



Discover **Florida**

Experience the best of Florida

This edition written and researched by

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This Is Florida

Florida is the USA's playground. Florida is bracken wetlands that melt under soul-searing sunsets. Florida is blue lakes, teal oceans and green rivers cutting a tropical plain into parcels of romantic beauty. Florida is sand like snow. Florida is cities that have dedicated themselves to giving you food, shopping, nightlife and enjoyment. Florida is waiting.

This state exudes a powerful attraction. Generation after generation of travelers keeps coming back. Our grandparents had retirement cottages here. Our parents can recall childhood visions of mermaids and manatees and Mickey that their children remember with a similar warm-hearted nostalgia, and want to pass on to the next generation and the next.

These recollections encapsulate what many deem 'Old Florida.' But Old Florida sits alongside the new here as the state is constantly pushing itself to reinvent the best in tourism. If you want it, Florida has it, in every color, size and shape.

There are malls near Fort Myers where you can live out your most lurid consumer fantasies. Thanks to demand for the local, organic and indigenous, those malls are a few miles from neighborly farmer's markets. There are theme parks galore in Orlando, while in the Everglades to the south and Apalachicola to the north, there are state and national parks where a unique subtropical environment is protected by dedicated citizens settling new frontiers in conservation and environmentalism.

There are miles of beach in Miami. And beyond sun and sun, a world class, daring arts district. There are the latest toys and trends of the wealthy in Palm Beach, and a few hours south, simple pleasures and parades dedicated to flights of fantasy in Key West.

And everywhere you go there is the backbone of Florida: visitors. They can find anything here, and often, more than what they expected. Get ready to join their satisfied ranks.

“
Florida is
the USA's
playground
”

Lifeguard stand, Miami (p178)

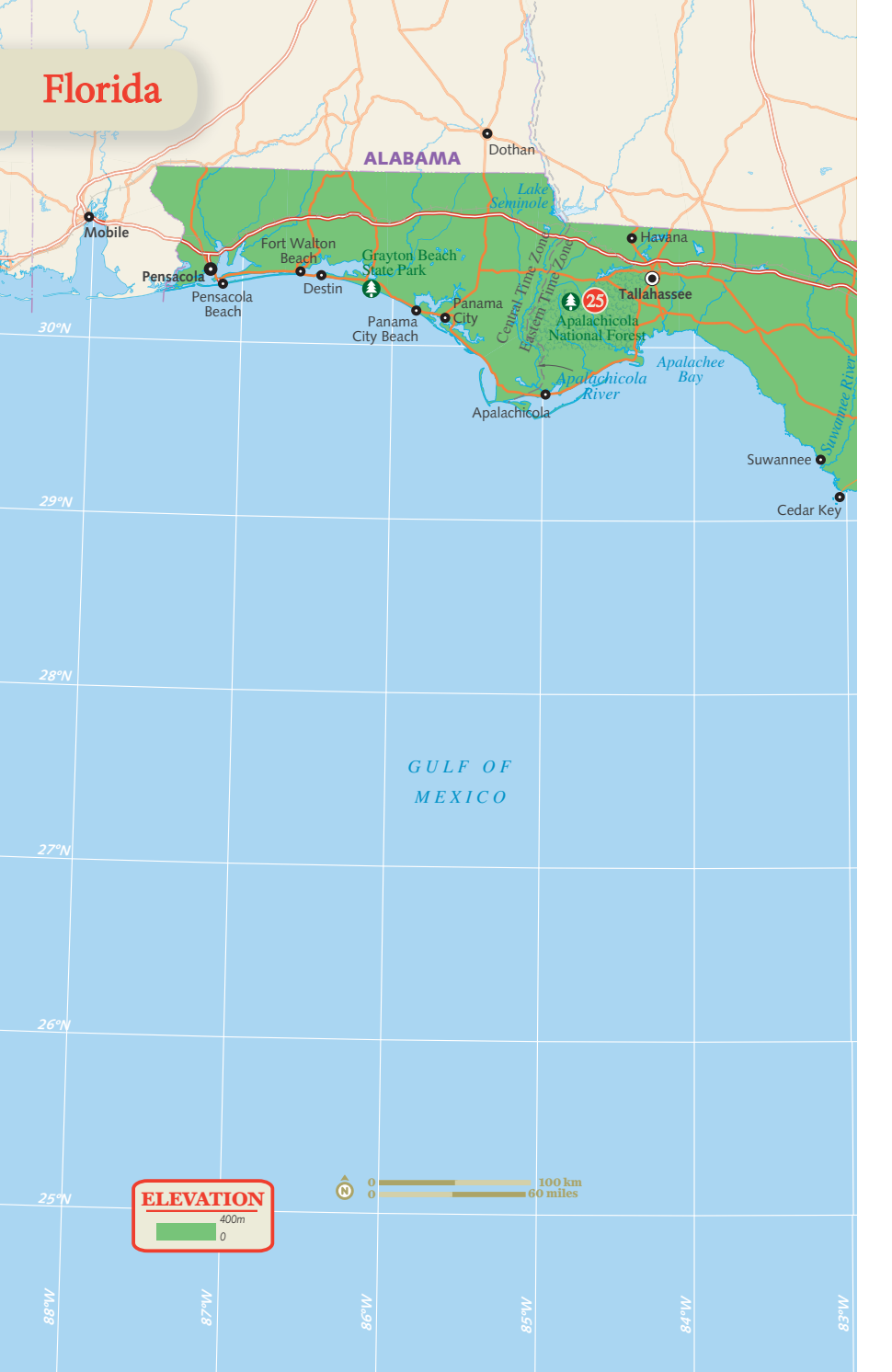
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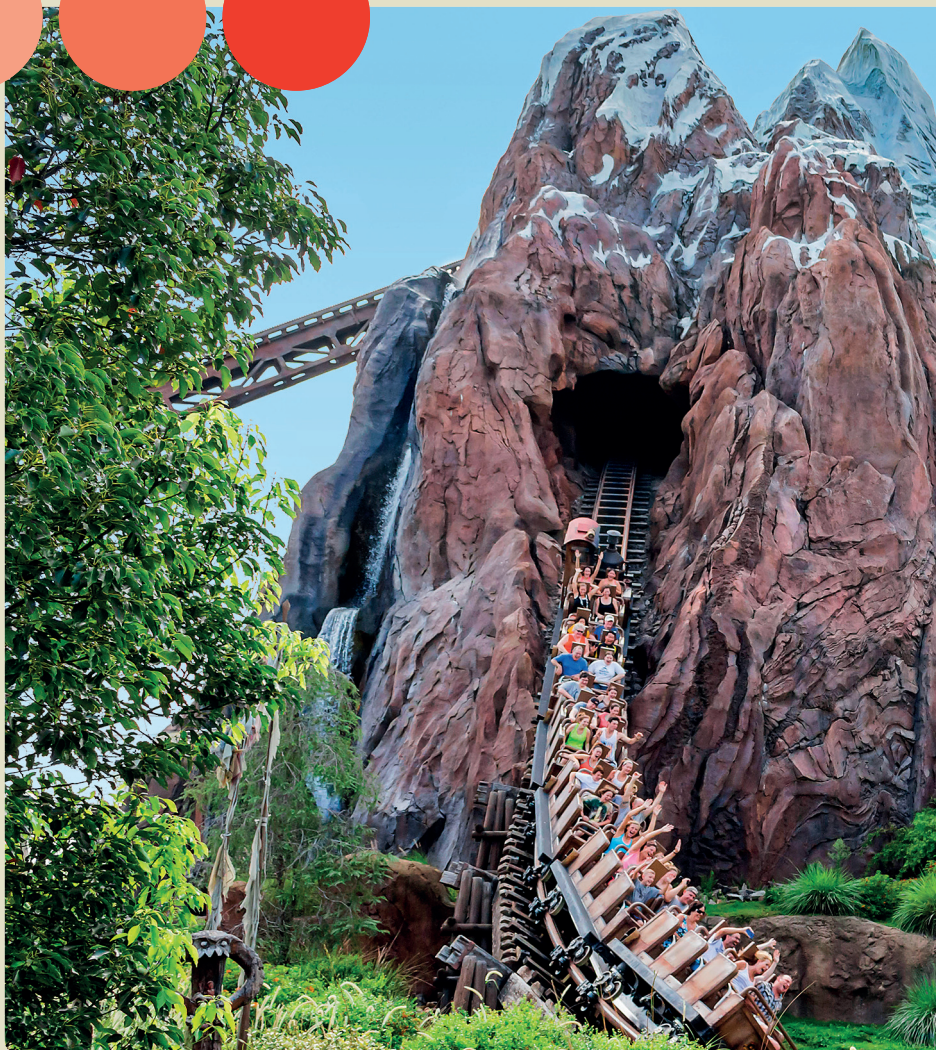
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25 Florida's Top Highlights



Walt Disney World® Resort

Florida's basic reason for being is to function as the world's best playground, and nowhere is this truer than Walt Disney World® Resort (p60). Mickey's home is one of the world's original theme parks, the embodiment of imagination and flights of fancy. Children can explore a bright realm that caters to their every need, and adults quickly revert back to childhood. Yes, it gets crowded, but it's the gold standard in all-American fun for a reason. Besides, if you don't go your kids will never, ever forgive you. Below: Expedition Everest (p69)

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November

★ White Party

A raucous gay and lesbian celebration (and HIV/AIDS fundraiser), the White Party is actually a series of parties and nightclub events in Miami Beach and Fort Lauderdale over a week in late November (www.whiteparty.net). And yes, wear white.

★ Tampa Cigar Heritage Festival

Tampa's Ybor City has a long history as the cigar-making capital of the US. That heritage, and the cigars themselves, are celebrated in this one-day festival (www.cigarheritagefestival.com).

★ St Arrrgustine Pirate Gathering

Put on an eye patch and dust off your pirate lingo for this hokey celebration of scurvy dogs and seafaring rascals in St Augustine for three days in mid-November.

December

High season begins for South Florida beaches. Manatees arrive in warm-water springs.

★ Art Basel Miami Beach

Very simply, early December sees one of the biggest international art shows in the world, with over 150 art galleries represented and four days of parties (www.artbaselmiamibeach.com).

★ Victorian Christmas Stroll

The landmark 1891 Tampa Bay Hotel (now a museum) celebrates Christmas, Victorian-style, for three weeks in December, with folks in period costume.

★ King Mango Strut

Miami's Coconut Grove rings in the New Year with this wacky, freak-alicious, after-Christmas parade, which spoofs current events and local politics (www.kingmangostrut.org).

Far left: June Goombay Festival;

Left: July 4th of July, Miami

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