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Why This North Florida Destination Should Be On Your Family's Vacation List



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Travel

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Jacksonville has plenty of outdoor parks and recreation areas for families. VISIT JACKSONVILLE

Jacksonville, Florida, is an ideal place to relax and unwind after months of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing isolation. One of the great things about this city is the extensive park system with hundreds of miles of hiking trails and more than 22 miles of beaches—offering plenty of room for movement, fresh air, and outdoor fun.

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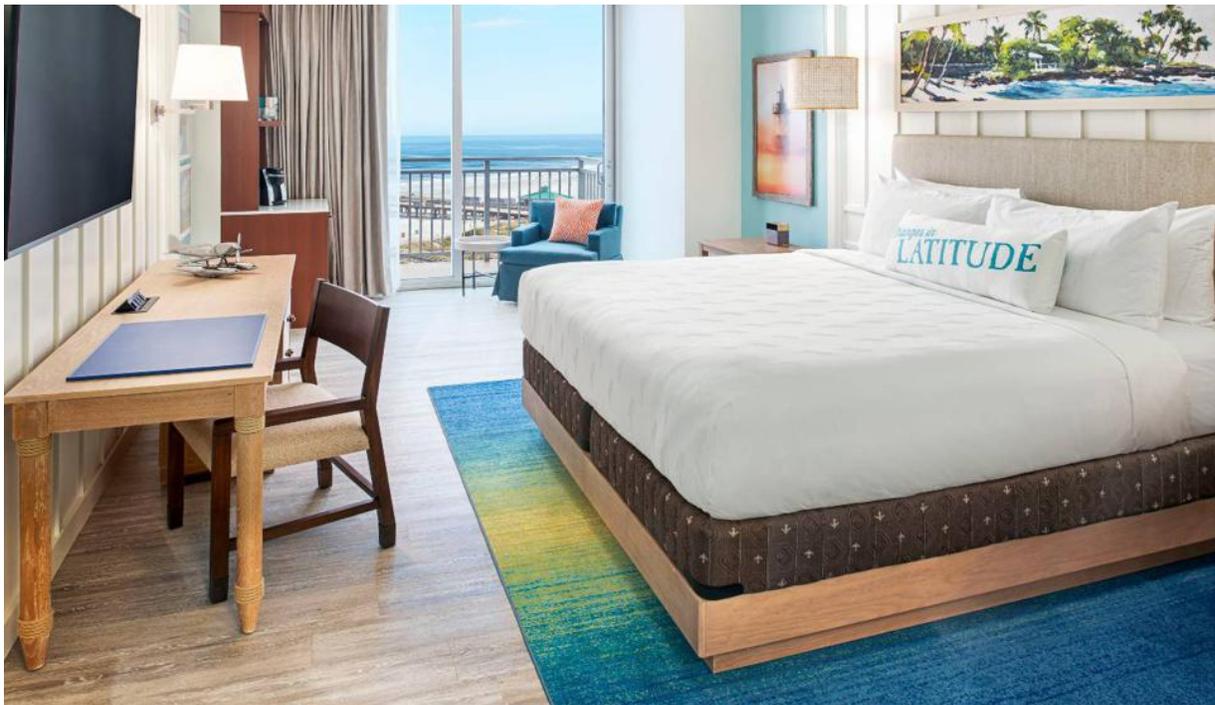
Did you know that Jacksonville has more than 400 city parks, seven state parks, and two national parks? That means you can hike, bike, kayak, stand-up paddleboard, surf, and explore in the great outdoors. You can hang out in unique spots like the remote Talbot Islands—don't miss Blackrock Beach and Boneyard Beach. Or visit Huguenot Park, where you can drive your car on the sand and right up to your perfect picnic spot.

Be sure to go for a hike at Hanna Park and enjoy one of its more than fifteen miles of trails.

We've put together the insider's guide to Jacksonville to show you how much fun you can have in the outdoors in this under-the-radar city.

Where to Stay





This is the first Margaritaville to open in 2021 and its location right on the beach is ideal.

MARGARITAVILLE BEACH HOTEL JACKSONVILLE BEACH

Margaritaville Beach Hotel Jacksonville Beach is the first Margaritaville property to open in 2021. Located a few blocks north of the Jacksonville Beach Pier, this brand-new property is located right on the water and has 202 rooms. It features three Margaritaville-inspired dining options with indoor and outdoor seating, including LandShark Bar & Grill, LandShark Lookout, and Joe Merchant. It also has a pool and firepit and direct access to the boardwalk, making it the perfect spot for families. The property offers a variety of rentals including chairs and umbrellas, beach tables, surfboards, stand-up paddleboards, beach cruiser bicycles, kayaks, boogie boards, and more.

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Designed by **The McBride Company** to embody the brand's passion for escapism, the family-friendly hotel combines the relaxed, surfer aesthetic of Jacksonville Beach with Margaritaville's timeless tropical feel.

Accommodations, including king and double-queen bedrooms, premium ocean-view guest rooms, and oceanfront suites with wraparound balconies all provide Margaritaville's signature casual-luxe vibe, comfortable bedding, and modern amenities.

The city's best attractions are easily accessible from the hotel, including the Jacksonville Beach amphitheater, Jacksonville Beach boardwalk, Jacksonville Beach pier, family-friendly beaches, biking and park trails, unique artisan shops and galleries, renowned golf courses, and more.

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LandShark Bar & Grill has tasty food and great views. MARGARITAVILLE BEACH HOTEL JACKSONVILLE BEACH

LandShark Lookout, located in the Margaritaville resort, is an open-air patio with great views overlooking the white-sand beach. It is a good spot to enjoy drinks and appetizers while taking in the scene. For a full meal, head to LandShark Bar & Grill, which combines classic American beach food with a fresh coastal twist. It serves burgers and fish sandwiches, tacos, fresh salads, and seafood entrées. Along with its namesake beverage, LandShark Lager, the bar menu includes imported and domestic beers, local craft beer, popular cocktails, and frozen drinks. For a great cup of joe in the morning or breakfast to go, head to Joe Merchant's Coffee & Provisions. It also offers sandwiches, salads, snacks, and drinks throughout the day.





V Pizza serves authentic Neapolitan pizza in a family-friendly environment. MELISSA MCGARRY
PHOTOGRAPHY

V Pizza has several locations but they all share the same delicious food. If you're looking for an authentic Neapolitan pizzeria, this is it. They import the equipment and ingredients from Italy to recreate the experience of pizza served in Naples, Italy. The idea for the restaurant came when the owners took their mothers on a trip to Italy and fell in love with the pizza there; they vowed to bring that experience back home to Jacksonville. Fan favorites include the chicken wings, the meatballs, the various salads and of course, the pizzas. Be sure to try the Pizza Delle Donne (mozzarella, pesto marinated chicken, ricotta cheese and spinach); the Pizza Carnivora (San Marzano tomato sauce, mozzarella, pancetta, soppressata, sausage, red onions, garlic and fresh basil) and their signature Pizza Margherita (San Marzano tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella, bufala mozzarella, and fresh basil). Be sure to leave room for dessert—the authentic Italian gelato is delicious. The restaurant prides itself on using the highest quality ingredients imported from Italy. And it definitely shows in the taste. They have a huge following of repeat customers.

Looking for a good breakfast spot? **Delicomb** is locally owned and operated and has yummy egg sandwiches and bakery options. They focus on organic ingredients and fresh, made-from-scratch meals. The espresso bar and coffee are worth checking out.

Active Adventure in Jacksonville





SUPs are a great way to experience Jacksonville from the water. RYAN KETTERMAN

Beach Life Rentals is the ideal one-stop shop. Let's face it, when traveling it's a pain to have to book SUP here, kayaks there, and bike rentals at another place. Beach Life Rentals makes it easy—and it should be all about ease when you travel. Located right in front of Margaritaville resort (they also have locations in front of Casa Marina Hotel, Seahorse Oceanfront Inn, and Best Western Oceanfront Hotel), Beach Life Rentals pretty much offer everything: beach cruisers, children's bikes and accessories, stand-up paddleboards, surfboards, kayaks, and boogie boards. They also offer free delivery and pick up on beach and bicycle rentals. The service is friendly and hospitable, and the equipment is in great shape. Their prices are reasonable, and Curt, the owner, is easygoing and knowledgeable.





Kayak is a great outdoor adventure activity. VISIT JACKSONVILLE

Be sure to spend some time at Talbot Islands State Park to really get a feel of nature. One of the best ways to experience this area is through a kayak tour. [Kayak Amelia](#) offers guided tours with a naturalist who can point out the wildlife, explain the salt-marsh ecosystem, and talk about the history and culture of the region. The tour starts with a short instruction, then people paddle on the water for two hours with a break mid-trip on a sandbar for a snack and swim. What's especially nice is that the tours are planned to go with the tide (or current), so you don't have to paddle as hard but instead take in the scenery. One of the best things about vacation is you get a chance to check things off your bucket list. Like surfing. Be sure to book a surf lesson at [Jacksonville Surf and Paddle](#) situated near Jacksonville Beach in Neptune Beach. The water is pretty warm year-round, which makes it great for surfing. Their motto is "Any age and any stage"—nobody is ever too young or too old. Private surf lessons are great for those with little or no experience or for those who haven't done it in a while. The one-on-one lesson will help get your balance and confidence up, so you can ride the waves and have some fun like the locals.





Taking a water taxi or a cruise is a nice way to get to see the city. VISIT JACKSONVILLE

One of the best ways to really see Jacksonville is from the water. The sunset cruise aboard the [St. Johns River Taxi & Tours](#) boat is peaceful and relaxing. Sailing into the sunset, with music and fresh air, the trip navigates along the St. Johns River toward Riverside, Avondale, and San Marco and then back downtown to see the sparkling city lights. You can bring your own snacks and beverages (small coolers are welcome aboard) and enjoy the sights and sounds of Jacksonville.

Check out my [website](#).



Judy Koutsky

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