



Gainesville

(from art to adventure)

College students aren't the only ones who come to Gainesville to expand their minds. Gainesville's status as a top town for baby boomers starts with the youthful, urbane vibe of the University of Florida, but that's only the preface to the story.

Crack the cover of this classic vacation destination, and you'll find an action-packed introduction to what can happen when arts, culture and intellect combine in a stunning natural environment.

Choose your own adventure

Paddling the crystal-clear springs that surround Gainesville, you're truly surrounded by nature: Fish and otters gliding below your kayak, majestic cypress trees alongside you,

snow-white egrets soaring above. North Florida lays claim to the highest number of first-magnitude springs in the world. While Ichetucknee Springs State Park is the best known of North Florida's springs, Manatee Springs and Fanning Springs State Parks also offer crystal blue springs for swimming and boating, as well as hiking trails. On the Santa Fe River, explore O'Leno State Park's historic Civilian Conservation Corps buildings. The blooming fields and forests of **Kanapaha Botanical**

Gardens (www.kanapaha.org) offer an idyllic way to spend the afternoon, while nearby **Chapman's Pond** is an Audubon-recognized hot spot for birding. www.florid-abirdingtrail.com

At **Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park**, American lotus blossoms burst forth across the 22,000-acre savannah each May and marsh marigolds dot the landscape each October. www.floridastateparks.org/paynesprairie

Arts alive

From Broadway musicals to avante garde dance to major musical acts, each season at the 1,700-seat **Phillips Center for the Performing Arts** brings a world of creativity to Gainesville. www.performingarts.ufl.edu

The **Phillips Center** stage is also home to the state touring company Dance Alive National Ballet, which features dancers from around the world in original and classic ballets. www.dancealive.org

Visual arts flourish here as well, with touring exhibits that draw centerpiece reviews in The New York Times, along with plein air paint-outs that celebrate the beauty of the storied landscape. Known for its exquisite collections of Asian and African art, the **Harn** also boasts sculpture and water gardens, a sizable photography collection, and even a Monet. www.harn.ufl.edu

For professional theater, head to the elegant turn-of-the-century Federal Building for a mainstage show in the **Hippodrome Theatre**, which draws professional actors from around the region. At the Hipp Cinema, visitors can catch groundbreaking independent and international films. www.thehipp.org

In Gainesville's downtown nightlife district, evenings find a crowd amassed at the **Bo Diddley Downtown Community Plaza** for the "Let's Go Downtown" entertainment series. From May through October, free Friday evening shows feature a wide variety of performers under the stars. (www.gvl-culturalaffairs.org) And at **Savannah Grande**, a downtown reception hall, the Gainesville Friends of Jazz and Blues concert series draws acts from Branford Marsalis to Manfredo Fest. www.gnvfriendsofjazz.org

Stay awhile

From the gracious Victorian inns of downtown Gainesville to the stately Herlong Mansion in Micanopy, Alachua County's historic inns are the perfect home base for exploring the area's heritage. (www.visitgainesville.com/lodging)

With 5,000 hotel rooms to choose from, Gainesville has a match for any taste and budget, including seven bed and breakfast inns, four of them lovingly restored homes in Gainesville's downtown historic district. Tour the area with your own personal guide - right on your cell phone. Destinations on the customizable cell-phone tour include the inns as well as the historic Thomas Center, a gracious 1920s hotel that now serves as Gainesville's art and culture headquarters www.visitgainesville.com 📱

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