



# The Everglades

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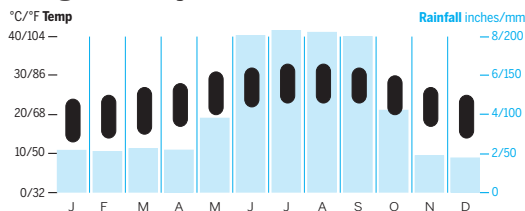
## Why Go?

The Everglades truly make South Florida unique, even more so than Miami. Called the 'River of Grass' by its initial Native American inhabitants, this is not just a wetland, or a swamp, or a lake, or a river or a prairie, or a grassland – it is all of the above, twisted together into a series of soft horizons, long vistas, sunsets that stretch across your entire field of vision and the creeping grin of a large population of dinosaur-era reptiles.

When you watch anhinga flexing their wings before breaking into a corkscrew dive, or the slow, Jurassic flap of a great blue heron gliding over its domain, or the sun kissing miles of unbroken saw grass as it sets behind humps of skeletal cypress domes, you'll have an idea of what we're speaking of. In a nation where natural beauty is measured by its capacity for drama, the Everglades subtly, contentedly flows on.

## When to Go

### Everglades City



**Dec–Mar** Dry season: top wildlife viewing along watercourses, but some kayaking will be difficult.

**Apr–Jun** Although the weather gets pretty hot, there's a good mix of water and wildlife.

**Jul–Nov** Lots of heat, lots of bugs and (except October and November) chances of hurricanes.

## EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

Although the grassy waters – the Everglades ecosystem – extend outside Everglades National Park (the third-largest in continental USA), you really need to enter the park to experience it. There are three main entrances and three main areas of the park: one along the southeast edge near Homestead and Florida City (Ernest Coe section); at the central-north side on the Tamiami Trail (Shark Valley section); and a third at the northwest shore (Gulf Coast section), past Everglades City. The Shark Valley and Gulf Coast sections of the park come one after the other in geographic succession, but the Ernest Coe area is entirely separate. At all of these entrances you'll pay \$10 for a vehicle pass, or \$5 if you're a cyclist, both of which are good for entrance for seven consecutive days into any entrance in the park.

These entrances allow for two good road trips from Miami. The first choice is heading west along the Tamiami Trail, past the Miccosukee reservation and Shark Valley, all the way to Everglades City, the Gulf Coast and the crystal waters of the 10,000 Islands.

The other option is to enter at Ernest Coe and take Hwy 9336 to Flamingo through the most 'Glades-y' landscape in the park, with unbroken vistas of wet prairie, big sky and long silences.

### **i** Getting There & Away

The largest subtropical wilderness in the continental USA is easily accessible from Miami. The Glades, which comprise the 80 southernmost miles of Florida, are bound by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Gulf of Mexico to the west. The Tamiami Trail (US Hwy 41) goes east-west, parallel to the more northern (and less interesting) Alligator Alley (I-75).

### **i** Getting Around

You need a car to properly enter the Everglades and once you're in, wearing a good pair of walking boots is essential to penetrate the interior. Having a canoe or kayak helps as well; these can be rented from outfits inside and outside of the park, or else you can seek out guided canoe and kayak tours. Bicycles are well suited to the flat roads of Everglades National Park, particularly in the area between Ernest Coe and Flamingo Point, but they're useless off the highway. In addition, the road shoulders in the park tend to be dangerously small.

## Tamiami Trail

Calle Ocho, in Miami's Little Havana (p85) happens to be the eastern end of the Tamiami Trail/US 41, which cuts through the Everglades to the Gulf of Mexico. So go west, young traveler, along US 41, a few dozen miles and several different worlds away from the city where the heat is on. This trip leads you onto the northern edges of the park, past long landscapes of flooded forest, gambling halls, swamp-buggy tours, roadside food shacks and other Old Florida accoutrements.

Past Hialeah, Miami fades like a trail of diminishing Starbucks until...*whoosh*...it's all huddled forest, open fields and a big canal off to the side (evidence of US 41's diversion of the Glades' all-important sheet flow). The surest sign the city is gone and the Glades have begun is the Confederate flag decals on **Pit BBQ** (p144). The empty road runs past the **Miccosukee Resort & Convention Center** (☎305-925-2555, 877-242-6464; www.miccosukee.com; 500 SW 177th Ave; r Dec-Mar/Apr-Nov \$150/120; ♿). It's essentially a casino-hotel complex full of slot machines and folks chunking coins into them – not really an ecological wonderland. Rooms have attractive geometric Native American designs worked into the furniture, but again, there's no need to stay here unless you're gambling.

As you head west you'll see fields and fields of pine forest and billboards advertising swamp tours. Airboats tours are an old-school way of seeing the Everglades (and there is something to be said for getting a tour from a raging Skynyrd fan with killer tats and better camo), but there are other ways of exploring the park as well.

### SHARK VALLEY

#### **i** Sights & Activities

##### Shark Valley

PARK

(☎305-221-8776; www.nps.gov/ever/planyourvisit/svdirections; car/cyclist \$10/5; ☀8:30am-6pm) Shark Valley sounds like it should be the headquarters for the villain in a James Bond movie, but it is in fact a slice of National Park Service grounds heavy with informative signs and knowledgeable rangers. Shark Valley is located in the cypress-and-hardwood-and-riverine section of the Everglades, a more traditionally jungly section of the park than the grassy fields and forest domes surrounding the Ernest Coe visitor center. A 15-mile/24km paved trail takes you past

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