

Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

DAY 1

Meet Jacksonville airport, hike Bell Springs Trail to Big Shoals

Our trip starts at the Jacksonville airport (JAX) at 10:00 am when your guides pick you up. We'll drive about 90 minutes west, where we'll encounter a landscape of clear springs, old forests, and winding rivers. At Stephen Foster Folk Cultural Park cabins, we'll meet our local expert naturalist guide who will be with us for much of the trip and whose expertise in biology and geology adds immeasurably to our understanding and enjoyment of the area. After a picnic lunch at the cabins, we'll start our exploration with a hike in Big Shoals State Park on the Bell Springs Trail. We'll hike up to Big Shoals, Florida's only class III whitewater, known for its small waterfall. The trail, a section of the much longer Florida Trail, follows the Suwannee River and is an out-and-back; if you don't feel like hiking all the way to the Shoals, you can sit and gaze at the river. The Hawthorne formation which caps our limestone and protects the Floridan aquifer is exposed along the way.

After our hike, we will settle in tonight, letting the feel of the area start to seep into our bones.

DAY 2

Canoeing instruction and paddling on Suwannee River

Today, after a relaxing breakfast, we turn to canoes for a completely different view of the Suwannee River. The Suwannee River is a blackwater river, so called because of the tannins that leach from the decaying vegetation of the surrounding forested swamps or wetlands, creating an acidic darkly stained water. The river is largely protected and we'll paddle a section from State Road 6 to Cone Bridge, about 5 hours, including time for paddling instruction and stopping to enjoy a picnic lunch on a beautiful sandbar. This stretch still retains some of the characteristics of the Deep Swamps and floodplains that leave the Okefenokee Swamp, with towering cypress, pines, and the oddly beautiful Ogeechee tupelo. We'll take our time on this stretch, so we have to get out on sandbars, go swimming, and drink in the natural world.

DAY 3

Kayaking on Ichetucknee River, free time in afternoon

This morning we drive about 45 minutes south to Ichetucknee Springs State Park. This park is particularly noted for the crystal clear Headspring, which feeds the Ichetucknee River. In contrast to the blackwater of the Suwannee, the water here is a clear aquamarine, making it possible to see the river bottom's fish and plants as we float on top. After first visiting the headspring, we return once more to kayaks and paddle for about two hours, past springs and tons of egrets, herons, and turtles. We'll pull out and enjoy lunch before hopping back in the van.

We leave the rest of the afternoon open so we'll have time to pursue any interest we may have developed, hike along the Suwannee or bike in Stephen Foster State Park, visit the local craftsmen who display their skills in the park, or simply sit on the front porch swing and take some well-deserved R&R. Tonight we'll share a final farewell dinner and toast our new found appreciation of Florida.

DAY 4

Weâ€™ll spend the morning back on the river in canoes or kayaks, paddling down stream from our put in point back to our cabins in Stephen Foster Folk Cultural Park. In contrast to the relatively wide river of Tuesday, the Suwannee is quite different here, much narrower and more twisty. This stretch of limestone bluffs has cut into the limestone of the Floridan aquifer and is the start of the world's highest concentrations of springs. We will stop at Suwannee Springs, a turn of the 19th and 20th century health resort built around the sulphur spring water. After a final picnic lunch, weâ€™ll have you back at the Jacksonville Airport by 2:30 you can plan to fly out anytime after 4:00.