

Kayaking in Crystal River Means Encounters of the Fish and Marine Mammal Kind

Go kayaking in the Crystal River area and you'll expose you and your family to wonderful marine creatures.

In fact, you may find yourself with a new friend of the big and gentle kind: the manatee.

Manatees, also known as Sea Cows, are large marine mammals that live in the Gulf of Mexico in the summer, when the Gulf's water heats up. They flock to coastal inlets, streams and lakes in the winter months because they prefer a water temperature of 72 degrees.

Manatees have large, fan-shaped tails and flippers. They are herbivores and like the sea grass that grows at the bottom of Florida's shallow lakes and inlets. They move quite slowly as they munch. They are very gentle and curious creatures. Don't be surprised if a manatee becomes your new best friend when it comes up to your kayak and lets you scratch its back (or even its belly if it turns over, which they are known to do).

Kayakers also will have the opportunity to get a close look at the water tarpon. This is a large, extremely shiny fish that -- and here's a really fun fact -- may be able to absorb oxygen by filling its large swim bladder with air and then absorbing it, something akin to primitive lungs. Tarpon can grow as large as 180 pounds, so you'll not want to fish for them from your kayak. Besides,

If you want to fish for tarpon, you need a special license in Florida to kill and keep the fish, so you'll just want to release it anyway.

If you really want to fish from your kayak, the mangrove snapper may be a better bet. Weighing in at a range from 2-6 pounds, the mangrove snapper abound in the mangrove forests you'll encounter in the Florida's coastal area.

Snook also abound in the shallow waters of Florida's coast, as do mullets. And, yes, you very well may see a mullet jump out of the water.

But perhaps the most memorable marine mammal you'll see from your kayak -- aside from the manatee, of course-- is a dolphin. Dolphins do like the open water, but they are known to explore the Gulf's coastal tributaries and dolphin sightings are quite common.

Renting one of our kayaks means you truly could come face to face with two of the gentlest of sea mammals, the dolphin and manatee.

We look forward to helping you create memories that will last for decades.