

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS AREA ATTRACTIONS

Marion, Illinois is an easy driving distance from St. Louis, Missouri, Evansville, Indiana. Chicago, IL Nashville, TN, and Memphis, TN. Southern IL has three major interstates that cross the state here. Interstates 57, Interstate 64, and Interstate 24 provide access to many areas of the Midwest.

St. Louis, MO offers many exciting attractions as well. The MLB St. Louis Cardinals play at Busch Stadium, Ballpark Village, the St. Louis Arch, the Gateway to the West, and the Six Flags theme park. The St. Louis Zoo, Grant's Farm, and many other attractions.

Nashville, TN is approximately 3 hours away, Memphis, TN is approximately 3.5 hours away, and Louisville, KY, home to the Louisville bat factory is approximately 3.5 hours away. All of these can be great vacation spots.

Things to Do

With seven wilderness areas and nine state parks, plus lakes, rivers, waterfalls and even a swamp to explore, the gorgeously green area around [Shawnee National Forest](#) offers all the ways to unplug and reconnect through recreation.

The area's main play spots hug the Ohio River, which forms the eastern and southern borders, and the Mississippi River, which marks the western edge. The area covers more than 400 square miles, but you can drive between the rivers in less than 90 minutes on the interior roads, stopping in small towns and rural retreats for coffee shops, restaurants and wine tastings. Or cruise the riverbanks on national drives—the 550-mile [Great River Road](#) through Illinois and the 188-mile [Ohio River Scenic Byway](#), both of which rim the Shawnee region.

Get a flying fix among the sandstone bluffs. Zip through the trees near Makanda with [Shawnee Bluffs Canopy Tour](#). Test your balance on a 180-foot suspension bridge and cruise hands-free on one of eight lines, the longest zip (1,100 feet). Shorter treks traverse five lines in about two hours. One Saturday a month in summer, fly like Batman on a full-moon tour.

For boulderers and climbers, [Jackson Falls](#) in Shawnee offers the largest number of climbing routes in Illinois, including 50-foot technical climbs up the sandstone bluffs. If you're new to climbing, guides found through [Egyptian Hills Resort](#) in Creal Springs or [Vertical Heartland Climbing School](#) in Buncombe can teach you the ropes.

Scenic Rides

Cruise the forest's heart on two wheels along the [Tunnel Hill State Trail](#), a 45-mile path connecting Harrisburg to Karnak. Ride over 23 trestles and through a 543-foot-long tunnel. Pass through farmland in the north, forest and bluffs in the central stretch, and the Cache River at the south. Stop by [Henry Barkhausen Cache River Wetlands Center](#) to learn about the swamp. If you need a bike, check out Sandburn Junction in Vienna.

If horseback riding is on your summer to-do list, saddle up at [Giant City Stables](#) in Makanda for one-hour trail rides. Small kids can ride ponies with a wrangler's assist, while anyone head-over-hooves in love can sign up for equestrian day camp.

For epic forest and river views, drive the 188-mile [Ohio River National Scenic Byway](#) from Cave-In-Rock State Park to Cairo. Spend a day exploring river towns and natural sights, including the 55-foot-wide limestone cave at Cave-in-Rock State Park and [Garden of the Gods](#). You'll also find frontier history at Metropolis' [Fort Massac State Park](#), the first Illinois state park. Learn about the fort's history (it dates to 1757) and see a replica of the 1802 structure. Extend the drive on the Great River Road in Cairo to loop up the Shawnee's eastern section.



Adventure Trails

Four hundred miles of trails spoil hikers in the Shawnee region. You could spend several weeks in silence on the 160-mile River to River Trail connecting the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, crossing five wilderness areas and several state parks. Bring a map for your all-day hike. If you want to overnight, backcountry gear is a must. For shorter treks, try one of these trails:

[*Burden Falls*](#)

Located in the Burden Falls Wilderness near Eddyville, the 1-mile loop crosses bedrock to the falls, a series of upper and lower cascades (and one of Illinois' largest). Explore the side trails to spot barred owls and other birds, and do some bouldering (climbing low rocks without ropes). Visit after a rain for the best waterfall views.

[*Garden of the Gods*](#)

It's one of the national forest's most-visited spots, thanks to stop-in-your-tracks scenery—100-foot limestone bluffs formed into shapes like those of Camel, Mushroom and Anvil rocks. Stroll by rock slabs and the surrounding valley overlooks on the Indian Point Trail, a 2-mile loop. Find the wilderness area near Herod.

Giant City State Park

Squeeze between massive sandstone walls on the 1-mile Giant City Nature Trail at this Makanda-area park; for a real challenge, try climbing the crevices. The 12-mile Red Cedar Hiking Trail loops through the woods, crossing a stream and accessing a waterfall for explorers looking for a full day trip or overnight backpack.

Jackson Falls

From the trailhead, it's an easy quarter-mile trek to the top of seasonal falls, dependent on rain for flow. For more of a challenge, descend into the canyon to the base of the falls. The 3.25-mile loop follows a rocky path with plenty of roots through the national forest and towering sandstone bluffs.

Little Grand Canyon

This 3.6-mile loop near Murphysboro leads trekkers through bluffs and forest, then a scramble up a 365-foot rocky creek bed for a view of the Big Muddy and Mississippi rivers. Enjoy the quiet on this lightly trafficked route.

Rim Rock Trail

The almost 1-mile loop follows the rim of a rock escarpment. Interpretative signs share the area's history as hikers pass the remains of a 1,500-year-old stone wall. Stairs lead to Ox-Lot Cave, once a shelter used by Native Americans.

Come on Wednesday and play baseball Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Your team will play all three days as everyone is guaranteed a minimum of five games. A time your team will never forget.

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“Let’s Play Ball”