

Monarchs Visit Every Year at The Grand Hotel

At the Grand....Butterflies are Free



The Grand Hotel has a long list of visitors who come to the hotel year after year to enjoy the many amenities offered.

But one large group of travelers holds the record for the number of visits – the beautiful **Monarch Butterflies** which stop by each year in October and November on their way from Canada and points east to the Yucatan Peninsula's Sierra Madre Mountains.

The Grand's grounds crews say the pretty "travelers" come to the Grand because of its beautifully manicured grounds and lush gardens, and while that's surely a factor, Mother Nature must get part of the credit too.

The Monarchs are on a 3,000-mile journey to the south and always pause their journey here on the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay. Here they rest and feed, gaining body weight and energy for the trip across the Gulf of Mexico. The Monarch migration is one of science's great mysteries. How do they know the route?

Entomologists believe they "follow the food," recognizing the all-important milkweed, seaside goldenrod and red clover by color and scent. They may also navigate by the sun and the Earth's magnetic forces.

The Monarch travels south only in the daylight, and may cover up to 80 miles in a single day. Cruising speed is 10-12 mph but they are capable of sprinting up to 85 mph when threatened. Their southbound odyssey is in large groups at relatively low altitudes; however, the return journey is generally solo, at higher altitudes and at higher speeds, both night and day. They rarely stop on the northbound (spring) migration as the all-important goal is for the females to reach the egg-laying fields as early as possible.

Many of the Grand's regular guests choose the Monarch time frame to visit with cameras and binoculars in hand. Teachers bring students to the grounds and report sightings to a national register, which tracks the annual migration.

It's true that "butterflies are free" at the Grand – free for the viewing and free to move on to their next destination.

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Photo by Susan Stein

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