

# Chokoloskee Island, FL

The gateway to Everglades National Park and the Ten Thousand Islands...and some of the best fishing in the world

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Chokoloskee Island is located in Southwest Florida in Collier County. The island has a long interesting history. It was first settled by the Calusa Indians who left behind huge oyster shell piles which are remain as a prominent reminder of these early settlers. The settlement of the island by white men in the late 19th century was similar to the “Wild West”. The gun and the knife ruled the day, and interesting characters both famous and notorious dominated the scene. The legend of EJ “Bloody” Watson is the best known. Watson was credited with crimes ranging from murder to smuggling and mayhem. His reputation for evil deeds terrified the islanders. In October 1910, Watson arrived by boat in Chokoloskee, and was met by a vigilante group of locals...all well armed. In the ensuing shootout, Watson was gunned down. The Coroner removed 33 slugs from his body, not counting buckshot! The incident is the subject of a reenactment each year on the Island.

The Chokoloskee Island of 2009 is much different. It’s a quaint community that serves as the gateway to Everglades National Park and The Ten Thousand

Islands...and some of the best fishing in the world! The area is dotted by mangrove islands that flood during high tide.

I fished a day with Cecil Brown a retired guide who seems to be related to everyone on the island. Our overnight lodging was with Cousin Ben and we purchased our bait from Cousin Caleb. Everyone we met asked Cecil for fishing advice, so I felt pretty good about our chances. Our primary fishing strategy was to cast live shrimp near the mangrove islands. These “honey holes,” as Cecil called them, yielded hard-hitting redfish and snook. It’s local knowledge that’s usually the key to a successful fishing trip. My optimism was rewarded, we caught redfish, snook, mangrove snapper, jewfish, and mullet. These species are available nearly year around, being somewhat more available in the warmer months. Tarpon fishing is rated as world class, and is best in the summer months and into early fall. Please check Florida Fish & Wildlife regulations ([www.my.fwc.com/fishing](http://www.my.fwc.com/fishing)) for the limits on each of these species.

Fishing guides are readily available on the island. When the fish are

running a reservation is needed. Visit [www.chokoloskee.com/fishing.html](http://www.chokoloskee.com/fishing.html) for more information including a listing of guides. Overnight hotel accommodations are available on the island or across the causeway in Everglades City.

Chokoloskee Island does not offer overnight dockage. The closest marinas for overnight dockage are:

**Marco Island**  
(about 20 miles from Chokoloskee)  
The Marina at Factory Bay  
tel: 239-389-2929

**Esplanade Marina**  
tel: 239-394-6333

**Everglades City**  
(only a few miles from Chokoloskee)  
Rod & Gun Club Docks  
tel: 813-695-2101

Chokoloskee Island is a worthwhile adventure into a part of Florida not often visited by yachtsmen. The friendly atmosphere and great fishing will bring you back. ❖