

Paradise Coast: 6 spectacular sights to see from the sky



Visitors to the Paradise Coast regularly note its beauty, splendor and tranquility, but they're only seeing the region from one vantage point.

It is absolutely stunning from the air. Just ask anyone who has booked Elite Jets' helicopter for a sightseeing trip. Aerial tours provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view the Paradise Coast without having to navigate traffic or tourists.

Every tour begins at Elite Jets' private terminal at Naples Airport, where passengers are greeted by Chief Helicopter Pilot Joe Fragione, or Chopper Joe as he's affectionately known. Guests will travel in comfort on Elite Jets' [Bell 407](#), a luxury helicopter that whisks passengers around southern Florida in air-conditioned comfort with cushioned leather seats.

Once airborne, passengers will delight in Chopper Joe's in-flight commentary as he shares interesting historical facts and anecdotes about the Paradise Coast. The view from the Bell 407's windows, though, come straight from a chamber of commerce brochure.



"Along the coastline, we fly at about 300 feet, low enough to see dolphins, manatees, stingrays, schools of fish, mangroves and coastal marshes," Chopper Joe said. "Southwest Florida is beautiful from the ground, but nothing compares to the breathtaking scenery and pristine environment you see from above."

The Paradise Coast is full of [unforgettable experiences](#), but for those seeking adventures that are a notch above, here are six spectacular sights to see from the sky:

Gator Spotting in the Everglades and Big Cypress

[Everglades National Park](#) is the nation's largest subtropical wilderness, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The park is a haven for bird watchers, kayakers, boaters, hikers, bikers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Nature-lovers who prefer a mosquito-free, air-conditioned experience can go alligator- and python-spotting by air. Flying at



a low altitude, a helicopter can zigzag across wetlands, sawgrass marshes, canals, hardwood hammocks, pinelands and sloughs, giving passengers a 360-degree tour of the Everglades.

A neighbor to the Everglades, [Big Cypress National Preserve](#) is a rich marine estuary fostering plant communities that are home to diverse wildlife. From the air, passengers can spot whitetail deer, turkey and hogs, but only eagle-eyed passengers have an opportunity to spot the endangered, reclusive Florida panther.

House Hunting above Gordon Drive



Naples is home to one of the hottest real estate markets in America, where million-dollar listings are the norm and 15-year-old beachfront mansions are considered teardowns. On Jan. 28, 2021, for example, a single-family home on Gordon Drive sold for \$36 million. A day later, the house next door sold for a whopping \$52 million. Two weeks after that, a residence six doors down sold for \$39 million.

Take house hunting to the next level with an aerial tour of the Paradise Coast's most affluent, exclusive communities. Port Royal, Bay Colony, Pelican Bay and other neighborhoods are scattered up and down the coast, so a quick helicopter tour can help prospective buyers narrow down their options to specific streets or even homes.

Travel Back in Time with Barron Collier

At one time, advertising executive Barron Collier was the largest landowner and developer in Florida. Even today, Collier's influence is still felt throughout Naples, located in the county synonymous with his last name.

In 1906, Collier purchased Useppa Island, a 100-acre bridgeless island off Southwest Florida's coast. It was, and still is, a place where days are guided by sunrises and sunsets, not meetings and traffic jams. It's a place where time stands still and nature reigns supreme.



Elite Jets is a member of Useppa Island Club, and the unique partnership allows guests who book its [Escape to Useppa Island](#) tour to relive Old Florida as Collier experienced it – quaint, quiet and quintessential.

Chopper Joe will land near the club's Collier Inn Restaurant, which features a menu filled with locally caught and grown ingredients, before leading a walking tour through the island's famed cottages.

Today, Useppa Island remains in private hands and essentially is an updated, colorful version of a vintage black-and-white Florida postcard from generations ago.

Travel to the Future, Circa 1981



The Paradise Coast's architectural style is decidedly Mediterranean. Visitors note a seamless blend reminiscent of the original Naples in Italy with rustic, Old Florida charm.

And then there is the Cape Romano Dome House, an oddity in a sea of uniformity.

The Dome House was built in the early 1980s on the southern end of Cape Romano, just south of Marco Island, as a series of connected concrete domes. With solar power to generate electricity and a cistern collecting rainwater, the Dome House was designed as a sustainable home before that term became a buzzword.

Nature took its toll, though, eroding the structures and sandy beach where they once stood. Today, the Dome House rests several hundred yards offshore and is only visible by boat or air. Viewing the structure from above also offers an environmental lesson about erosion and Southwest Florida's changing coastline.

Airborne Eco-Tour

With 110,000 acres of pristine mangrove forest, uplands and protected waters, the [Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) is immense. It is home to numerous species of birds, reptiles, mammals, fish, insects, plants and other wildlife.

The estuary truly is a natural wonder and a sight to behold.

However, portions of the reserve are so remote that boats, kayaks and hiking trails can't even get your close. From above, though, you can visit areas that have never been explored by humans, a truly exclusive experience only possible through an airborne eco-tour.



Beckoning Beaches



With 30 miles of white sand and seashells, the [beaches of Naples and Marco Island](#) are a top draw for visitors and residents alike. They are, no doubt, the main attraction.

What makes the Paradise Coast's shoreline unique, however, is its diversity. Starting from the south, sightseeing tours take passengers above the [Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge](#), a cluster of islands and islets that form one of the world's largest mangrove forests. Marco Island features the region's widest stretch of sand and a seemingly endless stretch of beachfront condominiums. Then it's back to nature in Rookery Bay and road-less retreats on Keewaydin Island, where boat docks – not garages – house residents' primary mode of transportation.

Further north on the mainland, multi-million homes dot the shoreline in Port Royal before transitioning to a mix of homes, mid-rise condos, hotels, private clubs, public beaches, high-rises and more conservation areas.

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