



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 as a national park to protect a rare combination of terrestrial and undersea life, to



Seafan  
©JOHN GALAS

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 between 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, goosehead scorpionfish, princess venus, peppermint goby. A reef explorer can spend hours drifting lazily in the waters above the reefs and watch a passing procession of some of the sea's most fascinating inhabitants.

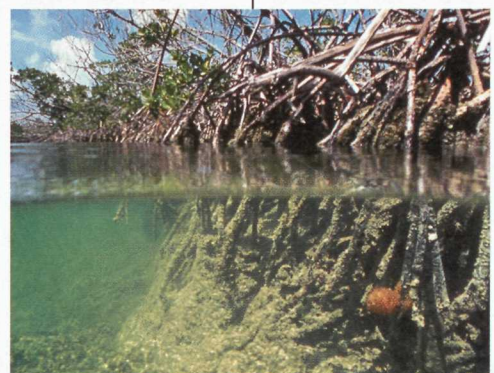
Whether on the reefs, the keys, the bay, or the mainland, you leave behind what is familiar and become acquainted with another world that is strange and wild. Biscayne is a different sort of national park. Expect the unexpected.

## 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. As recently as 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 understand 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 bird-watchers. 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. Hidden among the maze of roots is a



Red mangroves  
©JOHN BROOKS

productive nursery for all sorts of commercial, sport, and reef fish. Here the young find shelter and food. Fallen mangrove leaves feed bacteria and other microorganisms, and so begins a food web that supports not only underwater life but also birds that nest and roost in the tree tops.

**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. It guards the bay from being dirtied by eroded soil and pollutants washing from the land by trapping them in its tangle of roots. Mangroves 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. The 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 the shallow waters of this tropical lagoon 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 powerhouse, 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 peacefully on turtle and manatee



grasses. It is the water's warmth and ample food supply that attracts this endangered marine mammal.

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

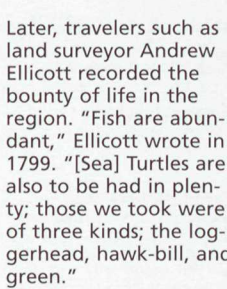
Large colonies of little blue herons, snowy egrets, and other wading birds nest seasonally in the protected refuge of the Arsenicker Keys. The extremely shallow waters surrounding these mangrove islands in the south bay are especially well suited for foraging.

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



Studying turtles  
NSP/COURTESY KODAK, PHOTO ©BRIE MONTARU

## Keys



Later, travelers such as land surveyor Andrew Ellicott recorded the bounty of life in the region. "Fish are abundant," Ellicott wrote in 1799. "[Sea] Turtles are also to be had in plenty; those we took were of three kinds; the log-herdhead, hawk-bill, and green."

In the 1800s and early 1900s many settlers of the keys earned their living from the bay. Among them were Key West fishermen who collected and sold the fast-growing, "fine-quality" bay sponges.

**Underwater Crossroads**  
Today commercial fishermen, anglers, snorkelers, and boaters still reap bountiful rewards from the bay. The bay's good health is reflected in the numbers of different kinds of fish—more than 250—that spend part of their lives in it. Many of the fish that dazzle snorkelers and divers on the coral reefs by day feed in the bay at night. Like the mangrove shoreline, the bay plays a critical role as a fish nursery. The young of many coral reef fish, such as parrot and butterfly fish, and sport fish, such as grunts, snappers, and the highly prized Spanish mackerel, find food and shelter from big hungry predators in the bay's thick jungle of marine grasses.

**Images of the Bay**  
Peering into the crystal waters of Biscayne Bay, it is hard to imagine either its past or its future as clouded. The bay seems suspended in time. While neighboring Miami-Dade County has mushroomed into a metropolis of more than 2.2 million people, the bay appears to have captured the magic of the Fountain of Youth that eluded Ponce de Leon. It has remained beautiful and relatively unspoiled. Though thousands of years old, it is still vibrant with life. But, this has not always been true.

Early in the 20th century parts of the bay were dying. In some northern areas of the park pollutants poisoned the bay, and construction runoff spilled suffocating amounts of sediments. Today after years of cleanup, the north bay is recovering and the rest of the bay remains nearly pristine.

In 1895 biologist Hugh Smith declared that Biscayne Bay was "one of the finest bodies of water on the coast of Florida." In another hundred years—if well-protected—it still could be.

**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, gamblers, millionaires, and four United States Presidents have spent time on the keys of Biscayne.

## Reef



About 100,000 years ago the Florida Keys were under construction. The builders were billions of coral animals, each not much larger than a period or 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. If you look closely, you can see fossil coral rock on the islands of Biscayne.

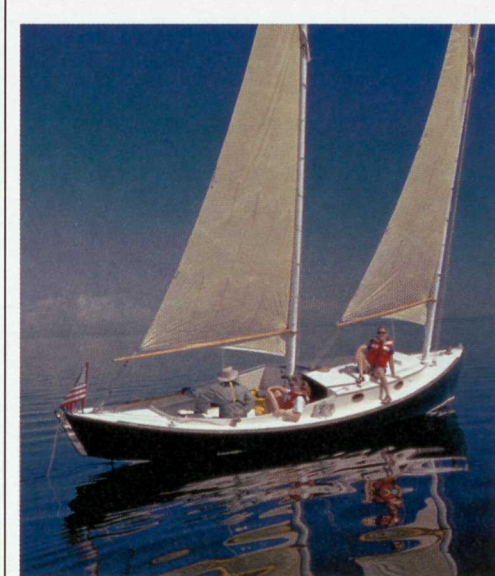
**Tropical Paradise**  
Gumbo limbo. Jamaican dogwood. Strangler fig. Devil's-potato. Satin-leaf. Torchwood. Mahogany. Only tiny pockets in South Florida contain this mixture of tropical trees and shrubs common in the West Indies. North-flowing air, ocean currents, and storms delivered the pioneer seeds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



Brown pelican  
NSP

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

**Fishes 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, 19th-century French naturalist, wrote after visiting the Florida reefs. Reefs host the world's most spectacular fish. Along Biscayne's



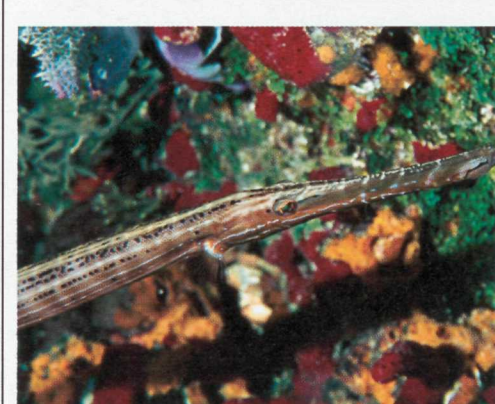
Sailing on Biscayne Bay  
NSP/COURTESY KODAK, PHOTO ©BRIE MONTARU



Snorkelers view elkhorn coral.  
©JOHN BROOKS

## Fishes of the Reef

reefs are more than 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 from their hard, stony skeletons.



Coral polyps.  
©JOHN BROOKS

suming 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 lower than

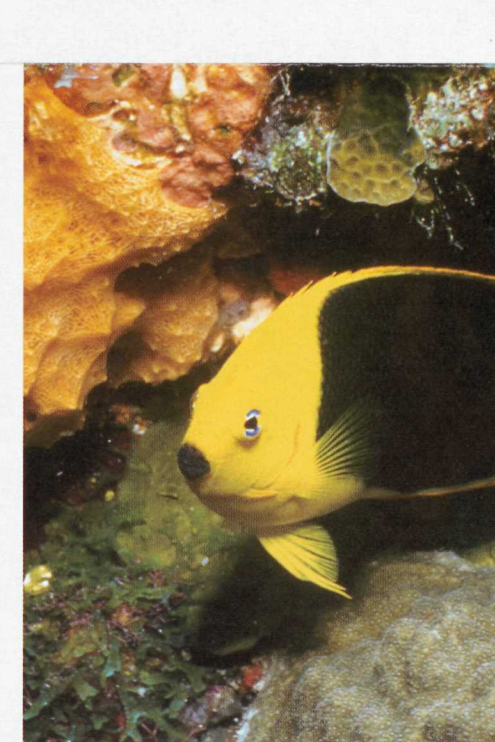
68°F), the right depth (no deeper than 200 feet), and be clean and well-lit. Such conditions exist all along the Florida

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



Vase sponge in a bed of seagrass.  
©JOHN BROOKS

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Rock beauty angelfish  
©JOHN BROOKS



Brain coral and Christmas tree worm  
©JOHN BROOKS



Tunicate  
©JOHN BROOKS

wrasses attract other fish in this way so they can clean them of parasites and dead tissue, getting a meal in return. Multicolored bars, stripes, and splotches blur the outline of other fish, making it difficult for predators to see them against the reef's complex background. Some fish are

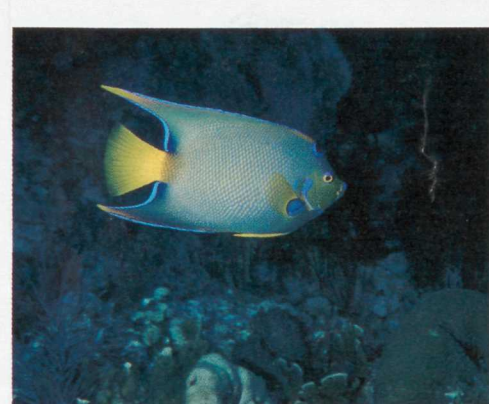


Parrotfish  
©STEVE SMOKEN

**A Montage of Motion**  
Morays are sedentary creatures, but most fish swim freely about the reefs. Some, such as 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



Southern stingray  
©JOHN BROOKS



Queen angelfish  
©JOHN BROOKS



Four-eye butterflyfish  
©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 for picnicking and hiking. All tours leave from Convoy Point. The concessioner rents snorkeling and scuba equipment, kayaks, and canoes. For information and reservations contact: Biscayne National Underwater Park, 9710 SW 328th Street, Homestead, FL 33033, 305-230-1100.

**Accommodations and Services** Homestead, Miami, and the Florida Keys have hotels and motels; 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. 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 campgrounds, open year-round.

## 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. • Loaded firearms, explosives, and other weapons are prohibited. • 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 wading; coral rock is sharp. • 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, be sure your tent has bugproof netting. • 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/bis/

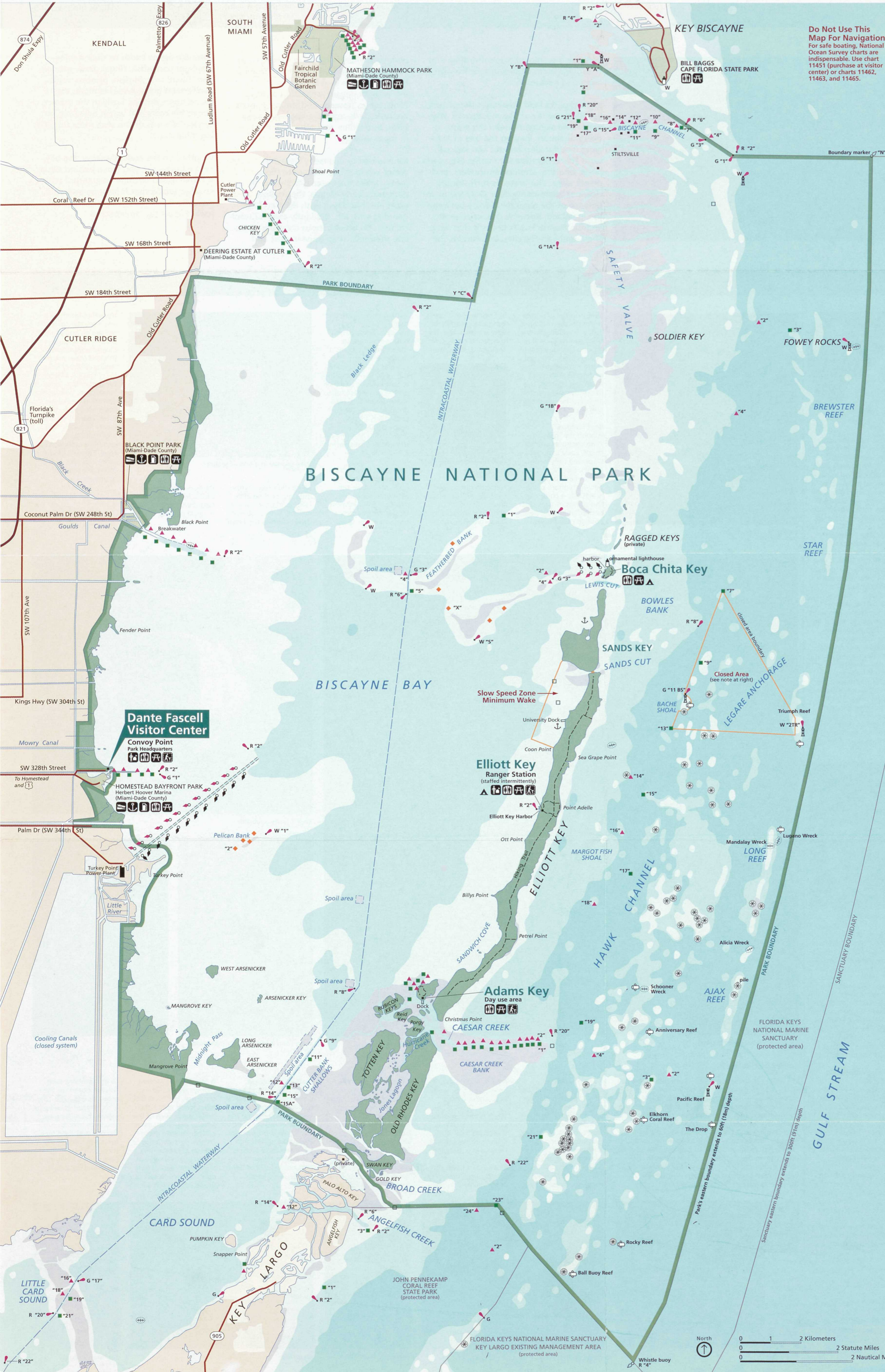
**Información en Español** Las llamadas locales requieren marcar el código de área (305) más el 230-7275.

## 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 with U.S.1 in Homestead. Driving south on the turnpike, you can reach SW 328th Street by taking Speedway Blvd. south (SW 137th Avenue), then follow signs. The rest of the park is accessible only by boat. See map for boat launches.



Biscayne National Park is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks visit [www.nps.gov](http://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		

Map Key to Water Features and Landmarks		
<b>Water Depths</b>		
<b>Shallows and Reefs</b>		

Channel Markers (entering from seaward)		

Other Aids and Landmarks		

**Boating Markers and Flags**  
Know these common buoys, signs, and flags. They are essential to safe navigation.

<b>Regulatory Markers</b>		
<b>Storm Warning Flags</b>		
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.		

## 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 catches in the ocean. Snapper and grouper are caught in the bay; Florida fishing licenses required. You must 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 seaward side of the keys in lobster season. Waterskiing is allowed; avoid mooring sites and watch for swimmers and divers.

**Closed Area—Legare Anchorage** No stopping, swimming, diving, or snorkeling is allowed. Underwater viewing devices, such as cameras and glass bottom buckets, are prohibited. Do not anchor vessels. Drift fishing and trolling are allowed.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## 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, but they are available at mainland marinas. Only Elliott Key has drinking water.

**Elliott Key** Boat docks are located 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. Popular overnight anchorage sites are offshore. The island has a self-guiding nature trail.

**Adams Key** A free boat dock, a picnic area, restrooms, and a trail are available for day use.

**Boca Chita Key** A cleared seawall, picnic area, hiking trail, and restrooms are available. A campground with grills and tables operates on a first-come, first-served basis. An ornamental lighthouse is open intermittently.

**Sands Key** Overnight anchorage sites are located offshore.

**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 nest-

## On the Reefs

Reef exploring is best on calm, sunny days. Both 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, we recommend that you stay on calmer patch reefs. Reef guidebooks are sold at Dante Fascell Visitor Center. Mooring buoys are available on some of the patch reefs. Check with a ranger for buoy locations and for information.

**Protecting Yourself and Safety Tips** Use caution when you visit the reefs. All snorkelers and divers must display the standard

diver's 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 stay 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.