

# Missouri Wildlife and Recreation

We are able to see just a bit of Missouri on the Texas Eagle route, but don't be fooled into thinking you've seen the state. Missouri's varied geography creates a surprising mixture of wildlife habitats, along with plenty of different outdoor recreation opportunities. Since natural resources also dictate human settlements, you'll find unique hamlets, picturesque towns and vibrant cities to explore when you're ready for a change from outdoor activities.

The state's 70,000 square miles are divided north and south by the Missouri River. To the north are plains, and to the south lie the Ozark Mountains, with its highest peak at only 1,772 feet. Since Missouri has no high ranges or oceans to regulate temperature, it generally has cold winters and hot, humid summers.

Missouri is home to over 100 species of amphibians and reptiles ranging from alligators to the state's most poisonous snake, the copperhead. Missouri has 206 species of fish, including the 100-pound paddlefish. Four hundred different types of birds reside here for at least part of the year. There are also 70 species of wild mammals such as bobcats, mountain lions, beavers, and black bears. The once endangered black bear population is making a comeback with an estimated 300 to 500 bears now in the wild. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works hard to conserve and protect these habitats for the continuing benefit of wildlife and the American people.

Peak tourist season is June through September. During this time you can check out the Missouri wineries, numerous golf courses, and visit the State Fair. Mid-May is considered to be the best time to make a visit to the beautifully colored Botanical Gardens. If you prefer cooler temperatures and sightseeing without the crowds, visit during the spring or fall months.

Among other nicknames, Missouri is known as "The Cave State," offering 6000 caves to explore. Missouri is also home to 50 State Parks which provide opportunities for fishing, bird watching, boating, four wheeling, hiking, and biking. Parks on the Black River provide canoeing, kayaking, and rafting for all skill levels.

In addition to these sites, Missouri is a crossroads for National Historic Trails. The California Trail, Lewis & Clark Trail, Oregon Trail, Pony Express Trail, Sante Fe Trail, and the Trail of Tears all traverse Missouri. The Ozark Plateau offers an additional 500 miles of recreational trails from St. Louis to Arkansas.

Today, there are 39 National Historic Landmarks in Missouri. These make up a variety of Historic Sites, Battlefields, Memorials, and Monuments. One of the best-known monuments is the Gateway Arch at Jefferson Expansion National Historic Park in St. Louis, which attracts more than four million visitors every year.

Missouri's varied parks and ecosystems offer you many recreational activities. Take some time to visit Missouri and explore something new!

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