the dock is through a 2.5-foot deep channel south of the Cape Haze power line crossing. Visitors might see endangered animals such as West Indian manatees, gopher tortoises, bald eagles and American oystercatchers. With a mile of white sand beach, popular activities on the island's Gulf side include sunbathing, swimming, snorkeling and shelling. Boat and surf fishing are also favorite pastimes. For hiking and nature study, trails meander through the land base

portion of this park on the Cape Haze Peninsula. Located off the coast of Cape Haze about nine miles south of Englewood. Boating location is Nautical Waterproof Chart #25. Intracoastal Waterway directional signs guide visitors to the park.

For more information or to visit this park, contact: Gasparilla Island State Park, 880 Belcher Road, Boca Grande, FL 33921 (941) 964-0375

Egmont Key

Although this park is primarily a wildlife refuge, it can be a personal refuge - a place to relax and collect shells along secluded beaches. Accessible only by private boat, Egmont Key has a natural and cultural history, including a lighthouse that has stood since 1858. During the 19th century, the island served as a camp for captured Seminoles at the end of the Third Seminole War 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. After touring the historic sites and trails, visitors can enjoy swimming, fishing, wildlife viewing and picnicking. Annual special events include Discover the Island in November. Other events and ranger programs are available.

Located at the mouth of Tampa Bay, southwest of Fort DeSoto Beach.

For more information or to visit this park, contact: Honeymoon Island State Park, #1 Causeway Boulevard, Dunedin, FL 34698 (727) 469-5942

Estero Bay Preserve State Park

The first aquatic preserve established in Florida protects the water, inlets and islands along 10 miles of Estero Bay. The preserve is home to a wide variety of wildlife including the bald eagle. Visitors can canoe or kayak in the bay or on the Estero River. Miles of trails offer visitors the opportunities to hike, bicycle or study the wildlife and native vegetation protected here. There are gopher tortoises, fiddler crabs, slash pines and live oaks throughout the park. Located near Estero, between Fort Myers and Naples.

For more information or to visit this park, contact: Koreshan State Historic Site, U.S. 41 at Corkscrew Road, Estero, FL 33928 (239) 992-0311

Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park

Winding through the Florida Everglades is a narrow thread of forested swamp called the Fakahatchee Strand. This vast wilderness is a mosaic of royal palm stands, cypress domes and grassy prairies dotted with wild bromeliads, native ferns and orchids. The park's wildlife includes a number of threatened and endangered species. The Florida panther, wood stork, Florida black bear, mangrove fox squirrel and Everglades mink have all been seen within the preserve. Although there is limited access to the preserve, visitors can see some areas by driving through a portion of the park on Janes Scenic Drive, an 11-mile unpaved gravel road. At the Big Cypress Bend, on the north side of U.S. 41 about seven miles west of Route 29, visitors can walk along a 2,000-foot boardwalk to experience the beauty of a magnificent old growth cypress forest. For the truly adventurous, the park offers guided swamp walks once a month from November through February. Located west of Copeland on State Road 29.

**137 Coastline Drive, Copeland, FL 34137
(239) 695-4593**

Gasparilla Island State Park

Separated from the mainland by Charlotte Harbor and Pine Island Sound, this island is part of a chain of Gulf Coast barrier islands. The centerpiece of Gasparilla is the restored Boca Grande Lighthouse built in 1890. Swimming, snorkeling, fishing and nature study are popular activities. Shelling is particularly good in the winter months. Two picnic areas offer pavilions for shade and scenic views of the surrounding water. The lighthouse is open to the public 10 a.m.-4 p.m. daily from November through May. From June through October it is open Wednesday through Sunday. It is closed on these holidays: New Year's, Martin Luther King's Birthday, Easter, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Annual special events include Christmas Lighting of the Lighthouse in December. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located on the south end of Gasparilla Island on the Boca Grande Causeway (private toll) at County Road 775 and Placida.

**880 Belcher Road, Boca Raton, FL 33921
(941) 964-0375**

Highlands Hammock State Park

One of Florida's oldest parks, opening to the public in 1931, Highlands Hammock was established

when local citizens came together to promote the hammock as a candidate for national park status. During the Great Depression, just prior to World War II, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) developed additional park facilities and the beginnings of a botanical garden. Today, many visitors enjoy bicycling the scenic three-mile loop drive or hiking along the park's nine trails. An elevated boardwalk traverses an old-growth cypress swamp. Picnicking is another popular activity as are ranger-guided tours of the park. Highlands Hammock State Park offers a full-facility campground, as well as a youth/group tent campground. Campground reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. A recreation hall and several picnic pavilions are available for rent. A museum showcasing the history of the CCC is open 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Annual special events include Firecracker 4th of July 5K Race in July, Music in the Park in October, CCC Festival and Turkey Trot 5K in November. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located on County Road 634, four miles west of Sebring.

5931 Hammock Road, Sebring, FL 33872
(863) 386-6094

Hillsborough River State Park

Opened in 1938 as one of Florida's first state parks, this park is divided by the swiftly flowing Hillsborough River. Fort Foster, a replica of an 1837 fort from the Second Seminole War, is located on the park grounds adjacent to the river. Fort tours are offered on weekends or with a reservation. The river provides opportunities for fishing, canoeing and kayaking; a canoe/kayak launch is available on the river. Canoes can be rented at the park's concession which also provides food, beverages, picnic supplies and souvenirs. Hikers can walk more than seven miles along four nature trails. The Wetlands Restoration Trail accommodates bicyclists and hikers. When the weather calls for it, visitors can enjoy a refreshing swim in the park's ADA accessible swimming pool. The park offers full-facility camping and a youth/group tent campground. A primitive campsite is available via a hiking trail; reservations are recommended. Camping reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. Annual special events include Fort Foster Rendezvous in February, Fall Harvest Festival in October and Candlelight Tours of Fort Foster in December. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located 12 miles north of

Tampa and six miles south of Zephyrhills on U.S. 301.

**15402 U.S. 301 North, Thonotosassa, FL
33592 (813) 987-6771**

Honeymoon Island State Park

The pioneers called it Hog Island, but it became Honeymoon Isle in 1939 when a New York developer built 50 palm-thatched bungalows for honeymooners. Today, more visitors than ever drive across the Dunedin Causeway to enjoy this sun-drenched park and its Gulf beaches. Nature lovers will find osprey nests, a wide variety of shorebirds and one of the few remaining slash pine forests in southern Florida on the three mile Osprey Trail. Four miles of beach offer plenty of recreational opportunities from sunbathing and shelling to good old sand castle building. The Rotary Centennial Nature Center offers information on the park's history, wildlife and diverse ecosystems while providing a wrap-around deck for viewing wading birds and other wildlife in the tidal flats. Annual special events include Earth Day in April, Shark Bite Challenge Kayak Race in April, Dunedin Rotary Sprint Triathlon in June, 4th of July Midnight Run in July and Halloween in the Park in October. Other events and ranger programs are available.

**#1 Causeway Boulevard, Dunedin, FL 34698
(727) 469-5942**

Judah P. Benjamin Confederate Memorial at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park

This antebellum mansion was home to Major Robert Gamble and headquarters of an extensive sugar plantation. It is the only surviving plantation house in South Florida. It is believed that Confederate Secretary of State, Judah P. Benjamin, took refuge here after the fall of the Confederacy until his safe passage to England could be secured. In 1925, the house and 16 acres were saved by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and donated to the state. Today, the mansion is furnished in the style of a successful mid-19th century plantation. Guided tours of the house are given six times a day, Thursday through Monday. There are picnic tables on the grounds. The visitors center is open from 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Thursday through Monday; it is closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's. Annual special events include Plantation Festival/Arts and Crafts Show in February, Spring Open House in March, Car & Truck Show in November and Christmas Open House in December. Other events

and ranger programs are available. Located in Ellenton on U.S. 301 East.

**3708 Patten Avenue, Ellenton, FL 34222
(941) 723-4536**

Koreshan State Historic Site

Throughout its history, Florida has welcomed pioneers of all kinds. Cyrus Reed Teed was probably the most unusual, bringing followers to Estero in 1894 to build 'New Jerusalem' for his new faith, 'Koreshanity.' The colony, known as the Koreshan Unity, believed that the entire universe existed within a giant, hollow sphere. The colony began fading after Teed's death in 1908. In 1961 the last four members deeded the land to the state. Today, visitors can fish, picnic, boat and hike where Teed's visionaries once carried out survey experiments to "prove" the horizon on the beaches curves upward. A boat ramp and canoe rentals are available. Visitors can take self-guided tours of the settlement or a ranger-guided tour. For overnight stays, the park has a full-facility campground. Camping reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. Annual special events include Ghost Walk in January and February, Antique Engine Show in March, Earth Day in April, Vintage RV Show in November and

Bluegrass Festival in December. Campers can enjoy campfire programs every Saturday night from January through March. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located on U.S. 41 at Corkscrew Road.

3800 Corkscrew Road, Estero, FL 33928 (239) 992-0311

Lake June-in-Winter Scrub State Park

This park protects one of the state's most endangered natural communities - sand pine scrub - often called "Florida's desert." Some of Florida's rarest plants and animals, including the Florida scrub-jay, Florida scrub lizard, Florida mouse, deer, gopher tortoise and bobcat are found here. Ospreys and bald eagles are frequently sighted along the three miles of lakefront. This relatively new park is still in development and best suited to those seeking a remote wilderness experience and nature study. Visitors can hike along the white sand firelanes, walk a half-mile nature trail, fish from the lakeshore or launch a canoe or kayak onto the lake. A picnic area has tables and a shelter, but no grills. Located about 12 miles south of Sebring off U.S. 27.

**Daffodil Road, Lake Placid, FL 33852 (863)
386-6094**

Lake Manatee State Park

This park extends along three miles of the south shore of Lake Manatee, which serves as a water reservoir for Manatee and Sarasota counties. The rest of the park is primarily pine flatwoods and sand pine scrub with some depression marshes and hardwood forests. A boat ramp provides easy access to the lake; boat motors must be less than 20 horsepower. Canoeing and kayaking are also popular activities. The lake offers excellent freshwater fishing and anglers can fish from their boats or from the park's fishing dock. Swimming is permitted in a designated area of Lake Manatee; a facility with showers is located nearby. A large picnic area is nestled in a sand pine scrub area near the lake. A picnic pavilion may be reserved for a fee. Canoe, horseshoe and volleyball rentals are available. Campers can enjoy campfire programs every Saturday night from January through March. Camping reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. Annual special events include Discover Lake Manatee in February and Tin Can Tourist in March. Other events and ranger programs are

available. Located 15 miles east of Bradenton on State Road 64.

**20007 State Road 64, Bradenton, FL 34212
(941) 741-3028**

Little Manatee River State Park

The Little River begins in a swampy area near Fort Lonesome and flows almost 40 miles before emptying into Tampa Bay. The river has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water and is part of the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve.

Visitors can fish along the banks of the river or rent canoes at the ranger station. Wildlife enthusiasts can enjoy hiking the 6.5 mile trail through the park's northern wilderness area. For those who prefer their hikes on horseback, the park has 12 miles of equestrian trails and four equestrian campsites. Campers can spend the night in a full-facility campground. Camping reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. A primitive campsite is a 2.5-mile hike down the trail. A youth/group campground accommodates up to 20 people. The scenic picnic area along the river has tables, grills and pavilions. Pavilions can be reserved for a fee. Unreserved pavilions are available on a first-come, first-served

basis. Annual special events include Poker Ride in January and Mystery Map Event in October. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located five miles south of Sun City, off U.S. 301 on Lightfoot Road.

215 Lightfoot Road, Wimauma, FL 33598
(813) 671-5005

Lovers Key State Park

For years, Lovers Key was accessible only by boat and it was said that only lovers traveled to the island to enjoy its remote and solitary beach. Today, it is one of four barrier islands that make up this state park. A haven for wildlife, the islands and their waters are home to West Indian manatees, bottlenose dolphins, roseate spoonbills, marsh rabbits and bald eagles. The two-mile beach is accessible by boardwalk or tram and is popular for shelling, swimming, picnicking and sunbathing. Black Island has more than five miles of multi-use trails for hiking and bicycling. Anglers and boaters can launch their vessels from the park's boat ramp. The park's concession offers boat and fishing tours, as well as bicycle, canoe and kayak rentals. For tour reservations, call (239) 765-7788. Annual special events include Turtle Trot 5K Race in May and Great Outdoor Adventure/Calusa Blueway Paddling Festival in October. Other events

and ranger programs are available. Located on County Road 865 between Fort Myers Beach and Bonita Beach in Lee County.

8700 Estero Boulevard, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931 (239) 463-4588

Madira Bickel Mound State Archeological Site

This ancient Native American site was the first in Florida to be designated a State Archaeological Site. Karl and Madira Bickel donated the mound and surrounding property to the state in 1948. The flat-topped ceremonial mound - composed of sand, shell and village debris - measures 100 by 170 feet at the base and 20 feet in height. Archaeological excavations have disclosed at least three periods of Native American cultures, the earliest dating back 2,000 years. Picnic tables and a kiosk with historic information are available. Plans for the future include a nature trail; no additional amenities are available at this time. Located on Bayshore Drive in Palmetto approximately 1.5 miles west of U.S. 19 and one mile south of I-275.

Bayshore Drive, Palmetto, FL (941) 723-4536

Mound Key Archeological State Park

Framed in forests of mangrove trees, the shell mounds and ridges of Mound Key rise more than 30 feet above the waters of Estero Bay. Prehistoric Native Americans are credited with creating this island's complex of mounds with an accumulation of seashells, fish bones and pottery. Mound Key is believed to have been the ceremonial center of the Calusa Indians when the Spaniards first attempted to colonize Southwest Florida. In 1566, the Spanish governor of Florida established a settlement on the island with a fort and the first Jesuit mission in the Spanish New World. The settlement was abandoned three years later after violent clashes with the Indians. The only access to the island is by boat; there are no facilities.

Interpretive displays can be found along a trail that spans the width of the island. Located in Estero Bay, several miles by boat from Koreshan State Historic Site or Lovers Key State Park.

**Care of Koreshan State Historical Site, 3800
Corkscrew Road, Estero, FL 33928 (239)
992-0311**

Myakka River State Park

One of the oldest and largest state parks, Myakka protects one of the state's most diverse natural areas. The Myakka River, designated as a Florida Wild and Scenic River, flows through 58 square miles of wetlands, prairies, hammocks and pinelands. Visitors can enjoy wildlife viewing from a boardwalk that stretches over Upper Myakka Lake, then take to the treetops with a stroll along the canopy walkway. The park's river and two lakes provide opportunities for boating, freshwater fishing, canoeing and kayaking; a boat ramp provides access to Upper Myakka Lake. Hikers can explore trails that cross large expanses of rare Florida dry prairie. Scenic lake tours are offered daily on the world's two largest airboats. Safari tram tours of the park's backcountry are offered from mid-December through May. Full-facility campgrounds and primitive campsites are available. Five palm log cabins, built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, have been modernized for comfortable lodging. Camping and cabin reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. Annual special events include Full Moon Concert in January, February and March. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located nine miles east of Sarasota on State Road 72.

**13208 State Road 72, Sarasota, FL 34241
(941) 361-6511**

Oscar Scherer State Park

A large acreage of scrubby flatwoods makes this park one of the best places to see Florida scrub-jays, a threatened species found only in Florida. The park protects scrubby and pine flatwoods that were once widespread throughout Sarasota County. Fifteen miles of trails through these beautiful natural areas provide opportunities for hiking, bicycling and wildlife viewing. Canoeists and kayakers can paddle along South Creek, a blackwater stream that flows to the Gulf of Mexico. Canoe and kayak rentals are available; motorized boats are not permitted in the park boundaries. Anglers enjoy freshwater and saltwater fishing along the creek. Anglers can fish along the shores of Lake Osprey, which is also the park's swimming destination. Picnic areas along South Creek are equipped with grills; pavilions can be reserved for a fee. The park has full-facility campsites and a youth/group campground. Camping reservations may be made by visiting ReserveAmerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at (800) 326-3521, TDD (888) 433-0287. The park's nature center has exhibits and videos about the park's natural communities. Annual special events include Hike

Oscar Scherer Day in January, Scrub-Jay 5K & Fun Walk in February, Fishathon and Earth Day in April. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located on U.S. 41 two miles south of Osprey.
1843 S. Tamiami Trail, Osprey, FL 34229
(941) 483-5956

Paynes Creek Historic State Park

During the 1840s, tensions between the settlers and Seminole Indians prompted authorities to establish a trading post in Florida's interior, away from settlements. Built in early 1849, the post was attacked and destroyed by renegade Indians that summer. In late 1849 Fort Chokonikla was built nearby as the first outpost in a chain of forts established to control the Seminoles. The Seminoles never attacked the fort, but the Army was nearly defeated by mosquitoes. Today, nature enthusiasts and hikers can enjoy walking along trails through the park's natural areas. Paynes Creek and the adjoining Peace River provide opportunities for canoeing, kayaking and fishing. A museum at the visitor center depicts the lives of Florida's Seminole Indians and pioneers during the 19th century. The visitor center is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Located one-half mile southeast of Bowling Green on Lake Branch summer. In late 1849 Fort Chokonikla was built nearby as the first

outpost in a chain of forts established to control the Seminoles. The Seminoles never attacked the fort, but the Army was nearly defeated by mosquitoes. Today, nature enthusiasts and hikers can enjoy walking along trails through the park's natural areas. Paynes Creek and the adjoining Peace River provide opportunities for canoeing, kayaking and fishing. A museum at the visitor center depicts the lives of Florida's Seminole Indians and pioneers during the 19th century. The visitor center is open 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily. Located one-half mile southeast of Bowling Green on Lake Branch Road.

**888 Lake Branch Road, Bowling Green, FL
33834 (863) 375-4717**

Skyway Fishing Pier State Park

When the new Sunshine Skyway Bridge was built over Tampa Bay, connecting St. Petersburg with Bradenton, the north and south spans of the old bridge were turned into fishing piers. Anglers can park their cars on the bridge within a few feet of their favorite fishing spot. The bridges are lighted at night so anglers can see to rig a line, bait the hook and get a good look at their catch. The light also attracts many species of fish, including snook, tarpon, grouper, black sea bass, Spanish mackerel, king mackerel, cobia, sheepshead, red snapper,

pompano and many more. Snacks, drinks, bait and fishing supplies are available at bait shops on both piers. The piers are open 24 hours a day, year-round. Located west of the Skyway Bridge on I-275 (U.S. 19).

**4905 34th Street South, #5000, St.
Petersburg, FL 33711 (727) 865-0668**

Stump Pass Beach State Park

At the southwest corner of Sarasota County there is a mile of beach where seashells and shark teeth wash up, and anglers fish the surf for prize catches. Visitors can enjoy an excellent view of the Gulf of Mexico, as well as a stretch of undeveloped Florida coastline. Visitors come to this secluded beach to enjoy the year-round swimming and sunbathing; shelling is best during the winter months. A hiking trail passes through five distinct natural communities that provide homes for many species of wildlife; covered picnic tables are located along the trail. While at the park, visitors might see West Indian manatees, gopher tortoises, snowy egrets, least terns and magnificent frigatebirds. Ranger-led turtle walks and beach nature walks are available in the summer. Located at the south end of Manasota Key off I-75, exit 191.

Manasota Key, Englewood, FL (941) 964-0375

Terra Ceia Preserve State Park

This park's 2,000 acres encompass mangrove forests, freshwater and saltwater wetlands and upland communities. Much of the preserve is in various stages of habitat restoration which is intended to return agricultural land to its natural and ecologically diverse condition. As restoration efforts continue, recreational facilities such as hiking trails, canoe/kayak launches, a boat ramp and interpretive kiosks are planned. Currently, kayaking is the primary activity within the preserve. Located south of I-275 on Terra Ceia Road.

**130 Terra Ceia Road, Terra Ceia, FL 34250
(941) 721-2068 or (941) 723-4536. For more information or to visit the park, contact Judah P. Benjamin Confederate Memorial at Gamble Plantation Historic State Park, 3708 Patten Avenue, Ellenton, FL 34222**

Weeki Wachee Springs State Park

The mermaids at Weeki Wachee Springs have delighted visitors since 1947. Today, visitors can

still witness the magic of the mermaids, take a river boat cruise and canoe or kayak on the Weeki Wachee River. The 538-acre park features a first magnitude spring and a 400-seat submerged theatre for watching the live mermaid show.

Buccaneer Bay offers a fun-filled flume ride for thrill seekers of all ages. The white sandy beach area and covered picnic pavilions provide a relaxing day for the entire family. Weeki Wachee's animal shows provide audiences with an entertaining and educational look at domesticated birds and reptiles. Located on U.S. 19 at the intersection of State Road 50, just north of Spring Hill and south of Homosassa Springs.

**6131 Commercial Way, Spring Hill, FL 34606
(352) 592-5656**

Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park

This park protects four miles of coastline along the Gulf of Mexico in western Pasco County. The salt spring looks small, but it is an amazing 320 feet deep. Gray fox, gopher tortoises, alligators and West Indian manatees call this park and its waters home. Birdwatchers can enjoy sighting raptors, wading birds, shore birds and migratory songbirds. A recent addition to the state park system,

Werner-Boyce has a picnic pavilion, tables, informational kiosk and a short hiking trail. Plans for the future include more access and recreational opportunities for visitors. Annual special events include Coastal Cleanup in September. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located off Scenic Drive in Port Richey. Turn west off U.S. 19 at Regency Park Boulevard, go .25 mile to the intersection of Scenic Drive and Cinema Drive.

**9120 Old Post Road, Port Richey, FL (727)
816-1890**

Ybor City Museum State Park

Don Vicente Martinez Ybor came to the frontier near Tampa and built a city that became the "Cigar Capital of the World." From the opening of the first cigar factory in 1886 until the 1930s, Ybor City flourished. This urban park is dedicated to the preservation of Ybor City's cultural heritage. The museum, housed in the historic Ferlita Bakery, traces the rich cultural history of Ybor City and the cigar-making industry. The museum has self-guided exhibits with written and audio information, and a video presentation. La Casita, a restored cigar worker's house, is open for viewing 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Guided tours are available daily, dependent on docent availability and group tour schedule. The

ornamental garden can be rented for events after regular park hours. Annual special events include The Ybor City Heritage & Cigar Festival in November. Other events and ranger programs are available. Located at the corner of 9th Avenue and 19th Street in Tampa.

**1818 Ninth Avenue, Tampa, FL 33605 (813)
247-6323**

Nature Photography Tips

Take pictures early in the day to eliminate heavy shadows.

Choose a subject or mood for your photo to make it interesting.

Remove things from the background that distract from your subject by repositioning your camera.

Hold your camera level.

Consider changing the focal point sometimes. Use the thirds rule, to keep your subject in two-thirds of the view.

When taking pictures of people or wildlife, be sure the eyes are in focus.