

Do you know - Dianna Rohweder

De Leon Springs State Park! Imagine swimming in water that's bubbled up from underground caves for thousands of years, then sitting down to cook your own pancakes at a table built inside a historic sugar mill. This 625-acre paradise produces 19 million gallons of crystal-clear spring water daily at a constant 72 degrees. The park seamlessly blends recreation with history, offering everything from refreshing swims to fascinating boat tours through waters where manatees and alligators peacefully coexist.

The Famous Pancake Experience: The Old Sugar Mill Pancake House sits inside a 100-year-old replica of the original 1830s sugar mill, where you'll cook unlimited pancakes right at your table using built-in griddles. You'll pour your own batter from pitchers and flip pancakes while enjoying views of the spring through large windows.

Crystal-Clear Swimming: The spring's swimming area with depths ranging from 18 inches in shallow areas to 30 feet at the spring boil. The water stays perfectly refreshing year-round and is so transparent you can see straight to the bottom.

Wildlife Boat Tours: The 50-minute Fountain of Youth Eco/Heritage tour departs four times daily, taking you through both the state park and Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge. You'll spot alligators sunning themselves, osprey diving for fish, great blue herons fishing along the banks, and if you're lucky during cooler months, gentle manatees gliding through the water. The guides share stories about the area's 6,000-year history and the legends surrounding Ponce de León's search for the Fountain of Youth.

Take the paved nature trail to meet "Old Methuselah," a magnificent 600-year-old bald cypress tree that's been standing since before European explorers arrived.

Rent kayaks, canoes, or paddleboards to explore Spring Garden Lake and the adjacent Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge's 22,000 acres of pristine waterways.

The visitor center houses fascinating exhibits about the area's rich history, including artifacts like ancient dugout canoes and displays about Queenie, the water-skiing elephant that entertained visitors during the park's roadside attraction days in the 1960s. Interpretive panels throughout the park tell stories spanning from Native American settlements to Civil War battles that occurred on these very grounds.

Arrive early, especially on weekends, as the park frequently reaches capacity and may temporarily close during high visitation periods. *The restaurant can have lengthy wait times, but you can join the waitlist online and explore the park while you wait. Weekdays offer a more peaceful experience with shorter lines and better wildlife viewing opportunities.*

Park admission is typically \$6 per vehicle, and the pancake experience costs around \$8 for unlimited pancakes, while boat tours are reasonably priced for the 50-minute educational experience. Picnic pavilions, playgrounds, and multiple trail options ensure everyone finds something enjoyable, whether they prefer active exploration or relaxed lounging.

The park opens daily at 8 AM and closes at sunset. *While dogs are welcome in most areas of the park, they're not allowed in the swimming area or restaurant.* Parking is plentiful, and the paved pathways make the main attractions accessible to visitors with mobility needs.

601 Ponce de Leon Blvd, De Leon Springs, FL 32130 – One hour and twenty minutes from Rohan Recreation Center. <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/de-leon-springs-state-park>