

# REPORT: Reimagining Tourism Marketing for Jacksonville

Prepared by: Rahman K. Johnson, Ph.D.  
in collaboration with Council Colleagues and Cultural Stakeholders

## Executive Summary

Jacksonville, Florida is a city of rich cultural heritage, where stories of resilience, resistance, innovation, and identity converge. As the city continues to expand its tourism footprint, the Jacksonville City Council has begun a comprehensive review of the *2024–2025 Visit Jacksonville Visitors Guide*, with specific attention to issues of inclusion and equitable cultural representation. This report reflects the Council's shared commitment to ensuring that every community sees itself reflected in the city's official storytelling and tourism materials.

Upon thorough analysis, this report identifies a series of omissions and missed opportunities in the current guide—most notably in the underrepresentation of African American, Latino, Filipino, Indigenous, and other historically marginalized communities. In response, the Council presents evidence-based findings and a comprehensive set of recommendations to guide future iterations of Jacksonville's cultural marketing and public engagement strategy.

## I. Cultural and Historical Gaps in the Visitor Guide

### A. Underrepresentation of African American Heritage

While the Visitor Guide does highlight Jacksonville's Black Heritage Trail and acknowledges several major landmarks—such as the Ritz Theatre and Museum, Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park, and the Eartha M.M. White Museum—these mentions are often relegated to special sections rather than integrated throughout the entire publication. Importantly:

- The **Ritz Theatre and Museum**, a premier institution celebrating African American history in LaVilla and once known as the "Harlem of the South," is omitted from the "Spots to Check Out" section despite its national cultural significance.
- **Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park**, located at the historic site of the Johnson brothers' family home, lacks clear visual and editorial prominence. This is the birthplace of the hymn known as the Black National Anthem—a song embedded in American history and reverence.
- The absence of **Edward Waters University**, Florida's oldest private institution and first HBCU, from the “spots to check out” portion of the guide represents a significant cultural oversight. EWU is not only a center of academic excellence but a historic institution instrumental in shaping Jacksonville's intellectual and civic landscape.

- The **Clara White Mission**, founded in 1904 by Dr. Eartha M.M. White, is similarly excluded. Located in the historic LaVilla neighborhood, the Mission houses a museum showcasing one of the country's foremost collections of African American artifacts and continues to serve the community with hot meals, transitional housing, and workforce development. Its cultural and humanitarian impact make it a vital site for heritage tourism.

## **B. Exclusion of the Jacksonville Public Library Special Collections**

The Jacksonville Public Library houses one of the **foremost African American historical and cultural artifact collections in the southeastern United States**, curated through decades of work by scholars, librarians, and community contributors. The Special Collections include photographs, manuscripts, personal papers, and ephemera from civic leaders, artists, and educators that provide critical insight into the Black experience in Florida. These materials are used in national research efforts and deserve prominent acknowledgment in the city's tourism and education strategies.

## **C. Absence of Latino and Filipino Cultural Narratives**

Despite the growing presence and contributions of Latino and Filipino communities across Jacksonville—particularly in Arlington, the Westside, and the Southside—there is a near-total absence of their stories in the current guide. From Filipino heritage parades to the legacy of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Central American entrepreneurs, the narratives of these communities enrich the city's cultural mosaic but remain unfeatured.

# **II. The Value of Inclusive Tourism**

Inclusive tourism is not merely a moral imperative—it is an economic, social, and reputational asset for cities. According to the **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**, travelers increasingly seek culturally authentic, diverse, and immersive experiences. Cities that center their histories—including stories of struggle and triumph—tend to attract deeper, more meaningful tourism engagement and repeat visitors.

Studies by **DestinationNEXT** and **American Planning Association (APA)** confirm that inclusive storytelling in tourism leads to:

- Increased economic returns for underrepresented communities
- Greater civic pride and intergenerational knowledge transfer
- Stronger destination branding and global visibility
- Improved social cohesion through representation and belonging

Jacksonville has an opportunity to be a national leader in how it reflects its people—especially given its status as a majority-minority city and its role in the Civil Rights Movement, religious pluralism, and Black educational advancement.

### **III. Recommendations for Reform**

#### **A. Immediate Additions to Visitor Publications**

1. Include **Edward Waters University, Clara White Mission, Ritz Theatre and Museum, and Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park** in the “Spots to Check Out” and interactive maps.
2. Feature the **Jacksonville Public Library’s Special Collections** as a major destination for cultural researchers and heritage tourists.
3. Add a section spotlighting **Filipino American and Latino festivals, faith institutions, culinary destinations, and community leaders.**

#### **B. Editorial and Visual Integration**

1. Distribute cultural heritage sites throughout the publication rather than isolating them in “Black History” or “Blast from the Past” sections.
2. Use photographs that reflect Jacksonville’s demographic diversity, particularly youth, elders, and intergenerational families.
3. Provide Spanish and Tagalog language translations of key visitor content.

#### **C. Strategic Marketing Shifts**

1. Collaborate with cultural institutions such as the **Jacksonville Urban League, Filipino American Cultural Society, Hispanic Bar Association, and Edward Waters University** on itinerary creation.
2. Create new thematic trails, such as:
  - **Jacksonville’s Faith & Freedom Trail**
  - **Diaspora Dining Districts**
  - **Legacy Leaders: A Civic Sites Trail**
3. Elevate the **Melanin Market, Eartha’s Farm, and Durkeeville Historical Society** as signature cultural destinations.

#### **D. Technology & Interpretation**

1. Expand the use of **QR codes at heritage landmarks** to link to oral histories, music, or immersive media.

2. Leverage the Visit Jax app to create augmented reality (AR) features for sites like the Ritz, Norman Studios, and James Weldon Johnson's childhood home.
  3. Develop guided tours through **interactive library-hosted portals**, blending academic research and visitor experience.
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#### **IV. Council Commitment**

The Jacksonville City Council recognizes the power of tourism as both economic engine and cultural amplifier. In partnership with Visit Jacksonville, the Office of General Counsel, and community-based institutions, the Council is committed to:

- Introducing legislation to ensure ongoing review of inclusive marketing practices
- Supporting budget allocations for culturally inclusive promotional material
- Working with the Jacksonville Public Library to showcase Special Collections and digitize key assets for broader accessibility
- Hosting listening sessions with underrepresented communities to co-create Jacksonville's next generation of cultural storytelling

In doing so, Jacksonville moves closer to becoming not just a city worth visiting, but a city where every story finds a home.

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**"Inclusion is not just about who we invite to the table, but whose story we choose to tell."**

– Jacksonville City Council, 2024

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904.255.5214



**City Hall at St. James**

117 West Duval Street, Suite 425

Jacksonville, Florida 32202

**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

May 27, 2025

Mr. Michael Corrigan – President & CEO

Visit Jacksonville

100 North Laura Street, Suite 120

Jacksonville, FL 32202

Dear Mr. Corrigan,

Thank you for your continued leadership in sharing Jacksonville's beauty with the world. From riverwalk sunrises to our vibrant beaches and the bold, local flavor of our culinary scene—you and your team consistently highlight what makes this city shine. Even in that shine, we know there are places where we can illuminate even more.

During a recent Public Comment, the council heard some interesting comments about the 2024–2025 *Visit Jacksonville Visitors Guide*. While we celebrate its energy and execution, we also noticed opportunities to broaden the brilliance. Please accept this compilation of reflections in the attached report “Reimagining Tourism Marketing for Jacksonville”. I hope you will find this less a burden and more of a possible blueprint for success.

As you know tourism isn't just about transactions. It's about transformation. When people visit a place that reflects *everyone*—when they see the resilience of a tapestry that creates this beautiful community. African American excellence, Latino legacy, Filipino faith and foodways, Native American Creativity, and the textured beauty of each one of our diverse communities—they don't just take pictures. They take part. They come back. They tell others. They invest.

Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park—sacred ground where a global anthem was born—deserves a place alongside every must-see. So does the Ritz Theatre and Museum, where LaVilla's heartbeat still echoes. So does Edward Waters University, our state's oldest private college or university, and the Clara White Mission, where service is stitched into history.

These aren't just sites. They're sacred. They are symbols of who we are and what we've survived, contributed, and created. We want the world to know Jacksonville not just for what it has, but for *who it is*.

Our reason for this report is to make sure that we are truly building a table that's long enough, broad enough, and bold enough to reflect the totality of our city.

Let's make this next edition of our visitor story one that sings with the fullness of our total harmony.

We stand ready to work.

Sincerely,

Member 1

Member 2

Member 3

Member 4

Member 5

Jacksonville City Council Members



GUIDED TOUR COMPANIES

ADLIB LUXURY TOURS & TRANSPORTATION, INC.  
904-827-1845  
adlibtours.com

ADVENTURE IN PARADISE BOAT TOURS  
904-339-5228  
adventureinparadise.org

ART BIKES  
904-524-6936  
artbikesjax.com

EXPLORE JAX CORE  
904-510-5995  
explorejaxcore.com

FIRST COAST FOODIE CREW  
904-701-4124  
firstcoastfoodiecrew.com

GO TUK’N TOURS  
904-322-8444  
gotukn.com

INSHORE OUTDOORS FISHING  
904-318-9906  
inshoredoutdoorsfishing.com

MCCOY WATERWAYS  
904-321-9687  
mccoywaterways.com

PEDAL PUB  
904-782-7433  
pedalpub.com

RIVER TAXI  
904-860-8294  
jaxrivertaxi.com

SEA SERPENT TOURS  
904-495-4200  
seaserpenttours.com

TASTE OF JACKSONVILLE FOOD TOURS  
904-638-7222  
tasteofjacksonvillefoodtours.com

THE TASTING TOUR  
904-325-3911  
thetastingtours.com/jacksonville-tours



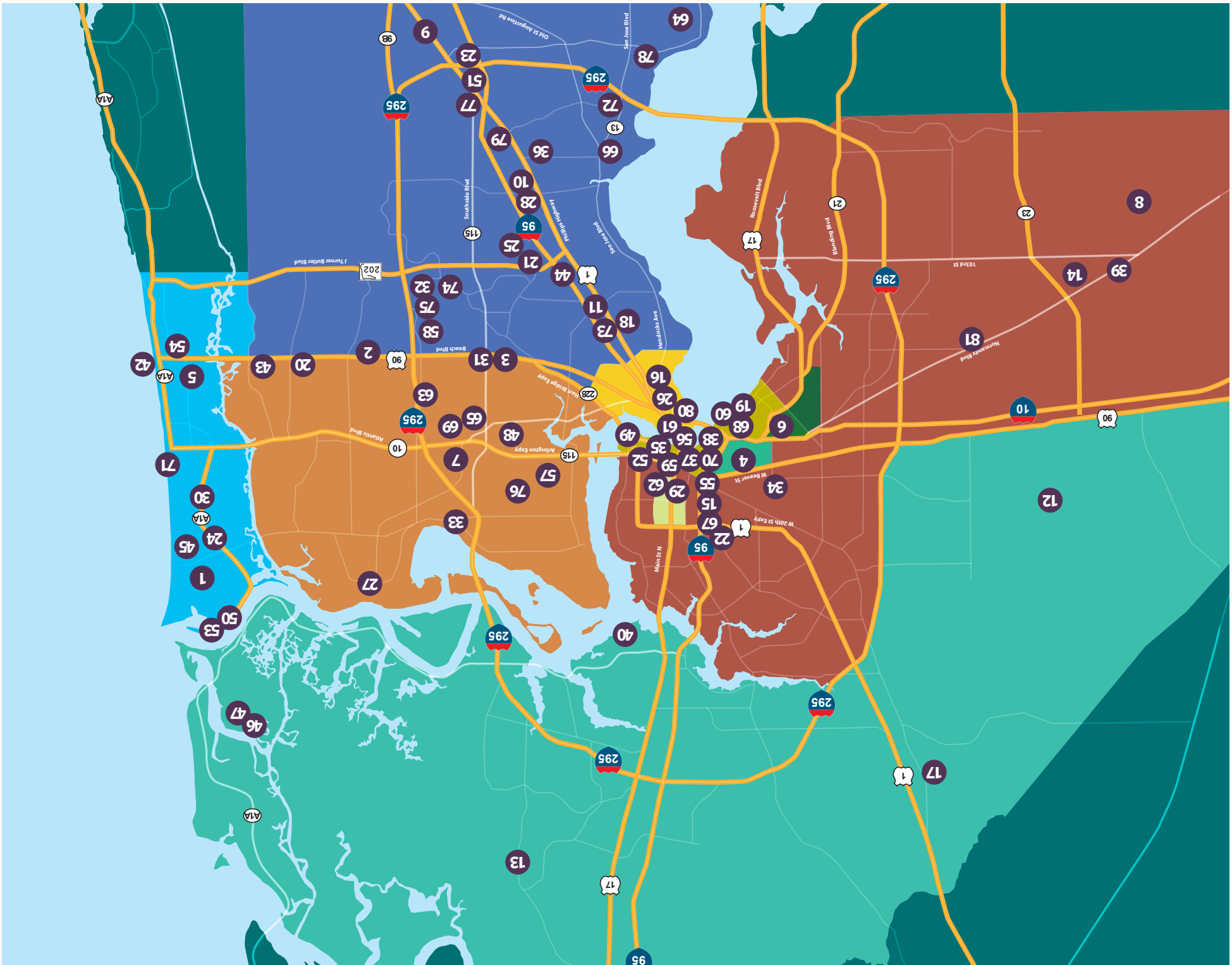
Explore more of Jacksonville's attractions, activities & tours at [visitjacksonville.com](https://www.visitjacksonville.com) or in the **VISIT JAX! APP**



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- @VisitJacksonville
- @Visit\_Jax
- @Visit\_Jax
- Visit Jacksonville
- Visit Jacksonville
- @Visit\_Jax
- #onlyinjax

visit Jacksonville and the Beaches





# ATTRACTIONS, ACTIVITIES & TOURS

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**1** **Adventure Kayak Florida**  
500 Wonderwood Dr  
904-404-6177  
[adventurekayakflorida.com](http://adventurekayakflorida.com)



**2** **Alhambra Theatre & Dining\***  
12000 Beach Blvd  
904-641-1212  
[alhambrajax.com](http://alhambrajax.com)



**3** **All Wet Sports**  
8550 Beach Blvd  
904-646-9887  
[allwetsports.net](http://allwetsports.net)



**4** **Battalion Airsoft Arena**  
2253 Dennis St  
904-355-7770  
[battalionairsoftarena.com](http://battalionairsoftarena.com)



**5** **Beaches Museum & History Park**  
381 Beach Blvd.  
904-241-5657  
[beachmuseum.org](http://beachmuseum.org)



**6** **Beautifully Devine Woodcraft Studios**  
1188 Edgewood Ave South  
904-534-7987  
[bdivinecustomdesigns.com](http://bdivinecustomdesigns.com)



**7** **bestbet Jacksonville**  
201 Monument Road  
904-646-0001  
[bestbetjax.com](http://bestbetjax.com)



**8** **Blu By U**  
5571 Long Branch Road  
904-525-5032  
[blubyujax.com](http://blubyujax.com)



**9** **Bravoz Entertainment Center**  
14985 Old Saint Augustine Rd  
904-300-0070  
[bravoz.com](http://bravoz.com)



**10** **Breakout Games**  
7999 Philips Hwy, Stes 302 & 303  
904-245-1630  
[breakoutgames.com/jacksonville](http://breakoutgames.com/jacksonville)



**11** **Burnt Glassworks**  
5105 Philips Highway #201  
904-877-1877  
[burntglassworks.net/experience](http://burntglassworks.net/experience)



**12** **Camp Milton Historic Preserve & Baldwin Rails to Trails**  
1225 Halsema Rd N  
904-630-2489  
[coj.net/departments/parks-and-recreation/recreation-and-community-programming/parks/jacksonville-baldwin-rail-trail.aspx](http://coj.net/departments/parks-and-recreation/recreation-and-community-programming/parks/jacksonville-baldwin-rail-trail.aspx)



**13** **Catty Shack Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary**  
1860 Starratt Road  
904-757-3603  
[cattyshack.org](http://cattyshack.org)



**14** **Cecil Field POW MIA Memorial**  
6112 POW-MIA Memorial Pkwy.  
904-303-8907  
[powmiamemorial.org](http://powmiamemorial.org)



**15** **Clara White Mission/Eartha M. M. White Museum**  
613 West Ashley Street  
904-354-4162  
[clarawhitemission.org](http://clarawhitemission.org)



**16** **Creative Grain Studio**  
1814 Hendricks Ave  
904-373-1163  
[creativegrainstudio.com](http://creativegrainstudio.com)



**17** **Congaree and Penn Farm\*\***  
11830 Old Kings Road  
904-527-1945  
[congarееandpenn.com](http://congarееandpenn.com)



**18** **Community First Igloo**  
3605 Philips Hwy  
904-399-3223  
[communityfirstigloo.com](http://communityfirstigloo.com)



**19** **Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens**  
829 Riverside Ave  
904-356-6857  
[cummERMuseum.org](http://cummERMuseum.org)



**20** **Darby's Dungeon**  
14185 Beach Boulevard, Unit 1A  
904-368-6660  
[darbysdungeon.com](http://darbysdungeon.com)



**21** **Dave & Buster's**  
7025 Salisbury Road  
904-296-1525  
[daveandbusters.com/locations](http://daveandbusters.com/locations)



**22** **Durkeeville Historical Society\***  
1293 W 19th St  
904-598-9567  
[durkeevillehistoricalsociety.org](http://durkeevillehistoricalsociety.org)



**23** **Escapology Jacksonville**  
10320 Shops Ln Suite 307  
904-574-8821  
[escapology.com/en/jacksonville-fl](http://escapology.com/en/jacksonville-fl)



**24** **First Coast Comedy**  
2292 Mayport Rd #35  
904-316-9292  
[firstcoastcomedy.com](http://firstcoastcomedy.com)



**25** **Flight Adventure Park Jacksonville**  
7022 A C Skinner Pkwy  
904-551-4035  
[flightfitnfun.com/locations/jacksonville](http://flightfitnfun.com/locations/jacksonville)



**26** **Fore Score Golf Tavern**  
1407 Atlantic Blvd  
904-374-8851  
[forescoregolf.com](http://forescoregolf.com)



**27** **Fort Caroline National Memorial**  
12713 Fort Caroline Road  
904-641-7155  
[nps.gov/foca](http://nps.gov/foca)



**28** **Frisch Family Holocaust Memorial Gallery**  
8540 Baycenter Road  
904-448-1933  
[jacksonvilleholocaustmemorial.com](http://jacksonvilleholocaustmemorial.com)



**29** **FSCJ Artist Series\***  
501 West State Street Suite 109  
904-632-5000  
[fscjartistseries.org](http://fscjartistseries.org)



**30** **Grey Matter Distillery**  
1221 Mayport Rd  
904-723-1114  
[greymatterdistillery.com](http://greymatterdistillery.com)



**31** **Hands On Childrens Museum**  
8580 Beach Blvd  
904-642-2688  
[handsonchildrensmuseum.org](http://handsonchildrensmuseum.org)



**32** **iFLY Jacksonville**  
10579 Brightman Blvd  
904-712-3388  
[iflyworld.com/jacksonville](http://iflyworld.com/jacksonville)



**33** **Jacksonville Arboretum & Botanical Gardens**  
1445 MillcoE Road  
904-318-4342  
[jacksonvillearboretum.org](http://jacksonvillearboretum.org)



**34** **Jacksonville Farmer's Market**  
1810 West Beaver St  
904-354-2821  
[jaxfarmersmarket.com](http://jaxfarmersmarket.com)



**35** **Jacksonville Naval Museum/USS Orleck**  
610 E Bay St  
904-789-SHIP (7447)  
[jaxnavalmuseum.org](http://jaxnavalmuseum.org)



**36** **Jacksonville Pottery Studio**  
9640 Sunbeam Center Dr Ste #3  
904-496-5295  
[jaxpottery.com](http://jaxpottery.com)



**37** **Jacksonville Public Library – Main Library**  
303 Laura Street  
904-630-2665  
[jaxpubliclibrary.org](http://jaxpubliclibrary.org)



**38** **Jacksonville Symphony\***  
300 Water Street Suite 200  
904-354-5547  
[jaxsymphony.org](http://jaxsymphony.org)



**39** **Jacksonville Xtreme Sports**  
5900 Secluded Ave  
904-651-7520  
[jacksonvillextremesports.com](http://jacksonvillextremesports.com)



**40** **Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens**  
370 Zoo Pkwy  
904-757-4463  
[jacksonvillezoo.org](http://jacksonvillezoo.org)



**41** **Jax Ale Trail**  
Various locations  
[visitjacksonville.com/jax-ale-trail](http://visitjacksonville.com/jax-ale-trail)



**42** **Jax Beach Pier**  
503 1st St N  
904-372-0798  
[thejaxpier.com](http://thejaxpier.com)



**43** **Jax Cooking Studio**  
14035 Beach Blvd #6  
904-379-6220  
[jaxcookingstudio.com](http://jaxcookingstudio.com)



**44** **K1 Speed**  
6601 Executive Park Court North  
904-425-5005  
[k1speed.com/jacksonville-location](http://k1speed.com/jacksonville-location)



**45** **Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park**  
500 Wonderwood Drive  
904-255-6767  
[jacksonville.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation/recreation-and-community-programming/kathryn-abbey-hanna-park.aspx](http://jacksonville.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation/recreation-and-community-programming/kathryn-abbey-hanna-park.aspx)



**46** **Kayak Amelia**  
13030 Heckscher Drive  
904-251-0016  
[kayakamelia.com](http://kayakamelia.com)



**47** **Kingsley Plantation**  
11676 Palmetto Ave  
904-251-3537 ext 11  
[nps.gov/timu](http://nps.gov/timu)



**48** **Kona Skate Park**  
8739 Kona Ave  
904-725-8770  
[konaskatepark.com](http://konaskatepark.com)



**49** **Kraken Cycleboats**  
Downtown Jacksonville on the St. Johns River  
813-603-3117  
[krakencycleboats.com/jacksonville-location](http://krakencycleboats.com/jacksonville-location)



**50** **Lucky Dolphin Tours**  
Mayport Boat Ramp - 4870 Ocean Street  
904-710-1126  
[luckydolphintours.com](http://luckydolphintours.com)



**51** **Main Event**  
10370 Phillips Hwy  
904-260-7500  
[mainevent.com/locations/jacksonville-fl](http://mainevent.com/locations/jacksonville-fl)



**52** **Manifest Distilling\*\***  
960 E Forsyth St  
904-619-1479  
[manifestdistilling.com](http://manifestdistilling.com)



**53** **Marine Science Education Center**  
1347 Palmer St  
904-247-5973  
[dcps.duvalschools.org/msec](http://dcps.duvalschools.org/msec)



**54** **Mind Bender Escape Rooms**  
1500 Beach Blvd #212  
904-853-6192  
[mindbenderescaperooms.com](http://mindbenderescaperooms.com)



**55** **Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville**  
333 North Laura Street  
904-366-6911  
[mocajacksonville.unf.edu](http://mocajacksonville.unf.edu)



**56** **Museum of Science & History**  
1025 Museum Circle  
904-742-7011  
[themosh.org](http://themosh.org)



**57** **Norman Studios\***  
6337 Arlington Road P.O. Box 15304  
904-742-7011  
[normanstudios.org](http://normanstudios.org)



**58** **Prototype Escape Games**  
3546 St. Johns Bluff Rd S Unit #113  
904-240-4448  
[prototypejax.com](http://prototypejax.com)



**59** **Ritz Theatre and Museum**  
829 North Davis Street  
904-807-2010  
[ritzjacksonville.com](http://ritzjacksonville.com)



**60** **Riverside Arts Market (Saturday only)**  
715 Riverside Ave  
904-389-2449  
[riversideartsmarket.org](http://riversideartsmarket.org)



**61** **River Taxi – St. Johns River Taxi**  
1015 Museum Circle  
904-860-TAXI (8294)  
[stjohnsrivertaxi.com](http://stjohnsrivertaxi.com)



**62** **Sally Industries\***  
745 W. Forsyth Street  
904-355-7100  
[sallydarkrides.com](http://sallydarkrides.com)



**63** **Seaside Adventures**  
2421 St. Johns Bluff Rd S Ste 119  
904-504-9202  
[seasideadventures.com](http://seasideadventures.com)



**64** **Sea Serpent Tours**  
904-495-4200  
[seaserpenttours.com](http://seaserpenttours.com)



**65** **Sk8 City Jacksonville**  
9244 Arlington Expressway  
904-374-4999  
[skatecityjax.com](http://skatecityjax.com)



**66** **Skate Station**  
3461 Kori Rd  
904-880-7703  
[funworks.com/mandarin](http://funworks.com/mandarin)



**67** **Stumpy's Hatchet House Axe Throwing**  
1719 N Main St  
904-551-3323  
[stumpypshh.com/jacksonvillefl](http://stumpypshh.com/jacksonvillefl)



**68** **Sun Ray Cinema**  
1028 Park St  
904-359-0049  
[sunraycinema.com](http://sunraycinema.com)



**69** **Surge Adventure Park**  
9292 Arlington Expy  
904-374-5682  
[surgeadventureparks.com/locations/Jacksonville](http://surgeadventureparks.com/locations/Jacksonville)



**70** **Sweet Pete's\*\***  
400 N. Hogan Street  
904-376-7161  
[sweetpetescandy.com](http://sweetpetescandy.com)



**71** **The Candle Garden**  
363 Atlantic Blvd Ste 8  
904-316-7608  
[thecandlegarden.co](http://thecandlegarden.co)



**72** **The Comedy Zone\***  
3130 Hartley Road, Ramada Inn Mandarin Conference Center  
904-292-4242  
[comedyzone.com](http://comedyzone.com)



**73** **The Edge Rock Gym**  
3563 Phillips Hwy Ste 702  
904-683-2512  
[theedgerockgym.com](http://theedgerockgym.com)



**74** **The Escape Game**  
4720 Town Crossing Drive Suite 107  
904-595-1440  
[theescapegame.com/jacksonville](http://theescapegame.com/jacksonville)



**75** **Topgolf Jacksonville**  
10531 Brightman Blvd  
904-328-2002  
[topgolf.com/us/jacksonville](http://topgolf.com/us/jacksonville)



**76** **Tree Hill Nature Center**  
7152 Lone Star Rd  
904-724-4646  
[treehill.org](http://treehill.org)



**77** **Urban Air Adventure Park**  
9950 Southside Blvd  
904-712-4457  
[urbanairtrampolinepark.com/locations/florida/south-jacksonville](http://urbanairtrampolinepark.com/locations/florida/south-jacksonville)



**78** **Walter Jones Historical Park & Mandarin Museum**  
11964 Mandarin Rd  
904-268-0784  
[mandarinmuseum.net](http://mandarinmuseum.net)



**79** **We Rock the Spectrum**  
9357 Philips Hwy  
904-330-0362  
[werockthespectrumjacksonville.com](http://werockthespectrumjacksonville.com)



**80** **Wick: A Candle Bar**  
1641 Hendricks Ave.  
904-613-8778  
[wickacandlebar.com](http://wickacandlebar.com)



**81** **World Skydiving Center\***  
9300 Normandy Blvd. Suite 514  
904-250-5903  
[worldskydivingcenter.com](http://worldskydivingcenter.com)



\*Arrangements/Tickets must be made in advance

\*\*Attraction also offers tours, reserve in advance



Autism Friendly



Adaptive Kayak Launch



Wheelchair Accessible



Accessible Park



Accessible Options



Hearing Impairment Friendly



Vision Impairment Friendly



Hearing Impairment Friendly