

Southeast Florida



Zooming north from Miami's seductive clutches, you'll find an endearing collection of beach towns – some classy, others quirky, all unique. From activity-packed, gay- and family-friendly Fort Lauderdale to quiet, exclusive, semireclusive Palm Beach; from laid-back Lauderdale-by-the-Sea to the rugged coast of Jupiter, you'll find more culture and nightlife than you can handle. For those looking for a more peaceful setting, the region's numerous natural gems – shady parklands dotting the shore, many with windswept dunes fending off the waves – will surely satisfy your demands for down-to-earth, outdoorsy pleasures.

Pristine wilderness awaits in state parks and the Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge between Stuart and northern Palm Beach. Thick with mangroves and loaded with wildlife, the area aches for exploration. Alternatively, you can kayak the coffee-colored waters of the 'wild and scenic' Loxahatchee River or camp in secluded islands that haven't seen visitors in...well, who knows how long.

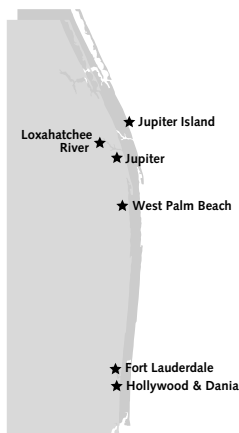
Don't forget West Palm Beach and Delray Beach: vibrant, diverse communities boasting wonderful cuisines, cultural dynamos, shopping galore and robust nightlife.

But the beaches are the real reason you're here. All along the coast, dozens of public beaches will give you the chance to soak up the rays. Ranging from Lauderdale's sparkling-white but jam-packed sands (especially across from Las Olas Blvd), to Lake Worth's sparse but surfable waves off Lake Ave, this stretch of sand is, really, the USA's sandbox.

So whatever you do, don't skip over this region on your journey from Miami to Disney World.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy West Palm Beach's **Clematis By Night** (p251), a free event held every Thursday under the stars, featuring national and local musicians and a host of tasty street food
- Glide through Fort Lauderdale on an authentic **gondola ride** (p224), and discover some of the 300 miles of navigable inland waterways in 'the Venice of America'
- Take a swing on the rig of the **Flying Trapeze School** (p217) in Hollywood
- Press the shutter at sunrise as the tide rushes in at **Blowing Rocks Preserve** (p253), Jupiter Island
- Kayak Jupiter's 'Wild and Scenic' **Loxahatchee River** (p254), for close-up views of cypress knees, mangrove forests and sunning alligators





History

Two words: Henry Flagler. If it weren't for this deep-pocketed visionary, southeast Florida may still be overrun with cabbage palms, bloodthirsty mosquitos and territorialators snapping at trembling canoers. After transforming northeastern Florida into a winter wonderland in the 1870s, Flagler set his sights further south, and by the mid-1890s had already completed two world-class hotels (including the 1100-room Royal Poinciana Hotel in Lake Worth, at the time the largest wooden structure in the world), established both Palm Beach and West Palm Beach and began pushing on to Miami and the Keys.

Climate

Like the rest of South Florida, southeast Florida boasts warm temperatures year-round: 60°F on average in winter, high 70s or 80s in spring and summer. Spring, and May especially, gets the highest rainfall at around 15in.

National, State & Regional Parks

There is no shortage of parks in this region – sandy, waterfront, shady, inland or flat. Dania's John U Lloyd Beach State Park (opposite) has miles of shallow, coastal mangroves, while tiny Peanut Island (p248) in West Palm Beach delivers big fun to boaters, campers and day-trippers. When the tide's rushing in, Jupiter's Blowing Rocks Preserve (p253) stages the most dramatic show in the region, but for sheer emptiness, the windswept dunes in north Hutchinson Island (p256) win the award for Most Remote.

Information

Palm Beach Post online (www.palmbeachpost.com)

A great source for all sorts of regional info.

Southeast and Florida Keys Information Pages

(www.i75online.com/flse.html) A website devoted to Southeast Florida visitor information, from weather reports to activity guides.

Getting There & Around

Southeast Florida is easy to navigate – and it's a good thing, considering all the folks who want to visit. With two airports – Fort Lauderdale's big, shiny one and West Palm Beach's intimate but growing option – and plenty of easy-to-follow interstates, you can't really go wrong. Car rentals are also cheap and plentiful here.