

Seek the Creek: A Kayak Paddle through the City

Explore the unknown quiet nature of the city of Sarasota on Phillippi Creek

By Liz Sandburg December 30, 2015

From VisitSarasota.org



Phillippi Creek by Matt Sandburg

It's a vacation conundrum. You came to Sarasota County looking for water, for nature, for a little adventure. The plethora of establishments advertising paddleboarding catches your eye, but the idea of attempting it for the first time in front of an audience of beach spectators stirs a bit of panic.

Kayaking looks like a blast, but waves and currents mess with your abilities. You want to see the wildlife but the seagulls trying to steal your PopChips are not quite working out for you. Fear not. There is another aquatic body in Sarasota that solves these conundrums simultaneously – you can explore, unwatched, unobstructed, surrounded by the natural beauty of the Gulf Coast - Phillippi Creek.

Along this narrow-ish strip of water, which traverses from Roberts Bay near the Gulf of Mexico up six miles of quiet nature, you come in full contact with the old Florida, untouched and void of not only tourists, but people in general. The allure of the larger bodies of water attract most water activity participants, opening this opportunity to a select few.



Paddleboarding on Phillippi Creek by Liz Sandburg

The ideal way to experience Phillippi Creek is by kayak or paddleboard. It's simply a quiet, slow environment that calls for a quiet, slow method of transportation. When venturing along, the sounds of the outside world become distant and few.

Yapping people, honking cars, incessant iPhone alerts - they all become nearly obsolete. Replacing them are birds and rustling trees as you become surrounded by the surrounding foliage, which admittedly, I tend to ignore in most situations. But it's quite lovely and a true element of Sarasota.

Suddenly, you're noticing trees and flowers you didn't see before and now you are really, truly seeing Florida. It's quite easy to forget there are houses on either side of the water and I tend to get startled when I hear a dog bark or a dinner call. But even then, it's a slow bark or a slow call. Somehow the pace of existence decreases and you drift on down. It hugs you and you succumb to the embrace. Your shoulders soften, your breathing calms. You've fallen for the siren call, and you're gonna like it.

Phillippi Creek is home to a plethora of animals, which vary per season. In the summer, you'll find yourself shocked as a breath of air bursts from a curious manatee a mere foot from your paddling hand. The Creek is one of their favorite homes in Sarasota and they are often found here during the summer months, enjoying the abundant feast of vegetation.

I have twice had the, er, unique pleasure of witnessing manatee mating in Phillippi Creek. Quite a sight, to say the least. Mothers and babies are common as well due to the quiet safety the Creek provides. Because of these gentle giants, the Creek is a no-wake zone, though the fact is irrelevant on your paddleboard. At least, it is for me. I'm pretty slow.



Manatees Mating on Phillippi Creek by Liz Sandburg

Otters, another curious critter, may pop by to say hello. Their call is similar to a squirrel though they are far more playful and adorable. Some people tell me they are mean, but I just plain refuse to believe it. They're too fun. Listening for these critters opens your ears to a world that is generally muffled. Was that rustling from a nesting egret? A frolicking otter? A launching turtle? A jumping mullet? A diving osprey? A sneaking alligator? Without realizing it, you'll become aware of the natural world and learn by observing an experiencing, not watching and googling.

Not to say that you won't google later. We've got some crazy critters you'll be looking up once you're on dry land again. Roseate spoonbills, hooded mergansers, banded water snakes, snook, alligator gars, blue crabs, flocks of ibis, sheepshead, kingfishers, screech owls, Muscovy ducks – all cool and all here. We've even had a coyote wander the Creek edge. Keep your eyes open and prepare to be amazed. I always am.

If the six-mile distance of the Creek intimidates you, fear not. Only my wacko husband does that. The rest of us leisurely paced adventurers have a number of options. Pinecraft Park has a launch for entry and is pretty much the northernmost point you'll want to pop in.

There is another at the southern point of the Creek at Phillippi Estate Park. And in the middle you'll find parks as well as Phillippi Creek Oyster Bar. Pull up, tie off your kayak, and enjoy a well-earned dozen on the half shell as you overlook your newly explored turf. For now you are a true Floridian at soul.