



## Southernmost Illinois is an outdoor enthusiast's scenic paradise.

BY JINNY RAVENSCROFT DANZER



**Left: A breathtaking sunset at Camel Rock in the Garden of the Gods.** Taylor Reed photo

**Above: Timber Ridge Outpost and Cabins offers two tree houses for overnight guests.** Jinny Ravenscroft Danzer photo

river. Browse the small towns of Rosiclare and Elizabethtown and hear tales of river pirates at Cave-in-Rock State Park.

### FOREST WONDERS

Wildflowers, dogwoods, and redbuds flourish in spring, while the area dresses in spectacular colors for fall. The Ohio River and Shawnee Hills scenic byways wind through the area. The Forest Service's new mobile interpretive tour (found at <http://myoncell.mobi/shawneenf>) gives information about 27 sites by scanning a QR (quick response) code with your phone or by calling (618) 219-7032 to hear about stops along the byways.

The Shawnee National Forest and adjacent lands are crisscrossed with trails. The 160-mile River-to-River Trail runs from the Ohio to the Mississippi. Rent a horse from area stables or bring your own. Or join a trail ride like the One Horse Gap nine-day ride in late July. There are several horse camps in or near the forest.

The half-mile Rim Rock National Recreational Trail takes hikers past an ancient stone wall and around a wooded hill, while a side trail drops down a stairway through deep crevasses in a cliff. It passes under an imposing bluff overhang and on to pretty Pounds Hollow Lake, where you can swim, boat, and fish.

Garden of the Gods is one of the best-known sights in southern Illinois, and for good reason. The quarter-mile Observation Trail passes along the top of a cliff, offering spectacular views of rock formations like Camel Rock and Devil's Smokestack. Both Garden of the Gods and Pounds Hollow have campgrounds and picnic areas.

June 13 is National Get Outdoors Day, a great time to enjoy the national forest. The U.S. Forest Service will waive fees at most of its day-use recreation sites.

# Head for the Hills

Vistas of cornfields and soybeans are plentiful in Illinois, but head south toward the rolling hills of the Illinois Ozarks and you'll find quite different scenery. Extending east from Missouri, the Ozarks cover much of southernmost Illinois between the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The area is perfect for a springtime outdoor adventure.

Nestled into a broad curve of the Ohio, Hardin and adjacent counties are dominated by these forested hills, many of them in the Shawnee National Forest. Here you'll find fantastic rock formations, lakes, streams, archaeological sites from the late Woodland period, and remnants of pioneer activities. There are plentiful opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, and birding. Fishing and hunting also are a big draw.

A few miles south of the forest, the landscape drops down to the

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The Iron Furnace Historic Site preserves a reconstructed stone furnace. Between 1838 and 1881, the furnace produced molten iron that flowed into molds called pigs. These were then taken by oxcart to Elizabethtown and shipped down the Ohio.

Some pleasant and unusual lodging has developed in the forest area. Among others, Rim Rock's Dogwood Cabins sit on 77 acres of wooded hills. The dogwoods aren't just in the name—they bloom profusely in April. The cabins have full facilities, including kitchens. This pet-friendly site is right across the road from the Rim Rock Trail.

Timber Ridge Outpost and Cabins offers two fairytale tree houses with full facilities, as well as log cabins, on 35 acres. "I think people want to do something different now," says owner Elizabeth Canfarelli. The resort offers archery lessons, birding hikes, and access to mountain biking and boating.

### CAVE-IN-ROCK STATE PARK

This cave above the Ohio River was notorious for river pirate attacks on unsuspecting travelers during the late 1700s and early 1800s. It is linked to outlaws like the Harpe brothers and the Mason gang. According to Mark McCorvie, an archaeologist at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, Mason had 23 scalps in his bag when he was caught. Members of his own family brought him in to claim the reward.

Today, the cave is peaceful and the park is developed with a campground, cabins, and a restaurant on a bluff overlooking the river. Hardin County Golf Course is nearby.

### COLORFUL RIVERTOWNS

Elizabethtown, a few miles west of the park, was settled in 1814 and has a look of contented maturity. The first portion of the stately, two-story Rose Hotel was built as a tavern on a low bluff on the river in 1812.

Across the street stands the River Rose Inn B&B, a two-story brick mansion built in 1914. It has four attractive bedrooms, two parlors, and a dining room. Shaded grounds enclose a cottage, a hot tub, and a pool.

The Ole Heritage Shoppes function not only as a craft market but as a visitor center. Find out about events like the Hardin County Heritage Festival when Elizabethtown celebrates July 4. For a closer river connection, savor a fresh fish dinner at the floating River Restaurant or take a free ferry



The American Fluorite Museum showcases the history of mining in the region. Jinny Ravenscroft Danzer photo

to Marion and Amish Country in Kentucky.

The nearby town of Rosiclare grew up around the discovery of fluorspar in 1843. It was the nation's largest fluorspar-producing area until Chinese imports put it out of business. The American Fluorite Museum, located in the former office building of the Rosiclare Lead and Fluorspar Mining Company, features samples of yellow and purple fluorite, as well as mining paraphernalia and fascinating photographs of the miners.

For a relaxing break, stroll along the town's river walk. Several camping spots are on the waterfront. Browse Rose Clare Craft and Antique Mall. There's a fish fry in May and a Fluorspar Festival in October.

Whether you want to participate in an outdoor activity, take in gorgeous scenery, or explore historical river towns, this section of Illinois will satisfy on all counts. ●

Jinny Ravenscroft Danzer is a contributor from St. Louis, Mo.

### BEFORE YOU GO

For more information, call the Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau at (800) 248-4373 or click on [www.southernmostillinois.com](http://www.southernmostillinois.com).

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