Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: June is Great Outdoors Month in America. It reminds us to connect with nature and explore fun outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping and paddling. I'm Emily Yeap.

Joining me today is Jessa Stone, a senior business student at Missouri State University. She's also an Outdoor Adventures trip guide for the MSU Foster Recreation Center. She's here to share how spending time outdoors improves your overall health, as well as highlight some ways to maximize your experience.

Jessa Stone: My top three benefits for going out into the outdoors, the first one would obviously be exercise. There are very few outdoor activities that don't require you to at least walk a little bit to a destination. Then activities like rock climbing, paddling, backpacking, they all have very physical aspects to them, which can get you really fit. And at least for me, once you start seeing those results, you start feeling really motivated to get back out there.

 My next one would be that it fosters relationships. So I know for a lot of people, I've heard that their entire social lives have changed when they've gotten involved in the outdoors. It gives you a route to see people with different cultures, different backgrounds, and then you're sharing a common goal. And when people work together to achieve a goal, there's often a bond that's created there.

 Next, it can boost your mental health, so, like I said, getting outside is often linked to being really active, which can release endorphins and can fight things like depression, anxiety. Then also, as a student, I know that for me, it's a big anti-stressor, to be able to get outside. There's a lot less things going on. It's a lot quieter. It's really good for me to combat stress that way.

Emily Yeap: Residents in our area don't have to go far to enjoy different outdoor activities, according to Stone.

Jessa Stone: People would be surprised at the number of things that you can do in Springfield or just in Missouri in general. Just about a half an hour from Springfield, there's Busiek. There's tons of hiking trails in Busiek. I went there last weekend and saw a gorgeous waterfall. You can also camp at Busiek. So you could hike during the day and maybe even hike in your tent, so you can put a tent in a backpack and then actually camp at Busiek. There's also the Nature Center, which has tons of little pathways you can take, animals you can see. And there's also Springfield Lake. So you can rent paddle boards to paddle at Springfield Lake, or if you know a student at Missouri State University, you can actually rent kayaks or canoes through Outdoor Adventures and get yourself out there.

Emily Yeap: Another great place in Springfield for families is the Botanical Gardens.

Jessa Stone: There's a Japanese stroll garden there, which has tons of cool little bridges. There's little tea houses that the kids can go in and explore. But then it's also fun for the adults. There's really beautiful flowers, there's cool trees that you don't really get to see normally in this area. It's something the whole family can enjoy together, and you can also get some really cool pictures.

Emily Yeap: Stone also recommends two must-visit places.

Jessa Stone: A couple places that are really, really fun to go that are in Missouri and about three hours from Springfield would be Johnson's Shut-Ins. This is one of my favorite spots. It's basically like a huge natural outdoor waterpark. So all over you can do cliff diving in certain specified areas that aren't dangerous. You can also hike there, and then there's huge water pools with little waterfalls going everywhere and little natural water slides. I think it's a hidden gem that a lot of us don't know about. Really close to that area, if you want to make a weekend out of it, there is Elephant Rock. I would describe Elephant Rock as basically Johnson's Shut-Ins without the water. So instead of having a ton of rocks and water to play in, now you just can hike on a ton of huge rock structures.

Emily Yeap: In terms of planning for an outdoors trip, Stone has this advice.

Jessa Stone: My best tip for trips is to plan for everything that could go wrong, and then you'll have everything you need to make the trip go right. I would always suggest bringing a first aid kit. It's just good to have. Check the weather beforehand, so you can dress accordingly. Obviously, wear sunscreen if it's sunny. Wear a rain jacket if it's rainy. I always suggest layers, because you really never can know. Sometimes it'll be shady, and you're cold, and then you walk into a part of the path, and all of a sudden, you're hot again. Bring extra food and water, especially if you're going into remote areas. Again, just in case, you want to be safe. Always bring cash, because there's a lot of activities at parks where they will not take debit or credit cards. Bring portable battery chargers for phones. Some of the worst things that can happen is when you're hiking all day, and you get to that beautiful destination, and you have nothing to take a picture and nothing to remember it by.

Emily Yeap: The best part about the outdoors is anyone can enjoy it.

Jessa Stone: You don't have to be rich to go into the outdoors. That means it's for everybody.

Emily Yeap: That was Jessa Stone, an Outdoor Adventures trip guide for the MSU Foster Recreation Center. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.