

*MIAMI
LIVING*

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Miami Ecotourism & Eco-Friendly Attractions

Image credit: Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden

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Ecologically and culturally diverse, Miami extends a friendly ¡*Bienvenidos!* for responsible, green-minded visitors.

From eco-friendly hotels and low-impact activities to give-back voluntourism opportunities that help the community, the greater Miami area offers many chances to support conservation efforts, observe wildlife and leave little or no trace of your time here.

Here are some brilliant ways to be mindful and kind while helping the Magic City retain its natural magic.

ECO-FRIENDLY ATTRACTIONS

Fairchild Garden

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, an 83-acre oasis with collections of rare tropical palms, cycads and flowering trees, plays an important role in the conservation of South Florida's endangered plants through seed banking and reintroduction of rare plants. The garden is open daily, showcasing its bizarre, beautiful plants, petite waterfalls, edible garden and butterfly conservatory. The eco-friendly bookstore features fair trade products and books on tropical gardening and cuisine.

Seabird Station

Pelican Harbor Seabird Station cares for more than 1,000 injured brown pelicans and seabirds, raptors, songbirds and reptiles every year, most victims of fishing tackle. There are self-guided and custom tours, along with a two-hour sunset birding cruise.

Shark Valley

A 50-minute drive from downtown Miami, the Shark Valley Visitor Center walking and bike trail in Everglades National Park is an amazing, 150-mile loop through alligators, wading birds and Florida's famed River of Grass, the largest subtropical wetland in North America. Rent a bike there or take the two-hour tram tour by a park-trained naturalist.

Deering Estate

The 1920s home of American businessman and

philanthropist Charles Deering, the Deering Estate is best known as a backdrop for the 1980s TV series "Miami Vice" and the starting line for "The Amazing Race All-Stars" in 2007, but it also is the site of the largest virgin coastal tropical hardwood hammock in the continental United States. Along with a sustainability film series and lectures, there are Biscayne Bay cruises, tours of the property's restricted natural areas and guided butterfly walks.

Biscayne National Park

Within sight of downtown Miami, the underwater Biscayne National Park is 172,971 acres of shallow bay waters, coral limestone, shoreline mangroves and one of the largest coral reefs in the world. The Biscayne National Park Institute provides eco-adventures that include snorkeling shipwrecks and coral reefs, cruising to islands, and paddling lagoons. The visitor center also rents paddle craft for self-guided tours.

Zoo Miami

With more than 40 endangered species among its 3,000 animals living in open-air spaces, the 750-acre Zoo Miami is involved in wildlife and environmental conservation initiatives around the world. Staff vets help track flamingos, Florida panthers, rare bonneted bats and other threatened species while also nursing sick or injured animals. Its "Zoo Doo" program recycles manure from elephants and rhinos with landscape debris to sell as high-quality natural fertilizer to the public.

South Florida Breadbasket

South of the city, the Redland-Homestead area is Miami's rich agritourism region, where visitors can spend an entire day picking tomatoes or strawberries at Knauss Berry Farm, slurping mamey or mango shakes at Robert is Here produce stand, sampling tropical wine at Schnebly Winery and learning about exotic fruit at Fruit and Spice Park.

By Jodi Mailander Farrell. Special thanks to Visitflorida.org for this story reprint.