

# Waterways

Bright beaches, mellow marshes  
and sleepy river currents

“WE MEET AS WATER meets water,” poet Ralph Waldo Emerson said. So it is in Jacksonville, dubbed the “River City by the Sea.” Diverse waterways—including beaches, saltwater marshes, and freshwater fishing holes—provide a common thread that links locals, from beach bums to downtown dwellers.

Water-based recreational opportunities abound. In the summer, an obvious favorite is Jacksonville’s 22 miles of beaches. And in the spring, sailing enthusiasts prepare all year for annual events like the River City Regatta in March and May’s 42-mile Mug Race Regatta, the world’s longest river sailboat race, both of which are hosted by the Rudder Club ([rudderclub.com](http://rudderclub.com)).

In the winter, surfers suit up even in the coolest months to ride the waves. And locals await the awe-inspiring return of endangered northern right whales, which migrate to the warm waters off Jacksonville, Ponte Vedra Beach, and St. Augustine during calving season—December, January, and February.

Wildlife lovers spend hours immersed in Northeast Florida’s salt marshes. Bird watchers love Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve ([nps.gov/timu](http://nps.gov/timu)), particularly in April when the colorful painted bunting arrives to nest. Kayaking and canoeing allows for spotting a variety of coastal critters. “People on the waterways usually encounter dolphins and occasionally get to see manatees,” says Brian Loadholtz, chief of resource education at the Preserve. Watch the shore as you paddle past the coastal dunes and hardwood hammocks; now and then, the elusive bobcat appears.

Dozens of boat launches offer access to freshwater fishing. Chartered services take both greenhorn and veteran anglers into the ocean to fish for saltwater catches. And if you’re visiting on business with little time to spare, enjoy a bit of the mighty St. Johns River with a lunchtime water-taxi ride between downtown spots on the S.S. Marine Taxi ([jaxwatertaxi.com](http://jaxwatertaxi.com)). Whether on the water or off, Jacksonville offer plenty of ways to play.



**Sunset Sojourn**  
The peaceful waters of  
the Timucuan Ecological  
and Historic Preserve on  
Fort George Island