



The Dolphin and the Manatees



We drove north of Dunedin to Crystal River to look for manatees. Kings

Bay in Crystal River is one of the best places in the world to observe manatees because water that emerges from several springs in the bay maintains a constant temperature of 72 degrees Fahrenheit. Hector and I loved manatees ever since we first saw some in Florida many years ago and we planned this trip to take our inflatable kayak, the Dolphin, out on the river.

We visited [Aardvark's Florida-Kayak Company](#) to buy paddling gloves and get the scoop on where to put in. Matt, the owner, is an avid believer in "passive observation" of the manatees and provided a wealth of information.

Kayaks should not chase manatees or follow directly behind them, they should sit still and wait to be approached or paddle next to the manatees without turning the boat towards them. Matt also informed they had in the past. the manatees but



The consequences

of ignoring all of this advice may prove fatal to the manatees. If they become too comfortable with humans, they may also become too comfortable with the boats the humans arrived in and approach them too closely. In addition, people that are too aggressive towards manatees may spook them and separate calves from their mothers, or frighten adults away to a colder part of the waterway, where they may not survive. Now that we understood why we should be passive observers of the manatees, we were ready to go see some.



Following Matt's advice, we started out in Hunter's Spring Park, which was in the middle of town but provided good access to a number of springs, including Three Sisters Springs, which he also highly recommended. After putting in, we paddled toward some snorkelers and immediately saw manatees. Seeing them alongside the snorkelers, we once again confirmed what gentle, docile creatures they are. They are also so silent that if you're not watching closely you may miss them. Sadly, several of the manatees we saw had propeller marks on their backs and their tails. Even in this protected area



We visited

Three Sisters springs, which allows kayaks and canoes, but no motorboats. This makes it a very quiet and peaceful place, as well as a beautiful one. Interestingly, a University of Florida student was on the shore conducting surveys. Hector agreed to take the survey in exchange for her taking a photo of us



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any we would

As we left Three

Sisters Springs, we found a large group of manatees in one of the sanctuaries just outside. There are

several of these sanctuaries for the manatees, areas along the bay that are roped off from swimmers, divers, snorkelers and boats. When the manatees get tired of too many humans, or need a quiet place, they gather in the sanctuaries. Apparently, there were a lot of people in the springs earlier in the day and the manatees needed to get away. This may explain part of the reason for the survey and makes me glad that those questions are being asked.



protection of these beautiful animals and hopeful that people like Matt will continue to advocate for them.

~ Brenda

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