



STORY IDEAS TO

TAKE YOU OFF FLORIDA'S BEATEN PATH

Updated: March 2015

Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands is an off-the-beaten track Florida getaway located on the Southwest Gulf coast halfway between Sarasota and Fort Myers. This pristine area combines miles of protected wildlife preserves with a collection of scenic fishing villages and artsy Florida communities, from Englewood to Port Charlotte to Placida to Punta Gorda, clustered around Charlotte Harbor. A member of the Society for Ethical Eco-Tourism, the area's sustainable low-rise development includes new, luxury and family-affordable accommodations and a commitment to preserve its natural beauty. This Family- and Baby Boomer-friendly area offers dozens of outdoor and indoor activities to wean the kids off television or Wii – activities that generations can enjoy together. When you're ready to return to civilization, a host of dining, shopping, nightlife and cultural experiences await.

www.CharlotteHarborTravel.com

***NEW* Sunshine State's One-of-a-Kind Attraction Set to Open Winter 2015: Florida Tracks & Trails**

Florida Tracks & Trails in Punta Gorda is under development to become the only multi-themed outdoor adventure and live entertainment park of its kind. The family-friendly 1,000-acre park will include a 56-acre entertainment ground with a spacious 40,000 square foot indoor venue and an outdoor event lawn exceeding 30-acres in size. Surrounding the entertainment grounds will be miles of one-directional OHV trails, four professionally designed Motocross tracks, 80-acres of world-class paintball, RV campgrounds, zip lines, a fresh-water beach, and a full suite of on-site amenities such as OHV rentals, a general store, party pavilions and more. Phase 1 is targeted to open in Winter 2015 with additional amenities opening shortly after. 39450 Bermont Road, east of Punta Gorda.

www.floridatracksandtrails.com

***OPENING IN 2016* Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens**

A 50 million year old stone fossil of a palm frond taken from a mountain top in Wyoming serves as the inspiration for the logo and signature sculpture of the new Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens, scheduled to open in September 2016. Seven large-scale sculptures will adorn the landscape of the 27-acre property. Flowering trees will bloom throughout the year and more than 15,000 sq. ft of boardwalks and docks are planned. Sculptures have been installed and the master plans for the Gardens were developed in 2010. The property is developed and primarily financed by the Roger E. and Linda A. Tetrault Foundation, a 501 c. (3) private foundation. This will be one of the largest endowments for a botanical garden in the state of Florida. www.peacrivergardens.org

Ride Green, Ride Healthy, Ride Like the Wind to Discover the Real Charlotte Harbor

Punta Gorda features the first Florida free bike loan program. The city was recognized, in 2010, as a "Florida Bike-Friendly Community" by the Florida Bicycle Association as a result of their volunteer organization called [TEAM Punta Gorda](#) offering a complimentary Yellow Bike Loaner Program. All that is required to enjoy a bicycle for an hour or a day is a credit card, driver's license and signature of waiver. Bicycles are offered on a space-available basis at various downtown locations such as Laisley Park Municipal Marina, Charlotte Regional Medical Center Wellness Center, Wyvern Hotel, Fishermen's Village and Punta Gorda Isles Yacht Club. In February 2013, the program saw a 300 percent increase in visitor usage of the Yellow Bike program.

Since Punta Gorda is a bicycle-friendly community, the Punta Gorda Pathways was established earlier this year, which is an 18-mile loop trail connecting pedestrian and bike paths around the city. Four bicycle routes were also established and marked and range in length from 17 miles to a 31-mile ride.

Undiscovered Beaches for Sunsets, Sports, Solitude and Shelling

Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands has 28 miles of uncrowded beaches for every interest. Romantics can watch the sun slip into the Gulf on [Englewood Beach on Manasota Key](#) or walk hand-in-hand along the shore. Many nearby restaurants offer nightlife. Adjoining Chadwick Park offers volleyball and basketball courts, and plenty of fishing. At [Port Charlotte Beach Park](#), families and athletes love the heated swimming pool, basketball, tennis, beach volleyball, bocce, horseshoe courts and playground. Picnic shelters, a fishing pier and boating access ramps add to the appeal. Explorer's beach: [Stump Pass Beach State Park](#), with wide open coastlines and nature trails for viewing wildlife and native plants, is ideal for shelling and gathering fossilized shark's teeth. Most secluded: [Don Pedro Island State Park](#), which can only be reached by private boat. There are plenty of shells and few people to compete for them! Look for manatees, bald eagles, and gopher tortoises. Far removed from civilization, yet amenities include restrooms, outdoor showers, picnic pavilions, and barbecue grills.

Hone Your Survival Skills with Expedition Survival

Expedition Survival teaches wilderness survival skills within a controlled environment with various scenarios. Guided trips and classes are designed for children and adults and vary from single-day to multiple-overnight trips. The organization specializes in giving underprivileged young people the opportunity to learn outdoor self-reliance skills through its affiliation as a school for The National Pathfinder Youth Organization. www.expeditionsurvival.com

Paddle Through Paradise - Blueway Trails

Part of the Florida Greenways and Trails System, nearly 200 miles of Blueway Trails are mapped for kayakers, with 53 trails rated for access, difficulty and scenic value. Veteran aficionados say these trails are some of the most beautiful in the U.S. Nearly 84 percent of the 830 miles of shoreline is protected from development, providing shelter and habitat for an amazing variety of species. With a guide, one might see hundreds of birds flying home to roost, wild boar, otters, Manta rays and horseshoe crabs. Experienced sea kayakers can enjoy challenges out on the Gulf. Learn kayak fishing, where one can sneak up on the prey. At least five outfitter/guides offer wilderness trips, photographic forays and tailored tours for beginner to expert, perhaps accompanied by manatees or dolphins. One even offers an affordable Kayak Wedding or Vow Renewal package for couples who want to add some splash to their romance.

From Blue Crab Picking to Dining Like James Beard, The Flavors of Charlotte Harbor

The [dining scene in Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands](http://www.charlotteharbortravel.com/media) is an eclectic mix of seafood shacks, sidewalk cafes, waterfront eateries, fine dining, and sweet spots. Primary dining districts include downtown Punta Gorda (which has more than 50 independently owned restaurants), Fishermen's Village and Englewood's Dearborn Street. Familiar corporate-owned restaurants are bountiful, too. Notable culinary experiences include dinner at Golden Spoon recipient The Perfect Capser headed by three-time nominee for the James Beard Foundation Best Chef in the South, Jeanie Roland, and lunch at the table actor Denzel Washington sat while filming "Out of Time" (2003) at The Fishery Restaurant in the fishing community of Placida. Anglers can enjoy their fresh catch and let someone else do the cooking. The Village Fish Market Restaurant & Lounge at Fishermen's Village will prepare a fishermen's cleaned fish any delicious way they'd like.

That's just the beginning of all that Charlotte Harbor & the Gulf Islands has to offer. Visit our online library for images - <http://www.charlotteharbortravel.com/media> or call us for additional photos and ideas tailored to your interests.

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Located on Florida's Southwest Gulf Coast, Between Sarasota and Fort Myers. Less than a 90-minute drive from Tampa International Airport.

Muscle Car City Museum
www.MuscleCarCity.net