

# Mom, that log is looking at me.

By Joquita Burka

The children peer over the edge of the boat, breathless. Did you see something move? Or was it your imagination? To the uninformed, the blackwaters appear dark and mysterious—a great setting for a horror movie. You don't have to tell them that the waters are, in reality, clean, merely dyed to the color of tea or coffee by the leaching of the tannins in the leaves of the trees that give the swamp its name—Cypress Gardens.

It's the perfect place—a mysterious, exotic locale, just 25 miles north of Charleston. Best of all, you and the kids just might learn something while exploring this fascinating place where, in fact, the "log" might be watching you, and is actually an alligator.

This part of Berkeley County was once home to Dean Hall,

one of the most important rice-producing plantations along the Cooper River. The blackwaters of the swamp were used to flood the prosperous rice fields. However, the Civil War forever changed farming in the area, and Benjamin R. Kittredge purchased the land in the late 1920s as a hunting preserve.

Tradition has it that when Kittredge saw how beautiful the reflection of the leaves appeared in the blackwaters, he began to speculate on how the waters would look if surrounded by flowers. With that he began to plant azaleas, dogwoods, daffodils and hundreds of other plants. His daughter formalized and vastly expanded the gardens.

In 1989, when Hurricane Hugo struck the gardens viciously, a huge community effort was undertaken to save the gardens as a unique habitat for wildlife and an educational center for both children and adults. Fortunately the community's efforts paid off, and in 2007 Cypress Gardens celebrated its 75th anniversary as a public garden.

Today, Cypress Gardens offers guests 163 acres of beauty including 80 acres of swamp and 4.5 miles of walking trails. Visitors can choose from guided tours or explore on their own. One of the most popular ways to explore the garden is in the traditional flat bottom boat. However, some choose to paddle their own canoes or kayaks across the waters to explore at their own pace.

The woods and waters abound with wildlife such as pileated woodpeckers, wood ducks, otter, barred owls and alligators.

Underneath, the blackwater holds its secrets close, and the easiest way to see what lurks in these waters is to visit the Cypress Gardens Aquarium, Reptile Center and Crocodile Isle. In the Aquarium you'll find 30 species of freshwater fish and

17 species of reptiles and amphibians. Where else can you spot an 80-pound Arkansas Blue Catfish? For things that slither and slide, take in the Reptile Center. There you'll find Pedro the Galapagos tortoise alongside anacondas and pythons. Obviously (and thankfully) the Aquarium and Reptile Center house many species not found in the area.

Crocodile Isle features everything from the African Nile Crocodile to the Thai Siamese Crocodile to the local natives. Less threatening members of the natural world are found in the Aviary and the Butterfly House. You and the children will be much more delighted with the idea of getting up close and personal with these species.

And, of course, there are the gardens. Any time of the year, something is blooming in this wonderland. In January the camellias. In March the azaleas. In July the Water Willows. In...well you get the idea. A full calendar of blossoms and blooms, as well as the best time to view certain types of wildlife, is online at [www.cypressgardens.info](http://www.cypressgardens.info). You'll see immediately that any time of the year there's something happening and well worth seeing at Cypress Gardens.

Find out more in *Places...*

Turn to page 139 in the "green pages" for more on Cypress Gardens.



Cypress Gardens, S.C.



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