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## Hyatt Coconut Point: A Tropical Family Escape

By Nancy Schretter, Editor

Sometimes a tropical family vacation is just what parents and kids have in mind. For family travel convenience, it's sometimes easier on frazzled parents – and the vacation budget – if the destination is just a drive or short direct flight away. For families seeking a tropical getaway, the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point fits the bill perfectly. With its swaying palm trees and lush landscaping, rich mahogany woods and plantation-style furniture, the Hyatt Coconut Point will have you thinking that you've been transplanted to the Caribbean in no time.

The Hyatt Regency Coconut Point is located in laid-back Bonita Springs, a Florida Gulf Coast town that's a welcome alternative to built-up Marco Island and Naples. Situated smack dab in the middle of twenty-six acres of unspoiled estuaries along Estero Bay, the elegant Hyatt is perfect for nature lovers and those seeking a true escape. It's easy to forget your cares here and fall into a relaxed rhythm of days spent lounging at the beach or pools.



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### Fun Family Adventures

Family vacationers are well aware of Hyatt's innovative kids' camps at its resorts throughout North America. Coconut Point's Camp Hyatt – called Camp Coconut – for children ages 3-12 focuses on the flora, fauna and culture of this region of Florida. Activities include Gasparilla's treasure hunt, aquatic adventures, movies, coconut painting, voyages to Big Hickory Island, arts & crafts, sandcastle fun, and making s'mores at the resort's fire pit. In addition, kids can enjoy animal crafts, photo safaris and eco-friendly activities and more through Camp Hyatt's partnership with National Geographic Kids.

In addition to the more formal Camp Coconut kids' program, families can also take part in the Hyatt Coconut Point's free "Going Coconuts" activities. These are held poolside and include scavenger hunts, relay games, dance parties, slide races, and

much more. The Hyatt's recreation staff plans a wide array of programs for kids and families, especially during major holiday periods when multi-day family entertainment extravaganzas are planned. Activity programs change daily, so stop by the recreation desk by the pool or see the hotel concierge for complete details.

Families seeking more active pursuits can enjoy kayak rentals, dolphin watch eco-tours and sunset cruises on shallow Estero Bay. AWE (All Water Excursions), a private company located at the Hyatt, provides a wide variety of on-the-water recreational opportunities for guests ranging from charter fishing trips and water skiing to shelling cruises and sailing trips. Estero Bay is the perfect destination for wildlife enthusiasts. We spotted egrets, cormorants, pelicans, an ibis, and even two bottlenose dolphins on our relaxing two-hour kayak trip.

On another morning, we hiked the quarter-mile boardwalk through the mangroves to the marina, also accessible by the resort's convenient trolley. Here, a free water taxi whisked us away for a fifteen minute ride to Big Hickory Island, the resort's private island beach shared with a nearby residential community. Our captain pointed out many species of birds and sights along the way.

The Hyatt's Big Hickory Island beach is a quiet destination with beach chairs and umbrellas. While this small white sand beach is a great spot for sunning, there's much more for families to do here. Hunting for sharks' teeth is a favorite pastime, along with swimming and shelling. This beach is a mecca for shell lovers, with several hundred different types of shells found in the area. Lifeguards do not patrol the beach, but the water entry is gradual and remains shallow for quite a distance. There is a large shaded pavilion area at the beach with rest rooms, picnic tables and lounge chairs, but no food or beverage services. If you're planning to spend a few hours here, stop by the resort's Kofe Nut Marketplace and pack some refreshments in the rolling coolers provided for beach excursions.

### **Waterworks and Much More**

For water-loving families, the Hyatt's three pools and hot tubs provide a tropical family playground. The main event is a 5,000 square-foot heated Adventure Pool with its 140-foot corkscrew water slide. The waterslide height requirements are forty-two inches or taller, and are strictly enforced. It was fun to watch the kids splash



down time and again – and parents found it tough to coax the kids away from the pool area. Children who slide down 100 times in the same day get a medal ... and it looked like a few came very

close to winning on my watch. This monster of a pool has a shallow zero-entry section for little ones and a small "Ciguala" waterslide for pint-sized kids who are not quite tall enough for the corkscrew.

For those seeking a bit more relaxation, the Hyatt offers an adults-only heated lap pool and a lovely cool pool fed by a massive two-story waterfall. If that's not enough water for you, guests also have access to four more pools and water features at Coconut Plantation, a Hyatt Vacation Club, just a free five-minute trolley shuttle ride away. Be sure to take the kids there to enjoy floating together in oversized inner tubes around the Vacation Club's 1,000-foot lazy river. Check with the Vacation Club Desk in the hotel lobby for wristbands and usage requirements.

Dining at the Hyatt Coconut Point is superb. The Hyatt's Key West-inspired Tarpon Bay Restaurant serves fresh seafood along with flavorful meats at dinner time. Specialties of the house include lobster mac and cheese (don't miss it – it's divine), crispy whole snapper, and many varieties of fish cooked "your way" served with up to three different types of sauces. My seafood dinners here were some of the best I've ever had and the wait staff is outstanding. Tanglewood, a AAA Four Diamond indoor American grille is open for breakfast, lunch, and seasonally for dinner. Corkscrew, an outdoor full-service bar and grille serves meals at tables and out by the pools from late morning through the afternoon. Kids' menus are available at all dining venues. For those who need their Starbucks, the hotel's Kofe Nut Marketplace = serves up your favorite coffees and lattes, along with pastries, snacks, s'mores kits and complimentary DVDs. In the evenings, s'mores by the fire pit can provide the perfect end to a family dinner.

During the summer months, evening family activities also may include a dive-in movie at the pool. There is a small video arcade next to Camp Hyatt as well as outdoor areas with billiards and a ping pong table, providing additional spots for teens and families to hang out at night.

For a true vacation escape, don't miss the resort's Stillwater Spa. The gorgeous two-story, 19,000 square-foot spa has eighteen treatment rooms where all manner of hydrotherapy, massage therapy, facials and body treatments are available. The spa contains one of the few Watsu pools in the country, in which massage takes place in a body-temperature heated pool with specially trained therapists who combine Japanese shiatsu and stretching techniques, resulting in an intense sense of deep relaxation. I opted instead for a classic Swedish massage on a heated massage table. The relaxing massage experience was one of the better ones I've had - Sandra had me out like a light halfway through my treatment. I came away with all muscle aches gone, completely renewed.

The spa also houses a salon and free fitness center (open 24 hours) with free weights as well as countless cardio and weight

machines. Kids must be at least 16 years of age to visit unaccompanied. There also is a spacious studio that offers a variety of fitness classes including yoga and pilates, all with window views of the nature preserves outdoors. Mani-pedi, salon services, and selected treatments are available for teens as well.

Guests at the Hyatt Coconut Point can use two hydro-grid tennis courts, a 24-foot climbing wall, and a wide assortment of bicycles – available free as part of the hotel's resort fee. An even bigger draw is the Raptor Bay Golf Club with its Raymond Floyd designed 18-hole golf course that attained the nation's first Audubon International's Gold Certification for environmental sensitivity. Each golf hole was carefully crafted to blend with the environment of native vegetation, lakes and nature preserve. Children's golf instruction programs are available. Raptor Bay also offers a well-appointed golf shop and Braxton's – a great spot for a casual lunch or meal. There's also the Chip Challenge - a tee box on resort's grounds where for guests can test their skill at chipping across a pond to a small green.

Those craving a little retail therapy on their vacation will be right at home at the Hyatt Coconut Point. The Coconut Point Mall, a huge outdoor shopping and entertainment complex, is just up the street from the resort. Here you'll find stores like DSW Shoes, Coach and Sephora along with theaters and family-friendly dining options such as Johnny Rockets and California Pizza Kitchen. The hotel's shuttle service makes stops there three days a week. In addition, bargain hunters will want to head to the Miramar Outlets, located just ten minutes away. The mall has over 140 top designed and brand name outlet stores including Banana Republic, Coach, DKNY, J.Crew, Juicy Couture, Lacoste, Polo Ralph Lauren, Talbots, True Religion and more. Free kids activities are also offered at select times as well.

Although it's not directly on the beach, the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point is a great option for a family looking to enjoy an upscale Florida resort with plenty of diversions in an area filled with nature. Believe me – the kids will go wild for the pools, not to mention the beach, Camp Hyatt, and all there is to see and do. This is one resort where both kids and parents can be relaxed and enjoy their vacation, both together and apart.

#### **If You Go:**

- Rates at the 454-room Hyatt Regency Coconut Point are lowest in the off-season (May through mid-December), and a variety of seasonal family deals are offered throughout the year, ranging from fourth night free packages to an adjoining room for 50% off. A \$20 per day resort fee covers all local calls and toll-free call surcharges from guest rooms, wired high-speed Internet access, all incoming faxes, in-room safe, bicycle rentals, golf bag storage, self-parking (very convenient), beach ferry, resort trolley, exercise facilities, and use of the DVD rental library (there are DVD players in each room and free one-night rentals). For more

information or to make reservations, call 800-55-HYATT or go to [www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com](http://www.coconutpoint.hyatt.com).

- Coconut Point's Camp Hyatt operates daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Friday and Saturday nights from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. year-round. Half-day (with or without lunch) and full-day sessions are available. The Camp Hyatt at Coconut Point is for kids ages 3-12. Children must be toilet-trained and out of diapers and pull-ups. Reservations should be made 24 hours in advance, although walk-in participation may be possible if there is space. For more information, visit [www.camphyatt.com](http://www.camphyatt.com) or call 239-444-1234.
- Babysitting service is available through Tender Loving Care, a bonded, off-property insured firm. Reservations should be made at least 48 hours in advance. For more information, call Tender Loving Care at 239-598-1515.
- Kids under 5 eat free at all hotel dining outlets, except for major holiday buffets. During the holiday weekends (such as Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July and Labor Day) the Tanglewood Restaurant usually offers a "Kids Pay Their Age Buffet" during which the kids' buffet costs the same amount as their age. For Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Even, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, children's buffet prices are available as part of scheduled annual events and kids 4 and under generally eat free of charge.
- The resort is located just a short 20- to 25-minute drive from the Fort Myers Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW). Nonstop flights are available from 48 cities on 20 different air carriers. Car rentals are available right at the airport - no shuttle required. For those who prefer not to drive, car service is available from LP Transportation ([www.golptransport.com](http://www.golptransport.com)). My driver, Daniel, was right on time and made the trip smooth and easy.

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