



A group of kayakers among Shell Creek's cypress and oak trees

PUNTA GORDA'S BEST ECO-ADVENTURES

GET CLOSE TO NATURE IN SOUTHWEST FLORIDA'S STUNNING LANDSCAPE

By Allison Yates

Punta Gorda is the site of a truly unique natural ecosystem. It is situated at the point where the Peace River intersects Charlotte Harbor, the second largest estuary in Florida. Seven natural tributaries and some of the area's best nature parks and preserves are easily accessible and offer a rich natural tapestry. Families will be amazed at the wildlife sightings at every turn. Alligators, dolphins, manatees and sea turtles all cohabitate in this remarkable landscape of salt marshes and mangroves. Frequently referred to as a 'nature lover's paradise,' here are three of the best eco-adventures to experience magical Punta Gorda.

KAYAK IN SHELL CREEK

While Charlotte Harbor is a kayaker's favorite, there's one place five miles from Punta Gorda that locals can't get enough of: Shell Creek. This straightforward, easily accessed stream is carved out between hills of cypress and oak trees, so it's perfect on a windy day. Audrey Lima, co-owner of It's Time! Kayak and Canoe, says one of the best parts about Shell Creek is that on a sunny day you can glance at any stump peeking out of the water and see lots of adorable turtles basking in the sun. itstimekayakandcanoe.com

GET CLOSE TO WILDLIFE AT BABCOCK RANCH

At Babcock Ranch get a glimpse of 70,000 acres of freshwater marshes, prairies and flatlands, and a swamp. The ranch's 90-minute eco-tours take guests through these adventurous landscapes by bus. Animal lovers will get the chance to see plenty of wildlife such as deer, birds and, of course, gators! babcockranchecotours.com

TEST YOUR BALANCE AT STAND UP PADDLEBOARDING

Stand up paddleboarding has become a popular water sport over the last few years, but it's more than just a great workout. Around Punta Gorda, stand up paddleboarders have the rare opportunity to glide off-the-beaten path waterways and see wildlife up close. Hooked on SUP, offering stand up paddleboarding eco-tours through the region, suggests first time visitors take a tour through Don Pedro State Park to wade through mangrove tunnels, secret lagoons and unspoiled beaches. Stand up paddleboards aren't just for adults; kids from two years and up can also enjoy spotting sea stars, manatees and turtles. hookedonsup.com 🐡



A gator comes up close to say hello at Babcock Ranch



Find manatees and sea stars at Don Pedro State Park

Photo of Shell Creek by Rick Fried/courtesy of Greater Charlotte Harbor Sierra Club; gator courtesy of Babcock Ranch; Don Pedro State Park courtesy of Hooked on SUP