

**St. George Island Visitor Center
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St. George Island State Park was Opened to Public Use in 1980

St. George Island (Dr. Julian G. Bruce) State Park features some nine miles of undeveloped beaches and dunes, surrounded by the Gulf of Mexico and Apalachicola Bay. The State Park occupies 1,962 acres at the eastern end of a long, narrow barrier island off the Franklin County coast. St. George State Park property was acquired by the state from private parties and is a combination of sandy coves, salt marshes, shady pines and oak forests.

The beach is fantastic and continually rated among the Top 15 in the United States by "Dr. Beach."

During most of its 5,000 years of existence, St. George Island (previously known as St. Georges Island) was uninhabited by man. It has now evolved into one of the top resort vacation destinations in Florida.

During World War II, the island was used by troops from nearby Camp Gordon Johnston (Lanark Village area) for numerous amphibious assault training exercises that were carried out over the area's vast dunes. Acquisition of land for the park in 1963 and completion of the causeway to the island in 1965 led to increased use of the beaches for recreational activity. In 1980, construction of the park facilities was complete, and the park was opened for public use.

The natural features of the park include extensive beaches and dunes, forests of slash pines and live oak hammocks. The ocean and bay support an abundance of marine life, while small freshwater ponds and sloughs provide a limited aquatic habitat in an otherwise arid climate. The waters of this area are some of the most productive commercial and sport fisheries in Florida, with a thriving oyster industry at the mouth of the Apalachicola River.

WILDLIFE

The arid conditions, coupled with the park's island location, limit both the number and type of resident animal life. Osprey may frequently be seen fishing in the waters, and their nests are found in the tops of living or dead pine trees in the park. Raccoons and ghost crabs may be observed, along with the salt-marsh snakes and diamondback terrapin that reside in the marsh and bay waters. Birds such as the snowy plover, least tern, black skimmer, willet and many other species of shorebirds frequently nest along the park's sandy shores and grass flats. The barrier islands of the Gulf Coast are important "rest stops" for a wide variety of migrating birds during the fall and spring. The best time to observe migrating

birds is after the passage of cold fronts.

FACILITIES

Recreation facilities include a series of hiking trails, boardwalks and observation platforms.

Camping is permitted in the campground located in the pine forests on the bay side or in the primitive campsites at Gap Point for those who wish to hike the 2.5-mile trail. The trail to Gap Point begins in the campground and meanders through the pine flatwood forest to the bay.

Swimming and sunbathing are popular activities on the white sandy beaches and clear Gulf waters. NO LIFEGUARDS ARE PROVIDED.

Surf and bay fishing may yield catches of flounder, redfish, sea trout, pompano, whiting or sometimes Spanish mackerel. A saltwater fishing license is required in Florida.

Boat ramps are located at the Youth Camp Area and East Slough. The speed limit on the park drive is 25 mph, except as posted. No vehicles of any type are permitted in the dune areas. St. George Island State Park is located on St. George Island, 10 miles southeast of Eastpoint, off U.S. 98 in Franklin County.

For more information contact St. George Island State Park 1900 E. Gulf Beach Dr., St. George Island, Florida 32328, 850/927-2111.

(A considerable amount of information for this article was gathered at the State of Florida Park Systems website - provided by the Department of Environmental Protection.)