

Eco Vacations



In a state surrounded by water, it should come as no surprise to learn Florida is an eco tourist's haven! Whether you're a birder, photographer, hiker, or are simply looking to become one with Mother Nature, the opportunity awaits in the Sunshine State!

Worlds away from theme park chaos, the **Suwannee River** provides a peaceful respite for the soul. Encompassing 52,935 acres of land in Dixie and Levy Counties, situated along Florida's Northwest Coast, the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge fronts 26 miles of the Gulf of Mexico where the habitat changes to scenic tidal marshes dotted with coastal islands. The refuge is open year-round for wildlife observation, hiking and photography. There are 40 miles of primary roads scattered throughout the refuge that are open to motorized vehicles. Hiking and bicycling are allowed on all refuge roads. The historic Suwannee River and its hardwood swamps can be viewed along a .6-mile River Trail.

For the adventurous wanting to truly experience the Suwannee River, which rises from the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia, curls through North Florida woodlands, and spills its spring-cooled waters in the Gulf of Mexico, the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail is the answer! The 170-mile Florida trail begins in White Springs, where the upper Suwannee is narrow, and highlighted by towering pines and stately cypress. A slow and lazy current makes this an ideal setting for picnics and leisurely paddling outings. The middle stretch of the river is popular for its springs. The

river widens and numerous springs and small shoals add to its character. On hot summer days, spring hopping is a popular pastime for paddlers and boaters who stop to enjoy a cool dip.

The lower Suwannee, past the town of Branford, runs wide and makes a favorite area for motorboats and paddlers.

352-493-0238 | www.fws.gov/lowersuwannee

The Great Florida Birding Trail is a program of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, supported in part by the Florida Department of Transportation and the Wildlife Foundation of Florida. This 2,000-mile, self-guided highway trail unifies a total of 489 birding sites throughout Florida. Modeled after the successful Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, this ambitious project features detailed guide booklets and special highway signs identifying Birding Trail sites.

The trail is divided into four sections. The East Florida, West Florida, Panhandle, and South Florida section, which was completed in January 2006. To better introduce visitors to the Trail, the Great Florida Birding Trail designated nine "gateway" sites at exceptional birding locations. There are two or three gateways located in each trail section. Gateways have staffed visitor centers and serve as hubs for Birding Trail infor-

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Each gateway has a special kiosk with birdwatching tips for beginners and introductory information regarding the Birding Trail.
<http://floridabirdingtrail.com>

Nature Coast State Trail is officially designated as part of Florida's Statewide System of Greenways and Trails. Traversing Florida's beautiful Nature Coast region, this trail provides an excellent opportunity to experience the Sunshine State "off the beaten path". The trail consists of two primary alignments built along abandoned rail lines that intersect at Wilcox Junction, connecting the communities of Cross City, Trenton, Fanning Springs, and Chiefland. Among the trail's highlights is a historic train trestle that allows trail goes to cross over the Suwannee River near Old Town. The trail is also close to nearby Fanning Springs State Park and Andrews Wildlife Management Area.
352-447-1720

Gainesville is an outdoor enthusiast's dream destination offering world-class venues for snorkeling, canoeing, and kayaking, incredible hiking and biking and even bird-watching. Paynes Prairie State Park Preserve, located just 20 minutes from historic downtown Gainesville is a 21,000-acre wilderness preserve and home for more than 800 species of plants and 430 species of vertebrates including 271 species of birds.

Located in northwest Gainesville, the 7,000-acre San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park is one of the finest examples of climax mesic hammocks remaining in Florida. With rolling hills, short climbs, sinkholes, upland forests, hammock and prairie, San Felasco offers prime hiking, biking trail and equestrian trails.
352-374-5260 | www.visitgainesville.com

Whether you are looking for something different in an off-the-beaten track destination, educational experiences, special interest subjects, or you just want a relaxing area to visit while touring northeast Florida; Putnam County is the ideal destination.

Highlights of Putnam County include the Rodman Recreation Area, located south of Palatka, featuring several ideal observation areas for viewing all types of Florida Birds. Nearby, the Welaka State Forest, provides the nature enthusiast the opportunity to view many of Florida's native birds in marsh and pine habitat.

All of north and central Florida attractions are just a short distance from this pristine part of the state. Putnam County is the destination where you can experience true Floridian culture through our many festi-

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Pasco County's Crystal Springs, just south of Zephyrhills, is the largest natural spring system south of Weeki Watchee. The 40 million gallon per day flow from Crystal Springs triples the down stream volume of the Hillsborough River as it wanders through the preserve.

In addition, Pasco County is a great birding destination because of its west central location; birds from both the north and south Florida areas can be observed. For example, the broad-winged hawk, a more northerly species, and the short-tailed hawk, a more southern species, can both be found here. Rare birds, such as the western vagrants like the scissor-tailed flycatcher can be viewed here as well.

800-842-1873 | www.visitpasco.net

The Pinellas Trail is truly one of Florida's premier urban trails. Stretching from Tarpon Springs to St. Petersburg, the trail links some of Pinellas County's most picturesque parks, scenic coastal areas, and residential neighborhoods. As a testament to its popularity, an estimated 90,000 people on average use the trail per month. The trail provides an excellent alternative to the automobile, amidst Florida's most densely populated county. Eight overpasses, for example, allow trail-goers to travel above traffic at several busy intersections. Whether you plan a day trip or a several day visit with overnight stays, there is plenty to do along the Pinellas trail. And it is worth the effort to visit.

727-464-8200 | www.pinellascounty.org

The Great Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail laces through protected Intracoastal waterways and rivers for 100 miles from Cayo Costa and Pine Island in the north to Bonita Springs' Imperial River in the south. The trail was designed for paddlers of all levels and special signs and GPS (Global Positioning System) coordinates guide paddlers through the waters.

239-461-7400 | www.greatcalusablueway.com

>> In addition to Florida's Eco-Friendly sights and sounds, many of the area's accommodations are proudly boasting a Florida certified "Green-Lodging" designation!

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The largest independently owned Green Hotels in the Florida Keys are found in Key West at the **Southernmost Hotel Collection**, in historic old town where Duval meets the Atlantic! Whether you choose La Mer Hotel and Dewey House, intimate four diamond oceanfront boutique hotels; the all-new Southernmost on the Beach with 127 rooms with endless views of the sea and sky; or the laid-back ambiance at Southernmost Hotel on Duval Street; you'll rest easy knowing each hotel is unique, uniquely Southernmost and awarded the One Palm Designation by the Green Lodging Association of Florida. From breathtaking Key West beach fronts to quiet and charming environs, they have your Key West vacation covered.
800-354-4455 | www.southernmostresorts.com

As a leader in Green Business, the **Colony Hotel & Cabana Club in Delray Beach** makes being environmentally responsible an essential part of everyday operations. The owner, Jestena Boughton, explains, "for 73 years my family carefully managed the Colony resources by following the basic three R's of green business - reduce waste, reuse materials, and recycle what cannot be reused." An example of Colony community environmental support is our annual tradition of donating a dollar for each room night sold to our local environmental organization. To maintain and upgrade their "Green Lodging" designation The Colony Hotel & Cabana Club is dedicated to water con-

servation, native Florida habitat enhancement, recycling program, and energy saver products.
561-276-4123 | www.thecolonyhotel.com

A mere 30-minutes from the excitement of Tallahassee, the relaxed and eco-friendly **Inn at Wildwood** welcomes visitors to its nature-based hotel and golf retreat. This Certified Green Lodging, is surrounded by more than 1,000 square miles of protected land which is home to some of the most unique and beautiful wildlife in the southeast. For golfers, Wildwood Resort Golf Course is known as the friendliest course in the Big Bend area. The par 72 layout, nestled among rolling hills and ancient oak trees, will challenge the best of players while still being kind to the casual golfer. Spacious guestrooms feature queen or king beds. Suites are available.
800-878-1546 | www.innatwildwood.com

The Hampton Inn & Suites I-10/Thomasville Road is a proud member of the Florida Green Lodging Program. This environmentally safe and eco-friendly property features 122 guest rooms and suites and is proud to be 100 percent Non-Smoking. The hotel offers spacious meeting rooms and an outdoor pool. Complimentary services include daily breakfast, dinner (Monday-Thursday), wire/wireless highspeed Internet and gym passes. The warm and friendly staff is available 24 hours to assist guests with their hotel needs. The Hampton Inn & Suites wants to be your home away from home when you are traveling to Florida's Capital City. Please contact Michelle Wilson Director of Sales and Marketing for your hotel needs. michelle@hospitalityamerica.com or 850/320-9913. *



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