



State Parks Perfect Destinations for Spring Break

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – Now is the time that we are beckoned outdoors by warmer temperatures, springtime blossoms and a break from school. This time of year, there's nowhere better to be than in an Alabama State Park.

The Alabama State Parks System offers springtime activities for the entire family, from riding mountain bikes to riding zip lines to riding the waves in the Gulf of Mexico. Almost everyone in our state lives within an hour's drive of a state park, so there's no need to spend precious time on the road!

Whether it's camping or spending restful nights in a resort lodge, the Alabama State Parks System has exactly what spring breakers need. Alabama's State Parks offer a hikers' paradise with more than 200 miles of trails. Rent a canoe and paddle on one of the many lakes at the parks. Relax at one of the system's five pools or exercise your brain by taking advantage of a guided tour and interpretive program at the park.

There are six resort parks in the system: Lake Guntersville, Cheaha, Gulf, DeSoto, Lakepoint and Joe Wheeler. These parks have pools, full-service restaurants and many unique attractions.

Overnight guests can lounge at the Gulf State Park campground pool and frolic at the adjoining splash pad with a tennis court just a few steps away.

At Cheaha Resort State Park, breathtaking views await throughout the 2,799-acre mountaintop retreat. Cabins, chalets and campgrounds offer overnight accommodations to fit your preference.

Adventure awaits at Lake Guntersville State Park with the aptly named Screaming Eagle Aerial Adventures zip line course. View the park like only the eagles have before the construction of this amazing attraction.

At DeSoto State Park, enjoy canoeing or kayaking, go fishing or hiking, biking or rappelling. Exploring nature is easy with more than 25 miles of trails as well as an ADA-accessible boardwalk.

Lakepoint on bass-fishing paradise Lake Eufaula offers more than just the greatest angling you could imagine. There's also hiking, swimming, wildlife and bird watching, camping, picnic areas and playgrounds. Lakepoint Resort Lodge and Convention Center offers 101 hotel rooms, 29 cabins and 10 lakefront cottages.

Joe Wheeler State Park is divided by the Tennessee River, which forms the 69,700-acre Wheeler Lake. Bass, bream and catfish are plentiful in the sparkling waters. Bring your sailboat to float your cares away, your bike to pedal your way through the wooded paradise or your clubs to use on the magnificent golf course.

If you are in the mood for "roughing it," the Alabama State Parks System offers plenty of campgrounds where you can get away from it all – or get away with your entire family or your best friends. Many of our parks also offer seminars and craft projects. Guests can learn the basics of backpacking, how to build your own survival tools, go gem mining, learn a new craft and so much more.

Don't forget about the smaller parks across the state with many that offer cabins and campgrounds for outdoors lovers. Explorers can also visit Cathedral Caverns in Woodville, near Scottsboro, or Rickwood Caverns north of Birmingham in Warrior. Cave tours offer easy walks and amazing views of these underground wonderlands. Cathedral Caverns is wheelchair accessible.

Those of us who love Alabama's State Parks are so thankful for the voters' overwhelming support of Amendment 2 in last November's election. The approval of the amendment to stop the raiding of the parks' budget was significant in terms of protecting the funds moving forward, but it does not immediately solve the budget crunch caused by repeated transfers of parks' funds over the past several years.

The best way to support our parks right now is to go out and enjoy them. Our parks are almost wholly supported by those who use them. Between 80 and 90 percent of the system's funding – and 100 percent of our operating costs – come from user fees, not tax dollars. Tell your friends about your wonderful experiences and encourage them to get out and visit, too! Our partners pay the way.

Finally, show your support by purchasing the Alabama State Parks Supporter specialized license plate. Almost all of the \$50 paid for the tags (above your normal fees) goes to support our parks.

Spring break is a perfect time to get outdoors in so many perfect settings in an Alabama State Park. Visit alapark.com and make your plans for that special getaway!

Greg Lein is the Director of the Alabama State Parks Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Alabama State Parks Division operates and maintains 22 parks encompassing approximately 48,000 acres of land and water.

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