



Five-Star Trails: Gainesville & Ocala: Your Guide to the Area's Most Beautiful Hikes

Sandra Friend, John Keatley

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While polar opposites in many ways – hip college town versus retiree mecca – both Gainesville and Ocala, only 35 miles apart, share a love of the outdoors. Student clubs from the University of Florida hike the same trails as Volksmarch groups from the Villages, enjoying wilderness immersion in the Ocala National Forest and scrambles on rugged terrain along the Cross Florida Greenway. With several hundred miles of trails throughout the region to choose from, **Five-Star Trails: Gainesville & Ocala** helps you find the best. Authored by Florida hiking expert and long-time Ocala resident Sandra Friend, with 40-year Eagle Scout and Florida Trail Association life member John Keatley, this handy guide provides a fresh perspective on the region's ever-expanding array of hiking trails. Find urban places for reflection like Sholom Park, a carefully manicured woodlands in a retirement community, and Bivens Arm Nature Park, surrounding a marsh in Gainesville; both feature inspirational quotes and places to relax along their trails. Explore the vast longleaf pine flatwoods of the Ocala National Forest on the Florida Trail near Lake Delancy and the shady swamp forests of Goethe State Forest along the Big Cypress Trail. See more alligators than you've ever seen in your life in the home of the Gators along the La Chua Trail at Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Covering more than 35 hikes across a three-county region, all within an hour's drive of either city, **Five-Star Trails: Gainesville & Ocala** gives you a reason to get outdoors now.

Hikes are rated and highlighted according to their strengths from five perspectives: scenery, trail conditions, good for children, difficulty, and solitude. Author recommendations for best hikes in other categories – including wildlife watching, ancient trees, Florida Trail segments, geology, kid-friendly, and dog-friendly hikes – make it easy to choose an adventure at a glance. Add in Sandra Friend's extensive knowledge of habitats, wildlife, wildflowers, and local history, and you'll be glad to have **Five-Star Trails: Gainesville & Ocala** as your guide to exploring the region's outdoors.

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