



OUTDOOR ADVENTURE *in* ILLINOIS

Hike, bike, paddle
or glide on trails in
Illinois parks,
forests and rivers.

BIG ROCKY HOLLOW TRAIL

*An easy
0.75-mile loop leads
to a 100-foot-tall
intermittent
waterfall at Ferne
Clyffe State Park
in Goreville.*

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ENJOY ILLINOIS: OUTDOORS & BEYOND



HIKING TRAILS

STARVED ROCK STATE PARK, OGLESBY

The thrill of chasing waterfalls draws people to this park's 13 miles of trails, all of which start from the visitors center or parking lots off IL-178 and IL-71. The more rain the Illinois River gets, the more powerful the flow of the cascades. Interior canyon trails lead to eight waterfalls. For an easy to moderate trek (one stone staircase) that's less than a mile, hikers can reach **French Canyon** with 45-foot walls. Ambitious adventurers can continue to one of the most photographed canyons in the park, **LaSalle**, a 4-mile round-trip. This moderate to difficult route (nine staircases) can take up to three hours.



Starved Rock State Park, Oglesby

ST. LOUIS CANYON
In less than 45 minutes, hikers can reach this canyon from Starved Rock Lodge. Along the way, you'll see Aurora, Sac and Kickapoo canyons, also composed of sandstone.



Pomona Natural Bridge, Pomona

SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST, HARRISBURG

It's a hiker's heaven, encompassing nearly 300,000 acres of oak-hickory forests, wetlands, grassy expanses, lush canyons and sheer bluffs. More than 300 miles of trails are marked, with 30-plus miles for hiking only. A highlight is the **Pomona Natural Bridge Trail**, a short loop through a forest and over its namesake sandstone bridge. The 90-foot-long span was created by eons of erosion.

CRAB ORCHARD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, MARION

Take a short, easy hike or challenging trek among 44,000 acres of oak-hickory upland forest, bottomland hardwoods, crop fields, brush, prairie, wetlands and lakes. Some trails incorporate displays of local history or the environment. The gentle 1.9-mile **Rocky Bluff Trail** leads past waterfalls and seasonal wildflowers. The 2.3-mile **Grassy Creek Trail** is less traveled and moderately difficult.

WATERFALL GLEN, DARIEN

This ecologically impressive forest preserve offers hikers 11 miles of trails over rolling to hilly terrain. And there's a lot to look at: The 2,500 acres of prairies, savannas and oak-maple woodlands nurture 740 native plant species and more than 300 species of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles. Also check out **Rocky Glen waterfall** and **Sawmill Creek bluff overlook**.



Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, Penfield

Dark Sky Park

*A new darksky trail and other improvements are coming to the **Middle Fork River Forest Preserve** in Penfield, Illinois' only International Dark Sky Park. Shielded from the glow of urban areas, the preserve is a nighttime refuge for wildlife and a boon for astronomers—the site's **North Waterfowl Management Area** is open 24 hours a day to accommodate night-sky viewing. The mile-long dark sky trail will be open year-round and accessible to visitors with limited mobility.*



Scan the code for more hiking trails.

MIDEWIN NATIONAL TALLGRASS PRAIRIE, WILMINGTON

Hike among the kind of pristine prairie the pioneers experienced—roaming bison included—at this restored site once dominated by rusting munitions factories and abandoned ammunition bunkers. Follow more than 34 miles of trails, 12 miles of which are for hiking only. To see bison, hike south from the **Iron Bridge Trailhead** to spotting scopes located along the Route 53 Trail and the Group 63 Trail.



Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie, Wilmington

ILLINOIS INSIDER: CAPTURING GOLDEN LIGHT

Try these tips when photographing sunsets with your smartphone: Scout out a location beforehand (in person or online). Don't shoot on a perfectly clear evening; clouds and haze provide color and drama. Wait—don't quit when the orange ball disappears. Great shots can come right after. Shoot in RAW format (if your phone allows), then enhance images in a photo editor.



BIKING TRAILS

LAKEFRONT TRAIL, CHICAGO

A full day of Windy City natural wonders and national landmarks awaits on the Lake Michigan shore. The popular path runs 18 miles along the lake, past beaches, parks and downtown restaurants. Spend an afternoon at the **Lincoln Park Zoo**, **Navy Pier** (both free) or **Shedd Aquarium**. Or simply kick back and alternate your gaze between the lake and downtown skyline.

TUNNEL HILL STATE TRAIL

Whirring bicycle freehubs have replaced the clickity-clack of railcars that used to pass through the trail's 543-foot-long namesake. The 45-mile path, mostly crushed limestone with some concrete sections, guides riders from Harrisburg to Karnak, darting through the **Shawnee National Forest** and surpassing the **Cache River State Natural Area's** swamps filled with cypress and tupelo trees.

Shift Into High Gear *Near the Mississippi River bluffs, **Grafton Zipline Adventures** maximizes the adrenaline, sending thrill seekers through the treeline up to 45 mph. Trailblazers reach almost the same speed during a tree-skittering journey at **Shawnee Bluffs Canopy Tour** in Makanda. The three-hour adventure stays above ground, with ziplines and aerial bridges connecting the treetops before the grand finale: a 1,100-foot-long trip over a bouldered creek. In Galena, **Long Hollow Canopy Tours** offers excitement from beginning to end. Choose from an aerial adventure park or six-line zipline course, which includes a ride to the first ascent in a utility terrain vehicle and a free fall from the final platform.*

LAKEFRONT TRAIL

*The 18-mile
multiuse trail has
designated lanes
for cyclists and
pedestrians.*





Grafton Zipline Adventures, Grafton

I & M CANAL STATE TRAIL

More than 100 miles of trails border the historic canal that connects Lake Michigan to the Illinois River. Visitors wanting to explore the country's first **National Heritage Area** can rent a bike at seven trailside stations. Once you have your steed, pedal over to **Old Joliet Prison**, outside of which sunglasses-clad Jake Blues reunited with brother Elwood in *The Blues Brothers*.

CONSTITUTION TRAIL

This 45-mile trail stretches from Bloomington to Normal, home of **Illinois State University**. In Bloomington, cycle past the **Beer Nuts factory**, a family-owned staple since the 1930s, before continuing north through parks, ISU's campus and Uptown Normal's popular shops and restaurants. Like a bicycle wheel, the trail has spokes—its eight branches include the **Route 66** portion that traces the Mother Road through Illinois.

GRAND ILLINOIS TRAIL

The name for the 535-mile loop—a collection of other state and local trails—certainly fits. Riders who want to put their legs to the ultimate test over a multiday tour can set off from Lake Michigan and pedal to the Mississippi River bluffs via Illinois' northern prairies. Then they can loop back east, heading toward Chicago along the Illinois River. For just a day trip, pick a stretch of trail that cuts through scenic areas like **Mississippi Palisades** or **Apple River Canyon state parks**.



Constitution Trail



Scan the code for more places to cycle.

ILLINOIS INSIDER: GREEN WHEELS Exploring Illinois via bicycle keeps more automobiles off the road, which reduces gasoline consumption and limits harmful carbon dioxide emissions that affect everyone's respiratory and heart health.



PALOS TRAIL SYSTEM, COOK COUNTY

The 42 miles of flowing, grin-inducing trails within **Palos Preserves** cater to riders of all levels, quickly dipping into ravines and grinding up hills alongside lakes and sloughs. The extensive, intersecting system—11 sections of unpaved singletrack that meander around the forest—is the largest in the Chicago area, hosting the annual **Palos Meltdown**, a mountain bike race and festival (late August).



*Bullfrog Lake,
Palos Preserves*

MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS



*Lake Glendale Rec Area and
Dixon Springs State Park,
Shawnee National Forest*

LAKE GLENDALE REC AREA AND DIXON SPRINGS STATE PARK, SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST

Intrepid bikers can spin through the Shawnee National Forest's first-ever mountain bike trails, established in 2021. Twist, drop and jump along 19 miles beneath tall pines—from **Dixon Springs State Park** to the loop around Lake Glendale. After a picnic break at **Pine Point**, descend more than 100 feet on the Rollercoaster Trail to get the blood flowing again.

ILLINOIS INSIDER: READY TO ROLL When you're out on the trail, be courteous to hikers and other bikers. Keep your speed under control, don't ride in mud and always announce yourself to anyone you're passing.



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CATALYST TRAIL
Proficient riders can tackle this technical section of Touch of Nature Trails in Makanda.

TOUCH OF NATURE TRAILS, MAKANDA

Beginners can hone their skills on nearly 3 miles of green (easy) trails, while proficient riders take on the difficult Catalyst section, a 3.3-mile snaking stretch along Indian Creek. The youngest set can ride the pump track or the skills loop in the **Kids Terrain Park** before graduating to the adult trails.

KICKAPOO STATE RECREATION AREA, OAKWOOD

Strenuous climbs, tricky turns and bombable descents on more than 10 marked routes—there's no shortage of variety over the 22 miles of trails. The dirt-packed singletrack on Trail 7 runs along a ravine before reaching a jump run at the trail's conclusion, while Trail 4 riders ford some water before the rocky, strenuous climb up Heartbreak Hill.



Scan the code for more places to go rock climbing.



Jackson Falls, Shawnee National Forest

On the Rocks

While best known for its lush forests, southern Illinois is also a destination for passionate cragmen and cragwomen. **Ferne Clyffe State Park** recently added to its rock climbing routes, exceeding more than 100 options to scale the park's cliffs and walls. The newly created climbing area includes eight different walls. Adventurers can also test their grip strength while bouldering in **Rebman Hollow**. Near Makanda, climbers can try to conquer Devil's Standtable at **Giant City State Park**. In the **Shawnee National Forest**, the **Jackson Falls** area boasts hundreds of climbing and bouldering routes, dozens of which lead out of the forested canyons.



WATER TRAILS



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**LOWER
CACHE RIVER
TRAIL**

Choose the 3- or 6-mile route of the trail, which takes paddlers through a cypress-tupelo swamp with 1,000-year-old trees.

Cache River State Natural Area, Belknap

FABULOUS FOX WATER TRAIL

Between the towns of Johnsbury and Ottawa, this beloved paddling path serves up a series of captivating urban and suburban vistas as well as restaurants and breweries for refueling. Hop out and explore dozens of small islands along this National Water Trail or fine-tune your birding skills by spotting Sandhill cranes, cormorants and great blue herons. (The rookery at the Kane-Kendall county line regularly hosts more than 30 nests high above the water.)

LAKE MICHIGAN WATER TRAIL

Though home to just 68 miles of this epic 1,638-mile route that traces the outline of Lake Michigan, Illinois contributes both serenity and sparkle to the National Recreational Water Trail. Launch sea kayaks (ideally with a group or guide) from the secluded beaches of **Illinois Beach State Park** in Zion and get close to coastal bluffs. Carry-in sites along North Shore beaches let you get in a water workout before enjoying neighborhood eateries. Wherever you begin, the Chicago skyline serves as a beacon to keep on paddling.



ROCK RIVER WATER TRAIL

The Rockford-to-Rock Island portion of this National Water Trail courses gently through small towns, rural landscapes and limestone bluffs. You can trace Native American heritage via historic markers and statues along the way that commemorate the Black Hawk and Sauk nations who first lived on these lands. Plan a day trip itinerary with stops at charming Oregon and nearby **Grand Detour**, a historic village where John Deere invented the first commercially successful steel plow. If you prefer letting the river power your journey, rent a tube at **Lundeen's Landing** in East Moline.

KANKAKEE RIVER NATIONAL WATER TRAIL

The Illinois portion of this blueway shared with Indiana is largely undeveloped and still resembles the Grand Kankakee Marsh, a vast area known before the 1880s as the Everglades of the North, with more than 1,000 square miles of inland water and vegetation. Take your time wending through the **Momence Wetlands Nature Preserve** and the **Momence Wetlands Land and Water Reserve**, home to abundant waterfowl, wild turkey and deer.

QUAD CITIES WATER TRAILS

The 45 miles of exceptional waterways along the Mississippi



*Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens
along the Rock River, Rockford*

and Rock rivers between Cordova and Andalusia have something for every paddler: urban backgrounds, lush backwater, gentle flows and strong currents. You may even see bald eagles. Expand your explorations by casting a line at fishing hot spots, hiking or biking more than 75 miles of surrounding trails, and recharging at an array of lodging options.



*Scan the
code for more
canoeing
and kayaking
spots.*



*St. Charles
Paddlewheel Riverboat*

Hues Cruise

*Viewed from the bow of a boat as the sun sinks, Illinois' leafy tapestry of red, orange and gold radiates autumn vibes. Hop aboard a **St. Charles Paddlewheel Riverboat** cruise for a 45-minute jaunt. Beginning in October, **Celebration River Cruises** hosts **Fall Foliage** excursions departing from Moline and featuring meals and live entertainment. Venture upriver to Marseilles Lock and Dam or downriver passing Buffalo Rock on **The Sainte Genevieve**, a stern wheel riverboat launching from Ottawa for scenic rides through Starved Rock Country. The vessel for Grafton Harbor's **Hakuna Matata** cruises may be small, but the views are mighty impressive.*

ILLINOIS INSIDER: FALL FISH TALES Seek out an Army Corps lake (there are 11 statewide, six for fishing), which are typically well-stocked with hungry fish as winter approaches. Large bass fishing picks up in October, and rainbow trout are plentiful through late October. Charters specializing in both are available throughout the state.



WINTER TRAILS

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI TRAILS

Most parks and preserves are open from dawn to dusk, and maintain and groom trails for cross-country skiers; some even offer rental equipment.

Lake County Forest Preserves

has 209 miles of scenic trails, including a flat loop around the lake at **Old School Forest Preserve** in Mettawa, hilly terrain at **Lakewood Forest Preserve** in Wauconda (ideal for more advanced skiers), and 31 miles of the **Des Plaines River Trail** for endurance skiers.

SNOWSHOE TRAILS

Step into a pair of snowshoes and move through the snowy season. Most forest preserves and nature centers offer snowshoes on a first-come-first-served basis. Seek out 13 miles of trails and frozen falls at **Starved Rock State Park** in Oglesby. **The Morton Arboretum** in Lisle lets snowshoers explore its 1,700 acres with four or more inches of snow. And in Monticello's **Allerton Park and Retreat Center**, trek on 16 miles of trails in its natural area.



Giant City State Park, Makanda



Mississippi River, Alton

Eagle Eye

*Showing off their 7-foot-wide wingspans, bald eagles can be spotted soaring over Illinois' rivers and dams between December and March. During this time, Illinois boasts the highest number (outside of Alaska) of the majestic birds, which rely on open water and a bounty of fish. One of the highest concentrations of eagles can be found at **Lock and Dam 18** in Gladstone. Other prime viewing spots include the top of the bluffs at **Starved Rock** and **Matthiessen state parks** in Oglesby. River towns such as Alton, Rock Island and Quincy host annual eagle festivals.*



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**POST OAK
NATURE TRAIL**
*Sandstone bluffs,
formed 100,000 years
ago, line this short
trail named for a
notable tree species in
Makanda's Giant City
State Park.*

**FAT-TIRE
BIKING TRAILS**

Cycle past bison, elk and cougars at **Wildlife Prairie Park** in Hanna City. More than 60 different native species of animals call the zoological park home. In winter, the park's 20 miles of mountain bike trails, including 3 miles of wide two-track for beginners, welcome fat bikes. In the Quad Cities, **Friends of Off-Road Cycling** built and maintains 40 miles of dirt singletrack. Cyclists who want less of a challenge travel the 1.2 miles of multiuse trails on **Sylvan Island** in Moline.



*Chestnut Mountain Resort,
Galena*

**SKI AND
SNOWBOARD
TRAILS**

Bunny-hill graduates, beginners and seasoned skiers can all find trails that suit their abilities at **Chestnut Mountain Resort** in Galena. The state's largest ski resort has 19 trails and a 475-foot vertical drop. Snowboarders head to the Farside, a 7-acre terrain park within Chestnut with 25 rails and other features. In Lisle, **Four Lakes Alpine Snowsports** gives suburbanites an opportunity to ski close to home with four trails and a terrain park known as The Alley.



*Scan the
code for
more winter
outdoor
activities.*



*Wildlife Prairie Park,
Hanna City*

ILLINOIS INSIDER: GNOME ROAM Search for the hidden gnome on each of Giant City State Park's winter hiking trails—most routes are less than 1 mile long. Find all seven of the mythical creatures to collect a prize.



**DISCOVER MORE
OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES**

Scan the code and explore the
state's national forests,
historic river towns and more!



1 Middle Fork River Forest Preserve, Penfield @blakesmith.photography **2** Bell Smith Springs, Shawnee National Forest @meghangarriott
3 Garden of the Gods, Shawnee National Forest @blk.people.outside **4** Chestnut Mountain Resort, Galena @jadro_jaja