



ILLINOIS. MILE AFTER MAGNIFICENT MILE.

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CONTACT: Katie Markese 312-297-7561
katie.markese@edelman.com

EXPLORING THE OUTDOORS IN ILLINOIS

Illinois' backdrop offers the perfect setting for outdoor excitement this spring

CHICAGO – Beyond Chicago's breathtaking skyline lies a vast landscape of the great Illinois outdoors – and everything to satisfy the outdoor enthusiast. Countless bike trails await as cyclists gear up for a scenic ride, while pristine waters lure kayakers and rugged terrain encourages those looking for a "heightened" thrill.

But outdoor activity does more than just thrill. A recent study conducted by the research firm Harris Interactive® for the Outdoor Industry Foundation shows that close to 90 percent of Americans 16 years and older feel that the outdoors reduces their stress levels and gives them a sense of accomplishment. The report also shows that "the outdoors is a natural cure for the blues." With such an endorsement, travelers will find that in all corners of the state, Illinois is the ideal destination to relax and experience nature's offerings this spring.

Ride, Ride, Ride

Chicago's bike trails cover hundreds of miles of scenic terrain, but perhaps none as awe-inspiring as the city's **Lakefront Trail**. This paved, multi-use path stretches 18 miles along Lake Michigan, providing cool lake breezes and stunning skyline views. Must-see stops along the way include the South Shore Cultural Center, the Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum, The Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium, Buckingham Fountain and Lincoln Park Zoo.

The city recently gave bikers another reason to start pedaling: The **Millennium Park Bicycle Station**, located across from the Aon Center at upper Randolph Street. The station offers a large fleet of bikes for rent by the hour, day or week, secure bicycle parking, lockers, showers, towel service and free bicycle valet parking during summer performances at Millennium Park and Grant Park festivals. (Chicago)

For more information or to download a Chicago bicycle map, contact the Millennium Park Bike Station (888-bike-way, www.chicagobikestation.com).

The picturesque **North Branch Bicycle Trail** starts at Caldwell and Devon avenues in Chicago and continues north approximately 20 miles to Lake County. The route stays close to the north branch of the Chicago River and ribbons through wooded areas with some stretches of prairie and beautiful residential neighborhoods. Taking a spin on this path offers opportunities for fun, exercise and relaxation with stops at the Skokie Lagoons, which provide access to picnic groves and views of gardens in the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, where thousands of spring flowers bloom. Cyclists can utilize bike racks near the entrance of the Garden to gain access to the grounds and explore on foot. (Chicagoland)

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Governor Rod Blagojevich

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism

For more information, contact the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (708-771-1330); Chicago Botanic Garden (847-835-5440, www.chicagobotanic.org).

Literally cut out from the rocks of Illinois' far northern region are trails ideal for cyclists looking for adventure steeped in Native American history. Once traveled by Iroquois, Pottawatomie and Chippewa tribes, **Rock Cut State Park Trails** provide more than 20 groomed miles of land for mountain biking, with the mighty Rock River as a scenic backdrop. Mountain biking trails are open April through November, prime time to enjoy more than 100 types of wildflowers on display. For visitors who want to include an overnight stay in their visit to Rock Cut, the park offers year-round campgrounds. (Northern)

For more information, contact Rock Cut State Park (815-885-3311, www.dnr.state.il.us).

Heartland Pathways is an abandoned rail bed in Central Illinois that runs from Clinton to Seymour, and where some of the last remnants of tall grass prairies are on display in Illinois. The 31 miles of farmland is sure to inspire peacefulness and nostalgia. A must-see attraction is at Clinton's Weldon Springs State Recreation Area, where life-sized images of local wildlife are carved out of the golden wood of a bald cypress tree. (Central)

For more information, contact Bloomington-Normal Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (309-665-0033, www.visitbn.org).

The paved **Great River Trail** extends 60 miles along the Mississippi River from Moline north to Savanna and offers riders magnificent views and historical points of interest. As riders follow the river, they pass unforgettable attractions such as Mississippi Palisades State Park, Fulton's reconstructed settler's village Heritage Canyon, and the Upper Mississippi Spring National Wildlife Refuge, where prairie animals roam freely. Riders can rent their wheels and helmets at Arnold's Bicycle Repair in Savanna or from the Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau in Moline. (Western)

For more information, contact the Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau (563-322-3911 or 800-747-7800, www.visitquadcities.com); Arnold's Bicycle Repair (815-273-7789).

If travelers on the **Tunnel Hill State Trail** use their imagination, they might hear the bangs and clangs of the major railroad construction project that occurred along the trail in the 19th century. Entrenched in history, the crushed limestone trail runs along a converted rail bed, stretching 45 miles through Southern Illinois. After spending the night at the House of Nahum bed and breakfast, riders can get an early start in Harrisburg, which is mostly pristine countryside. At New Castle, the old railroad bed enters the Shawnee National Forest area and remains there for roughly half of the trail's length. When riders hit New Burnside, they'll have the chance to marvel at the towering bluffs before passing through lush wetland south of Vienna. (Southern)

For more information, contact Southern Illinois Tourism Development Office (618-998-9397, www.adventureillinois.com); House of Nahum (618-252-1414).

From antique-rich Alton to Pere Marquette State Park, the **Sam Vadalabene Bike Trail** has riders flying alongside the Great River Road and a portion of the Meeting of the Great Rivers Scenic Byway. White limestone bluffs, views of the Mississippi and Civil War markers make up

the setting for this 20-mile journey. Cyclists can also ride through Elsau, a charming town which earned a place on the National Register of Historic Places for its architectural gems such as the 1874 Methodist Church and the 1857 Schoolhouse. For adventurers that need to rent a bike, the best way to get one is to head to Grafton where there are several rental shops such as Riverside Recreation. Country Corner Fudge offers families bike rental and delicious homemade treats for the ride! (Southwest)

For more information, contact Great River Road Association (www.greatriverroad.com/vadalabene.htm); Riverside Recreation (618-786-2455); Country Corner Fudge (618-786-3700).

Spring Into Action

Who knew visitors could kayak the Chicago River while simultaneously uncovering the architectural history of Chicago? **Kayak Chicago** offers fascinating architecture tours for those interested in seeing the city from a new vantage point. Beginners and advanced kayakers alike will enjoy paddling among the looming skyscrapers. (Chicago)

For more information, contact Kayak Chicago (630-336-7245, www.kayakchicago.com).

The **Fox River** in St. Charles also presents a special experience, this time by a scenic canoe ride. The Fox River has 103 miles of open waterways for canoeing, and countless opportunities to view wildlife, including whitetail deer, ducks and Great Blue Herons. The most popular paddle is a three-hour, seven-mile section between South Elgin and St. Charles, where explorers can view limestone bluffs and waterfalls. Visitors can get started at **Canoe Shack Outfitters** in St. Charles, where they can rent canoe equipment and choose from two different guided Fox River canoe trips. (Chicagoland)

For more information, contact Canoe Shack Outfitters (630-584-8017, www.canoeshack.com).

Visitors to Northern Illinois can make their own great adventure at **Starved Rock State Park**. The park offers 18 canyons for hiking, including the awesome St. Louis Canyon deep within the park. Adventurers will always discover something new along the trails, whether it's a colorful plant species, sparkling waterfalls or even cavern-dwelling bats and flying squirrels! Visitors who want more than a day's worth of exploration can stay at the 1930's era stone-and-log Starved Rock Lodge, situated atop a wooded bluff overlooking the picturesque Illinois River. (Northern)

For more information, contact Starved Rock State Park (815-667-4726, www.dnr.state.il.us).

Beautiful **Lake Shelbyville** boasts 172 miles of shoreline, innumerable coves for exploration, cruising, fishing and swimming and three marinas with boat rentals for travelers looking to make waves. Also, because the temperatures in the Lake Shelbyville region are generally 8 to 10 degrees warmer than the Chicago area, the summer last a little bit longer with beaches open in May through the first part of September. (Central)

For more information, contact Findlay Marina (217-756-8595); Lithia Springs Marina (800-447-4121); Sullivan Marina (888-728-7338); Lake Shelbyville (800-874-3529, www.lakeshelbyville.com/rec.htm).

Located 50 miles south of Quincy and reminiscent of a dude ranch, at **Harpole's Heartland Lodge** adventurers can ride all terrain vehicles through Heartland's 40 miles of forest, creeks and prairies; other notable offerings include Old-West style cookouts, hunting, fishing, skeet shooting and hayrides. (Western)

For more information, contact Harpole's Heartland Lodge (800-717-4868, www.heartlandlodge.com)

Beginners dreaming of climbing the bluffs of Illinois should take the first step at **Vertical Heartland Rock Climbing School**. Friends can literally lean on each other at this school, which teaches climber safety and technical equipment usage and methods. On an innovative, forested team-building course, visitors can challenge themselves in a garden of sandstone boulders. Once beginners have mastered certain skills, they can head to the lush, 4,000-acre **Giant City State Park**, where climbing and rappelling are permitted in two locations. Experienced climbers will enjoy Devil's Standtable Cliff, a steep and challenging climb made of rough sandstone. (Southern)

For more information and prices, contact Vertical Heartland Rock Climbing School (618-995-1427, www.verticalheartland.com); Giant City State Park (618-457-4836, www.dnr.state.il.us).

Nature-lovers looking for a scenic ride can find it at **Pere Marquette Riding Stables** in Grafton. Perfect for a family outing, Pere Marquette's stables provide horseback riding, trails, pony rides for children and even horses for sale. The 50-minute guided ride through nearly three miles of scenic trails helps renew appreciation for clean air, natural sights and local wildlife. The stables are open daily May through October and rides start at 10 a.m. and continue every hour on the hour until 4 p.m. (Southwest)

For more information or to make a reservation, contact Pere Marquette State Park (618-786-2156, www.dnr.state.il.us).

No matter what adventure travelers seek, they can find something to suit their outdoor style in Illinois. Whether it's canoeing, biking, rock climbing, horseback riding or more, Illinois has it all.

IBOT offers additional information on outdoor adventures and destinations, events statewide and suggested 3-Day Getaways through the Bureau's Web site, www.enjoyillinois.com or its travel counselors at **1-800-2CONNECT**. Additional information about the outdoors in Illinois is available through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources at <http://dnr.state.il.us>.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Statewide photography is available electronically or in slide format. For artwork, contact Katie Markese at katie.markese@edelman.com, 312-297-7561, or Anne Dattulo at anne.dattulo@edelman.com, 312-240-2829.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.