

As we boarded the boat, a seven-foot-long alligator circled us in the water. The guide said it was a gentle animal and wouldn't bother us. However, just seeing those beady eyes and enormous jaws was enough for us to heed his warning to keep our hands inside the boat at all times.

While we skimmed at about 30 MPH through the water, above us and in nearby thickets were colorful birds native to the area. They included hawks, herons, ospreys, egrets, cranes and other species. We watched as they sought out their prey.

We spotted more alligators, as well as frogs, snails, turtles and snakes. Although we didn't see any, tourists may see Florida panther, black bear, grey fox, key deer, manatee, otter and raccoon.

The Everglades are protected areas for wildlife, and all of the species of animals, birds and flora remain in their natural state. The guide further stated that great care is taken keep everything as it has been undisturbed for thousands of years.

There's a small museum at the landing, and while we were waiting for our ride, we saw stuffed versions of native animals and birds, including a 30-foot crocodile and other exhibits. We certainly enjoyed our airboat experience in Florida's Everglades, and look forward to the next time.

Our cost for the one-hour ride was about \$50 for adults, \$25 for kids age six to 12, and \$10 for ages three to six. Tours are available seven days a week, the company opens at 9:30 A.M. and the first tour is at 10 A.M. The last tour is at 4 P.M. Loxahatchee Everglades Tours, 15490 Loxahatchee Road, Parkland FL 33076-9703, evergladesairboattours.com