



## SPORTS & OUTDOOR RECREATION

### **BEST ATHLETE IN NORTHEAST FLORIDA** **Maurice Jones-Drew**

It's not surprising that MoJo has won the hearts of Jacksonville football fans. The 5-foot-7-inch running back is somewhat undersized for the market, but plays with more spirit than ballers twice his size — a sort of metaphorical appeal for the small-market Jags. MoJo's also got a soft spot for his hometown team, which picked him after all 32 teams passed him over in the first round of the 2006 draft, mostly because of his stature. (He picked his number to remind himself of the slight.) But MoJo has risen to the top of local squad, both through his personal charm and his indispensable advice to fantasy football fans, on his "Running With MJD" show on satellite radio stations Sirius 211 and XM 147.

### **BEST PLACE TO SEE LIVE SPORTS** **EverBank Field**

The downtown stadium has always been a fun place to watch sports, with plenty of Florida sunshine and St. Johns River breezes. But there's no question that fans get a little lift from attending games in a stadium with an actual name, a perk they haven't been able to enjoy since 2006. Beers aren't any cheaper than last year, and the Jaguars' future with the city remains unclear, but fans are flocking to the newly named stadium in significantly larger numbers — a spark of hope that the EverBank sign might signal the start of a new era.

### **BEST PLACE TO SEE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES** **Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens**

The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens houses more than 1,400 rare and exotic animals (including the Southern pudu, ring-tailed lemur, pygmy marmoset and Bell's hingeback tortoise) and more than 1,000 varieties of plants. Opened in Springfield in May 1914 with the

donation of one red deer fawn, it's since grown to be one of Jacksonville's most popular attractions. Affectionately dubbed Jazoo, it hosts everything from safari sleepovers to behind-the-scene excursions, like the Wild Florida Tour. There are also multiple areas suitable for staging large weddings. Copious amounts of alcohol plus large, furry animals with sharp teeth? Yes, please.

### **BEST ROAD RACE** **Gate River Run**

Between the midpoint of this race and the finish line, there are plenty of moments in the 15K River Run that could unnerve a runner, be it the ferocious winds of the Hart Bridge or the calf-cramping stretch of Atlantic Boulevard. Fortunately, there's plenty to boost a runner's sprits, too, including bands performing at 10 locations along the race route, water stations every mile and the promise of a finish in grand style at the fairgrounds, where there's a plethora of beer on tap. The largest 15K in the county, and the official USA 15K Championship, the River Run manages to be both massive (14,000 runners) and intimate — the kind of event where you can expect to run into neighbors, co-workers and friends, assuming you're not too exhausted to socialize.

### **BEST PLACE TO CANOE OR KAYAK** **Amelia Island**

Fort Clinch caps the northern tip of Amelia Island, across the Amelia River from Georgia. From a boat launch there, one can paddle to downtown Fernandina Beach or over to St. Marys, Ga., and Cumberland Island. At the southern end of the island, the 200-acre Amelia Island State Park offers paddling through salt marshes, where rivulets of tidal creeks cut winding pathways through the cordgrass. In both parks, watchful eyes might see an osprey snatch a fish in its claws or a dolphin or two or three rolling through the surf.

### **BEST CAMPING** **BEST PLACE TO BIKE** **BEST PARK** **Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park**

Kathryn Abbey Hanna Park is just minutes away from the hubbub of Duval County beaches, but it's a journey into natural Florida that's pleasantly engulfing. The park covers 450 acres on the Atlantic Ocean, with a sandy beach, a natural dune system and a maritime forest covering much of it. There are close to 300 campsites in the woods, where a tent can be pitched nestled under the shade of gangly oaks, tucked away from other campers down narrow sandy paths. For daytime activities, there are miles of hiking and biking trails, a 60-acre freshwater lake, a water playground for children and 1.5 miles of beautiful sandy beach on the ocean.



Best Fishing Spot: Jax Beach Pier

# BEST OF JAX 2010



**Best Skate Spot:**  
**Kona Skate Park**

Hanna Park also has more than 20 miles of off-road bicycling trails, with easy ones marked in green and the challenging ones marked in red. Be forewarned: Trails with names like “Grunt,” “Misery” and “Tornado Alley” live up to their reputations.

## **BEST PUBLIC GOLF COURSE** **Jacksonville Beach Golf Club**

For more than five decades, the Jax Beach Golf Club on Penman Road South has remained a municipally-owned-and-operated golf course with reasonable green fees. Open to the public seven days a week, the 18-hole course is just a stone’s throw from the Atlantic Ocean. Recently redesigned with Emerald Dwarf Bermuda greens, it’s a par 72 with TPC bunkers, a driving range, two putting greens, a bunker and short game area and an on-site restaurant, Hero’s 19th Hole.

## **BEST BOWLING ALLEY** **Beach Bowl**

A mainstay on Beach Boulevard in Jax Beach, Beach Bowl is where the hardened bowlers battle 7-10 splits by day and tweenie rabble-rousers bounce around to cosmic bowling at night. You want to do it right? Grab some sweet-smelling shoes, find the heaviest ball you can, score a couple of deadly Long Island iced teas from the bar, order up some nachos, get creative with your name on the electronic score card, and then proceed to destroy your date with strike after strike as you chase down a turkey.

## **BEST SURF SPOT** **The Poles**

The Poles location is consistently tagged Northeast Florida’s best place to catch a wave. Named after the boundary poles between Hanna Park and Naval Station Mayport, the area just south of the St. Johns River is one of Donavon Frankenreiter’s favorite spots to surf when he comes to town. According to surflife.com, the area has the ability to turn a stormy north swell into clean, left-hand lines, making it one of the area’s best and busiest places to catch a wave.

## **BEST SKATE SPOT** **Kona Skate Park**

For more than three decades, Kona Skate Park has been a shrine for shredders and skaters. And brah, you want indie cred? Kona is the oldest outdoor, privately owned skatepark in the United States (no word back from the Alaskan territories yet) and allows BMX bikers to bunnyhop all the livelong day in the concrete bowls and half-pipes. Tucked

away off Arlington Expressway, this rad landmark also features a shop that offers everything from shoes, decks and wheels to keep you airborne or at least help you look the part, lest you come across like a total yonker. Look it up! We had to!

## **BEST SCENIC DRIVE** **A1A, from St. Augustine to Fernandina**

Windows open, salt in your hair, waves breaking over your heart and a tidal pull in your solar plexus. Whether you’re cruising over Fort George Inlet, with the 449-acre sand bar of Huguenot Memorial Park to your right, or motoring down the sign- and telephone-pole-less stretch of A1A south of Ponte Vedra Beach, the northeastern stretch of A1A is arguably the prettiest road in Florida — and a good reminder of how highway travel used to be before the roads were reshaped by SUVs and drive-thrus. If life is a highway, A1A is our carefree youth.

## **BEST FISHING SPOT** **Jax Beach Pier**

Cast out into the Atlantic Ocean and catch your dinner — it’s a cheap thrill more locals are having these days at the Jax Beach Pier, on First Street North between Fourth and Fifth avenues. The 5-year-old structure, consistently voted Best Fishing Spot by our readers, offers fightin’ fish (tarpon, kingfish, cobia) and eatin’ fish (flounder, sea trout, whiting) for next to nothing — and no fishing license needed. The pier’s open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. (till 7 p.m. in the winter), and it’s only four bucks to fish all day. Just there to watch? Only \$1 — and no charge for kids younger than six. There’s a concession and bait & tackle shop to help you snag your piscine dream.

## **BEST OUTDOOR FESTIVAL** **Jacksonville Jazz Festival**

What began in 1980 as then-Mayor Jake Godbold’s plan to give Jacksonville a little culture has become an annual local favorite. Spread around various venues downtown, the redesigned event has brought in Buckwheat Zydeco, Chris Botti, The Superstars of Jazz featuring Wayne Henderson, Roy Ayers and Lonnie Liston Smith, and a musical tribute to the late Teddy Washington. Local favorites like Dot Wilder, Peggie Black, Isaac Byrd Jr. & Tribe Judah, and the Noel Freidline Quintet all have shown fans that our players have killer chops. Festival traditions include the Jazz Piano Competition and 'Round Midnight jam session which have once again given newcomers on the scene a chance to swing.