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## **TREETOP TREKKING AND GATOR GAZING SARASOTA SUMMER ECO-ADVENTURES**

SARASOTA, Fla. – From a canopy trail winding through the branches of ancient oaks and gator gazing on the world’s largest airboat, to kayaking through mangrove tunnels and spotting rare wildlife, Sarasota and Her Islands offers the outdoor enthusiast a wide array of activities to explore the natural beauty of Southwest Florida’s gulf coast. With scenic waterway trails, azure-blue waters and pristine wildlife preserves – families, nature aficionados and adventure lovers alike can head to Sarasota to experience the beautiful outdoors.

For the indecisive fisherman pondering the choice between saltwater and fresh, Oscar Scherer State Park at the South Creek Dam offers the best of both worlds. Snook, snapper and redfish are hunted amongst the saltwater below the dam, while large mouth bass, bream and catfish can be found in the freshwater above. The park also offers a swimming hole for those looking to cool off following a day spent in the sun, as well as opportunities for camping for those who want to stay longer than just one afternoon. Additionally, the Turtle Beach Campground offers beachside camping. This is one of the few remaining spots in Florida where you can camp on the beach.

An adventure of a different type awaits at Myakka River State Park, which plays host to North America’s first canopy trail. Travelers can get a feel for nature up in the canopy walking amongst the branches of ancient oaks and enjoying views looking out over more than three miles to Upper Myakka Lake. After trekking through the treetops, visitors can stop by the Myakka Outpost for their specialty - gator stew - before heading out on the world’s largest airboat, the “Gator Gal.” For the more adventurous traveler, kayaks offer a gator’s-eye view of the river, where it is common to spot rare wildlife in their natural habitat and alligators sunning on the banks.

In the 1950's, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created tunnels in the mangrove forest bordering Lido Key successfully ridding the island of mosquitoes by encouraging the inhospitable salt water to mix in with the fresh, preventing a nesting habitat. More than 50 years later, nature-seekers visiting South Lido Park can navigate the tunnels by kayak, gaining an unparalleled view of the mangrove forest's pristine eco-habitat.

For a hands-on seaside exploration, Mote Marine Aquarium offers a chance to see and touch life under the sea. From petting stingrays and picking up starfish to learning about sea turtle rehabilitation and peering into the shark habitat, animal lovers experience an up-close look at their favorite marine wildlife and the efforts to preserve them and their habitat.

Those interested in the ecology of Sarasota Bay can take a nature cruise with Sarasota Bay Explorers, where they have the opportunity to look for dolphins and manatees in their natural habitat, while observing great blue heron, great egrets, snowy plovers and American oystercatchers on the shore.

For more native wildlife, visitors to Sarasota can visit Crowley Museum & Nature Center, where eagles and ospreys nest, and river otters, butterflies, gopher tortoises, armadillos and deer can be spotted in the peaceful sanctuary. Offering a variety of nature trails, visitors to Crowley can hike through dry pine flatwoods, through shady oak hammock, over the Maple Branch swamp and through the Tatum Sawgrass Marsh.

Those looking for a relaxing journey on the water can set sail from the marina and take in an infamous Sarasota sunset on a chartered sailboat. More adventurous visitors can go scuba diving and snorkeling with equipment and training from Florida Underwater Sports. For an unbeatable view from above, Siesta Key Parasailing provides an exhilarating adventure.

With more canals crisscrossing its landscape than the city for which it was named, Venice is home to the Venetian Waterway Park trail. Meandering for nearly 10 miles along the eastern bank of the Intracoastal Waterway, the trail provides a scenic venue for rollerblading, biking and hiking. The newly opened Legacy Trail totals more than 12 miles in length and runs from just south of the City of Sarasota to Venice. The Legacy Trail hosts 15 areas to stop, rest, learn about its history or just enjoy the natural beauty surrounding the trail.

For a sandier outdoor escape, Sarasota and her string of eight islands boast Siesta Key Beach, which offers the world's "finest, whitest sands" as judged by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. After spending a day sunning on the beach, guests can participate in

one of the weekly “Turtle Walks” sponsored by The Ritz-Carlton and learn about sea turtles, sift through the sands to collect prehistoric shark teeth on Caspersen Beach in Venice, or simply cruise through the azure-blue waters on one of Sarasota’s many charters.

After exploring the many sights of Sarasota, recharge in the warm waters of the Warm Mineral Springs Resort in North Port and cool down with an authentic meal at the Lake Side Café. Let loose at night on a sunset cruise with LeBarge Tropical Cruises. Enjoy live music, drinks, and dancing while taking in the breathtaking views of Sarasota.

For more information on discovering Sarasota and Her Islands, call the **Sarasota Convention and Visitors Bureau** at **800-522-9799** or visit [www.sarasotafl.org](http://www.sarasotafl.org), as well as [www.discovernaturalsarasota.com](http://www.discovernaturalsarasota.com) .

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