

Southeast Florida

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Why Go?

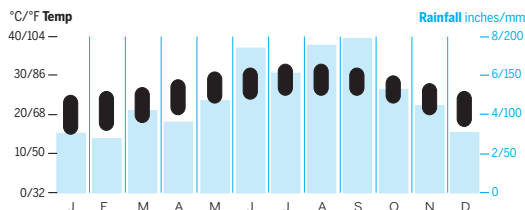
Zooming north from Miami's tanned and diamond-draped clutches, you'll find an endearing collection of beach towns – some classy, others quirky, all unique. From activity-packed, gay- and family-friendly Fort Lauderdale to quiet, exclusive, semireclusive Palm Beach; from laid-back Lauderdale-by-the-Sea to the rugged coast of Jupiter, you'll find more culture and nightlife than you can handle. This chunk of coast includes some of Florida's wealthiest enclaves – enjoy gawking at the castle-like beachfront mansions, but don't rear end that \$350,000 Bentley when parallel parking in front of the Gucci store in Palm Beach!

For those looking for a more, er, down-to-earth setting, the region's numerous natural gems – secluded islands, moss-draped mangrove swamps, wild rivers, empty dunes – will surely satisfy your demands for nonmaterial pleasures.

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

When to Go

Palm Beach



Mar & Apr Spring Break madness hits, packing the beaches with party-happy twentysomethings.

Jun–Nov Atlantic hurricane season, plus steamy summer weather, means a major tourism slowdown.

Dec–Apr Chilly temperatures up north bring vacationers and second home owners down in droves.

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 territorial gators 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.

GOLD COAST

Though the 70-or-so miles of sparkling Atlantic shoreline from Hollywood to Jupiter earned its nickname from the gold salvaged from area shipwrecks, it could easily have come from the mix of sapphire skies, cinnamon sands and wealthy residents bejeweling the region.

Here, the coastline has a split personality. First, there's slow-going, ocean-fronting Rte 1, a pleasant drive revealing infinite vistas and unspoiled beaches...though occasionally it feels like driving through the valley of a high-rise condo-canyon. Second, there's wizened, wrinkled Dixie Hwy, running parallel to Rte 1 but further inland, past dive bars, hole-in-the-wall eateries and diverse, working-class communities that sometimes forget the ocean's just a shell's throw away. Drive both stretches; each is rich with divergent offerings.

Hollywood & Dania Beach

📍 954 / HOLLYWOOD POP 143,000 / DANIA BEACH POP 28,000

Two 'suburban Fort Lauderdale' communities have managed to make names for themselves. Hollywood, a bustling, varied waterfront town that positions itself as a gateway to Fort Lauderdale, has earned a sizable wedge of the Spring Break market since Lauderdale gave revelers the boot. The resulting influx brings with it concerts in the sand, beach-volleyball tourneys and assorted debauchery each March. These days, the city's trying to glam up its image with several new South Beach-style developments.

In contrast, Dania (dane-ya) remains a mellow little town, with a fledgling antiques district and a breezy fishing pier.

👁 Sights & Activities

Hollywood Beach & Broadwalk BEACH
Reminiscent of California's famed Venice Beach, this beach and adjacent promenade teem with scantily clad Rollerbladers, fanny pack-wearing tourists and local families speaking a rainbow of languages. Standing guard over the walk are tacky T-shirt shops, ice-cream vendors, snack shacks and bars. This ain't no snooty Palm Beach, and that's why it's so much fun. The Broadwalk itself is a 2.2-mile, six-person-wide cement path, regularly clogged with skaters, strollers, and entire families pedaling enormous group bikes. If you feel like rolling along it, a dozen or so Broadwalk vendors rent bikes, Rollerblades and other gear by the hour or the day.

Kayaking KAYAKING
Once an important stop for Prohibition-era bootleggers, lush Whiskey Creek (get it?), nestled inside **John U Lloyd Beach State Park** (www.floridastateparks.org/lloydbeach; per vehicle \$6; ☀8am-sundown), is now a kayaking hot spot. The dense mangrove-lined route, roughly 2.5 miles long, is shallow, calm, ideal for beginners and just 15 minutes from downtown Dania. **Full Moon Kayak Co** (📞954-597-3040; www.fullmoonkayak.com; tours from \$35; 🕒10am-6pm Mon-Sat) runs day trips here and to other local paddling places. No guarantees, but they have spotted manatees.

🛏 Sleeping

Both Hollywood and Dania abound with character-ful motels and guesthouses, many seemingly unchanged from the 1940s.

TOP CHOICE **Hollywood Beach Hotel & Hostel**

HOTEL, HOSTEL \$
(📞954-391-9441; www.hollywoodbeachhostel.com; 334 Arizona St, Hollywood; dm from \$17, r from \$59; 🍷🍷🍷) Part of Hollywood's wave of hip new businesses, this slick complex combines dorms with a warren of whitewashed, vaguely Moroccan-looking motel units. Friendly staff, a clean and bright common kitchen, bike and surfboard rentals, and a deck with hammock chairs add sociability, but this is generally a quiet place which appeals to families as well as the traditional backpacker types. Those who do want to live