Pines, lakes and refuges

Six starting points for an East Texas and northwestern Louisiana nature day. State parks and federal wildlife refuges have different visitor purposes and rules.

PLACE	TRIP FIT + WHAT TO VERIFY
Caddo Lake State Park	A wetland setting near the Marshall-Jefferson area. Check paddling access, reservations, maps and weather.
Tyler State Park	Woodland trails and lake recreation. Confirm day-use access, activities and any equipment arrangements.
Martin Creek Lake State Park	A lake-side East Texas alternative. Compare the detour with your base and check current park notices.
Daingerfield State Park	Pineywoods trails and a small lake setting. Check camping or day-use arrangements rather than assuming availability.
Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge	A separate federal refuge, not the state park entrance. Verify public access areas and the current refuge visitor guidance.
Red River National Wildlife Refuge	Plan around the exact refuge unit. The Bossier-area visitor information is a starting point for trails and wildlife observation.

A refuge is not a National Park Service park. Do not assume passes, permits, pets, water access or activity rules are the same. Wildlife sightings are never guaranteed.

A slower day in cypress country

Find a nature outing that fits your group and the conditions.



Regional travel illustration: a composite of town streets, bayou scenery and a Southern meal; not a photograph of a particular venue.

Picture the day, then make it yours

Use this visual companion with the checklists and source links in the following pages. Leave space for discoveries and changes.

1 Choose an experience

A walk, a water view or a paddle.

2 Check the exact site

State park and refuge access differ.

3 Keep an alternative

Weather may change the day.

Choose the right nature day

Start with the experience and the group's needs, then research the location that fits.

IF YOU WANT...	CHECK THESE QUESTIONS FIRST
A short woodland walk	Which trail is open? Surface and distance? Shade, restrooms, rest points and accessibility?
Paddling or lake time	Where may we launch? Rental or own equipment? Weather, water conditions, operating dates and local rules?
Birding or photography	Which unit is open? Where may visitors stop? Are there seasonal closures or special public-use requirements?
Camping or an overnight base	Reservation and arrival rules? Suitable site size? Facilities, vehicle restrictions and a backup accommodation?

Official maps and visitor pages

Caddo Lake State Park - TPWD

Tyler State Park - TPWD

Martin Creek Lake State Park - TPWD

Daingerfield State Park - TPWD

Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge - USFWS

Red River National Wildlife Refuge - USFWS

Your day outside

Keep the plan on your device or print this page. Use current official maps for navigation.

Site and exact entrance: _____

Date, travel base and group size: _____

Activity and realistic time available: _____

Reservation / access confirmation: _____

Official information last checked: _____

Weather and alternate indoor activity: _____

Before leaving

Prepare water, suitable clothing, sun/insect protection, charged devices and an offline contact plan. Match activity and equipment to the group. Follow current site rules, stay in designated visitor areas and ask the managing agency about access concerns. Leave wildlife and habitat undisturbed.

Keep the day flexible

Choose one main activity, a rest break and a nearby meal. Leave time for changing weather and the drive back. A second park can wait for another visit.

Keep your nature notes

Use what you learned to choose the next outing.

What worked well for our group: _____

Access or equipment question still unresolved: _____

Season or activity to research next time: _____

Nearby food or town stop to pair with it: _____

Plan the return visit

Use the food passport for the meal before or after your visit. Use the route planner to compare real driving directions. Reopen the official visitor pages before every return trip.

Read the food-road-trip article and find all regional guides

Build a route and keep your own stop notes

Compare costs using your own quotes

Ask the ExploreTraveler travel assistant

Keep exploring

Share this complete free PDF by email or messaging. Its source links and QR code help the next reader return to the current guide collection. No signup or payment is required. Optional travel updates are a separate choice.

Research checked October 25, 2026. Menus, hours, access and conditions can change. This is an original planning workbook, not a claim that John and Karen visited every listed place. Tagged links identify the guide source; they do not show who privately received or read an offline copy.