

"Mother raccoons collect these berries for their babies," explains Kathy, picking some up and handing them out to the rest of us. "Try them, they are edible." Even though I can't say they are my favorite kind of fruit, it's good to know that I've just learned to recognize an edible berry. Should I ever be lost in the Florida swamps, I'll know what to eat.

Despite the heat, the summer is the best time of the year to take a swamp buggy tour. During the dry winter months, the water level can be as low as 2 inches, giving one the impression that there isn't much of a swamp to go through. In the summer, however, the water gets as deep as 5 feet, which is what makes the tour more adventurous and exciting, especially for the kids.

Reptile and critter shows

As at most animal-themed parks, Billie Swamp Safari offers a couple of shows to familiarize people with the local fauna. Shows are 45 minutes long and aim to both entertain and educate families about animals that live and breed in Florida. The reptile show seems to be most popular with young boys who apparently never get tired of watching gators and snakes. For those who don't particularly enjoy the company of reptiles, Billie Swamp Safari also offers a critter show, which is scheduled only once a day at 1:15 p.m. Raccoons, baby armadillos and a fluffy skunk are some of the animals you will see and get to know better during the show.

Also, the park rangers will fill you in on what to do and what not to do around these animals. Who knew that if you get sprayed by a skunk, taking a shower will worsen the matter and make you stink for seven days? I sure didn't. But now I know that if it ever happens to me, all I have to do is douse myself in tomato juice.

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