

We're Going Camping & You're Coming, Too

If you're one of the many people in East Orlando who enjoy visiting the great outdoors to spend quality time with your friends and family, you should consider visiting one of the many campsites located within a short 30 mile drive from where we call home.

For those of us like to keep things simple, or who are on a tight budget, camping is the answer. Put away those cell phones and leave your microwave meals in the fridge because we're setting up camp, building a fire and swapping stories this weekend.



Lake Louisa offers 4,500-square-feet of space to hike, ride equestrian trails or train for triathlons in the spring.

Lake Louisa State Park is one of the newer destinations for campers in the Central Florida region. Opening its gates in 1977 as a much smaller campsite, the decreasing number of citrus groves in the area meant that Lake Louisa was able to expand to today's size of 4,500-square-foot. This particular campground features many activities for kids and adults. "We have numerous activities here including equestrian trails, hiking, Triathlons during spring and generally a lot of things that are great for almost all ages," says Chuck McIntire, the park manager for Lake Louisa Campgrounds in Clermont. At Lake Louisa, some of the more popular activities include fishing and kayaking along one of the many eight named lakes at the park.

Don't think camping is for you? You'd be surprised at the diverse amount of people that go camping for all sorts of different reasons. "Younger families are very common to see at Lake Louisa, but overall, there is a pretty balanced amount of campers that visit," says McIntire.

Something unique to Blue Spring State Park for your family's viewing pleasure is manatee observing. Blue Spring is home to a number of West Indian Manatees each year, from November 15 until March 1. These manatees swim to the spring when waters in other areas become too cold for them to be there, making this area a true experience. Because of this phenomenon, visitors are able to view these creatures from the wildlife overlooks and the summer spring docks during

the winter. The spring prides itself on the manageability of its water temperature, a comfortable 72 degrees year round.



A heron flying over one of the many trails of Blue Springs State Park.

Another one of the many great spots to camp in the area is Wekiwa Springs State Park. Wekiwa is known for its vast landscapes and the rolling hills in the area. The park is home to its own distinct animal as well, the Florida Black Bear. At Wekiwa, the most popular activity for campers is canoeing or kayaking along Wekiwa River or Rock Springs Run, a healthy activity with plenty of great sights that really help put you in touch with nature. Many people choose to canoe solo; however there are many group options and guided tours available as well. If you are feeling adventurous, there are even campsites at Wekiwa that can only be accessed via canoe.

Many people who have never gone camping may have a somewhat skewed idea of what camping consists of, but veteran campers insist it's about taking time for yourself. "Camping is more about relaxing, and getting away for a while," says James English, an East Orlando resident who camps frequently around Central Florida. "Yes, you have to cook and grill your food, but camping should be more about enjoying yourselves and your activities."

English says you should also consider what activities you plan on doing while you're there and plan your trip time accordingly. "It all depends on the time of the year and what you feel like doing," he says.

Security is always something to consider when you're out camping as well, and it should never be ignored, even if the intruders aren't human. "You have to remember that there are wild animals," English says. "You can't just bring Styrofoam containers and not expect something to happen. You must be prepared before headed out into the woods. A lot of it is common sense, but it's fun. I really think everyone should try it at least once."

Article by Amanda Ferencz