

# SUNRISES NOT HIGH RISES

ECO WANDERLUSTING

**HIKING  
& BIRDING**

**UNDER THE SEA**

ECO  
WANDERLUSTING  
ISSUE

Nº 1

VERO BEACH  
FELLSMERE  
SEBASTIAN

Indian River County, Florida





FOR PRESS INQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

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# VERO BEACH | FELLSMERE | SEBASTIAN



# Eco *Wanderlusting*



Indian River County Vero Beach, Fellsmere, and Sebastian, aka, Indian River County encompass beaches, preserves and lagoons. But did you know the area is prolific in cattle ranches and citrus groves offering visitors area attractions that today are slipping from the Florida landscape?

Here the attractions are wildlife viewing in natural habitats both at sea and on land. Water outings on airboats, sailboats, seaplanes, motorboats and a variety of paddling excursions are plentiful while providing up-close views of manatees, dolphins, sea turtles, and more. Scuba diving a variety of wrecks in the area may have you stumbling across a vast plain of treasures.

Rich in natural resources with much of the area protected by conservation **aces**, outdoor enthusiasts can easily find themselves on a hike rich with old-Florida tropical flora and fauna. A variety of endangered local and migrating birds enjoy restored and natural wetlands, and walks to these areas provide prolific bird watching.

More than 50,000 acres of pristine, Florida wilderness surrounds the shores, lagoons, intercoastal waterways and lakes of Vero Beach, Sebastian, and Fellsmere. This is a place of environmental significance where mangrove swamps, maritime hammocks, and pine flatwoods inspire National Geographic-type explorations into primitive Florida

These explorations may begin with a trip to one of the America's most biodiverse lagoon ecosystems in the Northern hemisphere, Indian River Lagoon, or the country's first national wildlife refuge, Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. Don't miss the mystic Blue Cypress Lake, one of Florida's most bountiful osprey breeding sites, which attracts eco and wildlife enthusiasts from around the world. Here are just few eco-excursions you will want to add to your vacation planner:





- **Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge**, covers long stretches of quiet, undisturbed sandy beaches in the Northern part of Indian River County. The Refuge provides little or no artificial light, which is essential to the reproductive success and survival of the 15,000 to 20,000 sea turtles nesting annually. The Refuge was birthed to protect sea turtle habitats in the Western Hemisphere and is a significant area for loggerhead and green turtle nesting in North America as well. This area represents 25-35% of all loggerhead and green sea turtle nests in the US. One of the world's largest and rarest sea turtles, the leatherback, also nests within the Refuge. Visitors to Vero Beach can access the Refuge at Golden Sand County Park. A variety of sea turtle talks and walks and exclusive 'turtle digs' are offered to visitors during nesting season.

#### Other news of note about Archie Carr:

- A portion of the Archie Carr extends into the northern section of the County with many nesting habitats within the management area.
- The county boasts some of the highest of nesting density beaches in the state; averaging around 7,000 nests per year. In 2016, the County experienced a record number of loggerhead nests with over 7,100 nests. Expectations for 2017 nesting seasons are high especially amongst loggerheads and big green turtles.
- **TURTLE NEWS:** Indian River County is the only county in the state to employ a conservationist / environmental scientist on staff and the only County to offer 'turtle dig' events. Traditional turtle walks launch in May or June. The gestation period for a turtle nest is 50-60 days on average. The turtle dig tours follow this period and traditionally start in July or August. The County's environmental scientist educates families on the variety of turtle species that nest on the shores of Florida. Participants will also watch as scientific information is excavated from the turtle nest three days after the turtle naturally departs for the sea. This information is gathered with the intent of supporting local turtle biologists.



**INDIAN RIVER  
COUNTY HAS THE  
HIGHEST DENSITY OF  
NESTING BEACHES  
IN THE STATE.**

- **Blue Cypress Lake**, is an outdoor Shangri-La and part of the Blue Cypress Conservation Area in Fellsmere. This magnificent lake is approximately seven miles long and three miles wide with 21 miles of shoreline. The area is wrapped in 29,000 acres of marshes, swamps and cypress forests. It is a place of complete surrender to the great outdoors as blue skies give way to blue-hued water, which some say occurs because of the reflection of the Blue Cypress trees on the lake as the morning sun rises. NEWS TIP: Blue Cypress Lake is a top osprey nesting site in Florida reporting over 200 nests along the shoreline. For a unique experience kayak and canoe up close to see osprey nests in the wild and to marvel at the 130-foot tall cypress trees. The cypress trees make this worth a top bucketlist contender. Catch a glimpse of a American alligators, bald eagles, and fish including largemouth bass crappie, bluegill, catfish, chain pickerel and more. **Middleton's Fish Camp** is the only one of its kind on the lake. They provide eco-tours and fishing.

- **The Environmental Learning Center**, is an investigative, hands-on learning facility for adults and children alike in Vero Beach. This non-profit organization is located on 61 acres on Wabasso Island offering eco-excursions, pontoon-styled birding trips, wagon rides, canoe trips, touch tanks and more. The center hosts a variety of classes, special events, summer camps and school field trips.

**Fellsmere Preserve** is a popular bass fishing lake, located on 10,000 acres, in Fellsmere. The lake is located next to the famous Stick Marsh, one of the top lakes in the state to catch and release big-mouth bass, according to Hugh Crumpler's Florida Trophy Pro Bass Fishing. This area has been under restoration for the past few years with environmental enhancements including 13,000 trees planted; Red Maple, Holly, Sweet and Black Gum, and another 10,000 cypress trees. Wetlands are being restored which means animals will return to the area as well.

- The Florida Institute of Technology offers **Fit Challenge Courses** that test strength and endurance on the Trailhead Preserve in Fellsmere. Visitors who dream of upping their fitness levels can do so surrounded in natural ecosystems on an 18-acre course. The preserve offers 80 undisturbed acres and a one-of-a-kind obstacle course. These challenges are ideal for families, couples, and business team-building events.

**Indian River Lagoon** is one of the world's most important estuaries. The Lagoon is an aquatic wonder with more than 3,000 species of plants and animals forming part of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. The lagoon supports manatees, dolphins, turtle-nesting habitats, small stingrays, and several-hundred fish species. Three hundred bird genera can be spotted in and around the lagoon as well. Indian River Lagoon stretches across 40% of Florida's east coast starting in New Smyrna Beach and ending in St. Lucie Inlet, Florida. It's a must-stop for nature lovers, families, and visitors who wish to experience Mother Nature in action.







**Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway**, one of only two in the state of Florida, is 195 miles long spanning from Titusville to Wabasso. The southern corridor of the byway encompasses the entire Sebastian River area including Fellsmere. The Byway was designated a Scenic Highway because of the vast natural and recreational resources for explorers of all ages. As you travel the byway, you'll be taken aback by the unique and diverse habitat, special places and breathtaking scenery that await you. Check out the map of the entire byway and the southern corridor. To learn more about the America's Byways program, please visit [www.byways.org](http://www.byways.org).

- **Lagoon Greenway**, this exciting 187-acre property is located at the corner of 8th Street and Indian River Boulevard. It boasts an ecologically diverse three-mile trail system for hiking, jogging or bike riding. Even four-legged creatures on leashes are welcome on the property (with careful clean-up by their two-legged companions).
  - Main Trail is under 1/2 mile and begins at the trailhead-parking area. It traverses through gorgeous old growth oak and palm hammocks, and two wetlands on its way to the...
  - Two-Mile Loop Trail, known as the Mini-Adventure Trail, is a 1/4-mile narrow, uneven route. It winds through a dense oak and palm forest, bringing you close to native habitats of 'old Florida.'
  - Two-Mile Loop Trail is a wide, grassy trail which leads around a large mangrove wetland forest, with intermittent views of the beautiful Indian River Lagoon.
  - Mangrove Boardwalk is a 1/4-mile boardwalk that extends from the end of the Main Trail to the observation deck of the Indian River Lagoon. TIP: Perfect place to snap a selfie or landscape photo.
  - The area offers an additional variety of hiking trails from Vero Beach, to Fellsmere to Sebastian. Visitors can hike the dog-friendly Toni Robinson Waterfront Trail, in famous Pelican Wildlife Refuge, the Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area to peek wild coffee plants and bromeliads that dangle like Hollywood chandeliers and spot unusual fungi plants. Keep your smart phones turned on as this area is a photographer's dream.
- **McKee Botanical Garden**, is an 18-acre tropical garden with the largest collection of waterlilies in Florida. Located in Vero Beach, the Garden is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is home to "Stickwork" by Patrick Dougherty, an internationally acclaimed landscape artist. Another point of interest is the Bamboo Pavilion, the first permitted bamboo structure in the United States.



Hiking & Birding





- **The Ocean Research & Conservation Association (ORCA)** is working with the Indian River Lagoon to change the way information is obtained and presented. Mapping pollution is the best way to understand the attacks on our diverse water habitats to find the ideal solution for each environmental challenge. ORCA has developed science-based technologies to identify pollutants that can be controlled or eliminated, in effort to restore nature. Why is this critical? The beaches adjacent to the lagoon are one of the densest sea turtle nesting areas found in the Western Hemisphere. These species depend on healthy waterways for their existence. Additionally, these waterways support ocean fish that spawn in the Chesapeake Bay, Virginia then mature in the rich eco-system of Indian River Lagoon.
- **Round Island Beach Park**, is a beautiful beach to spot animals in their natural Vero Beach habitats. Round Island Beach Park is the perfect place to see a manatee, dolphin, egret, pelican and native tropical palms, flora and fauna on the water or a hike. Grills, picnic tables, a playground, a lookout tower, a bridge, forested hiking trails, restrooms, water fountains, lifeguards, parking and boat trailer parking spaces make this an ideal destination for couples and families alike yearning to get out and get into the great outdoors. Kayaking, canoeing and paddle boarding are popular choices that local retailers are happy to deliver and provide guided tours in the lagoon and out into the ocean.
- **T.M Goodwin WMA**, aka Broadmoor Marshes, is a 3,870-acre wetland restoration project in the upper St. John's River basin in Fellsmere. An excellent way to spend the day is walking or biking the levees and surrounding marshes; be mindful this is a designated hunting area. A lookout tower provides visitors with panoramic views so bring a camera. You may also keep your camera ready to shoot as a variety of migrating birds, wildflowers and American alligators can be seen in and around the marshes. Cars are welcome, but there's a restricted check before visiting.

- **Stick Marsh/Farm 13 Reservoir**, has a devoted following of bass fishermen and has a reputation as one of the most notable bass lakes in the county. This prominent 6,700-acre reservoir offers unsurpassed bass catch-and-release fishing. Opened to the public for fishing in 1987, Stick Marsh/Farm 13 continues to provide anglers active fishing. Recent reports state anglers catch more than 100 bass a day. Many believe the rich vegetation that Mother Nature has provided over the last few years is now attracting shellcrackers, bluegills, and crappies as well.

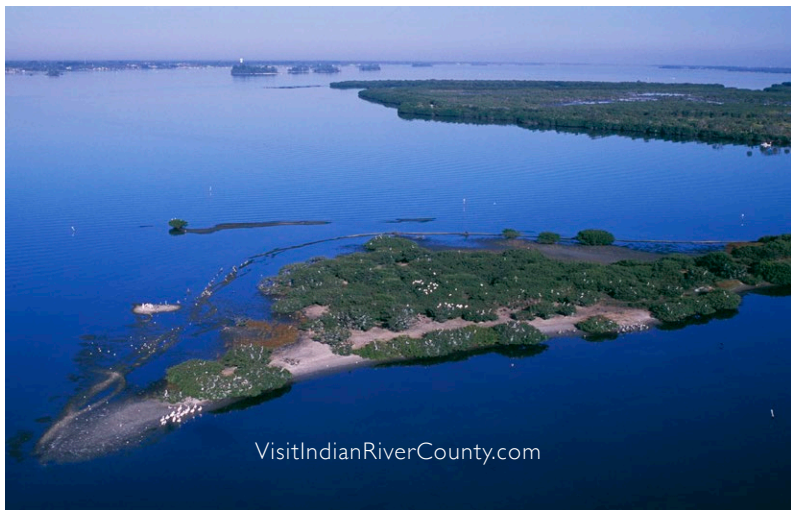
- **St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park** is a top spot for eco-wanderers who yearn for primitive Florida. This park delivers 22,000 acres of backwoods; complete with equestrian and mountain biking trails. Manatees also call this park home from November – March and can be seen from the platform located near the end of the unpaved Buffer Preserve Drive; note unpaved roads lead you in to and out of the park.

*NEWS TIP: Other rare species to spot include endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers, Florida scrub jays, Bachman's sparrows, wood storks, southern bald eagles, and the occasional rattlesnake and gopher tortises.*

- **Wabasso Causeway Park**, is like vacationing on your own private island in Vero Beach. Uncrowded and pristine beaches give way to a full-serve beach area with restrooms, picnic tables, and grills; plus, a boat ramp and fishing pier are all onsite.

- **Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge**, a historical refuge surrounded in a 5,445-acre nature preserve, located along A1A, about three miles north of the Wabasso Bridge in Vero Beach. The park is accessible by canoe/kayak via the Indian River Lagoon. Hiking, bank fishing or fishing by boat or recreational shellfish harvesting are permitted within the open waters of the Indian River Lagoon in Sebastian, Florida. The refuge is supported by the [Pelican Island Audubon Society](#) and provides a complete list of birding sites in Indian River County.

- Its historical roots date back into the 1903. President Theodore Roosevelt founded Pelican Island National Refuge as America's first refuge. The refuge was established to save brown pelicans and other birds as they were disappearing at alarming rates due to the era's obsession with 'fashionable' feathers.



- The refuge is home to 30 different bird species. It is a rookery, roost, feeding ground and loafing area. Birds to observe include:

- Anhinga
- Bald Eagle (threatened species)
- Blue Wing Teal (winter visitor)
- Brown Pelicans
- Cattle, Great, Reddish and Snowy, Egrets
- Common Loon (winter visitor)
- Double-crested Cormorant (migratory)
- Great, and Little Blue Herons
- Green-back and Tricolored Herons
- Frigate Bird (summer visitor)
- Lesser Scaup (winter visitor)
- Laughing Gull (winter visitor)
- Piping Plover (threatened species)
- Red-breasted Merganser (winter visitor)
- Ring-billed Gull (winter visitor)
- Roseate Spoonbill (summer visitor)
- White Ibis
- White Pelican (winter visitor)
- Wood Storks (endangered species)

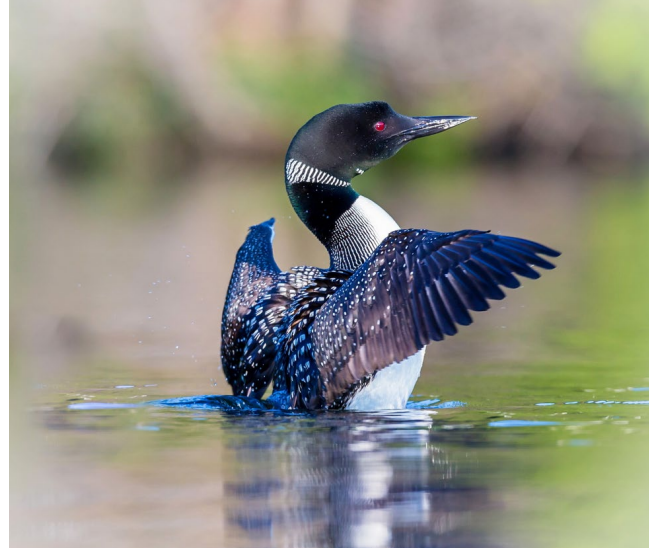
- Endangered species which frequent the refuge:

- Florida Manatee
- Green Sea Turtle
- Hawksbill Sea Turtle
- Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle

- **Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area** is a unique collaboration between citizens and government, jointly owned by St. Johns River Management District and Indian River County. The Herb Kale Trail received its namesake from a leading Florida ornithologist. This significant trail is known for migrating song birds; American Redstart and Gary Catbird – which flourish in the hardwood hammock and scrubby pine flatwoods.

- Kayak and canoe the mangrove forests and just beyond spot Royal Terns, feeding, loafing and nesting on spoil islands and bars in the Indian River Lagoon.
- Catch a glimpse of Tricolored Herons, Spotted Sandpipers and Blue-Winged Teal from the trail, the observation platform or elevated tower.

- **West Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility Wetlands** – is a modern-day marvel. A simply, yet profoundly eco-friendly technique is used to promote a pristine, bird-friendly environment. Once the water is washed through the facility, it is directed to flow through the wetlands. Cattails and bulrush remove excess nutrients like phosphates and nitrates which have been shown to prevent harmful downstream algae blooms which clog and obstruct native aquatic life.



- The facility is a birder lover's region nestled in a created wetland complete with a boardwalk, covered pavilion and observation tower. This made-made wetland is an active birding site with spring and summer being the most productive. The trails provide easy viewing of the 170+ birds that have been recorded visiting the facility. Bird watchers may see:

- Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Duck
- Caspian Tern
- Cave Swallow (rare sightings)
- Dickcissel (rare sightings)
- Least Bittern
- Limpkin
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Painted Bunting
- Purple Gallinule
- Roseate Spoonbill
- Snail Kites

- **Captain Forster Hammock Preserve** is one of the largest remaining maritime hammocks on Orchid Island, Vero Beach. The preserve is open from sunrise until sunset with guided and self-guided tours. Forster's Hammock Trail, a primitive foot trail which leads to two small seasonal ponds. There are a few short trail loops, which branches off the main trail; Forster's Hammock. One to note is Warbler's Walk. The area offers a slice of mature Florida that is hard to find nowadays. Parking and restrooms facilities are available.

- The songbird migration is an epic event taking place each spring and fall. Bird enthusiasts can view:

- Black and White Warblers (winter)
- Blue-headed Vireo (winter)
- Magnificent Frigate Birds (summer)
- Magnolia Warbler
- Painted Bunting (winter)
- Ovenbird
- Scarlet Tanager
- Tennessee Warbler
- Veery

# Under the Sea





ive sites filled with sunken treasures, shipwrecks, thriving coral reefs and artificial reefs are found in abundance off the shores of Vero Beach with some located only a few hundred feet off the Atlantic Coast.

There are four artificial reefs along the beaches of Indian River County, approximately 200-300 feet offshore. The first reef was deployed in 1987 by FP&L, is located along the south beach of Vero Beach at a depth of 38 feet. The remaining three were placed in 1999 by the Indian River County government. These three wrecks are located at depths of 66, 71 and 73 feet along the beachfront in Vero Beach.

Vero Beach Reef is a unique habitat and is close to the coastline. It is a nursery for all types of marine life—turtles, lobsters, manatees, rays, sharks, and 200+ species of fish and the *Oculina Varadosa*, *Oculina Diffusia*, fire, and other types of coral. The reef begins around Sebastian Inlet and runs unbroken to Riomar, which are viewable at low tide. It resumes off Sandypoint and extends south of the Ft Pierce Inlet, paralleling the coastline extending out about a half mile.

The reefs foundations are exposed limestone formations which jet upward from the bottom in various shapes and sizes.

The limestone ledges in some areas rise-up with monumental outcroppings and vast caverns that disappear into the abyss. The ledges are most notable in Vero Beach with some of the highest 'Relief'—as referred to by engineers—found anywhere.

This underwater world is known for shipwrecks, hence the designation of Florida's "Treasure Coast." A fleet of 11 Spanish Ships has left millions in undiscovered gold, the Breconshire, also known as the Boiler Wreck, owned by Jenkins Company of London was on route from New York City to Tampa when she went down in 1894.

Discover the undiscovered and book an eco-wanderlusting vacation in Indian River County. For additional off-the-beaten path adventures in Vero Beach, Fellsmere and or Sebastian [click here](#) or visit us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#).

