

We didn't dine at the Swamp Water Café although maybe we should have – a family of five ambled out the doorway and I overheard the wife saying how good everything tasted. I did glance at a menu and noted gator tail, frog legs, fry bread (tastes awesome, if you've never tried it), and other 'Glades specialties like muscadine grapes and beauty berries.

All this took place two years ago, and we want to go back. This time, we're going to spend the night in one of the comfy-looking chickees. Daily viewings include snake and alligator shows plus a Swamp Critter Show. They also offer one-hour swamp buggy tours that can accommodate up to 32 as well as airboat rides.

Beginning April 1, Billie Swamp Safari debuts a 90-minute, in-depth eco-tour that can be privately booked. According to Park Director Ed Woods, guests will get an even greater chance to view the beauty of hardwood hammocks, cypress domes, sloughs, and enjoy a viewing of alligators, deer and many species of birds, plus unusual exotic animals such as crocodiles, elan, antelope and bison. Rare sightings of Florida panthers have been sighted around here as well, but of course one can never count on being that lucky.

For more details contact Billie Swamp Safari at 800-949-6101 (in the US and Canada) or 863-983-6101 (international) or www.seminoletribe.com/safari. And save me a piece of fry bread.



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Hitchin' A Buggy Ride

March 25, 2008

It was far off the beaten path, but my fiance Kelly Braden and I quickly came to realize what a wise decision we'd made. Turning north off Alligator Alley's exit 49, we sped through nearly 20 miles deep into the heart of the Big Cypress National Preserve, our eyes peeled for deer, gators, rabbits, wading and flying birds, and any other visible creature.

Following the signs, we arrived at Billie Swamp Safari that's roughly situated between [Naples](#) and [Fort Lauderdale](#). The main compound on the 2,200-acre property featured an authentic Seminole village, replete with palmetto-frond Seminole chickees. Surrounding the property we found a nifty boardwalk nature trail, an alligator pit, a large traditional council hut, a restaurant and gift shop. We also looked at the animal and bird exhibits and a herpetarium – I'm fascinated by snakes. I especially loved the large gift shop with plenty of Indian crafts, native art and jewelry. I bought two knives to add to my collection as well as a few souvenirs for friends.



The special beauty of Big Cypress National Preserve
 Credit: Billie Swamp Safari