

Nature Calls

Talbot Islands State Parks are close to home but worlds away.



EcoMotion Tours takes guests into the wild on Segways

Just northeast of Downtown Jacksonville, the Talbot Islands State Parks provide a close-to-home scenic retreat. Extending from Amelia Island State Park south to Yellow Bluff Fort Historic State Park, the Talbot Islands comprise seven individual parks across 8,442 acres. Fort George Island Cultural State Park is home to the historic Kingsley Plantation and Ribault Club, while Little Talbot Island State Park is the only park that allows camping.

>> Things to Do

The activities available at the Talbot Islands vary from park to park. In general, however, the main attractions for visitors include miles of hiking trails, secluded kayak and canoe outings, fishing, birding and other outdoorsy pursuits. Perhaps best of all, the collection of parks are relatively lightly visited, particularly during the work week. Nature lovers will find the salt marshes and maritime forests perfect for exploring. For a way to get back to nature with a high-tech touch, check out Ecomotion Tours' guided

Segway tours (251-9477), as well as kayak tours, bike tours and kayak rentals from Kayak Amelia (888-30-KAYAK). Yellow Bluff features Civil War earthworks, a must-see for history lovers, who will also want to take Ecomotion's walking tour of Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island. The historic Ribault Club, also on Fort George Island, is a former resort that can be rented for weddings and other special events (251-1050). If you plan on staying the night, campsites and RV parking are available through Reserve America (800-326-3521).


>> Before You Go


Florida state parks are open from 8 AM until sundown, 365 days a year. Admission price varies from park to park, but ranges from no entry fee to \$4 per car; other parking and boat launch fees may apply. Driving directions to each of the individual parks is available on floridastateparks.org, and additional information about the parks can be obtained by calling 251-2320. *J





Insider Tips


We've enlisted the help of some Talbot Islands insiders for the skinny on what to do and when.

 **Beach:** Park services specialist Eric Steffey says that Boneyard Beach on Big Talbot Island (pictured above) is not to be missed. The secluded stretch of beach known for salt-washed skeletons of fallen oaks. Bring your camera.

 **Education:** Every weekend, the Talbot Islands parks host educational programs. January kicks off with Shark Tooth Fossil Identification, held on Little Talbot Island. It examines different types of sharks and their teeth, and which ones can be found on Florida's Beaches. Other programs this month include Secrets of the Salt Marsh, Talbot Critters and Beach Walk.

 **Horseback Riding:** An unusual way to see Amelia Island State Park is on horseback, says Kelly Robinson, president of Friends of the Talbot Islands State Parks. These one-hour tours take riders along a secluded wilderness trail and then along the beach. \$60 per person, 491-5166.

 **Fishing:** Winter is a popular time for fishing, and it is the mile-long, pedestrian-only George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier that's an angler's hotspot, Steffey says. The bridge is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year, but the nearby bait and tackle shop has closed, so you'll need to pack the necessary supplies.

 **Virtual Ranger:** A CD-guided tour allows guests to enjoy the parks from the comfort of their cars. This virtual ranger leads visitors along the 4.4-mile Satoriwa Trail circling Fort George Island. It includes 23 stops. Visit talbotislands.com for more information. *J