

INTO THE DEEP

Take the plunge at these unique Southern scuba-diving destinations

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Nº1

Kings Bay
Crystal River, Florida

Come face-to-face with West Indian manatees in the clear headwaters of Crystal River. Three Sisters Springs, one of thirty springs in Kings Bay, offers a seventeen-foot depth (great for novice divers) and temperate 72-degree water year-round. (Jacques Cousteau rehabilitated “Sewer Sam,” a manatee rescued from Miami’s sewer system, here.) Plan this freshwater dive between March 31 and November 15, as the natural habitat is closed in winter for the manatee migration. floridasprings.org

Nº2

Georgia Aquarium
Atlanta, Georgia

It’s not every day that you can dive in full view of family and friends—in an aquarium exhibit, no less. That’s part of the fun of Georgia Aquarium’s Journey with Gentle Giants program, which offers dives with its whale sharks (the largest fish in the world), manta rays, and other creatures in its Ocean Voyager exhibit. Certified open-water divers also have the opportunity to add on a PADI whale shark or manta ray specialty certification. georgia-aquarium.org

Nº3

Dale Hollow Lake
Celina, Tennessee

This 120-foot-deep lake on the Tennessee-Kentucky border offers an adventure akin to discovering the lost city of Atlantis. After the Obey River was dammed in 1943, the waters of the lake covered the town of Willow Grove. The result: a scuba diver’s delight. Take a boat out to the remains of the old schoolhouse and dive the crystal-clear waters in the company of loads of fish, such as smallmouth bass, trout, crappie, walleye, catfish, gar, and muskie. dalehollow.com

Nº4

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
Gulf of Mexico

About 100 miles off the coast of Louisiana sits the northernmost coral reef system in the country, one of only fourteen underwater areas protected by the National Marine Sanctuary Program. This spectacular spot for intermediate to advanced divers features an extensive, colorful coral reef—with some coral heads bigger than cars—as well as winter hammerhead sharks, eagle rays, and golden smooth trunkfish. flowergarden.noaa.gov

Nº5

Pelham Quarry
Pelham, Alabama

Divers of all skill levels will enjoy exploring this twenty-six-acre limestone quarry. Accessible by dock, its depths range from four to 140 feet, with a visibility of twenty-five feet in the summer. Underwater “attractions” include a school bus, cars, two fire trucks, boats, and obstacles such as concrete tubes to swim through or around. There’s also an array of freshwater life, including sunfish, catfish, bluegill, Japanese koi, jellyfish, and turtles. divealabama.com

1: BILL SERRE FOR VISITFLORIDA. 2: GEORGIA AQUARIUM. 3: TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT. 4: FGBNMS/HICKERSON. 5: DIVE ALABAMA