

TRAVEL

I've lived in Florida for nearly 30 years, but never got near Tallahassee. I didn't think you could get there from here. How wrong I was!

MORE THAN JUST POLITICS IN TALLAHASSEE!

It didn't take long to find the state capitol upon arriving in Tallahassee: The main road into town dead-ends into the historic building with the distinctive candy-striped awnings and adjacent 22-story legislative high-rise.

We checked into our modern "Aloft Tallahassee Downtown" hotel. It took me a few extra seconds to realize the check-in desk wasn't part of the snack bar: Understated is an understatement. Our room was equally compact but efficient.

We set out for food, libations and a bird's-eye view of the city by going to Happy Hour high above the city at a bar called "Level 8." Panoramic views, cold drinks and food. I knew we were in a "happening" restaurant for dinner when I saw Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi and her staff sitting at the next table. "Avenue Eat & Drink" is exactly the place you want to eat and drink in downtown. The food—and service—was Five Star. (The owner, Chris Clark, is actually from Sarasota and still commutes on a weekly basis from Lakewood Ranch!)

The next day began on the Wakulla River. We paddled in our kayak and soaked up the natural beauty around us. So removed from traffic, people and stress. I haven't kayaked much in my life, but I need to change that. Therapeutic. Our guide, Robbie from T-n-T Hide-a-Way grew up on the Wakulla and knew every animal—and every real estate transaction. Helpful fella. While we were being athletic, we rented bikes from Great Bicycle Shop and rode nearly seven miles down St. Mark's Historic Railroad Trail. Many cities convert rail beds into bike paths, and St. Mark's is no exception. We stopped for lunch at the Riverside Cafe for an old Florida seafood meal. It's the kind of water-front restaurant you want: It doesn't feel touristy!

While we were still half-an-hour west of the city, we continued exploring the rural side of Tallahassee, which local experts have renamed "Trailahassee!" We took a "Jungle Cruise Boat Tour" of Wakulla Springs, spotting everything from beautiful rare birds to manatees. There's nothing like a guided tour to make you feel like you learned something new! (Tallahassee actually has 600 miles of trails. You can learn more at www.VisitTallahassee.com or www.Trailahassee.com.)

We got back into downtown with enough time to rush into the capitol. Up to the 4th floor to get a glimpse of the legislative chambers, and up to the 22nd story to the 360 degree indoor observation deck. Beautiful views of every side of Tallahassee!

Another night of good food and good service, this time at "A La Provence." I learned the hard way though, that "medium" is actually "rare" when it comes to ordering filet mignon in a French restaurant. Good to know for next time.

We like staying off the beaten path and avoiding tourist traps, and our venue for live music and dancing could not have been more remote. I thought we were entering a construction site when we drove down a long dirt road to

The Bradford Blues Club. It was surreal to arrive at this little oasis in the middle of nowhere. Despite it's remoteness, a cover charge of a random \$13 doesn't deter the regulars. This place is loaded with history—and tradition: When the band took a break, the patrons headed outside to sit around a bonfire on the nearby lawn!

We had breakfast the next morning at the Canopy Road Cafe. For a restaurant in a strip mall, it sure draws a big crowd. That says something about it's good food—and big omelets! I had to eat well before our next excursion. We went to the Tallahassee Museum to try out the "Tree to Tree Adventures" park. I don't want to go out on a limb, but that's exactly what I did for the next couple hours. I thought I'd help my girlfriend Erin, but she wound up helping me. It



seems being 5'3" is better than being 6'3" when you're balancing on mid-air obstacle courses. I can blame my height, can't I? The actual zip-line portion was the breezy payoff after the rigorous stepping, wobbling and lunging up in the trees. The instructors were very thorough beforehand and guided us throughout the extensive course.

We built up our appetites for lunch at the Paisley Cafe. Tasty drinks and food. Nice outdoor dining too. The owner is very hands-on and helpful. She has a decadent desert made up of layers of brownie, chocolate chip and Oreos. It's called the "Slutty Brownie!"

Our visit to Tallahassee coincided with the Red Hills International Horse Trials. I haven't horsed around much in my life, but I did like the idea of sitting in a tent, sipping drinks and watching horses race by. That part I get.

We had dinner that night at Mockingbird Cafe. Another great dinner—and best of all, gluten-free desserts! Afterward, we tried something completely different and went "star gazing." I'm not talking about our esteemed legislative leaders—but rather the Big Dipper, the Northern Star and the moon, which I've learned is 200,000 miles away. The head of the Tallahassee Astronomical Society gave us an hour-long "show and tell" demonstration. I'll never look at the sky the same way again!

And I'll never look at Tallahassee the same way again. It's much more than just the state capitol and home to Florida State University. It's a perfect sized city with a lot of energy—and a lot to do! RAY COLLINS





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