



CANOPY ROADS AND CAMELLIA GARDENS MEET MAJESTIC WATERWAYS AND MEANDERING TRAILS

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.— From spotting manatees year round and strolling through bountiful gardens, to casting a line for the big one and paddling down a pristine river, Tallahassee is a slice of Florida that is rarely expected. Situated in the Panhandle, the Capital City combines the best outdoor experiences in Florida – nearby coastlines, vibrant lakes and rivers, and enveloping warmth – with a surprising landscape for the Sunshine State. As one of the most diverse biological regions in the United States, rolling hills stand in defined contrast to the typically flat land of the state’s peninsula, while ancient moss-draped live oaks and glossy-leaved sweet gums intertwine together to form protective shadows over nine protected canopied roads. Beautiful, yes; but more than just a stunning and scenic place to come together, Tallahassee is home to nature’s adventures (www.VisitTallahassee.com).

All four seasons bring different flora and fauna. In fact, The Nature Conservancy considers the Tallahassee area to be one of “America’s Last Great Places.” Whether by land or water, breath-taking landscapes, amazing wildlife and recreational activities abound for outdoor enthusiasts, explorers, trail-blazers and adventurers of all types to feed souls or claim serious bragging rights.

WATER

With five winding rivers, various sinkholes and 16 accessible lakes peppered throughout the region, Tallahassee visitors go wherever the water takes them. The Apalachicola River – with ever-changing scenery, from covered marshlands to open-air bays – branches into 11 different trails, some easy day trips meandering through tupelo

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swamps, and others intense multi-day river trips where endurance is key and some primitive camping may be required.

On the spring-fed Wakulla River, which also receives an influx of saltwater from the Gulf of Mexico and converges with the St. Marks River, it's not uncommon for paddlers to encounter freshwater fish, dolphins and manatees – all during the same trip. Outfitters such as The Wilderness Way provide kayak rentals, night trips on the Aucilla River as well as guided tours of the intricate and delicately balanced ecosystems of the area's numerous waterways, ranked by *Delta Sky* as the top kayaking spot in the United States. And area sinkholes including Leon Sinks Geological Area provide both above and under water exploration.

Standing statuesque along the water's edge, cypress trees line the tannin-tinged waters of the Bradford Brooks Chain of Lakes. Tepid waters flow between the various lakes in this system, creating an idyllic location for fishing, paddling and quiet reflection. Sprawling yet shallow Lake Iamonia features seven miles of bays, coves and secret crevices for discovery, while neighboring Lake Jackson is equally large at eight miles long. The mighty Lake Talquin reigns as one of the best freshwater fishing holes, housing speckled perch, shellcracker and crappie, but competes with the Wacissa River – one of the few rivers in North Florida where the elusive Suwannee Bass resides – for the rarest catch of the day.

For visitors who prefer saltier angling, the Gulf Coast is less than 30 miles away. Fed by the Aucilla, Econfinia, St. Marks and Ochlocknee Rivers and framed by the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Appalachee Bay – a churning mix of fresh and salt water, grass flats and diving depths – merges with the Gulf of Mexico. Near the shore trout, redfish and giant tarpon make frequent appearances, while deep sea runs return prime kingfish and cobia. Charters and guides are nearly as abundant as the fish, with many flats, deep sea and sportfishing excursions available.

Just inland, exhilarating 70-degree waters flow through one of the world's deepest freshwater springs at Wakulla Springs State Park, where wildlife and visitors alike come

together to take a refreshing plunge. Snorkeling and swimming in these crystal waters yields natural encounters best described as up close and personal, from tiny turtles' heads occasionally breaking through the surface to mammoth manatees – whose looks provide a hint of prehistoric ancestry – sluggishly paddling about with rubbery grey flippers. Below the surface, an extensive cave and tunnel system is an underwater archaeological site housing fossilized remains, including ancient mastodon bones visible from 80 feet above on the park's signature glass bottom boat.

The water isn't the only location for roaming wildlife, birdwatchers put binoculars into overtime searching the skies and shallow marshes for native birds. The purple gallinule whose long yellow legs allow easy wading and the anhinga with its snake-like neck and outspread wings drying in the sun are easy to spot; but the limpkin – also known as the crying bird – is easier to hear. Its rattling wail is often used as a jungle sound effect, perhaps just one of the reasons the original “Tarzan” movie and “Creature from the Black Lagoon” were both filmed at Wakulla Springs.

CANOPY ROADS, GARDENS AND TRAILS

Tallahassee's canopy roads, originally old Indian trails now lined with huge, moss-draped live oaks, provide scenic driving adventures for visitors. Covering 78 miles, downloadable [maps](#) are available including the unique history of these nine protected roads.

Majestic trees give way to flowering flora at Maclay Gardens State Park. Shades of pink – crimson, rose, fuchsia and carnation – paint the landscape with graceful camellias, blossoming dogwoods, fragrant redbuds and royal azaleas. Secret gardens, reflecting pools and stunning floral architecture lend to the enchanting ambiance of the park, complemented by five miles of hiking trails that afford spectacular lake views. Goodwood Museum & Gardens has been restored to capture the early 20th century design and landscape and features roses, heirloom bulbs, centuries old live oak trees and magnolias surrounding the stately antebellum mansion.

Hikers, cyclists, runners and equestrians alike will revel in the number of nature trails in Tallahassee – cutting through dense hardwood forests, traversing ravines, climbing bluffs

and wading through swampy wetlands. Of interest is nearby Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserve – the largest natural geological exposure in Florida. Spectators gather annually in March for the Red Hills International Horse Trials, one of the premier equestrian eventing competitions attracting the world’s best riders from 11 countries and 28 states, held at beautiful Elinor Klapp-Phipps Park.

Equally stunning is the St. Marks Historic Railroad Trail, valued nearly as much for its history as its scenery. Once an active railroad dating back to 1837, the trail is now popular among cyclists, stretching 16 miles north to south, passing through quaint communities and covered forest preserves, and ending in the small coastal town of St. Marks (where trail blazers often enjoy the freshest seafood from any number of waterside restaurants before heading back – a reward for a bike ride well done).

Branching off the railroad, the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge imparts 75 miles of marked trails – including intersection with the Florida National Scenic Trail meandering through – with each mile marker revealing a new habitat or species for examination, including eagles, otters and wetland wildflowers. Attracting more than 300 species of birds, and waterfowl and migratory monarch butterflies, the refuge is a birder and butterfly-watcher’s paradise.

Named the largest forest in Florida, the Apalachicola National Forest spans 571,088 acres and includes 2,735 acres of fresh water streams, rivers, lakes and natural springs. Nature enthusiasts travel the 67 linear mile Florida Trail, explore the Leon Sinks – a geological area full of sinkholes and caverns – and gaze at the eye-catching open prairies filled with wildflowers at the Apalachee Savannas. Visitors take in the sight of a vanished Fort Gadsden, formerly the Apalachicola River outpost during the War of 1812. Home to one of the last extensive wiregrass and long leaf pine communities in existence, the Apalachicola National Forest provides a glimpse into Florida’s beauty before people arrived.

Tallahassee’s natural wonders that can’t be seen on foot can be seen by car on the Big Bend Scenic Byway – recently designated by the U.S. Department of Transportation

Federal Highway Administration as a National Scenic Byway – presenting more than 200 miles of driving trails circumventing the region. Visitors recreate the steps that are forever engrained in the region’s heritage, those of the Apalachee tribe, Creek Indians and Spanish Conquistadors. Starting at the Tallahassee Regional Airport, the two-day loop melds the best of landscapes together – passing through hardwood hammocks of rich pine forests speckled with streams and rivers then snaking southward along the coast to salt marshes, bays and sand dunes.

Tallahassee shares natural beauty and unparalleled outdoor adventure with an upbeat vitality. A fusion of cosmopolitan flair and charming personality defines the spirit of Tallahassee, Florida’s Capital City – where it all comes together for visitors. Situated just off Florida’s northern I-10 corridor, stretching along the state’s Panhandle, Tallahassee is a place where college town meets cultural center, politics meets performing arts and history meets nature – a place where the vibrancy of what to do is matched only by the city’s inviting hospitality. Additional visitor information is available from **Visit Tallahassee** at **www.VisitTallahassee.com** or **(800) 628-2866**.

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About Visit Tallahassee

Visit Tallahassee is the official tourism marketing organization for Tallahassee and Leon County Florida, operating as a department of Leon County Government. Visit Tallahassee promotes tourism to the area through direct sales, advertising, public relations, sports, film, product development and visitor services. For more information, visit www.VisitTallahassee.com.