



Cedar Key Area Real Florida Guide

Note: Colored numbers correspond with numbers on the map and represent destinations for each day.

Days 1 & 2

In the late 1800s, [Cedar Key \(1\)](#) was a major port city and processor of cedar logs for the pencil industry. Several factors contributed to its downfall: hurricanes, the emergence of Tampa as a major port, and the depletion of old-growth cedar trees. Today, tourism is a major industry and a mecca for birders, boaters, paddlers and anglers. In spite of its popularity, the town has managed to keep its Old Florida feel and laid-back pace. There are [numerous opportunities](#) for the nature lover, so it takes more than one day to take it all in. Slow down and truly savor the rich history and natural beauty of this coastline by enjoying [land trails](#) and exploring [paddling trails](#). Cedar Key is also known as Florida's [clam capital](#) and local restaurants serve up plenty of tasty clam dishes.



In this Old Florida setting, visitors can see an array of shorebirds, wading birds and migratory birds throughout the year. The Gulf islands that make up the [Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge](#) are perfect resting and nesting areas for wading birds, shorebirds and migratory song birds. [Atsena Otie Key \(2\)](#), a half mile south of Cedar



Key, is the only island where the interior is open for hiking year-round. At Atsena Otie you can visit the historic ruins of the Faber Cedar Mill near the dock that once supplied wood for making pencils. Stroll to the eastern end of the island to view the historic cemetery with hand-carved headstones, evidence of yellow fever and a hard life on the Gulf.

Seahorse Key (3) is another must stop when the beaches are open. This former prison for Confederate soldiers has the highest elevation on Florida's west coast, rising 52 feet. Wildlife viewing is tremendous and egrets, night herons, brown pelicans, white ibis, cormorants, reddish egrets and roseate spoonbills have made themselves at home in the Seahorse Key rookery. The interiors of these islands are closed to the public, and for good reason. They have venomous snakes and thick undergrowth. To protect the nesting birds and their young, Seahorse Key's beaches and a 100-yard perimeter are closed to public entry from March 1 through the month of June. After the young have left the nest, the Cedar Keys Refuge staff hosts an open house on Seahorse Key, opening its lighthouse the first Saturday after July 4th.



The [Cedar Key Museum State Park](#) (4) encompasses 14 acres and offers guests an opportunity to imagine themselves as conservationist and writer [John Muir](#), taking a quiet walk past large pines and oaks down to the view Cedar Key's salt marshes after a 1,000 mile walk to the Gulf. "...emerging from a multitude of tropical plants, I beheld the Gulf of Mexico stretching away unbounded, except by the sky," he wrote.



John Muir did in fact spend a few months in Cedar Key in 1867 and his time spent in the little town is commemorated by a state historic marker which is located on the museum's grounds. The museum contains exhibits that depict Cedar Key's colorful history. Part of the collection is sea shells and Indian artifacts collected by Saint Clair Whitman, the founder of the first museum in Cedar Key. Whitman's house is located at the park and has been restored to reflect life in the 1920s. A short nature trail gives visitors the opportunity to see wildlife and birds, as well as native vegetation. Small gray squirrels, gopher tortoises, mockingbirds, blue jays, woodpeckers and green tree frogs can be seen on the museum grounds and along the walking trail. Open Thursday through Monday.

Day 3



The 5,000-acre [Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve \(5\)](#) is located five miles east of Cedar Key and is accessed from two trailheads, one on SR 24 and the other on CR 347. Hikers, equestrians and off-road bicyclists who want to experience a mosaic of Florida habitats and observe abundant wildlife will find it on over 13 miles of trails that wind through the park. The Reserve is a site on the [Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail](#) and part of the National Audubon Society's [Big Bend Ecosystem](#)

[Important Bird Area](#). Salt marshes on the Gulf of Mexico give way to a succession of swamps, hardwood forests, pine flatwoods and scrub, providing splendid opportunities for photography and wildlife observation. The shallow waters and numerous creeks



piercing the salt marshes are ideal for fishing, canoeing and kayaking. Rental canoes and kayaks are available in Cedar Key.

A short distance north of Cedar Key Scrub at the end of CR 326, within the wildlife refuge, is the massive [Shell Mound \(6\)](#) that was built up over a 1,000-year period. Between 1,800 and 400 years ago, native people ate oysters, clams and other food and discarded the remains, creating the large mound. A hiking trail and boardwalks cross the serene salt marsh, providing outstanding views of the mound and pristine coastline.





Legend

- Bicycle Trail
- Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail
- Visitor Center
- Hiking Trail
- Canoeing and Kayaking
- Camping
- Fishing
- Equestrian Trail
- US Highway
- State Road
- Other Roads
- Paddling Trails
- Trails
- Conservation Lands

