

Views from **On Top of the World[®]** Communities

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The Ocala/Marion County Area

OCALA, FLA. – Ocala, the largest city and county seat, charms residents and visitors alike with its historic downtown and its leafy neighborhood streets lined with Victorian and Tudor homes. World-renowned as one of the world's four major thoroughbred centers, Ocala's 600 horse farms have produced winners of the Kentucky Derby, Preakness Stakes and Breeders' Cups.

The clear waters of Alexander Springs, Juniper Springs, the Rainbow River and Silver River are ideal for snorkeling, camping, canoeing, swimming and boating. And with more than 600 lakes, this area is an angler's paradise. Silver Springs, the largest artesian spring formation in the world, is a 350-acre nature theme park located just east of Ocala.

Nearly three-quarters of the Ocala National Forest is in Marion County, providing unique ecological sites, trails and natural springs throughout its 383,573 acres. There are specially marked walking and hiking trails, designated trails for horseback riding, and lakes for fishing and boating.

And if all this nature is inspiration for the adventurous, the arts community in and

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around Ocala is inspiration for the soul.

Fine Arts for Ocala, founded in 1967, promotes a vibrant cultural life in the area, highlighted by the group's annual autumn art show that attracts more than 50,000 people to the two-day event.

The Ocala Symphony Orchestra is one of the state's finest professional orchestras, and Ocala also is home to the Appleton Museum of Art – one of the South's premier art repositories. And nearby is the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, where guests can tour the farmhouse and view the Cross Creek surroundings that inspired the author of *The Yearling*.

Marion County's state-of-the-art healthcare facilities include three major hospitals, a multi-service county health system and more than 350 licensed physicians. All area hospitals operate in conjunction with the world-famous Shands Teaching Hospital in Gainesville, where the region's Veteran's Administration hospital also can be found.

Ocala is home to more than 200 houses of worship representing about 40 different denominations.

This central Florida location puts residents 90 minutes from the Atlantic Ocean and 40 minutes from the Gulf of Mexico, and within a convenient drive to all the major attractions, shopping, dining and sporting events offered in the metropolitan areas of Orlando, Tampa and Jacksonville. Residents have a choice of Orlando and Tampa international airports or Gainesville Regional Airport.