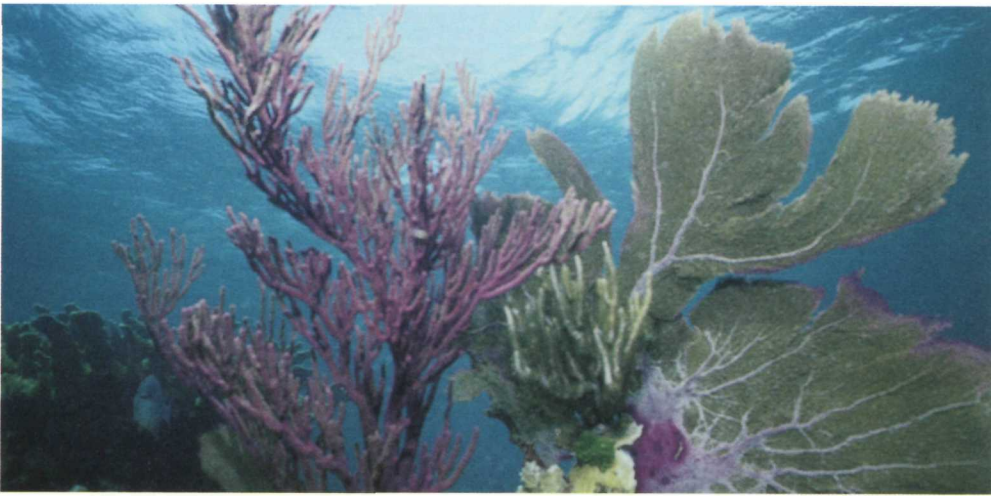




The 65-foot lighthouse on Boca Chita Key provides outstanding views of Biscayne Bay.

Biscayne National Park has the simple beauty of a child’s drawing. Clear blue water. Bright yellow sun. Big sky. Dark green woodlands. Here and there a boat, a bird. It is a subtropical place where a mainland mangrove shoreline, a warm shallow bay, small islands or keys, and living coral reefs intermingle. Together they make up a vast, almost pristine wilderness and recreation area along the southeast edge of the Florida peninsula. The park, located 21 miles east of Everglades National Park, was established as a national monument in 1968. In 1980 it was enlarged to 173,000 acres and designated a national park to protect a rare combination of terrestrial and undersea



Seafan
©JOHN HALAS

life, to preserve a scenic subtropical setting, and to provide an outstanding spot for recreation and relaxation.

In most parks land dominates the picture. But Biscayne is not like most parks. Here water and sky overwhelm the scene in every direction, leaving the bits of low-lying land looking remote and insignificant. This is paradise for marine life, water birds, boaters, anglers, snorkelers, and divers alike. The water is refreshingly clean, extraordinarily clear. Only the maintenance of the natural interplay among the mainland, Biscayne Bay, keys, reefs, and the Florida Straits keeps it that way. The Caribbean-like climate saturates the park

with year-round warmth, generous sunshine, and abundant rainfall. Tropical life thrives. The land is filled to overflowing with an unusual collection of trees, ferns, vines, flowers, and shrubs. Forests are lush, dark, humid, evergreen; many birds, butterflies, and other animals live in these woods.

No less odd or diverse is Biscayne’s underwater world. At its center are the coral reefs. Unlike the ocean depths, which are dark and nearly lifeless, the shallow water reefs are inundated with light and burgeoning with life. Brilliantly colorful tropical fish and other curious creatures populate the reefs. Their appearances and behavior

are as exotic as their names—stoplight parrotfish, finger garlic sponge, goose-head scorpionfish, princess venus, peppermint goby. An explorer can spend hours drifting lazily in the waters above the reefs and watch a procession of some of the sea’s most fascinating inhabitants.

Whether on the reefs, the keys, the bay, or the mainland, you leave behind what is familiar and become acquainted with another world that is strange and wild. Biscayne is a different sort of national park. Expect the unexpected.

Mainland

In Biscayne the mainland mangrove shoreline has been preserved almost unbroken. For many years these trees of tropical and subtropical coasts were considered almost worthless. Some were cut for timber or used to make charcoal. In the 1960s the mangrove wilderness was referred to as “a form of wasteland.” Like thousands of other wetlands, it was cleared or filled to make way for harbors and expanding cities.

Now we know that the mangroves are vital to the well-being of the park and surrounding areas. Without them there would be fewer fish for anglers and fewer birds for birdwatchers. Biscayne Bay would become murky. Areas inland would be exposed to the full violence of hurricanes.

Beyond the Darkness
It is hard to see what lives in the brackish waters of the mangrove swamps because this water is stained brown by tannins from the trees.



Red mangroves
©JOHN BROOKS

Hidden in the maze of roots is a productive nursery for commercial, sport, and reef fish. Here young find shelter and food. Fallen mangrove leaves feed bacteria and other microorganisms, and so begins a food web that supports underwater life and birds that nest and roost in the trees.

Defending the Coast
The mangrove forest appears as a nearly impenetrable fortress. Perhaps a snake or mosquito can move through easily, but little else can. It makes an effective buffer between the mainland and Biscayne Bay.

Mangroves guard the bay from being dirtied by eroded soil and pollutants washing from the land by trapping them in their tangle of roots. The trees also stand as a natural line of defense against the strong wind and waves of hurricanes.

Freaks of Nature
Mangroves have been called freaks, and a close look reveals why. Roots of the red mangrove arch still-like out of the water or grow down into the water from overhead branches. Roots of the black mangrove look like hundreds of cigars planted in the mud—they are the breathing organs necessary for survival in this waterlogged environment.

Bay

“The water of Biscayne Bay is exceedingly clear. In no part can one fail to clearly distinguish objects on the bottom . . .,” biologist Hugh Smith wrote in 1895. Today these shallow waters are still remarkably transparent. They serve as a blue-green tinted window to a world of starfish, sponges, sea urchins, crabs, fish of all sizes and kinds, and hundreds of other marine plants and animals.

The bay is a reservoir of natural riches, teeming with unusual, valuable, and rare wildlife. It is home for many; a temporary refuge and feeding ground for others; and a birthplace and nursery for still others. It is a benign power-house, designed to draw energy from the sun and use it to support a complex and far-reaching web of life.

The manatee is one unusual animal that depends on this web. This gentle blubbery giant visits the bay in winter to graze on turtle and



manatee grasses. The water’s warmth and ample food supply attracts this endangered marine mammal.

Sanctuary for Birds
Birds are drawn here year-round. Each follows its own instincts for survival. Brown pelicans patrol the water’s surface, diving to catch prey. White ibis meander across exposed mud flats, probing for small fish and crustaceans.

Large colonies of little blue herons, snowy egrets, and other wading birds nest seasonally in the protected refuge of Arsenicker Keys. Shallow waters surrounding these mangrove islands in the south bay are especially well suited for foraging.

History of Abundance
The coastal wilderness of south Florida was the first spot in North America explored by Europeans. Spanish explorer Ponce de León sailed across Biscayne Bay in search of the mythical Fountain of Youth in 1513.



Studying turtles
NPS / COURTESY KODAK, PHOTO ONEIL MONTANUS

Keys



About 100,000 years ago the Florida Keys were under construction. The builders were billions of coral animals, each not much larger than a dot on this page. Together these animals built a 150-mile-long chain of coral reefs. When these reefs later emerged from the sea, they became the islands of the Florida Keys. Look closely—you can see fossil coral rock on the islands of Biscayne.

Tropical Paradise
Gumbo limbo. Jamaican dogwood. Strangler fig. Devil’s-potato. Torchwood. Mahogany. Satin-leaf. Only tiny pockets in South Florida contain this mixture of tropical trees and shrubs common in the West Indies. North-flowing air, ocean currents, and storms delivered the pioneer seeds and plants that grew into the islands’ lush, jungle-like forests.



Brown pelican
NPS

Walking on a trail in these hardwood hammocks, you may see other tropical natives. Zebra longwing butterflies and endangered Schaus swallowtails find refuge in the leaves and vines. Golden orb weavers betray their presence with large yellow spider webs. Birds and a few mammals share these mangrove-fringed keys.

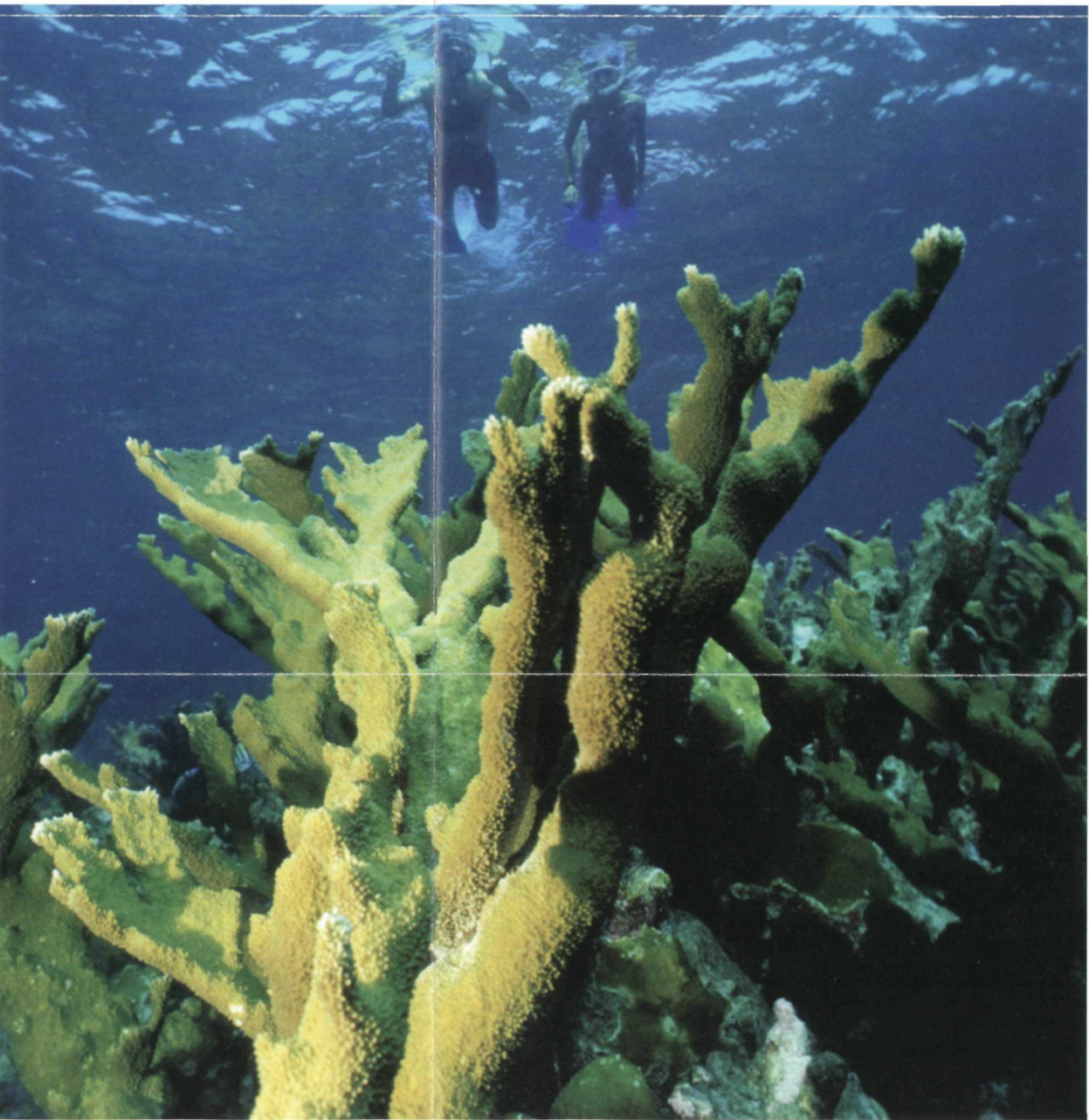
American Indians to Millionaires
Over the years the keys attracted people willing to risk the chance of a hurricane and the certainty of pesky bugs. American Indians were first. Tree-cutters from the Bahamas came later and felled massive mahoganies for ships. Early settlers on Elliott Key cleared forests and planted key limes and pineapples. Subtropical forests throughout the keys were destroyed. Biscayne preserves some of the finest left today.

The islands abound with legends of pirates and buried treasure. Shipwrecks, victims of high seas and treacherous reefs, lie offshore. Fortune hunters, bootleggers, artists, millionaires, and four U.S. presidents have spent time on the keys.

Reef



Sailing on Biscayne Bay
NPS / COURTESY KODAK, PHOTO ONEIL MONTANUS



Snorkelers view elkhorn coral.
©JOHN BROOKS

Fish of the Reef

“In variety, in brilliance of color, in elegance of movement, the fishes may well compare with the most beautiful assemblage of birds in tropical climates,” Louis Agassiz, 1800s naturalist, wrote after visiting the Florida reefs. Reefs host the world’s most spectacular fish. Along Biscayne’s reefs are over

200 types of fish. Some are impressive in size, others in color. Some seem grotesque, others dangerous—or are they? Many behave in bizarre, unexplainable ways, at least to humans. Few places on Earth match the diversity of life in the reefs’ underwater wilderness.



Trumpetfish
©JOHN BROOKS

Dive into the undersea realm of the coral reefs, and you will discover a feast for the eyes. It is a living kaleidoscope of gaudy colors, bold patterns, intricate designs, and peculiar shapes. Alien, yet inviting, the life of the reefs excites and mystifies snorkelers and scientists alike.

Reef Builders
Among the most puzzling creatures are the corals. Early biologists suspected they were plants. But each coral—each brain, finger, or staghorn coral—is actually a colony of thousands of tiny, soft-bodied animals. These

animals called polyps are relatives of the sea anemone and jellyfish. Rarely seen in the day, the polyps emerge



Coral polyps
©JOHN BROOKS

from their hard, stony skeletons at night to feed, catching drifting plankton in their outstretched tentacles.



A Sea of Color
Imagine the most colorful scene you have ever seen—a field of wildflowers, glittering city lights at night, a desert sunset. Whatever it is, the dazzling spectrum displayed by reef fish will equal or surpass it. The range extends from the flamboyant—angel-fish, wrasses, parrotfish,

and neon gobies—to fish that seem drab and ordinary.

There is much speculation about what role the colors play. An eye-grabbing wardrobe may serve as a kind of billboard, advertising a fish’s presence. Vividly colored wrasses attract other fish in this way so



Queen angelfish
©JOHN BROOKS

These primitive, unassuming animals are the mighty master reef builders. The creation of one reef requires the effort of billions of individuals. Each extracts building material—calcium—from the sea and uses it to make itself a protective tube-shaped skeleton. Hundreds of these skeletons make a coral. Many corals, growing side by side and one on top of the other, form a reef.

Corals are very particular about where they build reefs. Like the offshore seas of Biscayne, the water must be the right temperature (no



Vase sponge in a bed of seagrass
©JOHN BROOKS

cooler than 68°F), the right depth (no deeper than 200 feet), and be clean and well-lit. Such conditions exist along

the Florida Keys in and south of Biscayne and in the Caribbean, and in other tropical oceans.



Rock beauty angelfish
©JOHN BROOKS



Brain coral and Christmas tree worm
©JOHN BROOKS



Tunicate
©JOHN BROOKS

colors at night, presumably to hide from nocturnal predators. The camouflaged moray eel blends in with its surroundings. Unsuspecting fish that swim too close often get caught between the eel’s powerful jaws and needle-sharp teeth.

A Montage of Motion
Morays are sedentary creatures, but most fish swim freely about the reefs. Some, like the solitary angelfish, move with deliberate grace. Others dart about in schools of thousands, moving with the precision of choreographed dancers. Each closeknit group offers protection

to its members. Reef fish are noted for their eccentric behavior. One is the sharp-beaked parrotfish. It can be seen, and even heard, munching on coral. Odd meal for a fish? Not really. Along with rock, the parrotfish is devouring algae and coral polyps.



Parrotfish
©STEVE SIMONEN



Southern stingray
©JOHN BROOKS

Exploring Biscayne

On the Mainland

Convoy Point Park headquarters and Dante Fascell Visitor Center are at Convoy Point. The visitor center has exhibits, theater/gallery, a bookstore, and schedules of activities. Convoy Point has a picnic area with tables, fire grills, restrooms, and a short trail with views of birds and marine life. Call 305-230-7275.

Boat Tours A concessioner offers glass-bottom boat tours, snorkeling and scuba diving trips to the reefs, and occasional island excursions. All tours leave from Convoy Point. The concessioner rents snorkeling and scuba equipment, kayaks, canoes, and paddleboats. For information and reservations contact: Biscayne National Underwater Park 305-230-1100 www.biscayneunderwater.com

Lodging and Services Homestead, Miami, and the Florida Keys have lodging; reservations are recommended. They also have restaurants, service stations, groceries, and other stores. Nearby public marinas have boat launch ramps and fuel, and often charter or rent sail and motor boats (see map below).

Camping There are no campgrounds on the park's mainland. See "On the Keys" (below right) for information about island camping. These campsites are reached only by boat; fees apply. Nearby private mainland campgrounds and trailer parks in Homestead, Florida City, and South Miami have spaces for tents, mobile homes, and trailers. Everglades National Park, John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, and other area parks have year-round campgrounds.

General Information

Climate Biscayne has warm, wet summers (May through October) and mild, dry winters (November through April). Expect sunshine and high humidity year-round. High temperatures average in the high 80s to low 90s°F in summer and mid-70s to low 80s°F in winter. Annual rainfall fluctuates, but 85 inches or more is common. Most rain falls in summer in brief afternoon thunderstorms. Summer and fall are seasons for hurricanes and tropical storms.

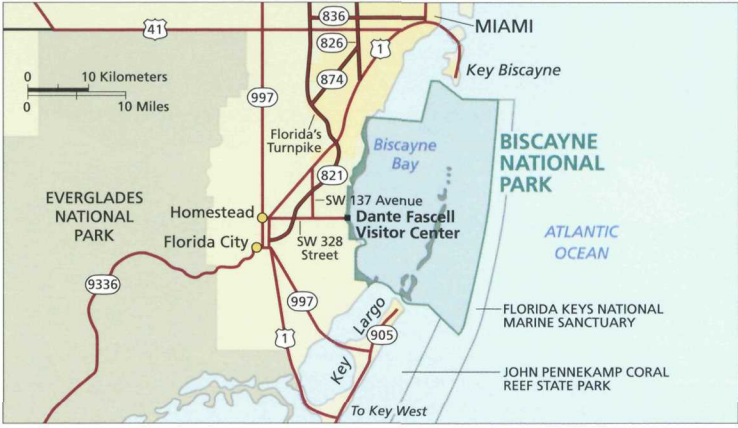
Safety and Regulations • The park is a wildlife and historical preserve—do not disturb or remove natural or historical objects; all are protected by federal law. • Pets must be on a leash no longer than six feet and are restricted to certain areas of the park. • Fires are allowed only in campstoves or designated grills. • Be careful

when wading; coral rock is sharp. • Fireworks and other explosives are prohibited. Weapons: federal and state regulations apply. • There are no lifeguards; do not swim alone. • Mosquitoes and biting insects are here year-round but are fewest January to April. Use insect repellent. If camping, make sure your tent has bugproof netting. • Protect yourself from the sun; wear waterproof sunscreen. • **Emergencies call 911.**

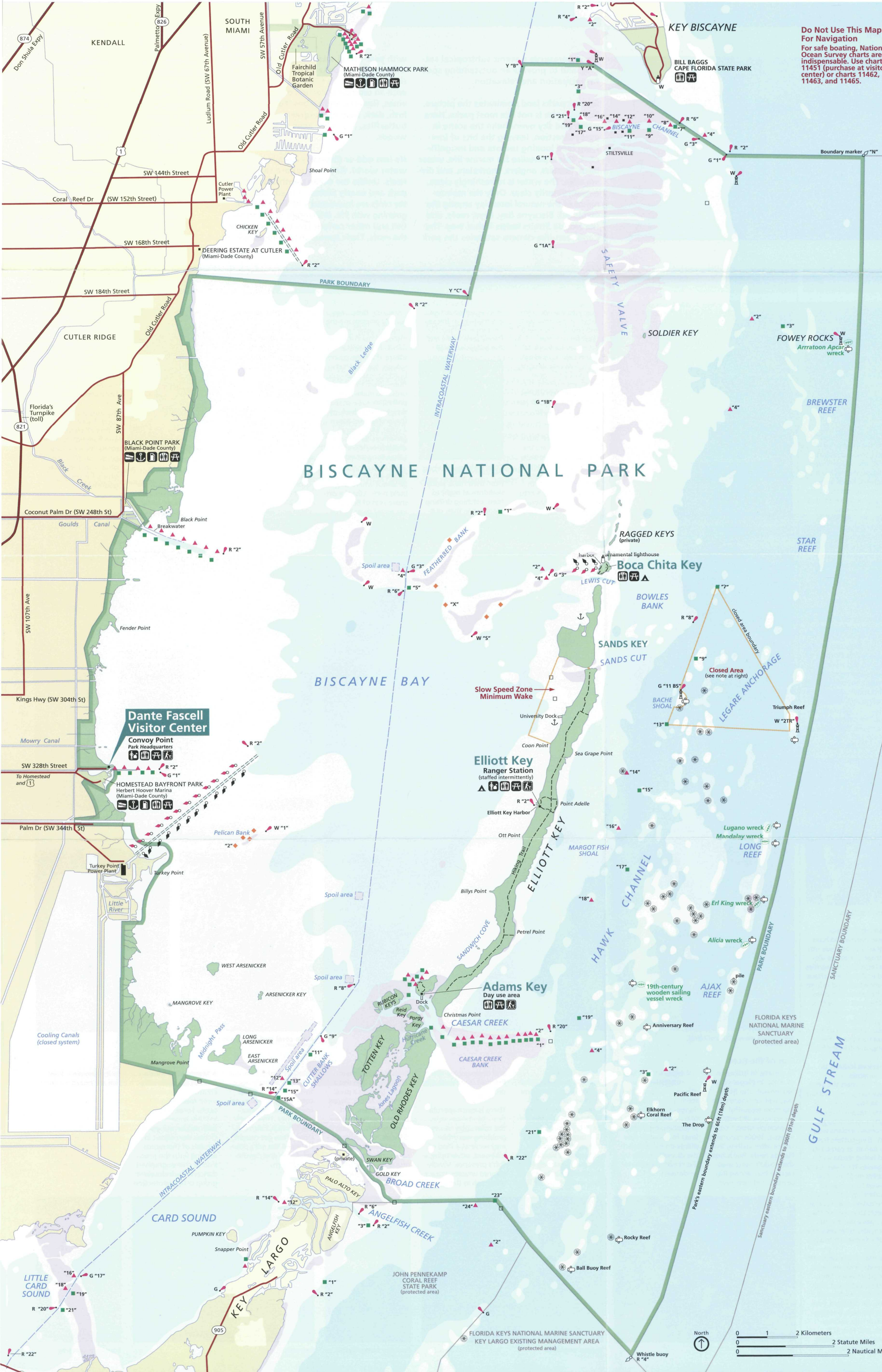
For More Information
Biscayne National Park
9700 SW 328th Street
Homestead, FL 33033-5634
305-230-7275
www.nps.gov/bisc

Getting to the Park

The main north-south highways approaching Biscayne are Florida's Turnpike and U.S. 1. The most direct route to Convoy Point is via SW 328th Street, which intersects U.S. 1 in Homestead. Driving south on the turnpike, you can reach SW 328th Street by taking Speedway Blvd. south (Exit 6, SW 137th Avenue); then follow signs. The rest of the park is accessible only by boat. See map (below) for boat launches.



Biscayne National Park is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.



Do Not Use This Map For Navigation
For safe boating, National Ocean Survey charts are indispensable. Use chart 11451 (purchase at visitor center) or charts 11462, 11463, and 11465.

Map Key to Facilities



Maritime Heritage Trail location



Ranger station



Boat launch



Self-guiding trail



Restrooms



Gas dock



Primitive campground



Picnic area



Marina



Popular anchorage

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)

Shallows and Reefs		
Shoal or spoil area	Coral reef near water surface	Coral reefs also lie deeper below water surface.

Channel Markers (entering from seaward)

Channel Markers (entering from seaward)					
	Red starboard daymarker (even numbered)		Starboard buoy		Other buoy
	Green port daymarker		Port buoy		Daymarker

(your number)					
Other Aids and Landmarks					
 Light	 Danger Shoal	 Lighthouse			
Light color: R Red	 Mooring buoy	 Tower			
G Green					
W White					
Y Yellow					

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	

Regulatory Markers					
	Keep out		Danger		Speed Limit (No wake-5mph)

Storm Warning Flag

For up-to-date weather forecasts, phone 305-229-4522 or monitor marine radio reports on VHF channels 1, 2, or 3. 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)

On the Water

The Florida Straits and Biscayne Bay offer great year-round recreation. You can enjoy saltwater fishing in all seasons. Marlin and sailfish are popular ocean catches. Catch snapper and grouper in the bay. Florida fishing licenses are required; obey regulations on size, number, season, and method of take.

You can take stone crabs in season and blue crabs year-round. Lobsters are protected in the bay and tidal creeks but may be taken on the keys' seaward side in season. Waterskiing is allowed; avoid mooring sites and watch for swimmers and divers. Jet skis and personal watercraft (PWC) are prohibited.

Closed 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 Keys

The keys can be reached only by boat. Developed recreation areas and services are limited to a few islands. Boat fuel, supplies, and food are not sold on any island; find them at mainland marinas. Only Elliott Key has drinking water.

Elliott Key Docking is available at Elliott Key Harbor and at University Dock. A campground with picnic tables and grills operates on a first-come, first-served basis. Drinking water, restrooms, and showers are nearby. Overnight anchorage sites are offshore. The island has a self-guiding interpretive trail.

Adams Key A boat dock, picnic area, restrooms,

Rules and Safety Tips *Caution!* Navigating the shallow waters of Biscayne can be tricky. Water depths on nautical charts represent the average depth at low tide—levels may be lower or higher. In Biscayne Bay low and high tides occur later than the times listed in the tide tables for Miami harbor entrance. In the southern part of the bay, low tide occurs as much as 3½ hours later and high tide as much as 2½ hours later. Boaters must know and use safe boating and navigation techniques.

Presailing Checklist You must take this gear when boating: U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) for each passenger, fire extinguisher, and signaling equipment. Take enough fuel for a round-trip. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return. Before leaving shore, check weather forecasts, sea conditions, and tides.

Caution Shallow Water • Use caution if boating near shallow areas or reefs. Striking the bottom with your propeller can kill corals or grassbeds and may damage your propeller or engine cooling system or hull. • Watch for manatees; propellers cause injury and death to these endangered mammals. • Watch for swimmers and divers near moored boats or in an area where they might be expected. Stay 300 feet away from a diver's flag. • If you leave your boat to swim, anchor it securely. Don't let currents, which are strongest on the outer reefs and in cuts between the keys, carry you or your boat away.

Rules and Safety Tips The entire park is a wildlife refuge. DO NOT FEED WILDLIFE. Raccoons become pests when humans feed them. Arsenicker Keys are particularly important as a bird nesting area; do not disturb

these keys. Closures: West Arsenicker Key, Arsenicker Key, and Soldier Key are closed to the public. Pack out all trash on the keys. Some private property still exists on the keys; please respect owners' rights. A few tropical plants can cause painful itching; do not touch plants that you don't recognize as harmless.

Fees There is a \$20 per night marina-use fee at Boca Chita Key and Elliott Key harbors, which includes a \$15 camping fee. Group campsites are \$30.

On the Reefs

Reef exploring is best on calm, sunny days. The outer reefs, along the park's eastern boundary, and the patch reefs, closer to shore, offer good snorkeling and diving.

Strong currents can occur on the outer reefs. Unless you are experienced, stay on calmer patch reefs. Reef guidebooks are sold at the Dante Fascell Visitor Center. Mooring buoys are available on some patch reefs. Ask a ranger for mooring buoy locations. Ask at the visitor center about the Maritime Heritage Trail.

Safety First Use caution when you visit the reefs. All snorkelers and divers

must display the standard regulation down-diver flag to warn boaters of their presence. Be aware of other boats in your area; propellers have injured divers. Never swim alone—always have another person on board.

Reef animals generally will not harm you if you leave them alone. It is good practice not to touch anything, even if it looks harmless. Coral can cause deep, slow-healing cuts. Attacks by barracuda or sharks rarely occur, but both are considered dangerous and should be watched carefully. Ask a ranger about hazards before you venture out.

Protecting the Reef The coral reef is alive. If your boat hits a reef, it will damage your boat, scar the reef, and kill coral animals. You will be subject to a fine and may be liable for the cost of restoring the damaged resource. Watch for coral heads near the surface if boating near patch reefs. Anchors damage reefs; anchor in a sandy bottom or use a mooring buoy. Standing or sitting on coral or grasping it can cause injury to you and the coral animals. Do not disturb reef inhabitants. Don't take home a souvenir—it is illegal! All cultural and natural resources in the park are protected by federal law.