

DIVING EPICENTER

with Ben & Jen

Crystal River Springs & Dive Sites

Your Map & Guide to 30 Spots on Florida's Gulf Coast

20 Top Springs • 10 Local Hidden Gems

Tap any GPS coordinate to open it in Google Maps

Welcome to the Springs

Crystal River and Florida's Gulf Coast hold some of the clearest, most beautiful spring water anywhere in the world — and much of it is free or nearly free to enjoy. This guide is the same list of spots we dive, paddle, and film for the channel, ranked by how much we love them.

Each entry tells you what it costs, how to get there, what to bring, and one thing worth knowing before you go. Coordinates are tappable — they'll open straight in Google Maps on your phone. Water in the springs stays around 72°F all year, so a wetsuit or rash guard makes almost any day comfortable.

A quick note on safety and access: several cave and cavern sites require diver certification, and manatee protection zones in Kings Bay restrict water access in winter (roughly November–March). Prices and seasonal rules change, so it's always worth a quick check before a trip. When in doubt, a local dive shop is your best friend.

THE TOP 20 SPRINGS & DIVE SITES

1. Three Sisters Springs / Kings Bay

Cost: Free to paddle/swim via Hunter Springs Park or Kings Bay Park; guided manatee snorkel tours run about \$80–90/person.

Getting there: From downtown Crystal River, launch at Kings Bay Park (491 N. Kings Bay Dr.) or Hunter Springs Park (104 NE 1st Ave.), then paddle south/east under the Kings Bay Drive bridge to the springs.

GPS: [28.9028, -82.5896](#)

Bring: Wetsuit or rash guard (water stays ~72°F year-round; winter air is much colder), reef-safe sunscreen, water shoes, a dry bag, and cash for parking.

Good to know: Kings Bay is fed by roughly 30–70 springs. Three Sisters is three named springs — Pretty Sister, Deep Sister, and Little Sister. Manatees crowd in from November to March, and this is the only place in the U.S. where in-water manatee interaction is legal — passive observation only, no chasing or touching.

2. Hunter Springs Park

Cost: Free (small parking fee).

Getting there: 104 NE 1st Ave, Crystal River — right downtown, walkable from most in-town lodging.

GPS: [28.9012, -82.5934](#)

Bring: Just swim gear and a towel — this is a low-effort, easy-access spot.

Good to know: Named for the Hunter family who owned the property in the early 1900s. Three springs feed this cove, so it's an easy place to explore several spots in one visit.

3. Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park

Cost: \$13 adult / \$5 child.

Getting there: 4150 S. Suncoast Blvd (US-19), Homosassa — about 20 minutes south of Crystal River. A pontoon boat or tram takes you to the main spring.

GPS: [28.7998, -82.5893](#)

Bring: Comfortable walking shoes (boardwalks throughout), bug spray, and a camera — one of the most photogenic wildlife stops on the list.

Good to know: Opened as a private roadside attraction in the 1940s and became a state park in 1989 after a local ballot measure — passed by about 200 votes — saved it from development. It was the longtime home of Lu the Hippo, an honorary Florida citizen who lived here until 2025 at age 65.

4. Rainbow Springs State Park / Rainbow River

Cost: \$2–6 park entry; tubing/kayak rental extra but cheap.

Getting there: 19158 SW 81st Place Rd, Dunnellon — about 40–45 minutes northeast via US-98/US-41.

GPS: [29.1027, -82.4387](#)

Bring: Water shoes, a tube or kayak (rentable on-site), and a waterproof camera housing — the river drift makes handheld filming tricky.

Good to know: A major tourist attraction from the 1930s–70s with glass-bottom boats and manmade waterfalls, later rescued and reopened as a state park in the 1990s. It's a first-magnitude spring, producing over 100 million gallons of water a day.

5. Weeki Wachee Springs State Park

Cost: \$13 adult / \$8 child; kayaking the river is free if you skip the park entrance.

Getting there: 6131 Commercial Way, Spring Hill — about 50 minutes south via US-19.

GPS: [28.5158, -82.5734](#)

Bring: A swimsuit for Buccaneer Bay, or just regular clothes for the mermaid show. Arrive before opening in peak season — daily capacity is capped.

Good to know: Home to the world-famous underwater mermaid shows, running continuously since 1947. The spring is the deepest known freshwater cave system in the U.S. — divers found new passages as recently as 2007, and the true bottom has never been found.

6. Devil's Den

Cost: Roughly \$18–45 depending on snorkel vs. dive.

Getting there: 5390 NE 180th Ave, Williston — about 50 minutes northeast.

GPS: [29.3810, -82.4780](#)

Bring: A wetsuit (constant 72°F), a dive light if scuba diving, and a booking — walk-ins aren't allowed.

Good to know: Named by early settlers for the steam that rises from the sinkhole on cold mornings, like a 'chimney to hell.' It's a fossil-rich site, with prehistoric fossil beds visible in the cavern walls.

7. Blue Grotto

Cost: Roughly \$40–75 for diving, less for snorkel-only.

Getting there: 3852 NE 80th Ave, Williston — right across the road from Devil's Den, about 50 minutes away.

GPS: [29.3775, -82.4630](#)

Bring: Dive certification card, dive light, and warm layers for after.

Good to know: Known for an underwater air bell about 10m down where divers can surface and talk while still submerged. Look for Virgil, a resident soft-shell turtle and local celebrity among regular divers.

8. Chassahowitzka River & “The Crack”

Cost: Free paddle-in (own kayak) or low-cost rental.

Getting there: Launch from Chassahowitzka River Campground, 8600 W. Miss Maggie Dr., Homosassa — about 25 minutes south. Paddle up the river and take a left at Baird Creek to reach the lagoon.

GPS: [28.7168, -82.6389](#)

Bring: Your own kayak/canoe (or rent locally), a headlamp for the shaded interior, and water shoes for the shallow, muddy approach.

Good to know: 'The Crack' is a genuinely narrow fissure spring — some paddlers have to get out and walk the last stretch. It sits inside the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1943.

9. Fort Island Gulf Beach

Cost: Free (parking fee only).

Getting there: End of Fort Island Trail (west off US-19 in Crystal River) — about 15 minutes from downtown.

GPS: [28.8590, -82.7205](#)

Bring: A tripod for sunset shots, bug spray for dusk, and casual boating/fishing gear.

Good to know: One of the only true sand-beach Gulf access points directly in Crystal River — much of the nearby coastline is marsh and mangrove — making it a reliable spot for beach and sunset views.

10. King's Spring (within Kings Bay)

Cost: Free with your own gear/kayak; easy to combine with Three Sisters.

Getting there: Same access as Three Sisters — paddle further into Kings Bay from Kings Bay Park.

GPS: [28.9040, -82.5910](#)

Bring: Same gear as Three Sisters; most people combine the two into one outing.

Good to know: Considered the manatee sanctuary zone of Kings Bay — seasonal no-entry zones are enforced here in winter to protect resting manatees, so check current refuge rules before visiting in season.

11. Seven Sisters Springs

Cost: Free/low-cost park access, short paddle.

Getting there: Access via Hunter Springs Park or Kings Bay Park — a shorter paddle than Three Sisters.

Bring: Kayak or paddleboard and a GoPro or waterproof camera for the small cave-maze mouth of the springs.

Good to know: Despite the name, it's a compact cluster feeding from a maze of small caves — a high-payoff view for a very short paddle.

12. Crystal River Archaeological State Park

Cost: Free/small donation.

Getting there: 3400 N. Museum Point, Crystal River — about 5–10 minutes from downtown.

GPS: [28.9087, -82.5972](#)

Bring: Walking shoes — no water gear needed. This is the dry, land-based stop on the list.

Good to know: A pre-Columbian site with six earthwork mounds used by Native peoples for roughly 1,600 years — one of the longest continuously-occupied sites in Florida. A good change of pace from the water.

13. Ozello Backcountry Flats

Cost: Free with your own boat.

Getting there: Head west on Ozello Trail off US-19, about 15 minutes from Crystal River, to reach the boat ramps.

GPS: [28.8618, -82.6957](#)

Bring: Sun protection (little shade out on the flats), polarized sunglasses for spotting fish, and plenty of water and fuel — cell service can be patchy.

Good to know: The winding, mangrove-lined Ozello Trail itself is a beautiful drive in — worth the trip even before you reach the water.

14. Manatee Springs State Park (Chiefland)

Cost: ~\$6 park entry.

Getting there: 11650 NW 115th St, Chiefland — about 1 hour north via US-19/US-98.

GPS: [29.4846, -82.9707](#)

Bring: Snorkel/dive gear, a wetsuit, and a park map — the trail system here is extensive.

Good to know: A first-magnitude spring discharging over 100 million gallons daily. Cave passages extend from the main spring, but they're for cave-certified divers only — stick to the open cavern area otherwise.

15. Gulf Scalloping Grounds (seasonal, June–Sept)

Cost: Free with your own boat plus a cheap state scallop license.

Getting there: Launch from any Crystal River/Ozello ramp and head into the nearshore seagrass flats. Beds shift year to year — check current FWC scalloping maps first.

Bring: A mesh scallop bag, a dive flag, snorkel gear, and a cooler for the catch.

Good to know: Citrus County's scallop season is set annually by the Florida FWC (typically late June through Labor Day) — always confirm current dates before you head out.

16. Paradise Springs

Cost: Roughly \$40–50 for a guided dive.

Getting there: Near Ocala, about 1 hour from Crystal River via US-41/SR-200.

GPS: [29.1656, -82.2402](#)

Bring: Dive certification and a dive light; guide booking is required in advance.

Good to know: A former limestone quarry that flooded into a spring — it descends to roughly 105 ft into an 'amphitheater' cavern shape, unusual for its man-made origin blended with natural clarity.

17. Ginnie Springs

Cost: ~\$28–32 day-use entry.

Getting there: 7300 NE Ginnie Springs Rd, High Springs — about 1.5 hours north via US-41/US-27.

GPS: [29.8377, -82.6912](#)

Bring: A full day's gear — most locals treat this as an all-day trip. Dive cert for cavern areas, water shoes, and cash/card for entry.

Good to know: A system of 7 connected springs feeding one large pool, frequently cited as the area's favorite site. The Devil's Eye/Ear cave entrances nearby are true cave systems — for full cave-certified divers only.

18. Crystal River Flats & Backwater Fishing Spots

Cost: Free with your own boat.

Getting there: Multiple public ramps in Crystal River proper — check the city marina and nearby boat ramps off US-19.

Bring: Standard fishing gear, polarized sunglasses, and sun protection.

Good to know: A reliable, no-planning-needed spot — good for any day when a bigger trip isn't happening.

19. Pine Island

Cost: Free (own boat).

Getting there: Pine Island Drive off US-19, about 10 minutes from downtown Crystal River.

Bring: Same as Fort Island Beach — sunset gear and casual boating equipment.

Good to know: A quieter, less-trafficked alternative to Fort Island Beach for a similar sunset wind-down.

20. Fanning Springs (Fanning Springs State Park)

Cost: ~\$5–6 park entry.

Getting there: 18020 NW Hwy 19, Fanning Springs — about 1.5 hours north.

GPS: [29.5878, -82.9346](#)

Bring: Snorkel gear, a wetsuit, and picnic supplies since it's a longer drive.

Good to know: *Sits where Fanning Spring meets the Suwannee River — the river made famous in Stephen Foster's 19th-century song. A nice historical hook for a road-trip day.*

10 LOCAL HIDDEN GEMS (OFF THE TOURIST RADAR)

These are the quieter, lesser-known spots — mostly free, mostly reached by kayak or small boat. A few of the Kings Bay spring vents aren't officially charted, so treat those coordinates as a starting point and confirm exact positions with a local dive shop before relying on them for navigation.

1. Gator Hole (Magnolia Spring)

GPS: [28.8960, -82.5940](#)

Free with your own kayak/boat from a Crystal River ramp. Once had an extensive cave system that collapsed around 1963 — the underwater landscape today still reflects that collapse.

2. Idiot's Delight

GPS: [28.9035, -82.5905](#)

Free, own gear/kayak from Kings Bay Park. A pair of narrow vertical shafts at least 20 ft deep — easy to miss if you don't know where to look.

3. Shark Sink

GPS: [28.9015, -82.5975](#)

Free, own gear/kayak, west side of Kings Bay. Formed when its roof collapsed around 1905 — no sharks here, the name is purely historical.

4. Tarpon Spring (King Spring)

GPS: [28.9060, -82.5945](#)

Free with your own gear, within Kings Bay near Banana Island. Considered by some enthusiasts one of the finest freshwater dive sites in the state for visibility, with big fish congregations at the exits (cavern reaches ~65 ft).

5. American Legion Spring

GPS: [28.8965, -82.5928](#)

Free county park with free parking, south edge of Crystal River off US-19 — even has a diving board over the spring. One of the lowest-effort spots on the whole list.

6. Jurassic Spring & House Spring (Hunter Springs Cove)

GPS: [28.9012, -82.5934](#)

Free (small parking fee), the lesser-explored corners of the Hunter Springs cove. Jurassic Spring alone pumps about 100 gallons an hour — small, and a fun overlooked corner.

7. Potter Creek / Chassahowitzka Backwaters

GPS: [28.7168, -82.6389](#)

Free with your own kayak from the Chassahowitzka River Campground — head into the wider creek system instead of straight to The Crack. Far quieter, since most visitors go straight to the lagoon.

8. Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park

GPS: [28.2989, -82.6841](#)

Free/very low fee, 8737 Old Post Rd, Port Richey — about 1 hour south. One of the few saltwater spring systems in the region, a neat contrast to the area's freshwater springs. Most of the park is water-access only.

9. Gum Slough

GPS: [28.8156, -82.1734](#)

Free, kayak-only, near Bushnell (~45 min). A favorite among serious Florida paddlers precisely because it stays under the radar — quiet, clear, and rarely crowded.

10. Lake Rousseau / Withlacoochee Backwaters

GPS: [29.0201, -82.3517](#)

Free with your own boat, ramps near Inverness/Dunnellon off SR-44 (~30–40 min). Formed when the Withlacoochee was dammed in the early 1900s for a power plant that was never completed.

BEFORE YOU HEAD OUT

Water temperature. Springs stay around 72°F year-round. In winter the air is much colder than the water — bring layers for before and after.

Manatee season. November–March, manatees gather in Kings Bay. In-water viewing is legal here only, and only as passive observation — never chase or touch. Some zones close seasonally.

Certification. Cave and cavern sites (Ginnie Springs' cave entrances, Devil's Den, Blue Grotto, Manatee Springs passages) require the right certification. Operators will turn away uncertified divers.

Prices & dates. Park fees, tour prices, and scallop-season dates change year to year. Confirm current rates and rules before you go.

Leave no trace. Reef-safe sunscreen, pack out what you pack in, and give wildlife space. These springs stay beautiful because visitors treat them well.

See you at the next spot.

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