

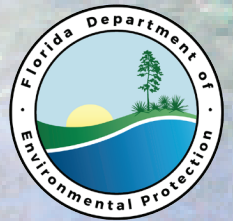
“Wish You Were Here”

Overall Historic State Park Real Florida Guide

Day 1: Begin your journey at [Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park](#), home to one of the largest and deepest freshwater springs in the world. This park has abundant wildlife, including alligators, turtles, deer and birds. River boat tours bring nature comfortably closer, providing excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and stunning photos. Swimming is a popular activity during the hot summer months in the spring’s sparkling 71-degree water. Wakulla Springs Lodge has retained its historic charm with painted cypress ceilings, period furnishings and an old soda fountain serving up nostalgia by the scoop. It’s like stepping into a bygone era. Build up an appetite strolling the shady nature trail along the upland wooded areas of the park and then dine in the historical dining room overlooking the springs.



From a tourist standpoint, Wakulla Springs became a popular destination in the late 1800s, and glass bottom boat tours began around 1925. The spring was developed more heavily as an attraction when Ed Ball, Florida businessman and brother-in-law of billionaire Alfred I. DuPont, purchased the spring and 4,000 acres of the surrounding property in 1934. Ball built a Mediterranean Revival style lodge overlooking the spring in 1937 and hired Newton



Perry to manage and promote the property. Perry developed several short underwater films that piqued the interest of prospective visitors and he succeeded in luring in Hollywood, too.

Johnny Weismuller, a former Olympic swimmer and the most famous of the Tarzan actors, was featured in parts of two movies filmed at the springs—"Tarzan's Secret Treasure" and "Tarzan's New York Adventure." Parts of "Creature from the Black Lagoon," "Airport 77" and "Joe Panther" were also filmed at the springs.



Spend a restful night at the [Wakulla Springs Lodge](#), and if visiting between mid-August to October, watch for migratory chimney swifts plunging into their nighttime roost, one of the Lodge's unused chimneys. This amazing spectacle takes place for several weeks in the spring as the birds are migrating north and from mid-August to October as they migrate south to the Amazon basin.

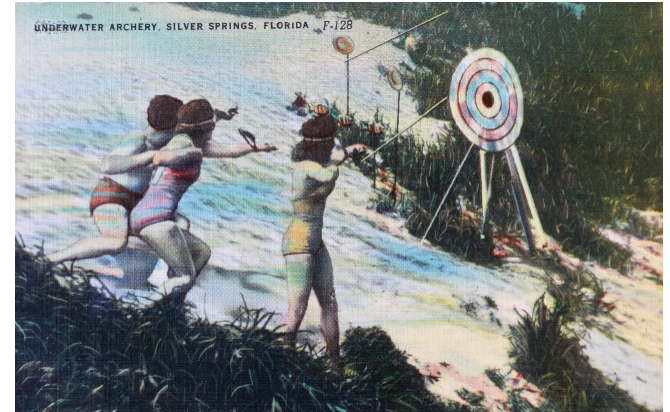
Day 2: Drive about three hours to [Silver Springs State Park](#), your home base for two nights.

Silver Springs has been a popular attraction in Florida for more than 150 years, starting when 19th century steamboats churned up the Ocklawaha and Silver rivers with throngs of visitors. Most historians believe glass-bottom boats were invented at Silver Springs in the 1870s and they remain popular to this day with tourists. During its heyday, Silver Springs featured much more than glass-bottom and jungle boat tours. The Ross Allen Reptile Institute held demonstrations and lectures with snakes, alligators, crocodiles and turtles and a fan favorite was the "milking" of rattlesnakes for their venom, to be used to make anti-venom.



A Seminole camp and pioneer village were built and manned by Seminole Indians and living history interpreters, and a replica of Fort King from the Second Seminole War was erected. During segregation, Paradise Park was established about a mile downstream for use by African-Americans. Eventually, animal exhibits, rides and a water park (opened in 1978) were added, too.

Rhesus monkeys were introduced into the attraction in the 1930s. A tour boat operator, “Colonel Tooey,” released them on an island as an exotic bonus for visitors on the jungle boat tours, but Tooey didn’t realize that rhesus monkeys are good swimmers. The primates escaped and began reproducing. They’ve been a curious anomaly—and periodic management nuisance—ever since (please don’t feed!).



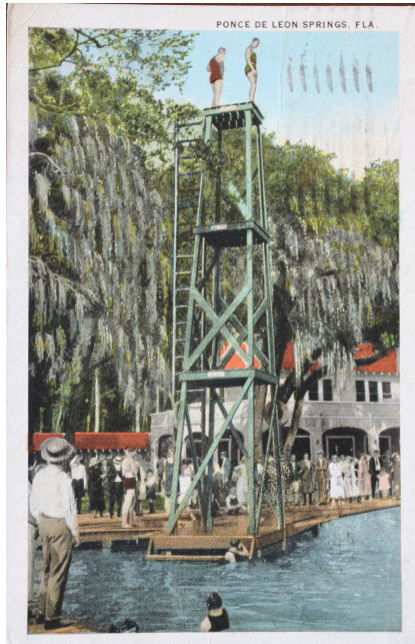
With the emergence of mega-theme parks in the Orlando area, visitors began to bypass Silver Springs and the attraction fell on hard times from a business standpoint. In 2013, the Florida Park Service began operating the property. Visitors can also access what is referred to as the River Side of the park on the other side of the springs and enjoy hiking, off-road bicycling and horseback riding. A campground and rental cabins are available, and one can visit the pioneer cracker village and Silver River Museum and Environmental Education Center.

Day 3: Drive about an hour to [De Leon Springs State Park](#) in time for breakfast and make your own pancakes at the table in the popular Old Spanish Mill Restaurant. This is a very popular park on weekends and during the summer so consider a visit during Florida’s pleasant cooler months to avoid crowds. While waiting for a place in the



restaurant, stroll the short nature trail or enjoy a 50-minute eco/history boat tour of the Spring Garden Run aboard the M/V Acuera. The tour boat is wheelchair-accessible with parking nearby.

In the 1880s DeLeon Springs had become a winter resort, and tourists were promised “a fountain of youth impregnated with a deliciously healthy combination of soda and sulphur.” In 1953, the resort was developed as an attraction, adding gardens, jungle



cruise and a water circus with “Queenie,” an elephant on water skis. In 1982, the state of Florida purchased the property and it became De Leon Springs State Park.

The Visitor Center features exhibits and artifacts reflecting many layers of the park’s rich history. The swimming area with year-round 72-degree water is adjacent to a beautiful, shady picnic ground. Canoe, kayak and paddleboat rentals are available for a paddling throughout the year. De Leon Springs flows into the [Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge](#) where paddlers can explore 18,000 acres of lakes, creeks and marshes, with excellent fishing and birding opportunities. The park is a site on the [Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail](#) and many wading birds are present in the spring run.

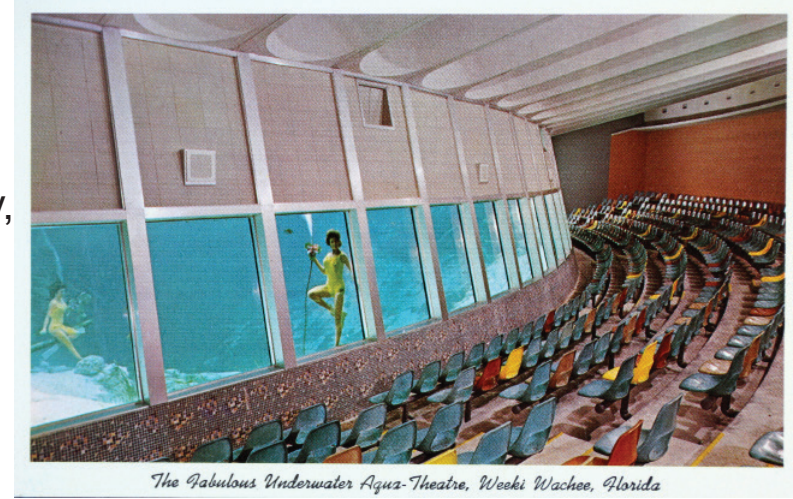
De Leon Springs offers a shady, half-mile paved nature trail that is wheelchair accessible. This trail passes through a flood plain hammock with many hardwoods, pines and other plants native to this area, including a cypress tree that is more than 500 years old. A portion of the 1,000-mile [Florida National Scenic Trail](#) runs through the park.

An interesting side trip would be to [Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park](#) (1 hour 20 minute drive from De Leon Springs), eat dinner at the nearby historic [Yearling](#)





[Restaurant](#) and return to Silver Springs for the night. Visitors to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings old Florida homestead can walk back in time to 1930s farm life where she lived and worked in the tiny community of Cross Creek. Her cracker style home and farm, where she wrote her Pulitzer prize-winning novel *The Yearling* and other wonderful works of fiction, has been restored and is preserved as it was when she lived here. The park is open every day and visitors may tour the house with a ranger in period costume from October through July on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.



The Fabulous Underwater Aqua-Theatre, Weeki Wachee, Florida

Day 4: Travel to [Weeki Wachee State Park](#), about a two hour drive from Silver Springs. Park admission includes a Mermaid Show at 11 a.m. or 3 p.m., a river boat cruise, and visit to the Buccaneer Bay Water Park. Or rent a [kayak or canoe](#) and paddle the crystal clear Weeki Wachee River where manatee may be seen.



An iconic old Florida roadside attraction, the mermaids at Weeki Wachee Springs have delighted visitors since 1947. Today, visitors can still witness the magic of the mermaids, gazing into the stunning backdrop of a first magnitude spring in a 400-seat submerged theatre.

Next drive about 30 minutes to [Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park](#) and catch one of the entertaining animal shows or enjoy a



boat tour. Visitors can see manatees every day of the year from the park's underwater observatory in the main spring and manatee programs are offered three times daily. The park is a wildlife rehabilitation center and showcases native Florida wildlife, including manatees, black bears, bobcats, white-tailed deer, American alligators, American crocodiles and river otters. At the Wildlife Encounter programs, snakes and other native animals are featured. The park features a children's education center, providing hands-on experiences about Florida's environment. Transportation from the visitor center on U.S. 19 to the West Entrance is available by tram or boat.

Drive to Rainbow Springs State Park for the night (40 minute drive)

Day 5: Explore [Rainbow Springs State Park](#) where archaeological evidence indicates that people have been using this spring for nearly 10,000 years. From the 1930s through the 1970s, Rainbow Springs was the site of a popular, privately-owned attraction. As the attraction grew, the river was dredged for glass bottom boat tours; and waterfalls were built on piles of phosphate tailings. A zoo, rodeo, gift shops and a monorail with leaf-shaped gondolas were added. In the mid-1970s, when larger theme parks lured the tourists away, Rainbow Springs was closed. In the mid-1990s, it reopened as a state park. In 1972, the U.S. Department of the Interior designated Rainbow Spring, Florida's fourth largest spring, as a National Natural Landmark. It is also an aquatic preserve and an Outstanding Florida Water.

Paddling or tubing the crystal-clear Rainbow River is popular and visitors are encouraged to enjoy it during Florida's pleasant winter months or on weekdays when



O-13—Underwater Boat at Beautiful Rainbow Springs, Fla.



the river is less crowded.

The entrance to the Rainbow Springs State Park campground is located on S.W. 180th Avenue Road about two miles north of County Road 484 and two miles south of State Road 40. The campground is about a nine miles distance from the Headsprings Entrance which is located three miles north of Dunnellon on the east side of U.S. 41.

Access the Headsprings Entrance for a leisurely stroll through the former attraction with shady gardens laced with azaleas, oaks and magnolias. The walkways pass by three man-made waterfalls and a native plant garden. While every season has much to offer, the February and March bloom of azaleas is a popular time to visit the park. The walkways are a mixture of brick, concrete and asphalt surfaces. While historically unique and offering great views of both river and gardens, the pathways were constructed prior to American Disabilities Act guidelines and are steep and uneven in places.

A native garden, which is a special attraction to butterflies and hummingbirds, lies behind the cultural gardens. A nature trail winds back behind the gardens through natural oak hammock and sandhill communities. This trail offers both river and phosphate pit overlooks and is approximately 2.5 miles long from the Visitors' Center.



