

9. Make Like Jacques Cousteau

PADDLING OUT ON THE TRANQUIL WATERS OF THE Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge with just the moon and the stars to light the way is glorious enough. But when the bio is back, the experience is downright supernatural.

The “bio” is bioluminescence, a glow-at-night marine life phenomenon that causes both fish and the water itself to emanate a ghostly blue-green aura. The best place to view the spectacle is in the Indian River Lagoon near Titusville. The bio arrives in different forms, depending upon the season.

Between mid-December and March, tiny comb jellyfish arrive. They’re a credit to their species: They glow like fireflies in the water and don’t have stinging tentacles. The bigger, better bioluminescence comes in the warm-weather months with the presence of microscopic marine organisms called dinoflagellates.

“It’s nether-worldish,” says Elizabeth Mahan, co-owner of **A Day Away Kayak Tours**. “If you come up on a school of mullet, when they jump out of the water it’s like a thousand bursts of blue-green flames across your bow. If dolphin swim under your kayaks, you can look down and see their luminous outlines.”

Mahan and her husband, Mike, take parties out on nighttime expeditions when bioluminescence overtakes Indian



River Lagoon. The tour company provides the kayaks and related equipment; previous kayaking experience isn’t required. adayawaykayaktours.com

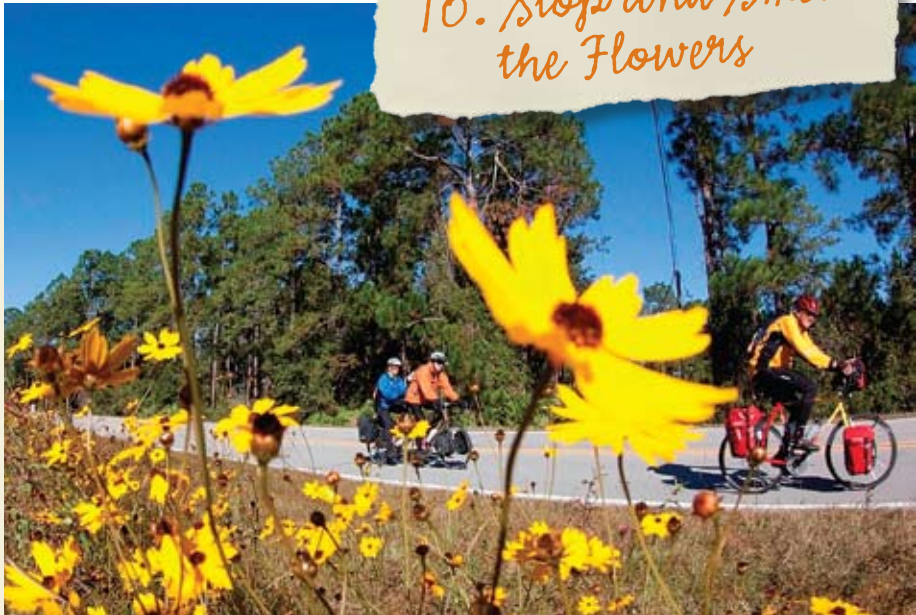
10. Stop and Smell the Flowers

“FLORIDA MAY LACK THE colorful fall leaves that some states have, but we have a terrific fall and spring wildflower display,” says Terry Zinn, board chair of the Florida Wildflower Foundation.

You can’t blame him for sounding defensive, what with all those showy leaves up north attracting all the attention while the wildflowers down here bust their blossoms. They’ve been at it for quite some time: After all, the state was named after them.

One of the best ways to enjoy the first flora of Florida is to traverse the state’s rural bike trails, such as the 260-mile **St. Johns River to the Sea Loop**, an increasingly popular, five-county pathway that offers views of Coreopsis (Florida’s state wildflower), Dune Sunflower, Gayfeather, Black-eyed Susan and Spanish Needles.

Numerous other trails offer the opportunity to stop



and smell the flowers, or at least tip your helmet at them. A good source for information about trails and tours is Bike Florida, a non-profit organization that arranges biking expeditions of various lengths throughout the state – and frequently hands out little packets of wildflower seeds for bikers to scatter along the way. bikeflorida.org