



Boca Chita Key features a 65-foot ornamental lighthouse (open intermittently).

© MAURY H. SELL

Biscayne National Park, along Florida's southeastern edge, is known for clear blue water, golden sunshine, and verdant woodlands. Among the simple beauty are Biscayne's small islands (keys), shallow bay, and mangrove shoreline. Enjoy a deep dive into these complex ecosystems. Discover amazing subtropical worlds, including coral reefs that brim with the dazzling colors of aquatic life.



Sea fan
© JOHN BROOKS

A Caribbean-like climate saturates Biscayne with year-round warmth, ample sunshine, and abundant rainfall. Biscayne is rich with marine life and birds that either migrate through or make this place their home.

This water is extraordinarily clear. Inundated with sunlight, its shallow coral reefs teem with life—including a spectacular variety of colorful tropical fish. You could spend hours in the waters above the reefs just observing Biscayne's fascinating inhabitants.

The keys appear sparsely between sea and sky. They are home to an array of trees, flowers, ferns, vines, and shrubs. The forests—dark, humid, and evergreen—are home to many birds, butterflies, and other animals.

Established as a national monument in 1968, Biscayne was designated a national park in 1980 and enlarged to 173,000 acres. The park protects these lands, waters, and natural residents and preserves this subtropical setting for all to enjoy.

With water and sky in every direction, low-lying land, and lush forests, opportunities for exploration seem endless. Boaters, paddlers, anglers, snorkelers, and divers enjoy water recreation and observe underwater life. Land-goers watch wildlife on shore, go camping, have picnics, and hike trails. People also experience the area's tranquility by listening to nature's sounds, taking in scenic vistas, and finding solitude.

How will you explore Biscayne?

Mangrove Forest

The mangrove trees of tropical and subtropical coasts were once considered almost worthless. Some were used to make charcoal or cut for timber.

Biscayne's mangrove wilderness in the 1960s was called "a form of wasteland." Like thousands of other wetlands, it was cleared or filled to make way for harbors and expanding cities.

Now, however, we know the mangrove forests are vital to this area. Without them fewer fish and birds would be here. The bay's water would be dirty and murky, not clean and clear. People would have fewer or degraded opportunities to explore Biscayne.

What else do the mangrove forests do?

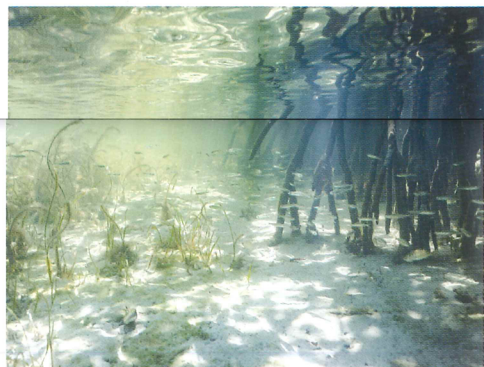
Provide a Productive Nursery

Life thrives in the mangrove swamp's brackish waters (where fresh and salt waters mix). Hidden in the mazes of tree roots, where the water is stained brown by tannins from the trees, is a productive nursery that shelters and feeds fish and other animals.

When fallen mangrove leaves feed bacteria and other microorganisms, a food web starts that supports underwater life and the birds that nest and roost in the trees.

Defend the Coast

Mangroves are a buffer between the bay and the mainland. The trees provide a natural defense against hurricane winds and waves. Without them Florida would be exposed to the full brunt of Atlantic hurricanes.



Mangrove roots and seagrass

Stay Rooted for Survival

Mangrove forests seem impenetrable—perhaps a snake or mosquito can move through easily but little else. Mangrove tree roots seem impenetrable too.

Black mangrove roots look like hundreds of fingers planted in the mud. They are the breathing organs necessary for a mangrove tree's survival in this water-logged environment.

The tangling roots of red mangroves either stretch down into the water from overhead branches or arch, stiltlike, out of the water. They keep the bay clean by trapping washed-up pollutants and eroded soil.



Barracuda and seagrass

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Seagrass Meadows

Biscayne's shallow waters are remarkably transparent. They serve as a blue-green window to a world of starfish, sponges, sea urchins, crabs, fish of all sizes and kinds, and hundreds more species of marine animals and plants.

Biscayne Bay is a powerhouse that draws the sun's energy and uses it to support a far-reaching and complex web of life. Many sun-dappled fish that dazzle divers and snorkelers on the coral reefs by day feed in the bay at night.

The bay is also a natural reservoir full of rare and unusual wildlife. For many animals, these waters provide a home, temporary refuge, feeding ground, birthplace, or nursery.

Manatees depend on the bay's warm water, which provides the ample food supply that attracts this threatened marine mammal. The gentle giant visits the bay in winter to graze on turtle grass and manatee grass.

A History of Abundance

This coastal wilderness is the first-known place in the Southeast that Europeans explored. Juan Ponce de León of Spain led an expedition that sailed through Biscayne Bay in 1513. He named the flowery peninsula *La Florida*.

Later travelers, like late-1700s surveyor Andrew Ellicott, noted this region's bounty of life—from abundant fish to plentiful sea turtles including the loggerhead, green, and hawksbill.

Many people who settled the keys in the 1800s and early 1900s earned their living off the bay. Among them were Key West fishers who collected and sold the fast-growing, "fine-quality" bay sponges.

Today's commercial fishermen, snorkelers, anglers, and boaters reap many rewards from the bay, whose good health is reflected in the more than 200 types of fish that spend part of their lives here.

Like the mangrove shoreline the bay has a critical role as a fish nursery. The young of many coral reef fish (like parrotfish and butterflyfish) and sport fish (like grunts, snappers, and Spanish mackerel) come to this thick jungle of marine grasses to find food and shelter from large predators.

Protecting the Bay

In some northern areas of Biscayne pollutants poison the bay, and runoff from construction spills suffocating amounts of sediment. After years of cleanup the north bay is now recovering.

Biologist Hugh Smith in 1895 declared Biscayne Bay "one of the finest bodies of water on the coast of Florida." If well-protected, in another hundred years it still could be.

What can you do to protect Biscayne today and for future generations?



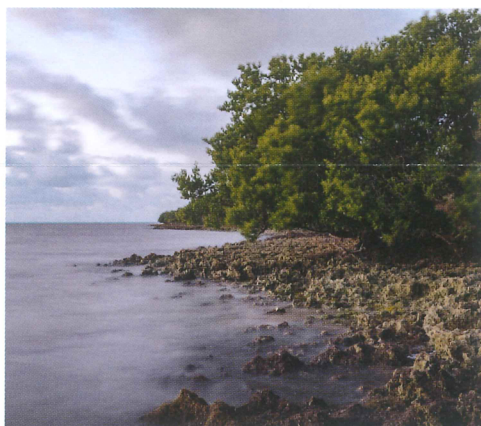
Sailboat

Hammocks on the Keys



About 100,000 years ago billions of coral animals began building a 150-mile chain of coral reefs that became the islands of the Florida Keys.

Corals are particular about where they build reefs. Water must be no cooler than 68°F, no deeper than 200 feet, clean, and well-lit. Corals find such conditions along the Florida Keys (in and south of Biscayne Bay), the Caribbean, and other tropical waters.



Elliott Key in the morning

A Tropical Paradise

Only tiny pockets in South Florida contain Biscayne's mixture of tropical trees and shrubs common to the West Indies.

North-flowing air, ocean currents, and storms delivered the pioneer seeds and plants that grew into the islands' lush, junglelike forests. Tree species include gumbo-limbo, satinleaf, devil's potato, mahogany, torchwood, strangler fig, and Jamaican dogwood.

Other native tropical species in these hardwood hammocks include golden orb weavers—spiders whose large, yellow webs betray their presence. The zebra longwing butterfly and the endangered Schaus swallowtail find refuge among these leaves and vines. Birds and a few mammals also share these mangrove-fringed keys.

A Sanctuary for Birds

Birds are drawn to Biscayne throughout the year. Each follows its own instincts for survival. Brown pelicans patrol the water's surface, diving to catch prey. White ibises meander across exposed mud flats, probing for small fish and crustaceans.

Large colonies of little blue heron, snowy egret, and other wading birds nest seasonally in the protected refuge of the Arsenicker Keys. The shallow waters surrounding the mangrove islands in the south bay are especially well-suited for the birds' foraging.



Great blue heron (white morph)

Coral Reef

Dive into the under-sea realm of living coral reefs for a wealth of discoveries. It's a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors, bold patterns, peculiar shapes, and intricate designs. Life among the reefs excites and mystifies snorkelers and scientists alike.



Coral polyps
© JOHN BROOKS

Meet the Reef Builders

The corals are puzzling creatures. Early biologists suspected they were plants, but each coral—including brain, finger, and staghorn—is a colony of thousands of tiny, soft-bodied animals called polyps. These relatives of sea anemone and jelly-

fish are not much larger than a dot on this page. Rarely out during the day, polyps emerge from their hard, stony skeletons at night to feed. Their outstretched tentacles catch drifting plankton for food.

An Undersea Metropolis

The creation of one reef requires the efforts of billions of individuals. Each one extracts the building material—calcium—from the ocean and uses it to make a protective, tube-shaped skeleton.

Hundreds of these skeletons together make a coral. The corals grow side to side and on top of each other. Many corals together form a reef.

Some of Biscayne's reefs are so old that parts of the keys have fossil coral rock.

Reefs are the cities of the sea. In and around them lives a huge and diverse population of fish and other marine animals. The reef hosts a complex food web from snails to sharks. Every hole, every crack is a home for something.



Vase sponge in a bed of seagrass
© JOHN BROOKS



Alina reef coral

The Many Fish of the Reef

Reefs host many of the world's most spectacular fish. Along Biscayne's reefs are over 600 types of fish ranging from the ordinary to the flamboyant—neon gobies, angelfish, parrotfish, wrasses, and more. Some fish are impressive in size, others in color, but few places on Earth match the diversity of life in Biscayne's underwater wilderness.

A Sea of Color

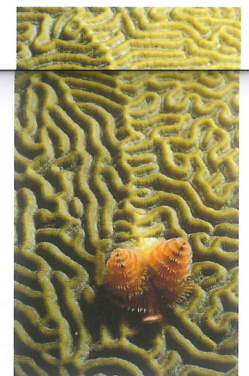
Attention-grabbing colors may advertise a fish's presence. Vividly colored wrasses attract other fish so they can clean them

of parasites and dead tissue, getting a meal in return. On the other hand some fish are masters of disguise. Multicolored bars, splotches, and stripes help blur the outline of some fish, making it difficult for predators to see them against the reef's complex background.

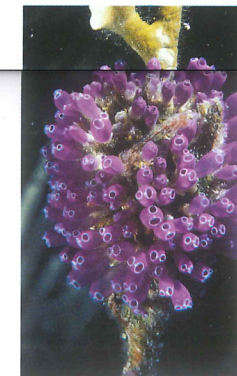
Many fish turn different colors at night, probably to hide from predators. Moray eels blend in with their surroundings. Unsuspecting fish that swim too close to them often get caught between the eels' powerful jaws and needle-sharp teeth.



Rock beauty angelfish
© JOHN BROOKS



Christmas tree worm and brain coral
© JOHN BROOKS



Tunicate
© JOHN BROOKS

A Montage of Motion

Morays are sedentary creatures, but most fish swim freely about the reefs. The solitary angelfish is one that moves with deliberate grace. Other fish protect themselves by darting about in close-knit groups of thousands that move with the precision of choreographed dancers.

Reef fish are noted for eccentric behavior. The sharp-beaked parrotfish can be seen, and even heard, munching on coral. Is coral an odd meal for a fish? Not really. Along with coral rock the parrotfish is devouring algae and polyps.



Queen angelfish
© JOHN BROOKS



Four-eye butterflyfish
© JOHN BROOKS



Parrotfish
© STEVE SIMONEN



Southern stingray
© JOHN BROOKS

Explore Biscayne

General Information

Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.

Convoy Point The Dante Fascell Visitor Center has exhibits, films, a gallery, museum, store, and activities schedule. Convoy Point has a picnic area with tables, fire grills, restrooms, and a short trail with views of birds and marine life. For more information call the park.

Things To Do Enjoy the park's rare combination of aquamarine waters, emerald islands, and vibrant coral reefs. Explore the park through boat tours, ranger programs, art exhibits, and a ½-mile accessible nature trail. The park has a free canoe / kayak launch. Find a schedule of guided tours and activities on the website.

Camping The park's mainland has no campgrounds. You may not camp overnight at the visitor center. You can reach campsites at Boca Chita and Elliott keys only by boat (fee).

Everglades National Park, John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, and other area parks have year-round campgrounds.

Climate Biscayne has warm, wet summers (May–Oct.) and mild, dry winters (Nov.–April). Expect sunshine and high humidity year-round. High temperatures average in the high 80s to low 90s°F in summer and the mid-70s to low 80s°F in winter. Annual rainfall fluctuates, but 60 or more inches is common. Most falls during brief afternoon storms in summer. Hurricanes and tropical storms occur in summer and fall.

Safety and Regulations The park is a wildlife and historical preserve. Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features; do not disturb or remove objects. • Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet and are restricted to certain areas. • Be careful while wading; coral rock is sharp. • Fires are allowed only in camp stoves or designated grills. • Protect yourself from the sun. Wear zinc- or titanium-based sunscreen. Use reef-safe sunscreen when possible. • There are no lifeguards. Do not swim alone. • Biting insects and mosquitoes are here year-round (least present Jan.–April). • Fireworks and other explosives are prohibited. • For firearms regulations check the park website. • Unpiloted aircraft including drones, balloons, and personal watercraft (PWC) are hazardous to wildlife and prohibited.

On mainland: Emergencies call 911
On water and islands: Hail US Coast Guard at VHF 16

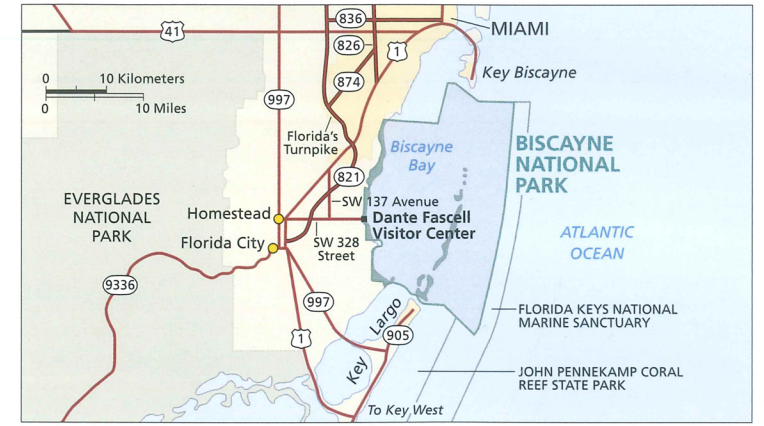
Biscayne National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more, visit www.nps.gov.

More Information
Biscayne National Park
9700 SW 328th St.
Homestead, FL 33033-5634
305-230-1144
www.nps.gov/bisc

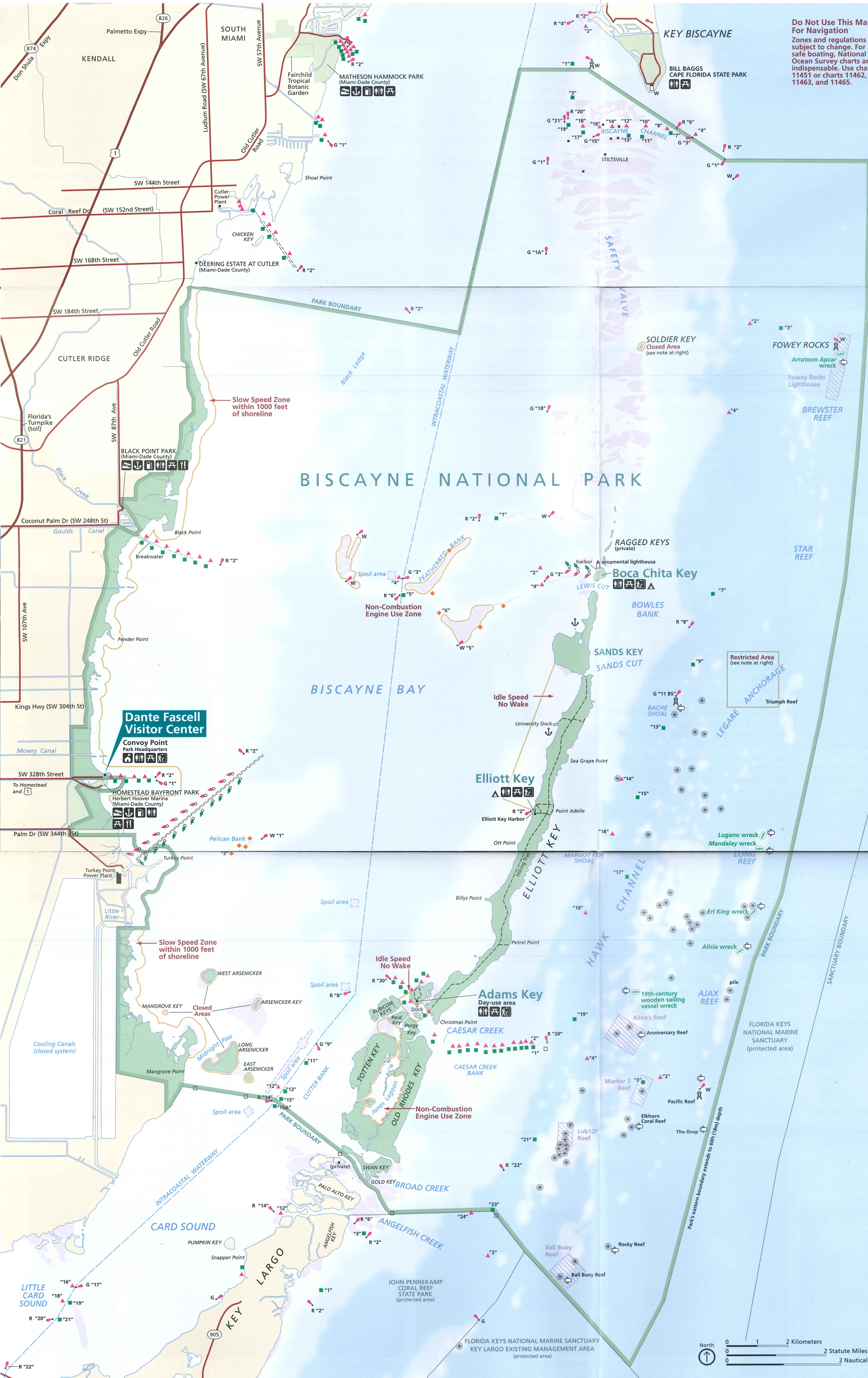
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Getting Here The most-direct route to Convoy Point is by SW 328th Street from Homestead. From the turnpike take exit 6 (SW 137th Avenue) to Speedway Boulevard south, then follow the signs to the park.

You can reach the rest of the park only by boat; launches marked on map below.



National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org



Do Not Use This Map For Navigation
Zones and regulations are subject to change. For safe boating, National Ocean Survey charts are indispensable. Use chart 11451 or charts 11462, 11463, and 11465.

Map Key to Facilities

Ranger station	Boat launch	Primitive campground
Restrooms	Gas dock	Popular anchorage
Picnic area	Marina	Self-guiding trail
Restaurant	Self-guiding trail	

Map Key to Water Features and Landmarks

Water Depths

0-6 feet (0-1.8 meters)	6-12 feet (1.8-3.6 meters)	Over 12 feet (Over 3.6 meters)
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Shallows and Reefs (coral reefs also lie deeper below water surface)

Shoal or spoil area	Coral reef near water surface
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Channel Markers (entering from seaward)

Red starboard daymarker (even numbered)	Starboard buoy	Other buoy
Green port daymarker (odd numbered)	Port buoy	Daymarker

Other Aids and Landmarks

Light	Danger shoal	Lighthouse
Light color: R Red, G Green, W White, Y Yellow	Mooring buoy	Tower

Boating Markers and Flags
Know these common buoys, signs, and flags. They are essential to safe navigation.

Channel Markers (entering from seaward)

Port (odd numbered) Lights flash green	Starboard (even numbered) Lights flash red	Diver's flag
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Regulatory Markers

Keep out	Danger	Speed limit (No wake-5 mph)
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Storm Warning Flags
For up-to-date weather forecasts, call 305-229-4522 or monitor marine radio reports on VHF channel 75. Channel 16 broadcasts special weather warnings.

Small craft advisory (20-38 mph winds)	Gale (39-54 mph winds)
Storm or whole gale (55-73 mph winds)	Hurricane (74 mph winds or higher)

Restricted Area—Legare Anchorage
Do not anchor vessels, stop, swim, dive, or snorkel. Underwater viewing devices like cameras and glass-bottom buckets are prohibited. Drift fishing and trolling are allowed.

On the Water

Biscayne offers year-round recreation.

Fishing Regulations Florida and National Park Service regulations apply for fishing license requirements, bag and size limits, closed areas and seasons, and allowable methods of take. Harvesting ornamental species is prohibited.

Visit myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/bnp for more information.

You can go saltwater fishing in all seasons.

Lobsters are protected in tidal creeks and the bay but may be taken on the keys' seaward side in season.

Boat collisions with manatees, dolphins, and sea turtles can injure and kill these protected animals. Swimmers or divers may be present, especially near moored or anchored boats. Stay 300 feet away from diver-down flags. Currents can carry away swimmers and improperly secured boats. Currents are strongest on outer reefs and in cuts between the keys. When waterskiing, avoid mooring sites, divers, and swimmers. Personal watercraft (PWC) are prohibited.

Caution!—Be alert!
Exercise caution when navigating shallow waters. Propellers can damage and kill coral and seagrass beds. These impacts can also damage a boat's hull, propeller, or engine cooling system.

On the Keys

You can reach the keys only by boat.

Developed recreation areas and services are limited to Adams, Boca Chita, and Elliott keys. Boat fuel, food, and supplies are not sold on islands; find them at mainland marinas. Only Elliott Key has drinking water.

Adams Key The boat dock, picnic area, trails, and restrooms are day-use only.

Arsenicker Keys and Soldier Key Some areas are closed to protect bird nesting. Do not disturb these areas.

Sands Key Overnight anchorage sites are available offshore.

Boca Chita Key Restrooms, picnic area, cleared seawall, trail, and campground with picnic tables and grills. Ornamental lighthouse is open intermittently.

Elliott Key The island has a self-guiding trail. The campground has a group site, grills, and picnic tables. Drinking water, restrooms, and showers are nearby.

University Dock is for daytime docking only. Overnight anchorage sites are offshore.

Reservations and Fees Reserve campsites at www.recreation.gov. Each campsite has QR codes for booking.

Camping at Boca Chita and Elliott keys is first-come, first-served whether you are at a campsite or on a boat. Overnight docking fees apply. Camping and docking fees are waived from May 1 to September 30.

Rules and Safety DO NOT FEED WILDLIFE. The park is a wildlife refuge. Raccoons can pester you when you feed them. • Some tropical plants cause painful itching. Only touch plants you know are harmless. • Respect the rights of private property owners. • Pack out all trash.

On the Reefs

Exploring reefs is best on sunny days when water and weather conditions are calm. Try diving or snorkeling at calm patch reefs close to shore or outer reefs along the park's eastern boundary. Some patch reefs have mooring buoys; ask a ranger for locations.

At the visitor center ask about the Maritime Heritage Trail.

Safety Ask a ranger about hazards before you head out.

Don't touch! Things may look harmless but be dangerous. • Coral can cause deep, slow-healing cuts.

Be cautious! Though sharks and barracudas rarely attack, consider them to be dangerous. • Reef animals generally will not harm you, but it is best to let them alone.

Never swim alone! Always have another person onboard. • When snorkeling and diving, you must display the standard regulation diver-down flag, then remain within 300 feet of the flag. This warns boaters of your presence.

Be aware! Boat propellers injure divers. • Outer reefs have strong currents. If you are inexperienced, stay on patch reefs.

Protect a Living Reef Hitting a reef with your boat or anchor kills animals, scars the reef, and damages your boat. You will be subject to a fine and may be liable for costs of restoring damaged resources. • Anchor in sandy bottoms or use a mooring buoy. • When boating at patch reefs, avoid coral heads near the surface. Do not disturb the reef inhabitants. • Grasping and sitting or standing on coral can injure you and reef animals. • Do not take a reef souvenir—it is illegal!