

DIVING EPICENTER

with Ben & Jen

Kayak Launch Points

of the Crystal River Gulf Coast

Where to put in, what it costs, what to know about tides and manatee zones — and which spring each launch gets you to.

Tap any launch GPS to open it straight in Google Maps.

KNOW BEFORE YOU LAUNCH

- **Fees:** Most Crystal River city launches charge about \$5 to park plus a separate ~\$5 paddle-craft launch fee, per vessel. Pay stations are card-only and ask for your license plate number — have both ready.
- **Hours:** City parks are generally open 8am to sunset, with hours shifting seasonally. No overnight parking. Restrooms usually close about 30 minutes before the park does.
- **Trailers:** Vehicles with trailers aren't allowed at Hunter Springs Park — use Kings Bay Park for trailer parking.
- **Frequent paddler?** If you paddle here often, the City sells an annual paddle-craft launch pass that's far cheaper than paying each visit.

Manatee season changes where you can paddle (Nov–Mar).

From mid-November through late March, manatee sanctuaries and no-entry zones are enforced across Kings Bay, and you cannot paddle through Three Sisters Springs. Respect every posted boundary and buoy line. Check current refuge rules before launching in season.

KINGS BAY LAUNCHES (Springs & Manatees)

1. Kings Bay Park

Address: 268 NW 3rd St, Crystal River

Launch GPS: [28.8970, -82.5950](#)

Paddle to: Three Sisters Springs, King's Spring, Seven Sisters, and the Kings Bay hidden-gem vents

Cost: ~\$5 parking + ~\$5 paddle launch. Trailer parking available (8-ft max).

Paddler's note: The main paddler's access point for Kings Bay — the headwaters of Crystal River, fed by roughly 30–70 springs pushing out a constant 72°F. Pay at the kiosk just inside the gravel lot and put the ticket on your dash; unpaid parking draws a \$50+ fine. Watch for manatees right off the dock, and keep an eye down through the clear water for the sand “boils” where spring vents bubble up from the bottom.

2. Hunter Springs Park

Address: 104 NE 1st Ave, Crystal River

Launch GPS: [28.9012, -82.5934](#)

Paddle to: Three Sisters Springs (short paddle), Hunter Springs cove, Gator Hole

Cost: ~\$5 parking + paddle launch fee. No trailers.

Paddler's note: Named for the Hunter family who owned the land in the early 1900s, this cove is fed by three springs — Hunter, Jurassic, and House — so you can drift over several vents in one short outing. Recently remodeled with a smooth sand staging area right to the water's edge, it's the easiest launch in town. Look for the white ibis (Florida's state bird) working the shoreline, and small fish stacking up over the spring boils. Fills up fast on weekends; arrive early.

3. Pete's Pier

Address: 1 SW 1st Place, Crystal River

Launch GPS: [28.8895, -82.5875](#)

Paddle to: Open Kings Bay and out toward the Crystal River / Gulf run

Cost: Paid parking; concrete boat ramp with dock.

Paddler's note: A good backup when the city park lots are full, and the better choice if you're launching a motorized boat rather than a paddle craft. From here you can point out toward the wider Crystal River run to the Gulf — watch for dolphins and wading birds along the mangrove edges as the bay opens up.

BACKCOUNTRY & OUTER LAUNCHES

4. Chassahowitzka River Campground

Address: 8600 W. Miss Maggie Dr., Homosassa (~25 min south)

Launch GPS: [28.7168, -82.6389](#)

Paddle to: “The Crack” fissure spring and the Potter Creek backwaters

Cost: Low-cost launch; kayak rentals available on site.

Paddler's note: This launch sits inside the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1943 — one of the oldest in the system. Paddle up the river and take a left at Baird Creek for “The Crack,” a genuinely narrow fissure spring where some paddlers have to hop out and walk the last stretch; stay in the wider creek system for the quieter Potter Creek backwaters. Watch for turtles, herons, and the occasional manatee in the deeper creek pockets. Bring a headlamp for the shaded interior, water shoes for the muddy approach, and an offline map — cell service drops out back here.

5. Ozello Trail Boat Ramps

Address: West on Ozello Trail off US-19 (~15 min from Crystal River)

Launch GPS: [28.8618, -82.6957](#)

Paddle to: The Ozello backcountry flats — fishing and open Gulf marsh

Cost: Free with your own boat/kayak.

Paddler's note: The winding, mangrove-lined Ozello Trail drive in is half the experience — a distinctive maze of tidal islands and marsh. Out on the flats, scan the shallow seagrass for redfish, snook, and rays gliding over the bottom, and watch the sky for ospreys and eagles hunting the shoreline. Little shade out here, so load up on sun protection and water, and carry extra fuel — cell service is patchy in the backcountry.

6. Gum Slough (near Bushnell)

Address: Public put-in off CR-529 (~45 min southeast)

Launch GPS: [28.8156, -82.1734](#)

Paddle to: The clear, narrow Gum Slough spring run

Cost: Free, kayak-only access.

Paddler's note: A favorite among serious Florida paddlers precisely because it stays under the radar — a clear, narrow, spring-fed run that winds through cypress and hardwood. Look for the deep blue spring boils along the way, plus turtles, wading birds, and if you're lucky, otters. Motorized access is very limited. Put-in points can shift — confirm current access locally before heading out, and bring plenty of water.

7. Lake Rousseau / Withlacoochee Backwaters

Address: Ramps near Inverness/Dunnellon off SR-44 (~30–40 min east)

Launch GPS: [29.0201, -82.3517](#)

Paddle to: The Withlacoochee backwaters and Lake Rousseau

Cost: Free with your own boat.

Paddler's note: A freshwater change of pace from the Gulf springs. The lake was formed when the Withlacoochee River was dammed in the early 1900s for a power plant that was ultimately never completed — an odd bit of local history behind an otherwise quiet-looking lake. The flooded timber and backwaters are prime bass and crappie water; watch for alligators, wading birds, and eagles. Bring standard boating safety gear; this is a calm, less-trafficked paddle.

QUICK PADDLE SAFETY

- Wear your PFD, and leash or clip everything to the boat — a dropped paddle or dry bag disappears fast.
- Kings Bay is tidal (about 2.5 ft of swing) and shallow — inches deep in spots, up to ~12 ft in the main channel. Watch the tide so you're not dragging bottom on the way back.
- Wind is the main challenge on open Kings Bay — check the forecast and paddle into the wind on the way out so the return is easier.
- Carry a dry bag (waterproof, not just splash-proof), an offline or printed map for the backcountry runs, and water for the whole trip.

Fees, hours, and access points change, and remote put-ins can move. Confirm current details before a trip — the City of Crystal River for the in-town launches, and a local outfitter for the backcountry runs.

See you at the next spot.

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