



Get Outdoors Florida! is a coalition promoting outdoor experiences to help Floridians have healthier lifestyles and develop an appreciation for our abundant natural resources.

For more Get Outdoors Florida! destinations and activities, visit www.getoutdoorsflorida.com

AC, BC Style

By Martha Robinson

Long before the invention of air conditioning, many places in Florida provided cool escapes from summer heat. On a hot summer day, Florida Caverns State Park provides several outside play and cool down options.

Florida Caverns State Park, one of Florida's only above-water caverns open to the public, is just over an hour's drive from Tallahassee.

Guided tours lead explorers through the cave's chambers decorated with dazzling formations of limestone stalactites, stalagmites, soda straws, flowstones and draperies. Visitors entering the cavern will feel a definite drop in temperature, an 'air conditioning' effect that the park ranger will explain, along with the geography, wildlife and history of this cave system. The cool 70ish temperature makes the cave tour a pleasant adventure.



"Florida Caverns State Park: an excellent all-day outdoor adventure spot."



Photo by Jack Delgado

Cave exploration is not the only activity at the state park.

The park offers visitors two networks of nature trails. The short, scenic Visitor Center Trail winds its way through towering hardwoods and limestone bluffs above the river floodplain where many rare plant species can be seen. The Upper Chipola trails offer six miles of exploration for hikers, bicyclists and horseback riders in the woodlands along the sparkling Chipola River.

Those bringing equine friends will find an equestrian facility located in the center of the multiuse trail system. Horseback riders can enjoy the use of stables. A wash rack located behind the stables provides a cooling down station for horses after a trail ride. Three RV sites are located adjacent to the stables for campers bringing horses.

Park visitors who prefer a paddling trail can rent canoes at the park or launch their own at the park's boat ramp. The Chipola River provides a scenic route where paddlers might see herons, egrets, alligators and beavers. Anglers who cast in the park's fishing spots may reel in bass, catfish, sunfish and mullet.



Photo by Patrick Lannon

Another cool play option at the park is the Blue Hole swimming area. The cold spring water provides an ideal method for lowering the heat index.

These options plus a playground and picnic areas make Florida Caverns State Park an excellent all-day outdoor adventure spot. A full facility campground provides an excuse to extend the play stay beyond a day.

Florida Caverns State Park is located three miles north of Marianna on State Road 166. From Tallahassee: Take I-10 west to exit 142. Turn right on Hwy 71 N to Hwy 90. Turn left. Follow signs to the park.



Photo by John B. Crowe