



Southeast Missouri Vacations

Your Summer Guide to Vacation Ideas in the Southeast Missouri Region

With Memorial Day behind us, the unofficial beginning of summer is here. For millions of Americans that means one thing: vacation. Here in Southeast Missouri, we are lucky enough to have a variety of places close to home to which we can escape for a weekend of fun, adventure or a personal retreat.

For an ample supply of exploring, paddling, trekking, climbing and splashing, look no farther than the region's natural wonders. There is no better place in the Midwest for a float trip than Southeast Missouri. Miles of rivers provide paddlers with thoroughfares through picturesque woods and bluffs. The two most popular rivers in the area, the Jacks Fork and Current, are part of America's National Scenic Riverways. The National Scenic Riverways Act was created by Congress in 1964 to protect 134 miles of the two rivers in Ozark Highlands. Most waterways are served by outfitters ready to send you down the river for fun and relaxation, whether you choose a canoe, raft, tube or kayak as your vehicle of choice.

Big Springs, near Van Buren, is one of the largest springs in the nation and can supply you with a fresh outlook on wildlife. The spring, which has an average flow of 276 million gallons of water a day, is home to 112 species of fish, 196 species of birds and 58 species of mammals.

If you're looking to experience something larger than life, head to Elephant Rocks State Park near Ironton. The park features giant red boulders standing end to end, like a train of circus elephants. Walk the mile-long path and snap some photos of yourself next to one of the massive geological formations. The biggest elephant rock, named Dumbo, is 27 feet tall, 35 feet long, and 17 feet wide and weighs 680 tons. Just a few minutes from the park, you can climb to the top of Taum Sauk Mountain, Missouri's highest point. Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park is also close by, which features water cascades and gorges. The spectacular locale is perfect for camping, hiking or swimming.

Missouri, the cave state, has more than 5,500 caves. The area from Fredericktown north to Bonne Terre was once the world's largest lead-mining district. At Bonne Terre, you can walk the wide passageways of the world's largest man-made caverns, or scuba-dive in its billion-gallon underground lake.

On the eastern side of this region, explore the Great River Road at Ste. Genevieve. The first French settlers in Missouri came to Ste. Genevieve in 1735. The town features about 50 historic buildings constructed in the French Creole style and many are open for tours. See Indian artifacts and Civil War relics at the Ste. Genevieve Museum. Maps for self-guided tours are available at the Great River Road Interpretive Center.

At the 3,415-acre Trail of Tears State Park in Jackson, you can walk through the solitude of the dark green forest, camp atop limestone bluffs or picnic as you embrace the majesty of the Mississippi. Craving some bass, bluegill or catfish? Cast your line into the river and hook what you can. The park serves as a memorial to the Cherokee Indians, who were forced to march through the area to relocate on a reservation in Oklahoma in 1838.

Cape Girardeau is of course one of the most picturesque river towns along the Mississippi. Visitors can share in this legacy at the Cape River Heritage Museum. You can see the floodgates downtown that have saved the town from the river's rampage numerous times. In Charleston, you can tour beautiful Victorian homes as well as the gardens surrounding them. Each April, Charleston hosts its annual Dogwood-Azalea Festival and the entire town is filled with millions of colorful dogwood and azalea blossoms. The festival helped earn Charleston's rating in Travel Holiday magazine as one of the 10 best small towns in America (April 2003 issue.)

In Sikeston, Lambert's Cafe, home of the famous "throwed rolls," is at the top of the list for best meals in Missouri. One of the nation's most renowned rodeos, the Jaycee Bootheel Rodeo, is held here in August. In New Madrid, visit Higginson School, a restored one-room schoolhouse and the Hunter-Dawson Home State Historic Site, an antebellum mansion. You can also visit Bloomfield, the birthplace of the U.S. military's *Stars and Stripes* newspaper during the Civil War.

For more information on planning a vacation in Missouri, visit these Web sites:

Missouri State Parks	http://www.mostateparks.com
Missouri Department of Tourism	http://www.missouritourism.org
Missouri Scenic Rivers	http://www.missouriscenicrivers.com

Contact Me

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: jcrowell@senate.mo.gov or visit me on the web at <http://www.jasoncrowell.com>.

Thank you for your time.

Senator Jason Crowell represents the people of Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison,

Mississippi, Perry and Scott counties in the Missouri Senate.