

A background image of a tropical beach scene. A large palm tree is on the left, and a white lifeguard stand is on the right. The sky is blue, and the sand is light-colored.

# Florida

## Understand Florida & Survival Guide

(PDF Chapter)

Edition 7th Edition, January 2015

Pages 60

Page Range 463–522

### Useful Links

Want more guides?

[Head to our shop.](#)

Trouble with your PDF?

[Trouble shoot here.](#)

Need more help?

[Head to our FAQs.](#)

Stay in touch

[Contact us here.](#)

### COVERAGE INCLUDES:

- Florida Today
- History - from First Inhabitants & Seminoles to Southernmost Schisms
- People & Culture
- The Arts
- Food & Drink
- Outdoor Activities
- Landscapes & Wildlife
- Directory A–Z
- Transportation

# Understand Florida

## **FLORIDA TODAY** .....464

Climate change and political division loom large in Florida, even as her population surges with immigrants and transplants.

## **HISTORY** .....466

Florida's history is a veritable rogues' gallery of smugglers, pirates, conquistadores, tycoons, speculators and visionaries.

## **PEOPLE & CULTURE** .....476

One of the nation's most diverse, immigrant-rich states is almost equal parts Old South and Nuevo Latino.

## **THE ARTS** .....481

Tacky, kitschy, bold, loud, lurid, surreal and often pink: Florida's arts are never less than entertaining.

## **FOOD & DRINK** .....486

Florida is using its vast bounty from land and sea for the greater culinary good of travelers everywhere.

## **OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES** .....491

Florida provides epic outdoor adventures, none more important than the trek from towel to ocean.

## **LANDSCAPES & WILDLIFE** .....497

Florida's natural world is a rare, wondrous spectacle of bizarre scenery and the often prehistoric creatures who inhabit it.

# Florida Today

Florida is undergoing seismic shifts in demographics, state identity, and – if the environment doesn't improve – state topography, thanks to immigration, economic recession and resurgence, and climate change. These developments, and how the state will adapt and respond to them, will shape life in the Sunshine State for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, the state is constantly re-evaluating and evolving her tourism infrastructure to accommodate an ever-increasing amount of visitors.

## Best on Film

**Scarface** (1983) Al Pacino.

**The Birdcage** (1996) Robin Williams and Nathan Lane as gay lovers.

**Sunshine State** (2002) Florida developers vs mermaid.

**Adaptation** (2002) Surreal adaptation of *The Orchid Thief*.

## Best in Print

**Pilgrim in the Land of Alligators**

(Jeff Klinenberg) Profiles of wacky Floridians.

**Salvaging the Real Florida** (Bill

Belleville) Moving nature essays on a fragile landscape.

**Paradise Screwed** (Carl Hiaasen) *Miami Herald* columns of biting sarcasm and outrage.

**Weird Florida** (Charlie Carlson) Too easy. Like shooting two-headed fish in a barrel.

## Wild Etiquette

**Wildflowers** Never pick them, especially orchids.

**Beaches** Never approach nesting sea turtles or hatchling runs. Adhere to lights-out policies.

**Coral reefs** Don't touch them when snorkeling or diving.

**Dolphins & manatees** Admire but don't touch, chase or feed them.

**Alligators** Never feed – they bite.

## Preserving the Peninsula

One of Florida's deepest cultural fault lines runs across the debate over development versus conservation. For years, development held sway in the state, which has long had one of the most robust housing markets in the country, and not coincidentally, one of the fastest growing populations. As of this writing, Florida was poised to overtake New York as the third-most populous state in the country.

All of those people need places to live, and in Florida, the need for housing and businesses has traditionally taken precedence over preservation. But a new check on growth has emerged that even some of the most gung-ho developers are noting. In the environmental debates of the 21st century, low-lying Florida is on the ecological frontlines of the climate change and water table debates.

Florida is a largely below-sea-level peninsula, and the ocean is rising even as the peninsula is crumbling. The culprits behind the crumble are artificial canals and waterways dredged in the early 20th century. Those public works directed water away from the Everglades and the South Florida aquifer, eroding the wetlands and depleting freshwater reserves. State leaders seem to have recognized how untenable the situation is, and as of the time of research, it seems that the Florida legislature may have the political will to redirect the natural flow of run-off water from Lake Okeechobee.

While the interior of the state is trying to re-establish a base of water, coastal areas are trying to ward water away. Rising sea levels can be traced to climate change; rains in Miami that would have been an afterthought a decade ago are now flooding main thoroughfares. Local governments are moving forward with climate change plans to deter the worst fallout of a potential ecological disaster.

## A House Divided

From Stand Your Ground laws to political redistricting, some of the most intense debates over American rights and responsibilities occur in Florida. This has always been a place where settlers tried to bend the world to fit their dreams, from Disney World emerging from Central Florida to Miami sprouting from a swamp. This can-do attitude usually comes hand in hand with a pro-business environment that stresses deregulation and individual liberty over public welfare. The frontier mentality that feeds this attitude has traditionally incubated in Florida's sprawling suburbs and agricultural zones.

But as Florida's city spaces grow, so do city ideals, values and policy priorities such as public infrastructure and mass transit. Governor Rick Scott's decision to void a high-speed train between Orlando and Tampa was seen as fiscal prudence by supporters from the countryside and exurbs, but urban opponents felt like a chance at alleviating the state's ubiquitous car culture had been squandered.

As these debates rage, the rifts between rural, white, culturally conservative North Florida and multiethnic South Florida are deepening. South Floridians feel political redistricting, seen by some as gerrymandering, has led to them being frozen out of the Florida statehouse; while the state is consistently a toss-up between Democrats and Republicans at the national level, at the state level Republicans have carved out numerous small districts and as a result dominate the legislature.

On the other hand, North Floridians feel like they are being demographically eclipsed by the increasingly ethnically diverse southern part of the state. The irony is that the children of those immigrants tend to Americanize quickly, and some would likely lean conservative if the anti-immigrant rhetoric coming from the American right wasn't so fiery. These kinds of views were what caused Pablo Pantoja, director of the Republican National Party's Hispanic Outreach program in Florida, to defect to the Democratic Party in 2013.

POPULATION: **19.32 MILLION**

AREA: **65,755 SQ MILES**

GDP: **\$748 BILLION**

GDP GROWTH: **+2.4%**

INFLATION: **1.74%**

UNEMPLOYMENT: **6.2%**

## if Florida were 100 people

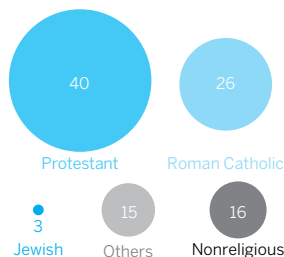


75 would be White  
16 would be Black  
2 would be Asian  
1 would be Native American  
6 would be other

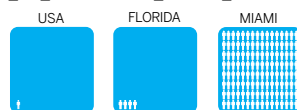
\*According to the US Census Bureau, Hispanics may be of any race so are included in applicable race categories

## belief systems

(% of population)



## population per sq mile



↑ ≈ 90 people

# History

Florida has the oldest recorded history of any US state, and it might qualify as the most bizarre too. Something about this swampy peninsula invites exaggeration and inflames desire, then gleefully bedevils those who pursue their visions. Spanish explorers chased rumors of golden cities, yet only a funhouse mirror separates them from Disney and its promised Magic Kingdom. The constant in this state is wild-eyed speculation, great tides of immigration, and inevitably, a crash. It certainly makes for great storytelling.

## Seminole & Indian Resources

Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum ([www.ahtahthiki.com](http://www.ahtahthiki.com))

The Museum ([www.flamuseum.com](http://www.flamuseum.com))

Heritage of the Ancient Ones ([www.ancientnative.org](http://www.ancientnative.org))

## First Inhabitants & Seminoles

Florida's original inhabitants never organized into large, cohesive tribes. For some 11,500 years, they remained split into numerous small chiefdoms or villages, becoming more settled and agricultural in the north and remaining more nomadic and warlike in the south.

The Apalachee in Florida's Panhandle developed the most complex agriculture-based society, but other tribes included the Timucua in northern Florida, the Tequesta along the central Atlantic Coast, and the fierce Calusa in southern Florida. Legends say it was a poison-tipped Calusa arrow that killed Spanish explorer Ponce de León.

The most striking evidence of these early cultures is shell mounds or middens. Florida's ancestral peoples ate well, and their discarded shells reached 30ft high and themselves became the foundations of villages, as at Mound Key.

When the Spanish arrived in the 1500s, the indigenous population numbered perhaps 250,000. Over the next 200 years, European diseases killed 80% of them. The rest were killed by war or sold into slavery, so that by the mid-1700s virtually none of Florida's original inhabitants were left.

However, as the 18th century unfolded, Muscogee and other tribes from the north migrated into Florida, driven by or enlisted in the partisan European feuds for New World territory. These tribes intermingled and intermarried, and in the late 1700s they were joined by numerous runaway African American slaves, whom they welcomed into their society.

## TIMELINE

### 10,000 BC

After crossing the Bering Strait from Siberia some 50,000 years earlier, humans arrive in Florida, hunting mastodon and saber-toothed tigers, at the end of the last ice age.

### AD 500

Indigenous peoples settle in year-round villages and begin farming, cultivating the 'three sisters' of corn, beans and squash, plus pumpkins, lemons and sunflowers.

### 1513

Ponce de León discovers Florida, landing south of Cape Canaveral, believing it to be an island. Since it's Easter time, he names it La Florida, 'The Flowery Land' or 'Feast of Flowers.'

At some point, these independent, fugitive, mixed peoples occupying Florida's interior were dubbed 'Seminoles,' a corruption of the Spanish word *cimarrones*, meaning 'free people' or 'wild ones.' Defying European rule and ethnic category, they were soon considered too free for the newly independent United States, who brought war to them.

## Five Flags: Florida Gets Passed Around

All Floridian schoolchildren are taught that Florida has been ruled by five flags: those of Spain, France, Britain, the US and the Confederacy.

Spain claimed Florida in 1513 when explorer Ponce de León arrived. Five more Spanish expeditions followed (and one French, raising its flag on the St Johns River), but established until 1565, when St Augustine was

### THE UNCONQUERED SEMINOLES

The US waged war on Florida's Seminoles three times. The First Seminole War, from 1817 to 1818, was instigated by Andrew Jackson, who ruthlessly attacked the Seminoles as punishment for sheltering runaway slaves and attacking US settlers. Trouble was, Florida was controlled by Spain. After Jackson took over Pensacola, Spain protested this foreign military incursion, forcing Jackson to halt.

In 1830, now President Andrew Jackson (aka Old Hickory), passed the Indian Removal Act, which aimed to move all Native Americans west of the Mississippi River. Some Seminoles agreed to give up their lands and move to reservations, but not all. In 1835 US troops arrived to enforce agreements and resistance, led by Osceola a Seminole leader, attacked an army detachment, triggering the Second Seminole War.

The war was fought guerrilla style by 2000 or so Seminoles in swamps and hammocks, and it's considered one of the most deadly and costly Indian wars in US history. In October 1837, Osceola was captured under a flag of truce and later died in captivity, but the Seminoles kept fighting. In 1842 the US finally called off its army, having spent \$20 million and seen the deaths of 1500 US soldiers.

Thousands of Seminoles had been killed or marched to reservations, but hundreds survived and took refuge in the Everglades. In 1855 a US army survey team went looking for them, but the Seminoles killed them first. The resulting backlash turned into the Third Seminole War, which ended after Chief Billy Bowlegs was paid to go west in 1858.

But 200 to 300 Seminoles refused to sign a peace treaty and slipped away again into the Everglades. Technically, these Seminoles never surrendered and remain the only 'unconquered' Native American tribe.

In the 1910s, brutally impoverished, the Seminoles discovered that tourists would pay to watch them in their temporary camps, and soon 'Seminole villages' were a mainstay of Florida tourist attractions, often featuring alligator wrestling and Seminole 'weddings.'

In 1957 the US officially recognized the **Seminole Tribe** ([www.semtribe.com](http://www.semtribe.com)), and in 1962, the **Miccosukee Tribe** ([www.miccosukee.com](http://www.miccosukee.com)).

#### 1539

Hernando de Soto arrives in Florida with 800 men, seeking rumored cities of gold. He fights Native Americans and camps near Tallahassee but, finding no precious metals, keeps marching west.

#### 1565

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founds St Augustine, which becomes the first permanent European settlement in the New World and is the oldest city in the continental US.

#### 1702

In their ongoing struggle with Spain and France over New World colonies, the British burn St Augustine to the ground; two years later they destroy 13 Spanish missions in Florida.

#### 1776

The American Revolution begins, but Florida's two colonies don't rebel. They remain loyal to the British crown, and soon English Tories flood south into Florida to escape the fighting.

### Alleged Fountains of Youth

*Fountain of Youth  
Archaeological  
Park, St Augustine*

*De Leon Springs  
State Park, DeLand*

*Warm Mineral  
Springs, Venice*

### Best Florida Histories

*The New History  
of Florida, Michael  
Gannon*

*The Everglades:  
River of Grass,  
Marjory Stoneman  
Douglas*

*Dreamers, Schem-  
ers and Scalawags,  
Stuart B McIver*

*The Enduring  
Seminoles, Patsy  
West*

*Miami Babylon,  
Gerald Posner*

settled. A malarial, easily pillaged outpost that produced little income, St Augustine truly succeeded at only one thing: spreading the Catholic religion. Spanish missionaries founded 31 missions across Florida, converting and schooling Native Americans, occasionally with notable civility.

In 1698 Spain established a permanent military fort at Pensacola, which was thence variously captured and recaptured by the Spanish, French, English and North Americans for a century.

Spain found itself on the losing side of the 1754–63 French and Indian War, having backed France in its fight with England. Afterward, Spain bartered with the English, giving them Florida in return for the captured Havana. Almost immediately, the 3000 or so Spaniards in Florida gratefully boarded boats for Cuba.

The British held Florida for 20 years and did marginally well, producing indigo, rice, oranges and timber. But in 1783, as Britain and the US were tidying up accounts after the close of the American Revolution, Britain handed Florida back to Spain – which this time had supported the winning side, the US.

The second Spanish period, from 1783 to 1819, was marked by one colossal misjudgment. Spain needed settlers, and quickly, so it vigorously promoted immigration to Florida, but this backfired when, by 1810, those immigrants (mainly North American settlers) started demanding ‘independence’ from Spain. Within a decade, Spain threw up its hands. It gave Florida back to the US for cash in a treaty formalized in 1822. In 1845 Florida became the 27th state of the US, but in 16 short years, it would reconsider that relationship and raise its fifth flag.

## From Civil War to Civil Rights

In 1838 the Florida territory was home to about 48,000 people, of whom 21,000 were African American slaves. By 1860, 15 years after statehood, Florida’s population was 140,000, of whom 40% were slaves, most of them working on highly profitable cotton plantations.

Thus, unsurprisingly, when Abraham Lincoln was elected president on an antislavery platform, Florida joined the Confederacy of southern states that seceded from the Union in 1861. During the ensuing Civil War, which lasted until 1865, only moderate fighting occurred in Florida.

Afterward, from 1865 to 1877, the US government imposed ‘Reconstruction’ on all ex-Confederate states. Reconstruction protected the rights of freed slaves, and led to 19 African Americans becoming elected to Florida’s state congress. Yet this radical social and political upheaval led to a furious backlash.

When federal troops finally left, Florida ‘unreconstructed’ in a hurry, adopting a series of Jim Crow laws that segregated and disenfranchised African Americans in every sphere of life – in

#### 1816–58

The three Seminole Wars pit the United States against the Seminoles and allies, including escaped slaves. Although most Seminoles are exiled, small bands remain in the Everglades.

#### 1823

Tallahassee is established as Florida’s territorial capital because it’s halfway between Pensacola and St Augustine. Later attempts to move the state capital fail.

#### 1835

In attacks coordinated by Seminole leader Osceola, Seminoles destroy five sugar plantations on Christmas Day and soon after kill 100 US soldiers marching near Tampa, launching the Second Seminole War.

#### 1845

Florida is admitted to the Union as the 27th state. Since it is a slave state, its admission is balanced by that of Iowa, a free state.

restaurants and parks, on beaches and buses – while a poll tax kept African Americans and the poor from voting. From then until the 1950s, African Americans field hands in turpentine camps and cane fields worked under a forced-labor ‘peonage’ system, in which they couldn’t leave till their wages paid off their debts, which of course never happened.

The Ku Klux Klan thrived, its popularity peaking in the 1920s, when Florida led the country in lynchings. Racial hysteria and violence were commonplace; most infamously, a white mob razed the entire town of Rosewood in 1923.

In 1954 the US Supreme Court ended legal segregation in the US with *Brown v Board of Education*, but in 1957 Florida’s Supreme Court rejected

## BLACK MARKET FLORIDA

In 1919, when the US passed the 18th Amendment – making liquor illegal and inaugurating Prohibition – bootleggers discovered something that previous generations of slaves and Seminoles knew well: Florida is a good place to hide.

Almost immediately Florida became, as the saying went, ‘wet as a frog,’ and soon fleets of ships and airplanes were bringing in Cuban and Jamaican rum to be hidden in coves and dispersed nationwide.

Interestingly, Florida rumrunning was conducted mostly by local ‘mom-and-pop’ operations, not the mob, despite the occasional vacationing mobster, such as Al Capone. In this way, Prohibition really drove home the benefits of a thriving black market. When times were good, as in the 1920s, all that (illicit) money got launder-...um...pumped into real estate, making the good times unbelievably great. When hard times hit in the 1930s, out-of-work farmers could still make bathtub gin and pay the bills. Because of this often-explicit understanding, Miami bars served drinks with impunity throughout the 1920s, and local police simply kept walking.

In the 1960s and ‘70s, the story was repeated with marijuana. Down-on-their-luck commercial fisherman made a mint smuggling plastic-wrapped bails of pot, and suddenly Florida was asking, ‘Recession? What recession?’ West Florida experienced a condo boom.

In the 1980s cocaine became the drug of choice. But this time the smugglers were Colombian cartels, and they did business with a gun, not a handshake. Bloody shootouts on Miami streets shocked Floridians (and inspired the *Miami Vice* TV show), but it didn’t slow the estimated \$10-billion drug business – and did you notice Miami’s new skyline? In the 1980s so much cash choked Miami banks that smuggling currency itself became an industry – along with smuggling out guns to Latin America and smuggling in rare birds, flowers, and Cuban cigars.

By the 1990s the cartels were finished and banking laws were stricter, but some still believed that smuggling remained Florida’s number-one industry.

### 1861

Voting 62 to seven, Florida secedes from the US and raises its fifth flag, that of the Confederacy. Florida’s farms and cattle provide vital Confederate supplies during the ensuing Civil War.

### 1889

Key West becomes the largest, most populous city in Florida largely due to the wrecking industry – salvaging cargo from ships that sink in the treacherous surrounding waters.

### 1894–5

The Great Freeze ruins citrus crops across the agricultural belt in Central Florida. Settlers begin moving to South Florida seeking warmer climates and longer growing seasons.

### 1912

‘Flagler’s Folly,’ Henry Flagler’s 128-mile overseas railroad connecting the Florida Keys, reaches Key West. It’s hailed as the ‘Eighth Wonder of the World’ but is destroyed by a 1935 hurricane.



### Historic Resorts & Mansions

Tampa Bay Hotel,  
Henry B Plant  
Museum, Tampa

Hotel Ponce de  
León, St Augustine

The Breakers, Palm  
Beach

Whitehall Mansion,  
Flagler Museum,  
Palm Beach

Biltmore Hotel,  
Coral Gables

this decision, declaring it ‘null and void.’ This sparked protests but little change until 1964, when a series of demonstrations, some led by Martin Luther King, Jr, and race riots rocked St Augustine and helped spur passage of the national Civil Rights Act of 1964.

More race riots blazed across Florida cities in 1967 and 1968, after which racial conflict eased as Florida belatedly and begrudgingly desegregated itself. Florida’s racial wounds healed equally slowly – as evidenced by more race riots in the early 1980s. Today, despite much progress and the fact that Florida is one of the nation’s most ethnically diverse states, these wounds still haven’t completely healed.

## Draining Swamps & Laying Rail

By the middle of the 19th century, the top half of Florida was reasonably well explored, but South Florida was still an oozing, mosquito-plagued swamp. So, in the 1870s, Florida inaugurated its first building boom by adopting laissez-faire economic policies centered on three things: unrestricted private development, minimal taxes and land grants for railroads.

In 10 years, from 1881 to 1891, Florida’s railroad miles quintupled, from 550 to 2566. Most of this track crisscrossed northern and central Florida, where the people were, but one rail line went south to nowhere. In 1886, railroad magnate Henry Flagler started building a railroad down the coast on the spectacular gamble that once he built it, people would come.

In 1896 Flagler’s line stopped at the squalid village of Fort Dallas, which incorporated as the city of Miami that same year. Then, people came, and kept coming, and Flagler is largely credited with founding every town from West Palm Beach to Miami.

It’s hard to do justice to what happened next, but it was madness, pure and simple – far crazier than Ponce’s dream of eternal waters. Why, all South Florida needed was to get rid of that pesky *swamp*, and then it really *would* be paradise: a land of eternal sunshine and profit.

In 1900 Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, envisioning an ‘Empire of the Everglades,’ set in motion a frenzy of canal building. Over the next 70 years, some 1800 miles of canals and levees were etched across Florida’s porous limestone. These earthworks drained about half the Everglades (about 1.5 million acres) below Lake Okeechobee, replacing it with farms, cattle ranches, orange groves, sugarcane and suburbs.

From 1920 to 1925 the South Florida land boom swept the nation. In 1915 Miami Beach was a sand bar; by 1925 it had 56 hotels, 178 apartment buildings and three golf courses. In 1920 Miami had one skyscraper; by 1925, 30 were under construction. In 1925 alone, 2.5 million people moved to Florida. Real-estate speculators sold undeveloped land, undredged land, and then just the airy paper promises of land. Everything went like hotcakes.

### 1923

The African American town of Rosewood, in Levy County, is wiped off the map by a white lynch mob; former residents are scattered and resettle elsewhere.

### 1926

A major hurricane flattens and floods South Florida. Nearly 400 people die, most drowning when Lake Okeechobee bursts its dike. Two years later another hurricane kills 2000 people.

### 1933–40

New Deal public-works projects employ 40,000 Floridians and help save Florida from the Depression. Most notable construction project is the Overseas Hwy through the Keys, replacing Flagler’s railroad.

### 1935

‘Swami of the Swamp’ Dick Pope opens Cypress Gardens, the USA’s first theme park, with water-ski stunts, topiary and Southern belles. Allegedly, this inspires Walt Disney to create California’s Disneyland.

Then, two hurricanes struck, in 1926 and 1928, and the party ended. The coup de grâce was the October 1929 stock-market crash, which took everyone's money. Like the nation, Florida plunged into the Depression, though the state rode it out better than most due to New Deal public works, tourism, and a highly profitable foray into rumrunning.

## Tin-Can Tourists, Retirees & a Big-Eared Mouse

For the record, tourism is Florida's number-one industry, and this doesn't count retirees (the tourists who never leave).

Tourism didn't become a force in Florida until the 1890s, when Flagler built his coastal railroad and his exclusive Miami Beach resorts. In the 1920s, middle-class 'tin-can tourists' arrived via the new Dixie Hwy - driving Model Ts, sleeping in campers and cooking their own food.

In the 1930s, to get those tourists spending, savvy promoters created the first 'theme parks': Cypress Gardens and Silver Springs. But it wasn't until after WWII that Florida tourism exploded. During the war, Miami was a major military training ground, and afterward many of those GIs returned with their families to enjoy Florida's sandy beaches at leisure.

In addition, after the war social security kicked in, and the nation's aging middle class migrated south to enjoy their first taste of retirement. As old folks will, they came slowly but steadily, at a rate of a thousand a week till they numbered in the hundreds of thousands and then millions. Many came from the East Coast, and quite a few were Jewish: by 1960, Miami Beach was 80% Jewish, creating a famous ethnic enclave.

Then one day in 1963, so the story goes, Walt Disney flew over central Florida, spotted the intersection of I-4 and the Florida Turnpike, and said, 'That's it.' In secret, he bought 43 sq miles of Orlando-area wetlands. Afterward, like an expert alligator wrestler, Disney successfully negotiated with the state of Florida and was granted unprecedented and unique municipal powers to build his tourist mecca.

Exempt from a host of state laws and building codes and largely self-governing, Disney World opened in 1971. How big did it become? In 1950 Florida received 4.5 million tourists, not quite twice its population. By the 1980s Disney alone was drawing 40 million visitors a year, or four times the state population.

Disney had the Midas touch. In the shadow of the Magic Kingdom, Florida's old-school attractions - Weeki Wachee, Seminole Village, Busch Gardens; all the places made famous through billboards and postcards - seemed hokey, small-time. The rules of tourism had changed forever.

The Florida State Archives website ([www.florida-memory.com](http://www.florida-memory.com)) presents a fascinating collection of historical documents (a 1586 map of St Augustine, Civil War letters), plus oodles of great photos, both historic and contemporary.

### 1941-45

US enters WWII. Two million men and women receive basic training in South Florida. At one point, the army commandeers 85% of Miami Beach's hotels to house personnel.

### 1942

From January to August, German U-boats sink over two dozen tankers and ships off Florida's coast. By war's end, Florida holds nearly 3000 German POWs in 15 labor camps.

### 1946

The development of modern air conditioning, coupled with a post-war economic boom, opens the door to thousands of transplants settling in the state.

### 1946

Frozen concentrated orange juice is invented. As the nation's top orange producer, this event leads to Florida's orange boom, giving birth to the orange millionaires of the '50s and '60s.

At the height of the industry in the 1940s, Florida's sugarcane fields produced one of every five teaspoons of sugar consumed in the US.

After WWII, the advent of effective bug spray and affordable air-conditioning did more for Florida tourism than anything else. With these two technological advancements, Florida's subtropical climate was finally safe for delicate Yankee skin.

## Viva Cuba Libre!

South Florida has often had a more intimate relationship with Cuba than with the rest of the US. Spain originally ruled Florida from Havana, and in the 20th century so many Cuban exiles sought refuge in Miami that they dubbed it the 'Exile Capital.' Later, as immigration expanded, Miami simply became the 'Capital of Latin America.'

From 1868 to 1902, during Cuba's long struggle for independence from Spain, Cuban exiles settled in Key West and Tampa, giving birth to Ybor City and its cigar-rolling industry. After independence, many Cubans returned home, but the economic ties they'd forged remained. Then, in 1959, Fidel Castro's revolution (plotted partly in Miami hotels) overthrew the Batista dictatorship. This triggered a several-year exodus of over 600,000 Cubans to Miami, most of them white, wealthy, educated professionals.

In April 1961 Castro declared Cuba a communist nation, setting the future course for US-Cuban relations. The next day President Kennedy approved the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion, which failed to overthrow Castro, and in October 1962 Kennedy blockaded Cuba to protest the presence of Russian nuclear missiles. Khrushchev famously 'blinked' and removed the missiles, but not before the US secretly agreed never to invade Cuba again.

None of this sat well with Miami's Cuban exiles, who agitated for the US to free Cuba (chanting '*Viva Cuba libre*': long live free Cuba). Between 1960 and 1980, a million Cubans emigrated - 10% of the island's population; by 1980, 60% of Miami was Cuban. Meanwhile, the US and Cuba wielded immigration policies like cudgels to kneecap each other.

The Cuban exiles disparaged assimilation (and sometimes the US), because the dream of return animated their lives. Miami became two parallel cities, Cuban and North American, that rarely spoke each other's language.

In the 1980s and 1990s, poorer immigrants flooded Miami from all over the Latin world - particularly El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. These groups did not always mix easily or embrace each other, but they found success in a city that already conducted business in Spanish. By the mid-1990s, South Florida was exporting \$25 billion in goods to Latin America, and Miami's Cubans were more economically powerful than Cuba itself.

Today, Miami's Cubans are firmly entrenched, and those of the younger generation no longer consider themselves exiles.

### 1947

Everglades National Park is established, successfully culminating a 19-year effort, led by Ernest Coe and Marjory Stoneman Douglas, to protect the Everglades from the harm done by dredging and draining.

### 1961

Brigade 2506, a 1300-strong volunteer army, invades Cuba's Bay of Pigs on April 16. President Kennedy withholds air support, leading to Brigade 2506's immediate defeat and capture by Fidel Castro.

### 1969

*Apollo 11* lifts off from Cape Canaveral, landing on the moon on July 20, winning the space race with the Russians. Five more lunar-bound rockets take off through 1972.

### 1971

Walt Disney World in Orlando opens and around 10,000 people arrive on the first day. The park attracts 10 million visitors during its first year.

## Hurricanes, the Everglades & Elections

Florida has a habit of selling itself too well. The precarious foundation of its paradise was driven home in 1992 when Hurricane Andrew ripped across South Florida, leaving a wake of destruction that stunned the state and the nation. Plus, mounting evidence of rampant pollution – fish kills, dying mangroves, murky bays – appeared like the bill for a century of unchecked sprawl, population growth and industrial nonchalance.

Newcomers were trampling the very features they were coming for. From 1930 to 1980, Florida's population growth rate was 564%. Florida had gone from the least-populated to the fourth-most-populated state and its infrastructure was woefully inadequate, with too few police, overcrowded prisons, traffic jams, ugly strip malls and some of the nation's worst schools.

In particular, saving the Everglades became more than another environmental crusade. It was a moral test: would Florida really squander one of the earth's wonders over subdivisions and a quick buck? Remarkably, legislation was passed: the Florida Forever Act and the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan were both signed into law in 2000. Meanwhile, the actual implementation of Everglades restoration has been delayed and held up by bureaucracy and politicking at the federal, state and local levels.

Yet 2000 became even more emblematic of Florida's deeply divided self. That year's tight presidential election between Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore hung on Florida's result. However, Florida's breathtakingly narrow vote in favor of Bush unraveled into a fiasco of 'irregularities,' including defective ballots, wrongly purged voter rolls and mysterious election-day roadblocks. After months of legal challenges and partial recounts, Florida's vote was finally approved, but its reputation had been tarnished.

As the 21st century dawned, Florida's historic tensions – between its mantra of growth and development and the unsustainable demands that this placed on society and nature – seemed as entrenched and intractable as ever.

### Southernmost Schisms

The beginning of this century was a politically polarizing time across much of the United States, and Florida, being in many ways a microcosm of the nation as a whole, was not immune to the trend. If anything, Florida's ideological divisions were exacerbated by deep boundaries that run along its geographic and ethnic lines.

While the governorship has remained securely in Republican hands since 1999, the state itself is a toss-up in every presidential election (it

It's all too easy to mock Florida for its bumbling 2000 presidential vote, but the HBO movie *Recount* (2008) doesn't. Instead, it cogently shows what happened and unearths the political grudges that shadowed an honest recount.

#### May 1980

In the McDuffie trial, white cops are acquitted of wrongdoing in the death of a black man, igniting racial tensions and Miami's Liberty City riots, killing 18 people.

#### 1980

Castro declares the Cuban port of Mariel 'open.' The USA's ensuing Mariel Boatlift rescues 125,000 *Marielitos*, who face intense discrimination in Miami.

#### 1984

TV show *Miami Vice* debuts, combining music-video sensibilities, pastel fashions, blighted South Beach locations and cynical undercover cops battling gun-wielding Miami cocaine cartels.

#### 1992

On August 24, Hurricane Andrew devastates Dade County, leaving 41 people dead, over 200,000 homeless and causing \$15.5 billion in damage.

narrowly broke for George W Bush twice and Barack Obama twice). This is largely due to redistricting practices, widely seen as gerrymandering (ie drawing voting districts to bolster a political party's performance), which have driven a deep rift between the state's political camps. That said, past governors such as Jeb Bush (George W Bush's younger brother; 1999-2007) and Charlie Crist (2007-2011) toed the centrist line within the Republican policy universe, generally skewing towards conservative economics and lenient policies regarding immigration.

Indeed, Crist, who supports same sex marriage but is also pro-gun ownership, made the relatively rare American political move of defection, joining the Democratic Party in 2012. That he did so a month after Barack Obama's re-election did not help his reputation as a political

## TRAYVON MARTIN & STAND YOUR GROUND

One of the most divisive racial and political incidents of the early 21st century began in Florida. On the night of February 26, 2012, 17-year old African American Trayvon Martin walked to his temporary home in the Central Florida town of Sanford. Martin, clad in a hoodie, was carrying a pack of Skittles and some Arizona Iced Tea. To get home quickly, he cut across yards in a gated community. Following him was George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old mixed-race Hispanic and neighborhood watch coordinator. Against the advice of police, Zimmerman confronted Martin, leading to an altercation. In the subsequent fight Zimmerman received head and facial injuries, and shot and killed the unarmed Martin.

Zimmerman was taken into police custody and released; under Florida's recently passed Stand Your Ground law, police did not believe he had committed a crime. Under the Stand Your Ground statute, in a self-defense incident a victim does not have to exercise the traditional 'Duty to Retreat' common across American legal code, which states that someone who kills in self defense must have exhausted their opportunities to avoid conflict.

Media attention and a subsequent national outcry led to Zimmerman being re-arrested on a charge of second-degree (ie non-premeditated) murder on April 11, 2012. A trial in the summer of 2013 found Zimmerman not guilty. The decision outraged many, who felt Zimmerman had (literally) gotten away with the murder of an unarmed teenager. On the flip side, gun-rights advocates believed Zimmerman had exercised his rights to self defense during the course of an assault.

The role of 'Stand Your Ground' was invoked and discussed by pundits and commentators, even though Zimmerman's legal team did not utilize Stand Your Ground in their defensive arguments. Nonetheless, there were calls for boycotts of Florida tourism over the law. To date, these boycotts have not had much impact on travel in the state. For an excellent overview of the impact of the legislation, read the June 2012 investigation into the law carried out by the *Tampa Bay Times*.

### 1999

On Thanksgiving, five-year-old Elián Gonzalez is rescued at sea, his Cuban mother having died en route. Despite wild protests by Miami's Cuban exiles, the US returns Elián to his father in Cuba.

### 2000

Before the presidential election, Florida mistakenly purges thousands of legitimate voters from rolls. George W Bush then narrowly defeats Al Gore by 537 votes in Florida to win the presidency.

### 2000-2010

High-rise architecture sweeps Miami; during this period, 20 of the city's 25 tallest buildings are erected, a trend some call the 'Manhattanization' of Miami.

### 2004

Florida records its worst hurricane season ever when four storms – Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne – strike the state over two months, causing 130 deaths and \$22 billion in damage.

opportunist, although defenders say he is merely flexible and open to changing his position on past issues. His ouster and political conversion came amid the 2008 financial crisis, which particularly devastated the Florida housing market.

Rick Scott settled into the gubernatorial office in Tallahassee in 2011 and has been instrumental in setting the state's political compass since. An unabashedly anti-regulation businessman (prior to election, Scott had been a CEO and venture capitalist with a net worth of \$218 million), he has also been sympathetic to Everglades protection policies, which speaks to the very delicate balancing act Scott maintains on a daily basis. He must constantly both diffuse and harness the tension between the white, conservative northern end of the state, the more liberal and Latin American south, and the mishmash of identities and interests that lays in between. A Florida of Stand Your Ground, Everglades restoration, climate-change denial and climate-change preparation policy is today's Florida in all its glorious contradictions.

## 2008

Wanting greater influence in the Democratic presidential nomination, Florida moves its primary up to January. The Democratic party strips Florida of its delegates, so its votes don't count.

## 2010

In the Gulf, *Deepwater Horizon's* offshore oil spill becomes the worst in US history. Oil only affects Panhandle beaches, but Florida tourism plummets, with losses estimated at \$3 billion.

## 2014

Everglades restoration plans get green lights from the state, including conservative politicians, but are then delayed due to bureaucratic gridlock and postponements from the Army Corps of Engineers.

## 2014

The 0.75-mile Port of Miami Tunnel, which connects the MacArthur Causeway on Watson Island with the Port of Miami on Dodge Island, is scheduled to open.

# People & Culture

**Florida's people and culture are a compelling mix of accents and rhythms, of pastel hues and Caribbean spices, of rebel yells and Latin hip-hop, of Jewish retirees and Miami Beach millionaires. Florida is, in a word, diverse. Like the prehistoric swamp at its heart, it is both fascinatingly complex and too fluid to pin down, making for a very intriguing place to explore. Is there tension? Absolutely. But that tension drives a social dynamic that is undoubtedly one of the most unique in the country.**

'Crackers' got their name most likely for the cracking of whips during cattle drives, though some say it was for the cracking of corn to make corneal, grits or moonshine. For a witty, affectionate look at what makes a Cracker, pick up *Cracker: The Cracker Culture in Florida History* by Dana Ste Claire.

## Portrait of a Peninsula

Pessimists contend that the state is so socially and culturally fractured that it will never have a coherent identity. Optimists, strangely enough, say nearly the same thing. Like an overpraised but insecure beauty queen, Florida is almost too popular for its own good, and it can never quite decide if the continual influx of newcomers and immigrants is its saving grace or what will eventually strain society to breaking point.

In terms of geography, Florida is a Southern state. Yet culturally, only Florida's northern half is truly of the South. The Panhandle, Jacksonville and the rural north welcome those who speak with that distinctive Southern drawl, serve sweet tea as a matter of course and still remember the Civil War. Here, the stereotype of the NASCAR-loving redneck with a Confederate-flag bumper sticker on a mud-splattered pickup truck remains the occasional reality.

But central Florida and the Tampa Bay area were a favored destination for Midwesterners, and here you often find plain-spoken, Protestant worker-bee sobriety. East Coast Yankees, once mocked as willing dupes for any old piece of swamp, have carved a definable presence in South Florida – such as in the Atlantic Coast's Jewish retirement communities, in callused, urban Miami, and in the sophisticated towns of the southern Gulf Coast.

Rural Florida, meanwhile, whether north or south, can still evoke America's western frontier. In the 19th century, after the West was won, Florida became one of the last places where pioneers could simply plant stakes and make a life. These pioneers became Florida's 'Crackers,' the poor farmers, cowhands and outlaws who traded life's comforts for independence on their terms. Sometimes any Florida pioneer is called a Cracker, but that's not quite right: the original Crackers scratched out a living in the backwoods (in the Keys, Crackers became Conchs). They were migrant field hands, not plantation owners, and with their lawless squatting, make-do creativity, vagrancy and carousing, they weren't regarded kindly by respectable townsfolk. But today, all native Floridians like to feel they too share that same streak of fierce, undomesticated self-reliance.

And yet, stand in parts of Miami and even Tampa and you won't feel like you're in the US at all, but tropical Latin America. The air is filled with Spanish, the majority of people are Roman Catholic, and the politics of Cuba, Haiti or Colombia animate conversations.

Ultimately, Florida satisfies and defies expectations all at once, and is a study in contrasts. From Cuban lawyers to itinerant construction workers, from fixed-income retirees to gay South Beach restaurateurs, it's one of the USA's more bizarre dinner parties come to life.

However, most residents do have something in common: in Florida, nearly everybody is from someplace else. Nearly everyone was a newcomer and, one and all, they wholeheartedly agree on two things: today's newcomers are going to ruin Florida, and wasn't it great to beat them here?

## Immigrants & the Capital of Latin America

Like Texas and California, modern Florida has been largely redefined by successive waves of Hispanic immigrants from Latin America. What sets Florida apart is the teeming diversity of its Latinos and their self-sufficient, economically powerful, politicized, Spanish-speaking presence.

How pervasive is Spanish? One in four Floridians speak a language other than English at home, and three-quarters of these speak Spanish. Further, nearly half of these Spanish-speakers admit they don't speak English very well – because they don't need to. This is a sore point with some Anglo Floridians, perhaps because it's incontrovertible evidence that Florida's Latinos are enjoying America's capitalism without necessarily having to adopt its culture or language.

Florida's Cuban exile community (concentrated in Little Havana and Hialeah Park), who began arriving in Miami in the 1960s following Castro's Cuban revolution, created this from the start. Educated and wealthy, these Cubans ran their own businesses, published their own newspapers and developed a Spanish-speaking city within a city. Their success aggravated Florida's African American population, who, at the moment the civil rights movement was opening the doors to economic opportunity, found themselves outmaneuvered for jobs by Hispanic newcomers.

Then Latinos kept arriving nonstop, ranging from the very poorest to the wealthiest. In Miami they found a Spanish-speaking infrastructure to help them, while sometimes being shunned by the insular Cuban exiles who preceded them.

Today, every Latin American country is represented in South Florida. Nicaraguans arrived in the 1980s, fleeing war in their country, and now number over 100,000. Miami's Little Haiti is home to more than 70,000 Haitians, the largest community in the US. There are 80,000 Brazilians, and large communities of Mexicans, Venezuelans, Colombians, Peruvians, Salvadorans, Jamaicans, Bahamians and more. This has led to significant in-migration around South Florida, as groups displace each other and shift to more fertile ground.

### IMMIGRATION BY THE NUMBERS

For the past 70 years the story of Florida has been population growth, which has been driven mostly by immigration. Before WWII Florida was the least populated state (with under two million), and today it is the fourth most populated, with 18.8 million in 2010.

Florida's growth rate has been astonishing – it was 44% in the 1970s. While it's been steadily declining since, growth was still more than 17% for the 21st century's first decade, twice the national average. That equaled nearly three million new residents from 2000 to 2010. Florida ranks fourth in the nation for the largest minority population (7.9 million), as well as for the largest number and percentage of foreign-born residents (3.5 million people, who make up 18%). In Miami the foreign-born population exceeds 60%, which is easily tops among large US cities.

Finally, Florida is home to an estimated 700,000 illegal immigrants, and stemming this tide is currently a hot-button issue.



The children of Cuban exiles are now called YUCAs, ‘young urban Cuban Americans,’ while the next generation of Latinos has been dubbed Generation Ñ (pronounced enyey), embodying a hybrid culture. For instance, the traditional Cuban *quinceañera* (or *quince*; celebrating a girl’s coming of age at 15) is still celebrated in Miami, but instead of a community-wide party, kids now plan trips. With each other, young Latinos slip seamlessly between English and Spanish, typically within the same sentence, reverting to Spanish or old-school Cuban in front of relatives.

Florida has also welcomed smaller waves of Asian immigrants from China, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. And, of course, South Florida is famous for its Jewish immigrants, not all of whom are over 65 or even from the US. There is a distinctly Latin flavor to South Florida Judaism, as Cuban and Latin Jews have joined those from the US East Coast, Europe and Russia. Overall, Florida is home to 850,000 Jews, with two-thirds living in the Greater Miami area.

## Life in Florida

Let’s get this out of the way first: Florida is indeed the nation’s oldest state. It has the highest percentage of people over 65 (over 17%), which pulls the state’s median age up to nearly 41, or four years higher than the national average. In fact, ever since WWII South Florida has been ‘God’s waiting room’ – the land of the retiree.

But the truth is, most immigrants to the state (whether from within the US or abroad) are aged 20 to 30, and they don’t come for the early-bird buffet. They come because of Florida’s historically low cost of living and its usually robust job and real-estate markets.

When times are good, what they find is that there are plenty of low- to mid-wage construction, tourist and service-sector jobs, and if they can buy one of those new-built condos or tract homes, they’re money ahead, as Florida home values usually outpace the nation’s. But in bad times when real estate falters – and in Florida, no matter how many warnings people get, the real-estate market does eventually falter – home values plummet, construction jobs dry up and service-sector wages can’t keep up with the bills. Thus, those 20- to 30-year-olds also leave the state in the highest numbers.

In recent years, the growing wealth gap in America has made it increasingly difficult for middle-income earners to afford rent (let alone a mortgage) in Florida’s growing urban areas. While businesses have always been able to fall back on cheap migrant labor from Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe, there has also usually been an accompanying nucleus of lifer service-industry professionals. Said professionals are increasingly finding Florida unaffordable, though, which bears the question: how can a state that is supported by tourism survive without folks who can afford what the tourism industry pays?

Florida’s urban and rural divides are extreme. Urban sprawl, particularly around Miami, Orlando and Tampa, is universally loathed – because who likes traffic jams and cookie-cutter sameness? Well, some folks like the sameness; Florida wouldn’t be famous for her suburbs and shopping malls if people didn’t occupy them. In addition new immigrants tend to gravitate to the suburbs – the green lawns predictably rejected by so many Americans seeking a new urbanism are seen as signs of a high quality of life for émigrés from Haiti and Cuba. In any case, almost everyone really does have a tan. It’s nearly unavoidable: 80% of Floridians live within 10 miles of the coast because that’s why everyone came – the beach.

### Profiles of Peoples

‘Voices of the Apalachicola,’ by Faith Eidse

‘Jews of South Florida,’ by Andrea Greenbaum

‘Cuban Miami,’ by Robert M Levine and Moisés Asís

So, along the peninsula's urbanized edges, everyone rubs up against each other: racial, ethnic and class tensions are a constant fact of life, but they have also calmed tremendously in recent decades. In general, tolerance (if not acceptance) of diversity is the norm, while tolerance of visitors is the rule. After all, they pay the bills.

But wilderness and rural life define much of interior and northern Florida: here, small working-class towns can be as white, old-fashioned and conservative as Miami is multiracial, gaudy and permissive. This is one reason why it's so hard to predict Florida elections and why sometimes they turn on a handful of votes.

A large military presence in the Florida Panhandle makes for an area that is generally quite conservative in its politics but, thanks to overseas rotations is a bit more cosmopolitan than the deep piney villages of the north Florida interior.

## Floridians at Play

Floridians are passionate about sports. If you let them, they'll fervently talk baseball, football, basketball and NASCAR through dinner, dessert and drinks on the porch.

For the majority of Floridians, college football is the true religion. Florida has three of the country's best collegiate teams – the University of Miami Hurricanes, the University of Florida Gators (in Gainesville) and the Florida State University Seminoles (in Tallahassee). Between them these teams have won nine national championships but, if anything, they are even more competitive with each other. It's hardly an exaggeration to say that beating an in-state rival is – at least for fans, who take deep pleasure in *hating* their rivals – almost more important than winning all the other games. If you want to cause a scene in Florida, tell an FSU student how much you love the Gators, or mention to a UF student how great the 'Noles are.

Florida also boasts three pro football teams: the Miami Dolphins, Tampa Bay Buccaneers and Jacksonville Jaguars. There's a reason college football is so popular in Florida; In recent years all three

When former *David Letterman* writer Rodney Rothman burned out, he decided to test drive 'retirement' in Boca Raton – at age 28. A good Jewish boy, Rothman crafts a very personal anthropological study of the unsentimental world of Florida retirees in *Early Bird: A Memoir of Premature Retirement*.

## CELEBRATING FLORIDA HERITAGE & CULTURE

Florida's diversity really comes alive in its many cultural festivals. Here are a handful worth planning a trip around.

**Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts & Humanities** ([www.zorafestival.org](http://www.zorafestival.org); Eatonville) For 20 years, Zora Neale Hurston's hometown has honored her with this African American cultural festival, culminating in a lively three-day street fair. Runs for one week in late January–early February.

**Carnaval Miami** ([www.carnaval-miami.org](http://www.carnaval-miami.org)) The Calle Ocho festival in Little Havana, which runs for 10 days in early March, is the USA's biggest Hispanic street fair. There are domino tournaments, cooking contests, Latin-music concerts and more.

**Florida Folk Festival** ([www.floridastateparks.org/folkfest](http://www.floridastateparks.org/folkfest); White Springs) Since 1953 the Stephen Foster State Folk Cultural Center has held this enormous heritage festival, with hundreds of Florida musicians – from gospel singers to banjo pickers – plus storytellers and Seminole craft demonstrations. Held on Memorial Day weekend.

**Goombay Festival** ([www.goombayfestivalcoconutgrove.com](http://www.goombayfestivalcoconutgrove.com); Miami) One of the nation's largest multicultural festivals celebrates Miami's Bahamian immigrants with tons of Caribbean music, dancing and food. Held over four days in early June.

**Barberville Jamboree** ([www.pioneersettlement.org](http://www.pioneersettlement.org); Barberville) On the first weekend of November, the Pioneer Settlement for the Creative Arts hosts Florida's best pioneer-heritage festival, with folk music and authentic demonstrations of Cracker life.

In *Dream State*, bawdy, gimlet-eyed journalist Diane Roberts weaves her family's biography with Florida's history to create a compelling, unique, hilarious masterpiece. Roberts is like the troublemaking cousin at Florida's family reunion, dishing the dirt everyone else is too polite to discuss.

Florida real estate is a continual Ponzi scheme. For a heartfelt look at the human cost when the Florida real-estate market collapsed in 2007, read *Exiles in Eden* by Paul Reyes, a reporter who joined the family business of 'trashing out' foreclosed homes.

professional teams have (sorry, it must be said) royally sucked. The Jaguars in particular seem to have made it a point of pride to be consistently the worst team in the NFL. Florida has two pro basketball teams, the Orlando Magic and Miami Heat. The Heat, who won back-to-back NBA championships in 2012 and 2013, are loved in Miami and pretty much loathed everywhere else. The Stanley Cup-winning Tampa Bay Lightning is one of several pro and semipro ice-hockey teams in the state, including the Miami-based Florida Panthers.

Major-league baseball's spring training creates a frenzy of excitement from February each year, when 15 pro teams practice across southern Florida. The stadiums then host minor-league teams, while two pro teams are based here: the Miami Marlins and the Tampa Bay Rays (in St Petersburg). The Minnesota Twins and Boston Red Sox both have their training facilities in Fort Myers.

NASCAR originated among liquor bootleggers who needed fast cars to escape the law – and who later raced against each other. Fast outgrowing its Southern redneck roots to become popular across the US, NASCAR is near and dear to Floridians and hosts regular events in Daytona.

Imported sports also flourish in Florida. One is the dangerous Basque game of jai alai, which is popular with Miami's cigar-smoking wagering game. Another is cricket, thanks to the Miami region's large Jamaican and West Indian population.

## Religion

Florida is not just another notch in the South's evangelical Bible Belt. It's actually considerably more diverse religiously than its neighboring states.

In Florida, religious affiliations split less along urban/rural lines than along northern/southern ones. About 40% of Florida is Protestant, and about 25% of Protestants are Evangelicals, who tend to be supporters of the religious right. However, these conservative Protestants are much more concentrated in northern Florida, nearer their Southern neighbors.

The majority of the state's Roman Catholics (who make up 26% of the population) and Jews (3%) live in South Florida. In South Florida, Jews make up 12% of the population, the second-highest percentage after the New York metro area. The high Catholic population reflects South Florida's wealth of Latin American immigrants.

South Florida also has a growing Muslim population, and it has a noticeable number of adherents of Santeria, a mix of West African and Catholic beliefs, and *voodoo* (voodoo), mainly practiced by Haitians.

Further, about 16% of Floridians say that they have no religious affiliation. That doesn't mean they lack spiritual beliefs; it just means their beliefs don't fit census categories. For instance, one of Florida's most famous religious communities is Cassadaga ([www.cassadaga.org](http://www.cassadaga.org)), a home for Spiritualists for more than 100 years.

# The Arts

Florida has a well-earned reputation as a welcoming port for all manner of kitsch and low-brow entertainment. It invented the theme park, spring break, *Miami Vice* and its own absurdist, black-comic semitropical crime noir. But there's so much more. Should we dismiss Florida's contributions to high culture just because the colors are always sunshine bright? At their best, Florida traditions are simultaneously homegrown and cosmopolitan, and vibrate with the surreal, mercurial truths of everyday life in this alligator-infested, hurricane-troubled peninsula.

## Literature

Beginning in the 1930s, Florida cleared its throat and developed its own bona fide literary voice, courtesy mainly of three writers. The most famous was Ernest Hemingway, who settled in Key West in 1928 to write, fish and drink, not necessarily in that order. 'Papa' wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *A Farewell to Arms* here, but he only set one novel in Florida, *To Have and Have Not* (1937), thus making his life more Floridian than his writing.

The honor of 'most Floridian writer' is generally bestowed on Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, who lived in Cross Creek between Gainesville and Ocala. She turned her sympathetic, keen eye on Florida's pioneers – the Crackers who populated 'the invisible Florida' – and on the elemental beauty of the state's swampy wilderness. Her novel *The Yearling* (1938) won the Pulitzer Prize, and *Cross Creek* (1942) is a much-lauded autobiographical novel. Her original homestead is now a museum.

Rounding out the trio is Zora Neale Hurston, an African American writer who was born in all-black Eatonville, near Orlando. Hurston became a major figure in New York's Harlem Renaissance of the 1930s, and her most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), evokes the suffering of Florida's rural African Americans, particularly women. In *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) Hurston portrays the marriage of two white Florida Crackers. Controversial in her time, Hurston died in obscurity and poverty.

Another famous depiction of Florida's pioneers is Patrick Smith's *A Land Remembered* (1984), a sprawling, multigenerational saga that highlights the Civil War. Meanwhile Peter Matthiessen's *Shadow Country* (2008) is an epic literary masterpiece. A trilogy revised into a single work, *Shadow Country* fictionalizes the true story of EJ Watson, a turn-of-the-century Everglades plume hunter who murdered his employees and was in turn murdered by the townsfolk.

Florida writing is perhaps most famous for its eccentric take on hard-boiled crime noir fiction. Carl Hiaasen almost singlehandedly defines the genre; his stories are hilarious bubbling gumbos of misfits and murderers, who collide in plots of thinly disguised environmentalism, in which the bad guys are developers and their true crimes are against nature. Some other popular authors are Randy Wayne White, John D MacDonald, James Hall and Tim Dorsey.

You can count among Florida's snowbirds some of the USA's best writers, such as Robert Frost, Stephen King, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Annie Dillard, and every January the US literati holds court at the annual Key West Literary Seminar.

## FLORIDA PULP

Florida mystery writers love to tickle the swampy underbelly of the Sunshine State. This list focuses on early novels of famous series. Grab one and hit the beach for another murderous day in paradise.

- ◆ *Rum Punch* (Elmore Leonard, 1992) Leonard is the undisputed master of intricate plots, crackling dialogue and terrific bad guys. Set in Miami, *Rum Punch* inspired Tarantino's movie *Jackie Brown*.
- ◆ *Double Whammy* (Carl Hiaasen, 1987) Hiaasen perfected his absurdist, black-comic rage in his second novel; you'll laugh till you cry. *Skinny Dip* and *Hoot* are also Hiaasen gems.
- ◆ *The Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper* (John D MacDonald, 1968) The godfather of Florida crime fiction introduces us to Travis McGee, who saves a girl from suicide and gets trouble as thanks.
- ◆ *Sanibel Flats* (Randy Wayne White, 1990) With crisp prose and tight plotting, White introduces his much-beloved 'retired' NSA agent/marine biologist Doc Ford.
- ◆ *Miami Blues* (Charles Willeford, 1984) Willeford first made it big with this addictive novel about a denture-wearing detective's chase after a quirky criminal.
- ◆ *Cold Case Squad* (Edna Buchanan, 2004) Miami police sergeant Craig Burch leads the cold-case squad after killers whose 'trails vanished long ago like footprints on a sea-washed beach.'
- ◆ *Torpedo Juice* (Tim Dorsey, 2005) Zany Serge A Storms only kills people who really deserve it – people who disrespect Florida – as he searches for love in the Keys.
- ◆ *Tropical Depression* (Laurence Shames, 1996) Shames is off-the-wall silly. Here, an inept Jersey bra magnate seeks to find himself in Key West. Yeah, right.

Florida's modern novelists tend to favor supernatural, even monstrously absurd Southern Gothic styles, none more so than Harry Crews; try *All We Need of Hell* (1987) and *Celebration* (1999). Two more cult favorites are *Ninety-two in the Shade* (1973) by Thomas McGaune and *Mile Zero* (1990) by Thomas Sanchez, both writerly, dreamlike Key West fantasies. Also don't miss Russell Banks' *Continental Drift* (1985), about the tragic intersection of a burned-out New Hampshire man and a Haitian woman in unforgiving Miami.

Most recently, Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* (2011), about the travails of a family of alligator wrestlers, marries Hiaasen-style characters with swamp-drenched magical realism.

## Cinema & Television

Get this: Jacksonville almost became Hollywood. In the 1910s, Jacksonville had 30 production companies – far more than Hollywood – who were using its palm-tree-lined beaches as 'exotic' backdrops for 120 silent films. Yet even as Laurel and Hardy were becoming famous in one-reeler slapstick comedies, religiously conservative Jacksonville decided to run those wild movie types out of town. Then Florida's 1926 real-estate bust (and the talkies) killed what remained of Florida moviemaking.

Still, it was a close call, and you can see why: Florida, like California, has always fostered dreams and fantasies. Only in Florida they come to life as theme parks.

Actually, Hollywood has returned to Florida time and again to film both TV shows and movies. Some of the more notable popular films include the Marx Bros farce *Cocanuts*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (filmed at Wakulla Springs), *The Truman Show* (filmed at Seaside), *Ulee's Gold*, *Donnie Brasco*, *Get Shorty*, *Hoot* and *Miami Blues*.

*Naked Came the Manatee* (1998) is a collaborative mystery novel by a constellation of famous Florida writers: Carl Hiaasen, Dave Barry, Elmore Leonard, James Hall, Edna Buchanan and more. It's like nibbling a delectable box of cyanide-laced chocolates.

Florida, as the setting, has been a main character in a number of TV shows. In the 1960s the most famous were *Flipper*, about a boy and his dolphin, and *I Dream of Jeannie*. Set in Cocoa Beach, *Jeannie* was Florida all over: an astronaut discovers a pinup-gorgeous female genie in a bottle, only she never quite fulfills his wishes in the way he wants.

In the 1980s Miami was never the same after *Miami Vice* hit the air. This groundbreaking cop drama made it OK to wear sport coats over T-shirts and helped inspire the renovation of South Beach's then-dilapidated historic district. The popular, more recent *CSI: Miami* owed a debt to actor Don Johnson and *Miami Vice*.

What's fascinating about modern Miami cinematic media is its willingness to peer past the pastel and deco. Of course, shows such as *Miami Vice* were always comfortable with Miami's seedy side. But recent forays into film and television are looking at the savagery and darkness that seem to lurk side by side with the glittery celebrity facade. Shows such as *Dexter* have dipped past Miami's glamor directly into her bucket of weirdness.

It's also worth noting that Miami is one of the centers of American Spanish-language media, especially film and television. The first Spanish-language presidential debate in the United States was hosted at the University of Miami on Univision, while Spanish-language network Telemundo is based in Hialeah, a suburb of Miami.

## Music

Florida's musical heritage is as rich and satisfyingly diverse as its cuisine. Folk and blues are deep-running currents in Florida music, and pioneers Ray Charles and Cannonball Adderley both hailed from the state. For folk, visit the **Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park** ([www.musicliveshere.com](http://www.musicliveshere.com)), near Suwannee River State Park, while Tallahassee has a notable blues scene.

Florida's state song, 'Old Folks at Home,' was written by Stephen Foster in 1851. Best known for the refrain 'Waaaay down upon the Suwanee River...', on the one hand it is a lament of an exile for his home, but on the other hand it quite explicitly a nostalgic missive by a slave who longs for his old plantation. In recent decades, Florida has sought to modernize the lyrics so that the song's sentimental paean to Old Florida is sanitized of its inherent racism, but some argue it should be retired nonetheless.

Florida definitely knows how to rock. Bo Diddley, after helping define rock and roll, settled near Gainesville for the second half of his life. North Florida is one of the wombs of that particularly American sub-genre of the musical catalog: Southern rock. The style is characterized by roots-laden references to old-school honky tonk overlaid with sometimes folksy, sometimes rowdy lyrics. Tom Petty, Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Allman Brothers form Florida's holy Southern-rock trio.

The 1960 movie of Glendon Swarthout's novel *Where the Boys Are* is largely responsible for spring break as we know it today. It's a bawdy, cautionary coming-of-age tale about four Midwest coeds visiting Fort Lauderdale for sun, sand and sex.

## PERFORMING ARTS

Iconic American playwright Tennessee Williams called Key West home on and off for over 30 years, but Florida doesn't have much of a homegrown theater or dance tradition. However, several South Florida cities offer top-drawer performing arts and some spectacular stages.

Naturally, Miami leads the way. The Miami City Ballet, a Balanchine company, is one of the nation's largest. The statewide **Florida Dance Association** ([www.floridadanceassociation.org](http://www.floridadanceassociation.org)) promotes dance performances and education. Miami's showstopper is the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, but also don't miss the New World Center. Tampa and St Petersburg also have large, lauded performing-arts centers.

For good regional theater, head for Miami, Sarasota, Orlando and even Fort Myers.

Two of the best film festivals in the US are the Miami International Film Festival ([www.miamifilmfestival.com](http://www.miamifilmfestival.com); March), a showcase for Latin cinema, and the up-and-coming Florida Film Festival ([www.floridafilmfestival.com](http://www.floridafilmfestival.com); April) in Orlando.

The Florida Division of Cultural Affairs ([www.florida-arts.org](http://www.florida-arts.org)) is a great resource for statewide arts organizations and agencies. Its Florida Artists Hall of Fame memorializes the Sunshine State's creative legacy.

In more recent years, bands including Matchbox Twenty, Dashboard Confessional, Radical Face and Iron & Wine have gotten their start in Florida. Indie-rock sounds are strong across the state, from the expected college towns such as Gainesville to the perhaps unexpected Latin streetscape of Miami.

The popular musician who most often defines Florida is Jimmy Buffet, whose heart lives in Key West, wherever his band may roam. His fans, known as Parrotheads, are a particularly faithful (some might say obsessed) bunch. If you've never heard Buffet's music, it's basically crowd-pleasing beach tunes with a gentle, anti-authoritarian bent – anarchy via sandals and piña colodas, if you will. In a state where musical tastes tend to divide along sharp cultural fault lines, Buffet's easy-going guitar riffs are a bridge between camps. The more conservative side of the state appreciates his yacht-y swagger, while liberals like his gentle advocacy for environmentalism.

Orlando (by way of mogul and now jailbird Lou Pearlman) bestowed upon the world a special genre of music: the boy bands of 'N Sync and Backstreet Boys. In fact, in many ways Orlando via Disney is responsible for shaping the soundscape of much of the world's teen and tween-focused pop music; Miley Cyrus and Britney Spears may not be from Florida, but they perfected the art of mass marketability via trained Disney handlers and taste makers. While the aim of pop is to create a universal sound that cuts across borders, Florida's native beat works its way into the most globally marketed Orlando albums, from Hollywood native Victoria Justice's mallrat anthems to Boca Raton-born Ariana Grande's Latin-spiced dance numbers.

Rap and hip-hop have flourished in Tampa and Miami, from old-school 2 Live Crew to Trick Daddy, Rick Ross, DJ Khaled and Pitbull, the most visible link between North American hip-hop and Latin American reggaeton. The latter has its roots in Panama and Puerto Rico, and blends rap with Jamaican dancehall, Trinidadian soca, salsa and electronica.

Miami, of course is a tasty mélange of Cuban salsa, Jamaican reggae, Dominican merengue and Spanish flamenco, plus mambo, rumba, cha-cha, calypso and more. Gloria Estefan & the Miami Sound Machine launched a revival of Cuban music in the 1970s, when they mixed Latin beats with disco with 'Conga.' While disco has thankfully waned, Latin music has not; for a taste of Miami-style hip-hop, check out Los Primeros. The best times to see ensemble Cuban bands – often with up to 20 musicians and singers – is during celebrations such as Carnaval Miami.

Electric music is ubiquitous across South Florida, especially in Miami, which celebrates the genre with two of its biggest festivals: the Ultra Music Festival and the Winter Music Conference, both of which kick off in March (the two festivals essentially piggyback off of one another).

## Architecture

Like its literature, Florida's architecture has some distinctive home-grown strains. These run from the old – the Spanish-colonial and Revival styles of St Augustine – to the aggressively modern, as in Miami and particularly South Beach.

At the turn of the century, Henry Flagler was instrumental in promoting a particularly Floridian Spanish-Moorish fantasia, which, as historian Michael Gannon writes, combined 'the stately architecture of Rome, the tiled rooftops of Spain, the dreamy beauty of Venice, [and] the tropical casualness of Algiers.' Prime examples are the monumental Hotel Ponce de León in St Augustine (now Flagler College), Whitehall Mansion in Palm Beach (now Flagler Museum) and Miami's awesome George Merrick-designed Coral Gables.

## THE FLORIDA HIGHWAYMEN

Beginning in the 1950s, about two dozen largely self-taught African American painters made a modest living selling vivid, impressionistic 'Florida-scapes' on wood and Masonite for about \$20 a pop. They sold these romantic visions of raw swamps and technicolor sunsets from the trunks of their cars along I-95 and A1A, a practice that eventually gave them their name.

The Highwaymen were mentored and encouraged by AE 'Beanie' Backus, a white artist and teacher in Fort Pierce. Considered the 'dean' of Florida landscape art, Beanie was also largely self-taught, often preferring the rough strokes of a palette knife over a brush. Backus and his contemporaries from the '50s and '60s are also referred to as the Indian River School, a reference to the famous Hudson River School of naturalist landscape painters.

Today, this outsider art is highly revered and collected. To learn more, pick up Gary Monroe's excellent book *The Highwaymen*; visit the **Highwaymen website** ([www.floridahighwaymenpaintings.com](http://www.floridahighwaymenpaintings.com)); and check out the **AE Backus Museum & Gallery** ([www.backusgallery.com](http://www.backusgallery.com)) in Fort Pierce.

Miami Beach got swept up in the art-deco movement in the 1920s and '30s (which Florida transformed into 'tropical deco'), and today it has the largest collection of art-deco buildings in the US. These languished until the mid-1980s, when their rounded corners and glass bricks were dusted off and spruced up with new coats of pastel-pink and aquamarine paint.

Florida's vernacular architecture is the oft-maligned 'Cracker house.' However, these pioneer homesteads were cleverly designed to maximize comfort in a pre-air-conditioning, subtropical climate. Raised off the ground with windows and doors positioned for cross-ventilation, they had extra-wide gables and porches for shade, and metal roofs to reflect the sun. They weren't pretty, but they worked. A great example is Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' home in Cross Creek.

## Painting & Visual Arts

Florida has an affinity for modern art, and modern artists find that Florida allows them to indulge their whims. In 1983 Bulgarian artist Christo 'wrapped' 11 islands in Biscayne Bay in flamingo-colored fabric, so that they floated in the water like giant discarded flowers, dwarfing the urban skyline. Everyone loved it; it was so Miami.

But then so was Spencer Tunick when he posed 140 naked women on hot-pink rafts in the Sagamore hotel pool in 2007, and Roberto Behar and Rosario Marquardt when they plunked salmon-colored *The Living Room* in the Design District. Whatever the reasons, cartoon-hued silly-happy grandeur and exhibitionism seem Miami's calling cards. That certainly applies to Brazilian-born Romero Britto, whose art graces several buildings, such as the Miami Children's Museum. Miami's prominence in the contemporary-art world was cemented in 2002 when the Art Basel festival arrived. Now, without question, Miami's gallery scene is unmatched outside of LA and Manhattan.

Some say Florida's affinity for bright colors started with the Florida Highwaymen and their supersaturated Florida landscapes. Another famous self-taught folk artist was Earl Cunningham, sometimes nicknamed 'Grandpa Moses' for his naive portraits of a bygone Florida world.

And Florida does not lack for high-quality art museums. In addition to Miami, other notable locations are Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, St Petersburg, Tampa, Sarasota, Naples and even Orlando.

### Folk Art & Florida Funkiness

Mennello Museum of American Art, Orlando

Richard Bickel Photography, Apalachicola

Lovegrove Gallery, Matlacha

Fort East Martello Museum & Gardens, Key West

Big Cypress Gallery, Everglades National Park



# Food & Drink

The treasures of the ocean, the citrus-scented whiff of farmland and an immigrant population give Florida serious culinary cred. On the flip side, strip malls, an all-too-American emphasis on reliability over adventure and a bad habit of cloning, rather than creating trends, are all marks against Florida's gastronomic reputation. Where does the truth lie? In the middle. In the meantime, gourmets can genuflect before celebrity chefs, while gourmands hunt Florida's delicacies, such as boiled peanuts, frogs legs and gator.

In Miami, you can find classic Cuban brands that are no longer sold in Cuba itself – such as Hatuey beer, La Llave coffee and Gilda crackers.

## Destination Dining

Florida has a rich culinary heritage, but the state wasn't known as a place for good restaurants until the 1990s, when a wave of gourmet chefs transformed the Miami dining scene. They dedicated themselves to pleasing sophisticated urban palates by spicing up menus with South Florida's unique combination of Cuban, Caribbean and Latin American influences, which came to be dubbed Floribbean cuisine.

Today, Miami remains the epicenter of all things gourmet, and it has the greatest selection of ethnic cuisines. It's a town that is highly susceptible to buzzword-of-the-moment dining trends; at the time of writing, farm-to-table cuisine and an affected focus on rustic simplicity was all the rage.

The ripples of Miami dining have since spread statewide. In big cities and anywhere moneyed tourists and snowbirds land, you will find up-scale restaurants and skilled chefs plying their trade, often in contemporary dining rooms framing ocean views.

North of Miami and Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach and West Palm Beach offer the well-heeled foodie oodles of fun. Key West is, as in all things, more laid-back, but its dining scene is notably stocked with creative-fusion cool, and for a town of its size, it possesses a surfeit of excellent dining options.

The southern Gulf Coast is similarly satisfying: Tampa and St Petersburg are riding the cusp of a culinary renaissance, with everything from Old World Iberian to locavore-inspired modern gastronomy. Skip south through the rich beach towns of Sarasota, Sanibel Island and Naples, and a memorable meal is a reservation away.

As you go north, robust Southern cuisine comes to dominate, and high-end dining favors classic Italian, French and seafood. Though lack-

## FLORIBBEAN CUISINE

OK, somebody worked hard to come up with 'Floribbean' – a term for Florida's tantalizing gourmet mélange of just-caught seafood, tropical fruits and eye-watering peppers, all dressed up with some combination of Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Caribbean, Haitian, Cajun, Cuban and even Southern influences. Some call it 'fusion,' 'Nuevo Latino,' 'New World,' 'nouvelle Floridian' or 'palm-tree cuisine,' and it could refer to anything from a ceviche of lime, conch, sweet peppers and scotch bonnets to grilled grouper with mango, *adobo* and fried plantains.

ing gourmet 'scenes,' great choices are sprinkled in Jacksonville and Tallahassee. Along the Atlantic Coast, Amelia Island and St Augustine are foodie havens, and there's plenty of fresh, upscale seafood in Panhandle resort towns.

In general, Florida offers two kinds of tourism destinations, and in a similar vein, it offers two kinds of eating options. In the more typical beach and tourism towns you'll find family-friendly eateries that emphasize big portions and cheap prices. The more upscale you get, the more rarefied the atmosphere, but with that said, this is always Florida. You'll see people showing up for nice dinners in sandals (almost) everywhere.

## Bounty of the Sea

Florida has always fed itself from the sea, which lies within arm's reach of nearly every point of the state. In a country where oysters are served in the rolling plains of Nebraska, there's no excuse not to have seafood in water-bound Florida. If it swims or crawls in the ocean, you can bet some enterprising local has shelled or scaled it, battered it, dropped it in a fryer and put it on a menu next to two plastic cups of tartar and cocktail sauce.

Grouper is far and away the most popular fish. Grouper sandwiches are to Florida what the cheesesteak is to Philadelphia or pizza to Manhattan – a defining, iconic dish, and the standard by which many places are measured. Hunting the perfect grilled or fried grouper sandwich is an

### South Florida Food Blogs

Jan Norris ([www.jannorris.com](http://www.jannorris.com))

Short Order (<http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/shortorder>)

Meatless Miami ([www.meatlessmiami.com](http://www.meatlessmiami.com))

### FLORIDA SPECIALTIES

From north to south, here's a list of dishes strange and sublime, but 100% Florida; try not to leave without trying them at least once.

**Boiled peanuts** In rural north Florida, they take green or immature peanuts and boil them until they're nice and mushy, sometimes spicing them up with Cajun or other seasonings. Sure, they feel weird in the mouth, but they're surprisingly addictive.

**Tarpon Springs Greek salad** We don't know why, but in Tarpon Springs, Greek restaurants started hiding a dollop of potato salad inside a regulation Greek salad – now you can find this odd combination throughout central Florida.

**Alligator** Alligator tastes like a cross between fish and pork. The meat comes from the tail, and is usually served as deep-fried nuggets, which overwhelms the delicate flavor and can make it chewy. Try it grilled. Most alligator is legally harvested on farms and is often sold in grocery stores. It's also healthier than chicken, with as much protein but half the fat, fewer calories and less cholesterol.

**Frogs legs** Those who know say the 'best' legs come from the Everglades; definitely ask, since you want to avoid imported ones from India, which are smaller and disparaged as 'flavorless.'

**Peel-and-eat shrimp** A decidedly old-school, Old Florida treat, peel-and-eat shrimp are served boiled and pink in their shells. There's an art to ripping off the legs and stripping down the shells to get to the sweet meat underneath, which is inevitably overwhelmed by a nice dunk in cocktail sauce.

**Stone crabs** The first recycled crustacean: only one claw is taken from a stone crab – the rest is tossed back in the sea (the claw regrows in 12 to 18 months, and crabs plucked again are called 'retreads'). The claws are so perishable that they're always cooked before selling. October through April is less a 'season' than a stone-crab frenzy. Joe Weiss of Miami Beach is credited with starting it all.

**Key lime pie** Key limes are yellow, and that's the color of an authentic Key lime pie, which is a custard of Key lime juice, sweetened condensed milk and egg yolks in a cracker crust, then topped with meringue. Avoid any slice that's green or stands ramrod straight.

## Florida Cookbooks

*Cross Creek  
Cookery, Marjorie  
Kinnan Rawlings*

*New World Cuisine,  
Allen Susser*

*Miami Spice:  
The New Florida  
Cuisine, Steve  
Raichlen*

*The Florida  
Cookbook: From  
Gulf Coast Gumbo  
to Key Lime Pie,  
Jeanne Voltz and  
Caroline Stuart*

*Florida Bounty,  
Eric and Sandra  
Jacobs*

obsessive Floridian quest (by the way, the issue of fried versus grilled has been known to provoke fights. Well, not really, but it could), as is finding the creamiest bowl of chowder.

Of course, a huge range of other fish are offered. Other popular species include snapper (with dozens of varieties), mahimahi (which is sometimes labeled as dolphin, to the hilarious consternation of many a tourist) and catfish.

Florida really shines when it comes to crustaceans: try pink shrimp and rock shrimp, and don't miss soft-shell blue crab – Florida is well known for her blue-crab hatcheries, making them available fresh year-round. Locals will boil their crabs, as is common across the American South, but a plethora of Northeastern transplants means crabs are also steamed. Try them side by side and determine which method you like best.

Winter (October to April) is the season for Florida spiny lobster and stone crab (out of season both will be frozen). Florida lobster is all tail, without the large claws of its Maine cousin, and stone crab is heavenly sweet, served steamed with butter or the ubiquitous mustard sauce. Usually, only the stone-crab claw is served; the arms are ripped off the poor creatures and then they're tossed back into the water, where the arm is re-grown and the whole process kicks off again the next year. We know this could be read as a sad metaphor for the futility of our mortal condition, but that claw meat really is good.

Finally, the Keys popularized conch (a giant sea snail); now fished out, most conch is from the Bahamas. It has a slightly rubbery texture and a lovely, savory flavor. From July to September, Steinhatchee is the place for fresh scallops, and in fall/winter, Apalachicola Bay produces 90% of Florida's small but flavorful oysters.

## Cuban & Latin American Cuisine

Cuban food, once considered 'exotic,' is itself a mix of Caribbean, African and Latin American influences, and in Tampa and Miami, it's a staple of everyday life. Side up to a Cuban *loncheria* (snack bar) and order a *pan cubano*: a buttered, grilled baguette stuffed with ham, roast pork, cheese, mustard and pickles.

Integral to many Cuban dishes are *mojo* (a garlicky vinaigrette, sprinkled on sandwiches), *adobo* (a meat marinade of garlic, salt, cumin, oregano and sour orange juice) and *sofrito* (a stew-starter mix of garlic, onion and chili peppers). Cuban food may seem foreign and strange, but it's actually quite accessible to even the most conservative palette; this is basically meat-and-starch cuisine, with an emphasis on huge portions. Main-course meats are typically accompanied by rice and beans and fried plantains.

With its large number of Central and Latin American immigrants, the Miami area offers plenty of authentic ethnic eateries. Seek out Haitian *griot* (marinated fried pork), Jamaican jerk chicken, Brazilian barbecue, Central American *gallo pinto* (red beans and rice) and Nicaraguan *tres leches* ('three milks' cake).

In the morning, try a Cuban coffee, also known as *café cubano* or *cortadito*. This hot shot of liquid gold is essentially sweetened espresso, while *café con leche* is just *café au lait* with a different accent: equal parts coffee and hot milk.

Another Cuban treat is *guarapo*, or fresh-squeezed sugarcane juice. Cuban snack bars serve the greenish liquid straight or poured over crushed ice, and it's essential to an authentic *mojito*. It also sometimes finds its way into *batidos*, a milky, refreshing Latin American fruit smoothie.

## Southern Cooking

The further north you travel, the more Southern the cooking gets in Florida. This is the sort of cuisine that makes up in fat what it may lack in refinement. 'Meat and three' is Southern restaurant lingo for a main meat – such as fried chicken, catfish, barbecued ribs, chicken-fried steak or even chitlins (hog's intestines) – and three sides: perhaps some combination of hush puppies, cheese grits (a sort of cornmeal polenta), cornbread, coleslaw, mashed potatoes, black-eyed peas, collard greens or buttery corn. End with pecan pie, and that's living. Po' boys are merely Southern hoagies, usually filled with fried nuggets of goodness.

Cracker cooking is Florida's rough-and-tumble variation on Southern cuisine, but with more reptiles and amphibians. And you'll find a good deal of Cajun and Creole as well, which mix in spicy gumbos and bisques from Louisiana's neighboring swamps. These days, Southern food isn't confined to North Florida. Fancy variations on the theme – haute Southern, if you will – are all the rage from Jacksonville to Key West.

Southern Floridian cooking is epitomized by writer Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' famous cookbook *Cross Creek Cookery*. Near Rawlings' former home, the Yearling Restaurant (p366) is a good place to try Southern Floridian (ie North Florida) food.

Iced tea is so ubiquitous it's called the 'wine of the South,' but watch out for 'sweet tea,' which is an almost entirely different Southern drink – tea so sugary your eyes will cross. You may want to specify that your tea come unsweetened if you don't fancy a trip to the dentist.

If you love farmers' markets, visit the website of the Florida Dept of Agriculture ([www.florida-agriculture.com](http://www.florida-agriculture.com)), which has listings for farmers' markets across the state.

### SUNSHINE STATE FOOD FESTIVALS

Many of Florida's food festivals have the tumultuous air of county fairs, with carnival rides, music, parades, beauty pageants and any number of wacky, only-in-Florida happenings.

*Food Fest!* by Joan Steinbacher is the definitive guide; her companion website ([www.foodfestguide.com](http://www.foodfestguide.com)) lists festivals for the coming three months.

**Everglades Seafood Festival** ([www.evergladesseafoodfestival.com](http://www.evergladesseafoodfestival.com)) Everglades City; three-day weekend, early February. Not just seafood, but gator, frogs legs and snakes, oh my!

**Swamp Cabbage Festival** ([www.swampcabbagefestival.org](http://www.swampcabbagefestival.org)) LaBelle; three-day weekend, late February. Armadillo races and crowning of the Miss Swamp Cabbage Queen.

**Grant Seafood Festival** ([www.grantseafoodfestival.com](http://www.grantseafoodfestival.com)) Grant; two-day weekend, early March. This small Space Coast town throws one of Florida's biggest seafood parties.

**Florida Strawberry Festival** ([www.flstrawberryfestival.com](http://www.flstrawberryfestival.com)) Plant City; 11 days, early March. Since 1930, more than half a million folks come annually to pluck, eat and honor the mighty berry.

**Carnaval Miami** ([www.carnaval-miami.org](http://www.carnaval-miami.org)) Miami; two weeks, early March. Negotiate drag queens and in-line skaters to reach the Cuban Calle Ocho food booths.

**Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival** ([www.shrimpfestival.com](http://www.shrimpfestival.com)) Amelia Island; three-day weekend, early May. Avast, you scurvy dog! Pirates invade for shrimp and a juried art show.

**Palatka Blue Crab Festival** ([www.bluecrabfestival.com](http://www.bluecrabfestival.com)) Palatka; four-day Memorial Day weekend. Hosts the state championship for chowder and gumbo. Yes, it's that good.

**Florida Seafood Festival** ([www.floridaseafoodfestival.com](http://www.floridaseafoodfestival.com)) Apalachicola; two days, early November. Stand way, way back at its signature oyster-shucking and -eating contests.

**Ribfest** ([www.ribfest.org](http://www.ribfest.org)) St Petersburg; three days, mid-November. Three words: ribs, rock, Harleys.

Edible Communities ([www.ediblecommunities.com](http://www.ediblecommunities.com)) is a regional magazine series that celebrates and supports local, sustainable farming, culinary artisans and seasonal produce.

It publishes editions (print and online) for Orlando and South Florida.

Coinciding with modern refrigeration, frozen concentrated orange juice was invented in Florida in 1946: this popularized orange juice as a year-round drink and created a generation of 'orange millionaires.'

## From Farm (& Grove) to Table

Florida has worked long and hard to become an agricultural powerhouse, and it's famous for its citrus. The state is the nation's largest producer of oranges, grapefruits, tangerines and limes, not to mention mangoes and sugarcane. Scads of bananas, strawberries, coconuts, avocados (once called 'alligator pears'), and the gamut of tropical fruits and vegetables are also grown in Florida. The major agricultural region is around Lake Okeechobee, with field upon field and grove upon grove as far as the eye can see.

With the advent of the USA's locavore, farm-to-table movement, Florida started featuring vegetables in its cooking and promoting its freshness on the plate. Florida's regional highlights – its Southern and Latin American cuisines – do not usually emphasize greens or vegetarianism. But today, most restaurants with upscale or gourmet pretensions promote the local sources of their produce and offer appealing choices for vegetarians.

That said, old habits die hard. The further you get outside of places such as Miami, Orlando, Sanibel, Fort Lauderdale, St Petersburg and college towns, the fewer the dedicated vegetarian restaurants. In many rural areas and in parts of North Florida, vegetarians can be forced to choose among iceberg-lettuce salads and pastas.

One indigenous local delicacy is heart of palm, or 'swamp cabbage,' which has a delicate, sweet crunch. The heart of the sabal palm, Florida's state tree, it was a mainstay for Florida pioneers. Try it if you can find it served fresh (don't bother if it's canned; it won't be from Florida).

## Libations

Is it the heat or the humidity? With the exception of the occasional teetotaling dry town, Florida's embrace of liquor is prodigious, even epic. And as you ponder this legacy – from Prohibition-era rumrunners, spring-break hedonists and drive-through liquor stores to Ernest Hemingway and Jimmy Buffett – it can seem that quantity trumps quality most of the time.

Yet as with Florida's cuisine, so with its bars. Surely, Anheuser-Busch's Jacksonville brewery will never go out of business, but Tampa also boasts several handcrafted local microbreweries. Daytona's beaches may be littered with gallon-size hurricane glasses, but Miami mixologists hone their reputations with their designer takes on martinis and *mojitos*.

Indeed, Cuban bartenders became celebrities in the 1920s for what they did with all that sugarcane and citrus: the two classics are the *Cuba libre* (rum, lime and cola) and the *mojito* (rum, sugar, mint, lime and club soda), traditionally served with *chicharrones* (deep-fried pork rinds).

As for Hemingway, he favored piña coladas, lots of them. Jimmy Buffett memorialized the margarita – so that now every sweaty beach bar along the peninsula claims to make the 'best.' Welcome, good friends, to Margaritaville.

# Outdoor Activities

Florida doesn't have mountains, valleys, cliffs, or snow. What does she have? Water, and lots of it – freshwater, saltwater, rainwater, springwater, swamp water. Florida's peninsula bends with more than 1200 miles of coastline, which include more than 660 miles of the best beaches in the US. Plus: coral reefs, prehistoric swamps and forests, all teeming with Ice Age flora and dinosaur-era fauna. In short, Florida doesn't have everything, but her surreal, watery landscape still provides one of the greatest shows on Earth.

## Hiking & Camping

One thing Florida hikers never have to worry about is elevation gain. But the weather more than makes up for it. If your destination is South Florida, it's best to hike and camp from November through March. This is Florida's 'dry season,' when rain, temperatures, humidity and mosquitoes decrease to tolerable levels. In summer, hike before noon to avoid the midday heat and afternoon thundershowers.

The **Florida National Scenic Trail** ([www.fs.usda.gov/fnst](http://www.fs.usda.gov/fnst)) is one of 11 national scenic trails and covers 1400 not-yet-contiguous miles. It runs north from the swamps of Big Cypress National Preserve; around Lake Okeechobee; through the Ocala National Forest; and then west to the Gulf Islands National Seashore near Pensacola. All the parks above are filled with great hikes.

Other prime hiking areas include the remote pine wilderness, karst terrain and limestone sinkholes of Apalachicola National Forest and Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park. Wekiwa Springs State Park rewards hikers, paddlers and snorkelers.

South Florida swamps tend to favor 1- to 2-mile boardwalk trails; these are excellent, and almost always wheelchair accessible. But to really explore the wetlands, get in a kayak or canoe. In the Everglades, you can also embark on 'wet walks,' which are wading trips deep into the black-water heart of the swamps. It may seem like folly to tread through the same waters that alligators and crocodiles prowl, but wet walks have been conducted unabated for well over a decade.

Prized camping spots include the shady riverside at Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park; the Ocala National Forest; the Panhandle's

### Great Hiking & Camping Guides

*30 Eco-Trips in Florida (2005), Holly Ambrose*

*Hiker's Guide to the Sunshine State (2005), Sandra Friend*

*The Best in Tent Camping: Florida (2010), John Malloy*

### TREAD LIGHTLY, EXPLORE SAFELY

These days, it should go without saying that any wilderness, even a swamp, is a fragile place. Practicing 'Leave No Trace' ethics (see [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org) for comprehensive advice) boils down to staying on the trail, cleaning up your own mess, and observing nature rather than plucking or feeding it.

As you enjoy Florida's natural bounty, take care of yourself, too. Carry lots of water – up to a gallon per person per day – and always be prepared for rain. Line backpacks with plastic bags, and carry rain gear and extra clothes for when (not if) you get soaked. Reid Tillery's *Surviving the Wilds of Florida* is a helpful guide, while Tillery's website **Florida Adventuring** ([www.floridaadventuring.com](http://www.floridaadventuring.com)) covers backcountry essentials.

A great all-in-one paddling guide – with everything from the state's best water trails to nitty-gritty advice about weather, equipment and supplies – is *Paddler's Guide to the Sunshine State* (2001) by Sandy Huff.

St Joseph State Park; Myakka River State Park; the 'chickees' (raised platforms) that dot the waterways of the Everglades and the 10,000 Islands; and in the Florida Keys, Bahia Honda State Park.

Just be warned: mosquitoes are an unavoidable reality, especially during the spring and summer months. Sunscreen is a must when hiking in Florida, but a good bug repellent (and insect-proof clothes) comes a close second.

## Swimming & Springs

Florida's beaches are the best in the continental United States, and incredibly diverse, so let's start with two questions: Do you prefer sunrise or sunset? Do you prefer surfing and boogie boarding or sunbathing and sandcastles? For sunrise and surfing, hit the bigger, east-facing waves of the Atlantic Coast; for sandcastles at sunset, choose the soporific, west-facing waters of the Gulf Coast and the Panhandle.

Would you prefer if we get a little more nuanced with our sand and surf judgment? Fair enough. There are a few other elements of beach-going we can certainly address: namely, the 'beach as casual escape' versus 'family destination' versus 'spring-break boozefest' versus 'sexy spot to show off your fashion sense and spot celebrities.' If you're into the last of those iterations of beach, head for Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami Beach. These are the spots where you'll see the stars and models decked out in swimwear. Those searching for a casual beach escape or a trip for the family may be better served by the tepid, calm waters of the Gulf; Sanibel Island, off the coast of Fort Myers, may have the most family-friendly beaches in the state. You'll also feel less pressure to look stunning in your skivvies compared to Southeast Florida and Miami. If you're into straight-up partying and a spring-break atmosphere, set your compass to Panama City and Daytona Beach, and kiss your liver goodbye. Fair warning: while the Florida Keys seem like they would possess excellent swaths of sand, they are in fact mangrove islands with few natural beaches to speak of (larger private resorts do tend to create their own artificial beaches).

Beyond that, your main concern is how close to or far from other people you want to be. Even in the most hyper-developed condo canyons of South Florida, it is possible to find state and local parks that provide a

### GET YOUR BOARD ON

Eleven-time world-champion surfer Kelly Slater is from Cocoa Beach, and four-time women's champion Lisa Anderson is from Ormond Beach. Both first learned how to carve in Space Coast waves, in the shadow of rockets, and Slater honed his aerials at Sebastian Inlet.

All of which is to say that while Florida's surf may be considered 'small' by Californian and Hawaiian standards, Florida's surfing community and history are not. Plus, Florida makes up in wave quantity what it may lack in wave size.

Nearly the entire Atlantic Coast has rideable waves, but the best spots are gathered along the Space Coast, which has surf lessons, rentals and popular competitions: shoot for Cocoa Beach, Indian Lant, Sebastian Inlet and Playalinda Beach. However, you'll find tiny, longboard-friendly peelers from Fort Lauderdale down to Miami's South Beach, although the presence of the Bahamas offshore prevents Miami from being a truly great surfing destination. In general, you'll find the big waves end at around Jupiter Beach.

Florida's northern Atlantic Coast is less attractive, partly due to chilly winter water, but consistent, 2ft to 3ft surf can be had at Daytona Beach; from Flagler Beach up to St Augustine; and around Amelia Island.

relative degree of natural isolation. With few exceptions, Florida's beaches are safe places to swim; the most dangerous surf will occur just before and after a storm. Also, stingrays in summer and occasional jellyfish can trouble swimmers (look for lifeguard-posted warnings).

Don't overlook Florida's lakes, rivers and springs. Taking a dip in one of Florida's 700 freshwater springs – each 72°F (22°C) and, when healthy, clear as glass – is unforgettable. There are too many to list, but good swimming destinations are the Suwannee River, the Ichetucknee River and Ponce de Leon Springs State Park.

## Canoeing & Kayaking

To really experience Florida's swamps and rivers, its estuaries and inlets, its lagoons and barrier islands, you need a watercraft, preferably the kind you paddle. The intimate quiet of dipping among mangroves, cruising alligators and startled ibis stirs wonder in the soul.

The winter 'dry' season is best for paddling. That's because 'dry' in Florida is still pretty darn wet. So why come during the dry season? Because evaporation and receding waterlines force wildlife into highly visible concentrations amid the state's waterways and pools. In summer, canoe near cool, freshwater springs and swimming beaches, because you'll be dreaming about them.

In terms of rivers, the 207-mile Suwannee River is quintessential Florida: a meandering, muddy ribbon (ideal for multiday trips) decorated with 60 clear blue springs that runs from Georgia's Okefenokee Swamp to the Gulf of Mexico. About 170 miles are an official **wilderness trail** ([www.floridastateparks.org/wilderness](http://www.floridastateparks.org/wilderness)), and the section near Big Shoals State Park actually has some Class III rapids – woo-hoo!

Other unforgettable rivers include: the Atlantic Coast's 'Wild and Scenic' Loxahatchee River; Orlando's 'Wild and Scenic' Wekiva River; and the Tampa region's placid Hillsborough River and the alligator-packed Myakka River.

You'll tell your grandchildren about kayaking Everglades National Park; Hell's Bay paddling trail is heavenly. The nearby 10,000 Islands are just as amazing, and nothing beats sleeping in the Everglades in a 'chickee' (a wooden platform raised above the waterline). A truly great Florida adventure – indeed, one of the most unique wilderness experiences in North America – is paddling through the mangrove ecosystem that fringes the entirety of the southern Florida coast.

And don't forget the coasts. You'll kick yourself if you don't kayak Miami's Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park; Tampa Bay's Caladesi Island; Sanibel Island's JN 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge; and the Big Bend's Cedar Key. There's even an entire 'blueway' – a collection of charted streams and rivers – within Lee County in southwest Florida.

On Florida's Atlantic Coast, more mangroves, water birds, dolphins and manatees await at Canaveral National Seashore, particularly Mosquito Lagoon, and also seek out Indian River Lagoon. Big and Little Talbot Islands provide more intercoastal magic.

## Diving & Snorkeling

For diving and snorkeling, most already know about Florida's superlative coral reefs and wreck diving, but northern Florida is also known as the 'Cave Diving Capital of the US.' The peninsula's limestone has more holes than Swiss cheese, and most are burbling goblets of diamond-clear (if chilly) water.

Many diving spots line the Suwannee River: try **Peacock Springs State Park** ([www.floridastateparks.org/peacocksprings](http://www.floridastateparks.org/peacocksprings)), one of the continent's largest underwater cave systems; **Troy Springs State Park** ([www.floridastateparks.org/troyspring](http://www.floridastateparks.org/troyspring)); and Manatee Springs State Park. Another



## LIFE'S A BEACH

Florida's best beach? Why not ask us to choose a favorite child? It's impossible! Each beach has its own personality, its own wondrous qualities. But visitors do have to make decisions. For the best beaches by coastline, see below. For a list based on 'science,' consult Dr Beach ([www.drbeach.org](http://www.drbeach.org)).

### Best Gulf Coast Beaches

- ➔ Siesta Key Beach (p403)
- ➔ Fort DeSoto Park (p389)
- ➔ Honeymoon Island State Park (p394)
- ➔ Sanibel Island (p417)
- ➔ Naples Municipal Beach (p421)
- ➔ Fort Myers Beach (p415)

### Best Atlantic Coast Beaches

- ➔ Apollo Beach (p314)
- ➔ Bahia Honda State Park (p168)
- ➔ Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park (p83)
- ➔ Fort Lauderdale (p189)
- ➔ Lake Worth Beach (p204)
- ➔ Hutchinson Island (p223)
- ➔ Vero Beach (p322)

### Best Panhandle Beaches

- ➔ Grayton Beach State Park (p441)
- ➔ St George Island State Park (p450)
- ➔ Pensacola Beach (p428)

fun dive is Blue Spring State Park, near Orlando. Note that you need to be cavern certified to dive a spring (an open-water certification won't do), and solo diving is usually not allowed. But local dive shops can help with both. One place that offers certification courses is Vortex Spring.

Every Florida spring has prime snorkeling. At times, the clarity of the water is disconcerting, as if you were floating on air; every creature and school of fish all the way to the bottom feels just out of reach, so that, as William Bartram once wrote, 'the trout swims by the very nose of the alligator and laughs in his face.'

If you prefer coral reefs teeming with rainbow-bright tropical fish, you're in luck...Florida has the continent's largest coral-reef system. The two best spots are John Pennkamp Coral Reef State Park, located in Key Largo (the uppermost of the Florida Keys) and Biscayne National Park, located south of Miami, at the tip of the Florida mainland. Biscayne is actually the only national park in the US park service system to exist primarily under the waves - 95% of the park is located underwater. If you travel further along the Keys, you won't be disappointed at Bahia Honda State Park or Key West.

Wreck diving in Florida is equally epic, and some are even accessible to snorkelers. So many Spanish galleons sank off the Emerald Coast, near Panama City Beach, that it's dubbed the 'Wreck Capital of the South.' But also check out wreck dives in Pensacola, Sebastian Inlet State Park, Troy Springs, Fort Lauderdale, Biscayne National Park and Key West, a town

that historically supported itself off the industry of wrecking, or salvaging sunken ships and their cargo.

Named for its abundant sea turtles, the Dry Tortugas are well worth the effort to reach them.

## Biking

Florida is too flat for mountain biking, but there are plenty of off-road opportunities, along with hundreds of miles of paved trails for those who prefer to keep their ride clean. As with hiking, avoid biking in summer, unless you like getting hot and sweaty.

Top off-riding spots include **Big Shoals State Park** ([www.floridastateparks.org/bigshoals](http://www.floridastateparks.org/bigshoals)), with 25 miles of trails along the Suwannee River, and Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, with 20 miles of trails through its bizarre landscape. Also recommended are the Ocala National Forest and the Apalachicola National Forest, particularly the sandy Munson Hills Loop.

With so many paved biking trails, it's hard to choose. To dip among the Panhandle's sugar-sand beaches, take the 19-mile Timpanoochee Trail, which parallels Hwy 30A. In Tallahassee, the 16-mile Tallahassee-St Marks Historic Railroad State Trail shoots you right to the Gulf. Both paved and off-road trails encircle Lake Okeechobee, which is a great way to take in the surrounding countryside. Two of the most unforgettable paved trails? Palm Beach's Lake Trail, aka the 'Trail of Conspicuous Consumption' for all the mansions and yachts, and the 15-mile Shark Valley Tram Road Trail, which pierces the Everglades' gator-infested sawgrass river.

For more-involved overland adventures, do the Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail, which mirrors the Keys Hwy for 70 noncontiguous miles, and the urban-and-coastal Pinellas Trail, which runs 43 miles from St Petersburg to Tarpon Springs.

In Florida's many beach towns, it's easy to find beach-cruiser-style bicycle rentals. These heavy-duty vehicles are made for lazy cycling along flat boardwalks – a perfect casual exercise for travelers who may be a little out of shape.

## Fishing

The world may contain seven seas, but there's only one Fishing Capital of the World: Florida. No, this isn't typically overwrought Floridian hype. Fishing here is the best the US offers, and for variety and abundance, nowhere else on the globe can claim an indisputable advantage.

In Florida's abundant rivers and lakes, largemouth bass are the main prize. Prime spots, with good access and facilities, are **Lake Manatee State Park** ([www.floridastateparks.org/lakemanatee](http://www.floridastateparks.org/lakemanatee)), south of St Petersburg; for fly-fishing, Myakka River State Park; and **Jacksonville** ([www.jacksonvillefishing.com](http://www.jacksonvillefishing.com)), which has charters to the St Johns River and Lake George for freshwater fishing and to the bay for ocean fishing, plus kayak fishing.

Near-shore saltwater fishing means redfish and mighty tarpon, snook, spotted sea trout and much more, up and down both coasts. The jetties at Sebastian Inlet are a mecca for shore anglers on the Atlantic Coast, while on the Gulf, Tampa's Skyway Fishing Pier is dubbed the world's longest fishing pier.

In the Keys, Bahia Honda and Old Seven Mile Bridge on Pigeon Key are other shore-fishing highlights.

However, as 'Papa' Hemingway would tell you, the real fishing is off-shore, where majestic sailfish leap and thrash. Bluefish and mahimahi are other popular deep-water fish. For offshore charters, head for Stuart, Fort Lauderdale, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, Destin, Steinhatchee and

## Wildlife-Watching Resources

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission ([www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com))

Audubon of Florida ([www.audubonofflorida.org](http://www.audubonofflorida.org))

Great Florida Birding Trail ([www.floridabirdingtrail.com](http://www.floridabirdingtrail.com))

Florida Wildlife Viewing ([www.floridawildlifeviewing.com](http://www.floridawildlifeviewing.com))

Florida mystery writer Randy Wayne White has created an angler's delight with his *Ultimate Tarpon Book* (2010), a celebration of Florida's legendary big-game fish, with 'contributions' from Hemingway, Teddy Roosevelt, Zane Grey and others.

Theme parks have most of Florida's adrenaline-pumping thrill rides. Then there's DeLand, where the tandem jump was invented and which today remains an epicenter of skydiving. Get jumping at [www.skydivedeland.com](http://www.skydivedeland.com).

Miami. The best strategy is to walk the harborside, talking with captains, until you find one who speaks to your experience and interests.

Note that you usually need a license to fish, and there are a slew of regulations about what you can catch.

## Sailing

If you like the wind in your sails, Florida is your place. Miami is a sailing sweet spot, with plenty of marinas for renting or berthing your own boat – Key Biscayne is a particular gem. Fort Lauderdale is chock-full of boating options. In Key West, you can sail on a schooner with real cannons, though tour operators are plentiful throughout the Keys. To learn how to sail, check out Pensacola's Lanier Sailing Academy.

## Golf

Fun fact: With more than 1250 courses (and counting), Florida has the most golf courses of any US state. Whether or not this is related to Florida's high number of wealthy retirees isn't known, but one thing is certain, if you want to tee up, you won't have to look far.

Towns that are notable for golf include Palm Beach, Naples, Fort Myers, Orlando, Jacksonville, Miami and St Augustine. Near St Augustine is the World Golf Hall of Fame.

For a comprehensive list of Florida courses, see **Florida Golf** ([www.fgolf.com](http://www.fgolf.com)).

# Landscapes & Wildlife

Naturalist Marjory Stoneman Douglas called Florida 'a long pointed spoon' that is as 'familiar as the map of North America itself.' On that map, the shapely Floridian peninsula represents one of the most ecologically diverse regions in the world. Eons ago, a limestone landmass settled just north of the Tropic of Cancer. A confluence of porous rock and climate gave rise to a watery world of uncommon abundance – one that could be undone by humanity in a geological eye blink.

## The Land

Florida is many things, but elevated it is decidedly not. This state is as flat as a pancake, or as Douglas says, like a spoon of freshwater resting delicately in a bowl of saltwater – a spongy brick of limestone hugged by the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The highest point, the Panhandle's Britton Hill, has to stretch to reach 350ft, which isn't half as tall as the buildings of downtown Miami. This makes Florida officially the nation's flattest state, despite being 22nd in total area with 58,560 sq miles.

However, over 4000 of those square miles are water; lakes and springs pepper the map like bullet holes in a road sign. That shotgun-sized hole in the south is Lake Okeechobee, the second-largest freshwater lake in North America. Sounds impressive, but the bottom of the lake is only a few feet above sea level, and it's so shallow you can practically wade across.

Every year Lake Okeechobee ever so gently floods the southern tip of the peninsula. Or it wants to; canals divert much of the flow to either irrigation fields or Florida's bracketing major bodies of water – ie the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. But were the water to follow the natural lay of the land, it would flow down: from its center, the state of Florida inclines about 6in every 6 miles until finally, the peninsula can't keep its head above water anymore. What was an unelevated plane peters out into the 10,000 Islands and the Florida Keys, which end with a flourish in the Gulf of Mexico. Key West, the last in the chain, is the southernmost point in the continental United States.

Incidentally, when the waters of Okeechobee *do* flood the South Florida plane, they interact with the local grasslands and limestone to create a wilderness unlike any other: the Everglades. They also fill up the freshwater aquifers that are required for maintaining human existence in the ever-urbanizing Miami area. Today, numerous plans, which seem to fall prey to private interest and bureaucratic roadblocks, are being discussed for restoring the original flow of water from Central to South Florida, an act that would revitalize the 'Glades and, to some degree, address the water supply needs of Greater Miami.

What really sets Florida apart, though, is that it occupies a subtropical transition zone between northern temperate and southern tropical climates. This is key to the coast's florid coral-reef system, the largest in North America, and the key to Florida's attention-getting collection of surreal swamps, botanical oddities and monstrous critters. The

### Great Nature Guides

*'The Living Gulf Coast' (2011) by Charles Sobczak*

*'Priceless Florida' (2004) by Ellie Whitney, D Bruce Means & Anne Rudloe*

*'Seashore Plants of South Florida & the Caribbean' (1994) by David W Nellis*

## FLORIDA'S MANATEES

It's hard to believe Florida's West Indian manatees were ever mistaken for mermaids, but it's easy to see their attraction: these gentle, curious, colossal mammals are as sweetly lovable as 10ft, 1000lb teddy bears. Solitary and playful, they have been known to 'surf' waves, and every winter, from November to March, they migrate into the warmer waters of Florida's freshwater estuaries, rivers and springs. Like humans, manatees will die if trapped in 62°F (17°C) water for 24 hours, and in winter Florida's eternally 72°F (22°C) springs are balmy spas.

Florida residents for over 45 million years, these shy herbivores have absolutely no defenses except their size (they can reach 13ft and 3000lb), and they don't do much, spending most of each day resting and eating the equivalent of 10% of their body weight. Rarely moving faster than a languid saunter, manatees even reproduce slowly; females birth one calf every two to five years. The exception to their docility? Mating. Males are notorious for their aggressive sex drive.

Florida's manatees have been under some form of protection since 1893, and they were included in the first federal endangered-species list in 1967. Manatees were once hunted for their meat, but today collisions with boats are a leading cause of manatee death, accounting for over 20% annually. Propeller scars are so ubiquitous among the living they are the chief identifying tool of scientists.

Population counts are notoriously difficult and unreliable. In 2013 a bloom of red tide algae in Southwest Florida and illnesses caused the death of over 800 manatees – a whopping 16% of the total population of these gentle giants. At the time of writing there were at least 4800 manatees left in the state.

Everglades gets the most press and as an International Biosphere, World Heritage Site and National Park, this 'river of grass' deserves it.

But while the Everglades are gorgeous, there is far more waiting to be discovered. The Keys are dollops of intensely beautiful mangrove forest biomes. The white-sand beaches of the Gulf Coast have been gently lapped over geological millennia into wide ribbons of sugar studded with prehistoric shells. The Panhandle's Apalachicola River basin has been called a 'Garden of Eden,' in which Ice Age plants survive in lost ravines and where more species of amphibians and reptiles hop and slither than anywhere else in the US. The Indian River Lagoon estuary, stretching 156 miles along the Atlantic Coast, is the most diverse on the continent. And across North Florida, the pockmarked and honeycombed limestone (called karst terrain) holds the Florida Aquifer, which is fed solely by rain and bubbles up like liquid diamonds in more than 700 freshwater springs.

## Wildlife

With swamps full of gators, rivers full of snakes, manatees in mangroves, sea turtles on beaches, and giant flocks of seabirds taking wing at once, how is it, again, that a squeaky-voiced mouse became Florida's headliner?

## Birds

Nearly 500 avian species have been documented in the state, including some of the world's most magnificent migratory waterbirds: ibis, egrets, great blue herons, white pelicans and whooping cranes. This makes Florida the ultimate bird-watcher's paradise.

Nearly 350 species spend time in the Everglades, the prime bird-watching spot in Florida. But you don't have to brave the swamp. Completed in 2006, the **Great Florida Birding Trail** ([www.floridabirdingtrail.com](http://www.floridabirdingtrail.com)) runs 2000 miles and includes nearly 500 bird-watching sites. Nine of these are 'gate-

To learn about the incredible efforts to save the whooping crane, visit Operation Migration ([www.operationmigration.org](http://www.operationmigration.org)), a nonprofit organisation run by Bill Lishman, whose techniques inspired the film *Fly Away Home*. Another resource is [www.bring-backthecranes.org](http://www.bring-backthecranes.org).

way' sites, with staffed visitor centers and free 'loan' binoculars; see the website for downloadable guides and look for brown road signs when driving.

Among the largest birds, white pelicans arrive in winter (October to April), while brown pelicans, the only pelican to dive for its food, lives here year-round. To see the striking pale-pink roseate spoonbill, a member of the ibis family, visit JN 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge, the wintering site for a third of the US roseate spoonbill population.

About 5000 nonmigratory sandhill cranes are joined by 25,000 migratory cousins each winter. White whooping cranes, which at up to 5ft tall are the tallest bird in North America, are nearly extinct; about 100 winter on Florida's Gulf Coast near Homosassa.

Songbirds and raptors fill Florida skies, too. The state has more than 1000 mated pairs of bald eagles, the most in the southern US. Peregrine falcons, which can dive up to 150mph, also migrate through in spring and fall.

Back in the day, birds were both legally hunted and poached for their gorgeous feathers, which were molded, shaped and accessorized into fashion accoutrements. Miami-based journalist and Everglades advocate Marjory Stoneman Douglas wrote about this practice and the subsequent loss of avian life, a move which laid the foundation for both wilderness protection and wildlife conservation in the state.

## Land Mammals

Florida's most endangered mammal is the Florida panther. Before European contact, perhaps 1500 roamed the state. The first panther bounty (\$5 a scalp) was passed in 1832, and over the next 130 years they were hunted relentlessly. Though hunting was stopped in 1958, it was too late for panthers to survive on their own. Without a captive breeding program, begun in 1991, the Florida panther would now be extinct and with only around 120 known to exist, they're not out of the swamp yet. The biggest killers of panthers are motor vehicles. Every year a handful – sometimes more – of panthers are killed on roads; pay particular attention to speed limits posted in areas such as the Tamiami Trail, which cuts through Everglades National Park and the Big Cypress Preserve.

You're not likely to see a panther, but black bears have recovered to a population of around 3000. As their forests diminish, bears are occasionally seen traipsing through suburbs in northern Florida.

Easy to find, white-tailed deer are a common species that troubles landscaping. Endemic to the Keys are Key deer, a Honey-I-Shrunk-the-Ungulate subspecies. Less than 3ft tall and lighter than a 10-year-old boy, they live mostly on Big Pine Key.

Although they are ostensibly native to the American West, the adaptable coyote has been spotted across Florida, appearing as far south as the Florida Keys. Hopefully they won't swim too much further or else they'll end up on Big Pine Key, home of the aforementioned Key deer.

The critically endangered red wolf once roamed the bottomlands, marshes and flooded forests of the American eastern seaboard, particularly the southeast. Due to hunting and habitat loss the red wolf was almost wiped out, but a breeding population has been established at the St Vincent National Wildlife Refuge, located off the coast of the Panhandle.

## Marine Mammals

Florida's coastal waters are home to 21 species of dolphins and whales. By far the most common is the bottlenose dolphin, which is highly social, extremely intelligent and frequently encountered around the entire peninsula. Bottlenose dolphins are also the species most often seen in captivity.

Audubon of Florida ([www.audubonofflorida.org](http://www.audubonofflorida.org)) is perhaps Florida's leading conservation organization. It has tons of birding and ecological information, and it publishes *Florida Naturalist* magazine.

The North Atlantic population of about 300 right whales comes to winter calving grounds off the Atlantic Coast near Jacksonville. These giant animals can be over 50ft long and are the most endangered species of whale.

Winter is also the season for manatees, which seek out Florida's warm-water springs and power-plant discharge canals, beginning in November. These lovable, lumbering creatures are another iconic Florida species whose conservation both galvanizes and divides state residents.

### Reptiles & Amphibians

Boasting an estimated 184 species, Florida has the nation's largest collection of reptiles and amphibians and, unfortunately, it's growing. No, we're not anti-reptile, but invasive scaly species are wreaking havoc with Florida's native, delicate ecosystem. Uninvited guests arrive regularly, many establishing themselves after being released by pet owners. Some of the more dangerous, problematic and invasive species include Burmese pythons, black and green iguanas and Nile monitor lizards.

The American alligator is Florida's poster species, and they are ubiquitous in Central and South Florida. They don't pose much of a threat to humans unless you do something irredeemably stupid, like feed or provoke them. With that said, you may want to keep small children and pets away from unfamiliar inland bodies of water. South Florida is also home to the only North American population of American crocodile. Florida's crocs number around 1500; they prefer saltwater, and to distinguish them from gators, check their smile – a croc's snout is more tapered and its teeth stick out.

Turtles, frogs and snakes love Florida, and nothing is cuter than watching bright skinks, lizards and anoles skittering over porches and sidewalks. Cute doesn't always describe the state's 44 species of snakes – though Floridian promoters emphasize that only six species are poisonous, and only four of those are common. Feel better? Of the baddies, three are rattlesnakes (diamondback, pygmy, canebrake) and the others

### KEEPERS OF THE EVERGLADES

Anyone who has dipped a paddle among the sawgrass and hardwood hammocks of Everglades National Park wouldn't quibble with the American alligators' Florida sobriquet, 'Keepers of the Everglades.' With their snouts, eyeballs, and pebbled backs so still they hardly ripple the water's surface, alligators have watched over the Glades for more than 200 million years.

It's impossible to count Florida's wild alligators, but estimates are that 1.5 million lumber among the state's lakes, rivers and golf courses. No longer officially endangered, they remain protected because they resemble the still-endangered American crocodile. Alligator served in restaurants typically comes from licensed alligator farms, though since 1988 Florida has conducted an annual alligator harvest, open to nonresidents, that allows two alligators per person.

Alligators are alpha predators that keep the rest of the food chain in check, and their 'gator holes' become vital water cups in the dry season and during droughts, aiding the entire wetlands ecosystem. Alligators, which live for about 30 years, can grow up to 14ft long and weigh 1000lb.

A vocal courtship begins in April, and mating takes place in May and June. By late June, females begin laying nests of 30 to 45 eggs, which incubate for two months before hatching. On average, only four alligators per nest survive to adulthood.

Alligators hunt in water, often close to shore; typically, they run on land to flee, not to chase. In Florida, an estimated 15 to 20 nonfatal attacks on humans occur each year, and there have been 22 fatal attacks since 1948.

Some estimate an alligator's top short-distance land speed at 30mph, but it's a myth that you must zigzag to avoid them. The best advice is to run in a straight line as fast as your little legs can go.

are copperheads, cottonmouths and coral snakes. The diamondback is the biggest (up to 7ft), most aggressive and most dangerous. But rest assured, while cottonmouths live in and around water, most Florida water snakes are not cottonmouths. Whew!

## Sea Turtles

Most sea-turtle nesting in continental US occurs in Florida. Predominantly three species create over 80,000 nests annually, mostly on southern Atlantic Coast beaches but extending to all Gulf Coast beaches. Most are loggerhead, then far fewer green and leatherback, and historically hawksbill and Kemp's ridley as well; all five species are endangered or threatened. The leatherback is the largest, attaining 10ft and 2000lb in size.

During the May-to-October nesting season, sea turtles deposit from 80 to 120 eggs in each nest. The eggs incubate for about two months, and then the hatchlings emerge all at once and make for the ocean. Contrary to myth, hatchlings don't need the moon to find their way to the sea. However, they can become hopelessly confused by artificial lights and noisy human audiences. For the best, least-disruptive experience, join a sanctioned turtle watch; for a list, visit [www.myfwc.com/seaturtle](http://www.myfwc.com/seaturtle), then click on 'Educational Information' and 'Where to View Sea Turtles.'

## Plants

The diversity of the peninsula's flora, including over 4000 species of plants, is unmatched in the continental US. Florida contains the southern extent of temperate ecosystems and the northern extent of tropical ones, which blend and merge in a bewildering, fluid taxonomy of environments. Interestingly, most of the world at this latitude is a desert, which Florida definitely is not.

## Wetlands & Swamps

It takes special kinds of plants to thrive in the humid, waterlogged, sometimes-salty marshes, sloughs, swales, seeps, basins, marl prairies and swamps of Florida, and several hundred specialized native plants evolved to do so. Much of the Everglades is dominated by vast expanses of sawgrass, which is actually a sedge with fine toothlike edges that can reach 10ft high. South Florida is a symphony of sedges, grasses and rushes. These hardy water-tolerant species provide abundant seeds to feed birds and animals, protect fish in shallow water, and pad wetlands for birds and alligators.

The strangest plants are the submerged and immersed species that grow in, under and out of the water. Free-floating species include bladderwort and coontail, a species that lives, flowers and is pollinated entirely underwater. Florida's swamps are abundant with rooted plants that have floating leaves, including the pretty American lotus, water lilies and spatterdock (if you love quaint names, you'll love Florida botany!). Another common immersed plant, bur marigolds, can paint whole prairies yellow.

Across Florida, whenever land rises just enough to create drier islands, tracts, hills and hillocks, dense tree-filled hammocks occur; ecological zones can shift as dramatically in 1ft in Florida as they do in 1000ft elsewhere. These hammocks go by many names depending on location and type. Tropical hammocks typically mix tropical hardwoods and palms with semideciduous and evergreen trees such as live oak.

Another dramatic, beautiful tree in Florida's swamps is the bald cypress, the most flood-tolerant tree. It can grow 150ft tall, with buttressed, wide trunks and roots with 'knees' that poke above the drenched soil.

Naturalist Doug Alderson helped create the Big Bend Paddling Trail, and in his book *Waters Less Traveled* (2005) he describes his adventures: dodging pygmy rattlesnakes, meeting Shitty Bill, discussing Kemp's ridley turtles and pondering manatee farts.

In Florida, even the plants bite: the Panhandle has the most species of carnivorous plants in the US – a result of its nutrient-poor sandy soil.



Cypress domes are a particular type of swamp, which arise when a watery depression occurs in a pine flatwood.

### Forests, Scrubs & Flatwoods

Florida's northern forests, particularly in the Panhandle, are an epicenter of plant and animal biodiversity, just as much as its southern swamps. Here, the continent's temperate forests of hickory, elm, ash, maple, magnolia and locust trees combine with the various pine, gum and oak trees that are common throughout Florida along with the sawgrass, cypress and cabbage palms of southern Florida. The wet but temperate Apalachicola forest supports 40 kinds of trees and more insect species than scientists can count.

Central and Northern Florida were once covered in longleaf and slash-pine forests, both prized for timber and pine gum. Today, due to logging, only 2% of old-growth longleaf forests remain. Faster-growing slash pine has now largely replaced longleaf pine in Florida's second-growth forests.

Scrubs are found throughout Florida; they are typically old dunes with well-drained sandy soil. In central Florida (along the Lake Wales Ridge), scrubs are the oldest plant communities, with the highest number of endemic and rare species. Sand pines, scrub oak, rosemary and lichens predominate.

Scrubs often blend into sandy pine flatwoods, which typically have a sparse longleaf or slash-pine overstory and an understory of grasses and/or saw palmetto. Saw palmetto is a vital Florida plant: its fruit is an important food for bears and deer (and an herbal medicine), it provides shelter for panthers and snakes, and its flower is an important source of honey. It's named for its sharp saw-toothed leaf stems.

### Mangroves & Coastal Dunes

Where not shaved smooth by sand, Southern Florida's coastline is often covered with a three-day stubble of mangroves. Mangroves are not a single species; the name refers to all tropical trees and shrubs that have adapted to loose wet soil, saltwater, and periodic root submergence. Mangroves have also developed 'live birth,' germinating their seeds while they're still

Visit the website of the Florida Native Plant Society ([www.fnps.org](http://www.fnps.org)), a nonprofit conservation organization, for updates on preservation issues and invasive species and for a nice overview of Florida's native plants and ecosystems.

### GHOST HUNTERS

Florida has more species of orchids than any other state in the US, and orchids are themselves the largest family of flowering plants in the world, with perhaps 25,000 species. On the dial of botanical fascination, orchids rank highly, and the Florida orchid that inspires the most intense devotion is the rare ghost orchid.

This bizarre epiphytic flower has no leaves and usually only one bloom, which is of course deathly white with two long thin drooping petals that curl like a handlebar mustache. The ghost orchid is pollinated in the dead of night by the giant sphinx moth, which is the only insect with a proboscis long enough to reach down the ghost orchid's 5in-long nectar spur.

The exact locations of ghost orchids are kept secret for fear of poachers, who, as Susan Orlean's book *The Orchid Thief* makes clear, are a real threat to their survival. But the flower's general whereabouts are common knowledge: South Florida's approximately 2000 ghost orchids are almost all in Big Cypress National Preserve and Fakahatchee Strand Preserve State Park. Of course, these parks are home to a great many other wild orchids, as are Everglades National Park, Myakka River State Park and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

To learn more, see Florida's Native Orchids ([www.flnativeorchids.com](http://www.flnativeorchids.com)) and Ghost Orchid Info ([www.ghostorchid.info](http://www.ghostorchid.info)), and visit Sarasota's Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.

attached to the parent tree. Of the over 50 species of mangroves worldwide, only three predominate in Florida: red, black and white.

Mangroves play a vital role on the peninsula, and their destruction usually sets off a domino-effect of ecological damage. Mangroves 'stabilize' coastal land, trapping sand, silt and sediment. As this builds up, new land is created, which ironically strangles the mangroves themselves. Mangroves mitigate the storm surge and damaging winds of hurricanes, and they anchor tidal and estuary communities, providing vital wildlife habitats.

Coastal dunes are typically home to grasses and shrubs, saw palmetto and occasionally pines and cabbage palm (or sabal palm, the Florida state tree). Sea oats, with large plumes that trap wind-blown sand, are important for stabilizing dunes, while coastal hammocks welcome the wiggly gumbo-limbo tree, whose red peeling bark has earned it the nickname the 'tourist tree.'

## National, State & Regional Parks

About 26% of Florida's land lies in public hands, which breaks down to three national forests, 11 national parks, 28 national wildlife refuges (including the first, Pelican Island), and 160 state parks. Attendance is up, with over 20 million folks visiting state parks annually, and Florida's state parks have twice been voted the nation's best.

Florida's parks are easy to explore. For more information, see the websites of the following organizations:

**Florida State Parks** ([www.floridastateparks.org](http://www.floridastateparks.org))

**National Forests, Florida** ([www.fs.usda.gov/florida](http://www.fs.usda.gov/florida))

**National Park Service** ([www.nps.gov/dрто](http://www.nps.gov/dрто))

**National Wildlife Refuges, Florida** ([www.fws.gov/southeast/maps/fl.html](http://www.fws.gov/southeast/maps/fl.html))

**Recreation.gov** ([www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)) National campground reservations.

**Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission** ([www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com)) Manages Florida's mostly undeveloped Wildlife Management Areas (WMA); the website is an excellent resource for wildlife-viewing, as well as boating, hunting, fishing and permits.

## Environmental Issues

Florida's environmental problems are the inevitable result of its century-long love affair with land development, population growth and tourism, and addressing them is especially urgent given Florida's uniquely diverse natural world. These complex, intertwined environmental impacts include erosion of wetlands, depletion of the aquifer, rampant pollution (particularly of waters), invasive species, endangered species and widespread habitat destruction. There is nary an acre of Florida that escapes concern.

In the last decade, Florida has enacted several significant conservation efforts. In 2000, the state passed the Florida Forever Act ([www.supportfloridaforever.org](http://www.supportfloridaforever.org)), a 10-year, \$3 billion conservation program that in 2008 was renewed for another 10 years. It also passed the multi-billion-dollar Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP; [www.evergladesplan.org](http://www.evergladesplan.org)) and the associated Central Everglades Planning Project. Unfortunately, implementation of the latter plan has been delayed due to a lack of approval from Federal agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers.

Signs of other progress can be encouraging. For instance, phosphorous levels in the Everglades have been seriously reduced, and the Kissimmee River is a model of restoration: within a few years of backfilling the canal that had restricted its flow, the river's floodplain is again a humid marsh full of waterbirds and alligators. Also, in 2010 the state completed a purchase of 300 sq miles of Lake Okeechobee sugarcane fields from US Sugar,

The Florida chapter of the Nature Conservancy ([www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)) has been instrumental in the Florida Forever legislation. Check the web for updates and conservation issues.

intending to convert them back to swamp. Along with plans to bridge 6.5 miles of the Tamiami Trail, the lake may once again water the Glades.

However, Lake Okeechobee, controlled by Hoover Dike since 1928, is full of toxic sludge which gets stirred up during hurricanes and causes 'red tides,' or algal blooms that kill fish. Red tides occur naturally, but they are also sparked by pollution and unnatural water flows.

Studies have found that half of the state's lakes and waterways are too polluted for fishing. Though industrial pollution has been curtailed, pollution from residential development (sewage, fertilizer runoff) more than compensates. This is distressing Florida's freshwater springs, which can turn murky with algae. Plus, as the groundwater gets pumped out to slake homeowners' thirsts, the springs are shrinking and the drying limestone honeycomb underfoot sometimes collapses, causing sinkholes that swallow cars and homes.

Residential development continues almost unabated. The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach corridor (the USA's sixth-largest urban area) is, as developers say, 'built out,' so developers are targeting the Panhandle and central Florida. Projections for the next 50 years show unrelenting urban sprawl up and down both coasts and across Central Florida.

Then there's the rising seas due to global warming. Here, the low-lying Florida Keys are a 'canary in a coalmine,' being watched worldwide for impacts. In another century, some quip, South Florida's coastline could be a modern-day Atlantis, with its most expensive real estate underwater.

## A KINDER, GENTLER WILDERNESS ENCOUNTER

While yesterday's glass-bottom boats and alligator wrestling have evolved into today's swamp-buggy rides and manatee encounters, the question remains: just because you can do something, does that mean you should? In Florida, everyone can be involved in protecting nature just by considering the best ways to experience it without harming it in the process.

For most activities, there isn't a single right answer; specific impacts are often debated. However, here are a few guidelines:

**Airboats and swamp buggies** While airboats have a much lighter 'footprint' than big-wheeled buggies, both are motorized (and loud) and have far larger impacts than canoes for exploring wetlands. As a rule, nonmotorized activities are least damaging.

**Dolphin encounters** Captive dolphins are, for better or worse, usually already acclimated to humans. However, when encountering wild dolphins in the ocean, it is illegal by federal law to feed, pursue or touch them. Keep in mind that habituating any wild animal to humans can lead to the animal's death, since approaching humans often results in conflict and accidents (as with boats).

**Manatee swims** When swimming near manatees, a federally protected endangered species, look but don't touch. 'Passive observation' is the standard. Harassment is a rampant problem that may lead to stricter 'no touch' legislation.

**Feeding wild animals** In a word, don't. Friendly animals such as deer and manatees may come to rely on human food (to their detriment), while feeding bears and alligators just encourages them to hunt you.

**Sea-turtle nesting sites** It's a federal crime to approach nesting sea turtles or hatching runs. Most nesting beaches have warning signs and a nighttime 'lights out' policy. If you do encounter turtles on the beach, keep your distance and don't take flash photos.

**Coral-reef etiquette** Coral polyps are living organisms and touching or breaking coral creates openings for infection and disease. To prevent reef damage, never touch the coral. It's that simple.

# Survival Guide

## **DIRECTORY A-Z... 506    TRANSPORTATION... 516**

Accommodations.....	506	GETTING THERE & AWAY .....	516
Activities .....	508	Air .....	516
Discount Cards.....	509	Land .....	517
Electricity .....	509	Sea .....	518
Food .....	509	GETTING AROUND.....	518
Gay & Lesbian Travelers .....	510	Air .....	518
Health.....	510	Bicycle .....	518
Insurance.....	511	Boat .....	519
Internet Access.....	511	Bus .....	519
Legal Matters .....	513	Car & Motorcycle.....	520
Money.....	513	Hitchhiking .....	521
Opening Hours .....	513	Local Transportation .....	522
Photography.....	513	Train .....	522
Post.....	513		
Public Holidays.....	513		
Safe Travel.....	514		
Telephone .....	514		
Tourist Information .....	514		
Travelers with Disabilities.....	514		
Volunteering .....	514		
Women Travelers .....	515		
Work .....	515		

# Directory A-Z

## Accommodations

Our reviews (and rates) use the following room types:

- ◆ single occupancy (s)
- ◆ double occupancy (d)
- ◆ room (r), same rate for one or two people
- ◆ dorm bed (dm)
- ◆ suite (ste)
- ◆ apartment (apt)

Many places have certain rooms that cost above or below their standard rates, and seasonal/holiday fluctuations can see rates rise and fall dramatically, especially in Orlando and tourist beach towns. Specific advice for the best rates varies by region,

and is included throughout. On the one hand, booking in advance for high-season tourist hot spots (like beaches and Orlando resorts) can be essential to ensure the room you want. On the other, enquiring at the last minute, or even same-day, can yield amazing discounts on any rooms still available.

### B&Bs & Inns

These accommodations vary from small, comfy houses with shared bath (least expensive) to romantic, antique-filled historic homes and opulent mansions with private bath (most expensive). Properties focusing on upscale romance may discourage children. Also,

inns and B&Bs often require a minimum stay of two or three days on weekends and advance reservations. Always call ahead to confirm policies (regarding kids, pets, smoking) and bath arrangements: many lower end B&Bs will have shared baths, although anywhere charging more than \$100 per night should include private facilities. As a general rule, any property calling themselves a B&B will provide a full cooked breakfast for one or two guests. Properties designating themselves as an inn may not include breakfast. If you're opting for this type of accommodation, the breakfast is often one of the best perks, so be sure to confirm what's included before your stay!

## SLEEPING PRICE RANGES

The following price ranges refer to a standard double room at high season rates, unless rates are distinguished as winter/summer or high/low season. Note that 'high season' can mean summer or winter depending on the region. Unless otherwise stated, rates do not include breakfast, bathrooms are private and all lodging is open year-round. Rates don't include taxes, which vary considerably between towns; in fact, hotels almost never include taxes and fees in their rate quotes, so always ask for the total rate with tax. Florida's sales tax is 6%, and some communities tack on more. States, cities and towns also usually levy taxes on hotel rooms, which can increase the final bill by 10% to 12%.

**\$** less than \$100

**\$\$** \$100–200

**\$\$\$** more than \$200

## Camping

Three types of campgrounds are available: undeveloped or primitive (\$10 per night), public or powered (\$15 to \$25) and privately owned (\$25 and up). In general, Florida campgrounds are quite safe. Undeveloped campgrounds are just that (undeveloped), while most public campgrounds have toilets, showers and drinking water. Reserve state-park sites in advance (yes, you need to!) by calling ☎800-326-3521 or visiting [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com).

Most privately owned campgrounds are geared to RVs (recreational vehi-

## PRACTICALITIES

- **Electricity** Voltage is 110/120V, 60 cycles.
- **Measurements** Distances are measured in feet, yards and miles; weights are tallied in ounces, pounds and tons.
- **Newspapers** Florida has three major daily newspapers: *Miami Herald* (in Spanish, *El Nuevo Herald*), *Orlando Sentinel* and the *St Petersburg Times*.
- **Smoking** Florida bans smoking in all enclosed workplaces, including restaurants and shops, but excluding 'stand-alone' bars (that don't emphasize food) and designated hotel smoking rooms.
- **Time** Most of Florida is in the US Eastern Time Zone: noon in Miami equals 9am in San Francisco and 5pm in London. West of the Apalachicola River, the Panhandle is in the US Central Time Zone, one hour behind the rest of the state. During daylight-saving time, clocks 'spring forward' one hour in March and 'fall back' one hour in November.
- **TV** Florida receives all the major US TV and cable networks: **Florida Smart** ([www.floridasmart.com/news](http://www.floridasmart.com/news)) lists them by region. Video systems use the NTSC color TV standard.

cles; motor homes) but will also have a small section available for tent campers. Expect tons of amenities, like swimming pools, laundry facilities, convenience stores and bars. **Kampgrounds of America** (KOA; [www.koa.com](http://www.koa.com)) is a national network of private kampgrounds; its Kamping Kabins have air-con and kitchens.

A growing trend is free camping (or 'framping'), where you're able to legally sleep in your car or camper, or pitch a tent on public land. Sites can be as un-glamorous as casino car parks, or as picturesque as a soft grassy knoll by a billowing brook. Note, you can't just pitch a tent wherever you want, and you can be fined by the police if you're sleeping in the wrong place. One of the best resources for frampers is [www.freecampsites.net](http://www.freecampsites.net).

## Hostels

In most hostels, group dorms are segregated by sex and you'll be sharing a bath-

room; occasionally alcohol is banned. About half the hostels throughout Florida are affiliated with **Hostelling International USA** (HI-USA; ☎301-495-1240, reservations 888-464-4872; [www.hiusa.org](http://www.hiusa.org)). You don't have to be a member to stay, but you'll pay a slightly higher rate; you can join HI by phone, online or at most youth hostels. From the US, you can book many HI hostels through its toll-free reservations service.

Try [www.hostels.com](http://www.hostels.com) for listings of Florida's many independent hostels. Most have comparable rates and conditions to HI hostels, and some are better.

## Hotels

We have tried to highlight independently owned hotels in this guide, but in many towns, members of hotel chains offer the best value in terms of comfort, location and price. The calling-card of chain hotels is reliability: acceptable cleanliness, unremarkable yet inoffensive decor, a comfortable bed and a good shower. Air-conditioning, mini-refrigerator, microwave, hair dryer, safe and, increasingly, flat-screen TVs and free wi-fi are now standard amenities in most midrange chains. A recent trend, most evident in Miami and beach resorts, is an emergence of funky new brands, such as **aloft** ([www.starwoodhotels.com/aloft/hotels](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/aloft/hotels)), which are owned by more recognizable hotel chains striving for a share of the boutique market.

High-end hotel chains like Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton overwhelm guests with their high levels of luxury and service: Les Clefs d'Or concierges, valet parking, 24-hour room service, dry cleaning, health clubs and decadent day spas. These special touches are reflected in the room rates. If you're paying for these five-star properties and finding they're not delivering on any of their promises, you have every right to speak politely with the front-desk manager to have your concerns addressed – you deserve only the best.

You'll find plenty of boutique and specialty hotels in places such as Miami's South Beach and Palm Beach. While all large chain hotels have toll-free reservation numbers, you may find better savings by calling the

## BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodations reviews by Lonely Planet authors, check out <http://lonelyplanet.com/usa/florida/hotels>. You'll find independent reviews, as well as recommendations on the best places to stay. Best of all, you can book online.

hotel directly, or paying up-front using the hotel website or a third-party booking site.

Note that it is customary to tip in most hotels of any size or stature in the US. Anywhere between \$1 and \$5 is appreciated for the porter who carries your bags, the bellhop who greets you by name daily, and the driver of the 'free' airport shuttle. Some people find it a nice gesture to leave a greenback or two on the pillow for the housekeeping staff. Conversely, if you're given attitude or any sense of entitlement by any hotel staff member, do feel free to save your bucks for the bar.

Chain-owned hotels include the following:

**Four Seasons** (☎800-819-5053; [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com))

**Hilton** (☎800-445-8667; [www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com))

**Holiday Inn** (☎888-465-4329; [www.holidayinn.com](http://www.holidayinn.com))

**Marriott** (☎888-236-2427; [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com))

**Radisson** (☎888-201-1718; [www.radisson.com](http://www.radisson.com))

**Ritz-Carlton** (☎800-542-8680; [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com))

**Sheraton** (☎800-325-3535; [www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton](http://www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton))

**Wyndham** (☎877-999-3223; [www.wyndham.com](http://www.wyndham.com))

## Motels

Budget and midrange motels remain prevalent in Florida; these 'drive-up rooms' are often near highway exits and along a town's main road. Many are still independently owned, and thus quality varies tremendously. Some are much better inside than their exteriors suggest: ask to see a room first if you're unsure. Most strive for the same level of amenities and cleanliness as a budget-chain hotel.

A motel's 'rack rates' can be more open to haggling, but not always. Demand is the final arbiter, though simply

asking about any specials can sometimes inspire a discount.

The most common motel chains with a presence in Florida include:

**Best Western** (☎800-780-7234; [www.bestwestern.com](http://www.bestwestern.com))

**Choice Hotels** (☎877-424-6423; [www.choicehotels.com](http://www.choicehotels.com))

**Motel 6** (☎800-466-8356; [www.motel6.com](http://www.motel6.com))

**Red Roof Inn** (☎800-733-7663; [www.redroof.com](http://www.redroof.com))

**Super 8** (☎800-454-3213; [www.super8.com](http://www.super8.com))

## Resorts

Florida resorts, much like Disney World, aim to be so all-encompassing you'll never need, or want, to leave. Included are all manner of fitness and sports facilities, pools, spas, restaurants, bars and so on. Many also have on-site babysitting services. However, some also tack an extra 'resort fee' onto rates, so always ask.

## Activities

For an introduction to all the things you can do in Florida, see the Outdoor Activities chapter (p491).

## Biking

Note that the state organizations listed under Hiking & Camping also discuss biking trails. Florida law requires that all cyclists under 16 must wear a helmet (under 18 in national parks).

**Bike Florida** ([www.bikeflorida.org](http://www.bikeflorida.org)) Nonprofit organization promoting safe cycling and organized rides, with good biking links.

**Florida Bicycle Association** ([www.floridabicycle.org](http://www.floridabicycle.org)) Advocacy organization providing tons of advice, a statewide list of cycling clubs, and links to off-road-cycling organizations, racing clubs, a touring calendar and more.

## Canoeing & Kayaking

Water-trail and kayaking information is also provided by the Florida State Parks and

Florida Greenways & Trails websites listed under Hiking & Camping. Here are more resources:

**American Canoe Association** (ACA; [www.americancanoe.org](http://www.americancanoe.org)) ACA publishes a newsletter, has a water-trails database and organizes courses.

**Florida Professional Paddlesports Association** ([www.paddleflausa.com](http://www.paddleflausa.com)) Provides a list of affiliated member kayak outfitters.

**Kayak Online** ([www.kayakonline.com](http://www.kayakonline.com)) A good resource for kayak gear, with links to Florida outfitters.

## Diving

Ocean diving in Florida requires an Open Water I certificate, and Florida has plenty of certification programs (with good weather, they take three days). To dive in freshwater springs, you need a separate cave-diving certification, and this is also offered throughout the state.

**National Association for Underwater Instruction** (NAUI; [www.nauai.org](http://www.nauai.org)) Information on dive certifications and a list of NAUI-certified Florida dive instructors.

**Professional Diving Instructors Corporation** (PDIC; [www.pdic-intl.com](http://www.pdic-intl.com)) Similar to NAUI, with its own list of PDIC-certified Florida dive instructors.

## Fishing

All non-residents 16 and over need a fishing license to fish and crab, and Florida offers several short-term options. There are lots of regulations about what and how much you can catch, and where. Locals can give you details, but please do the right thing and review the official word on what's OK and what's not; visit the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission website.

**Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission** (FWC; [www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com)) The official source for all

fishing regulations and licenses (purchase online or by phone). Also has boating and hunting information.

**Florida Fishing Capital of the World** ([www.visit-florida.com/fishing](http://www.visit-florida.com/fishing)) State-run all-purpose fishing advice and information.

**Florida Sportsman** ([www.floridasportsman.com](http://www.floridasportsman.com)) Get the lowdown on sport fishing, tournaments, charters and gear, and detailed regional advice.

## Hiking & Camping

For advice on low-impact hiking and camping, visit **Leave No Trace** ([www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org)). For a rich introduction to Florida trails, see **Florida Hikes** ([www.floridahikes.com](http://www.floridahikes.com)).

For short hikes in national, state or regional parks, free park maps are perfectly adequate. Most outdoor stores and ranger stations sell good topographical (topo) maps.

**Florida Greenways & Trails** ([www.visitflorida.com/trails](http://www.visitflorida.com/trails)) The Florida Dept of Environmental Protection has downloadable hiking, biking and kayaking trail descriptions.

**Florida State Parks** ([www.floridastateparks.org](http://www.floridastateparks.org)) Comprehensive state-park information and all cabin and camping reservations.

**Florida Trail Association** ([www.floridatrail.org](http://www.floridatrail.org)) Maintains the Florida National Scenic Trail (FNST); a wealth of online advice, descriptions and maps.

**Florida Trails Network** ([www.floridatrailnetwork.com](http://www.floridatrailnetwork.com)) The state's main database of current and future trails.

**Rails-to-Trails Conservancy** ([www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)) Converts abandoned railroad corridors into public biking and hiking trails; has a Florida chapter and reviews trails at [www.traillink.com](http://www.traillink.com).

**Recreation.gov** ([www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)) Reserve camping at all national parks and forests.

**National Geographic** ([www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com)) Custom and GPS maps.

**Trails.com** ([www.trails.com](http://www.trails.com)) Create custom, downloadable topo maps.

**US Geological Survey** (USGS; ☎888-275-8747; [www.store.usgs.gov](http://www.store.usgs.gov)) Your online one-stop shop for maps and geological surveys of all US states.

## Surfing

Looking for lessons, surf reports or competitions? Start here:

**Florida Surfing** ([www.floridasurfing.com](http://www.floridasurfing.com)) Instructors, contests, webcams, weather, equipment, history: it's all here.

**Florida Surfing Association** (FSA; [www.floridasurfing.org](http://www.floridasurfing.org)) Manages Florida's surf competitions; also runs the surf school at Jacksonville Beach.

**Surf Guru** ([www.surfguru.com](http://www.surfguru.com)) East Coast Florida surf reports.

**Surfer** ([www.surfermag.com](http://www.surfermag.com)) *Surfer's* travel reports cover Florida and just about every break in the USA.

## Discount Cards

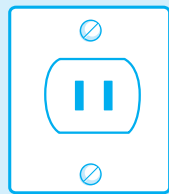
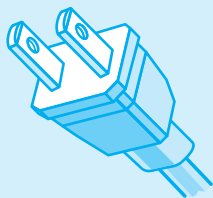
There are no discount cards specific to Florida. It's a very competitive tourist destination, so persistence, patience and thorough research often pays dividends.

Being a member of certain groups also gives access to discounts (usually about 10%) at many hotels, museums and sights. Simply carry the appropriate ID.

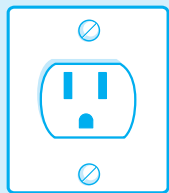
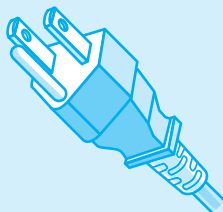
**Students** Any student ID is typically honored; international students might consider an **International Student Identity Card** (ISIC; [www.isiccard.com](http://www.isiccard.com)).

**Seniors** Generally refers to those 65 and older, but sometimes those 60 and older. Join the **American Association of Retired Persons** (AARP; ☎888-687-2277; [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)) for more travel bargains.

## Electricity



110V/60Hz



110V/60Hz

## Food

To whet your appetite for all things culinary and beverage-related in Florida, see the Food & Drink chapter (p486).



## EATING PRICE RANGES

The following price ranges refer to a typical dinner main course. The Florida state sales and use tax is 6%, which will be added to the total of your bill. Some counties and municipalities may charge an additional percentage, but this is the exception and not the rule. For good to excellent service, always tip 15% to 25% of the total bill.

For Miami and Orlando:

- \$ less than \$15
  - \$\$ \$15–30
  - \$\$\$ more than \$30
- Elsewhere:
- \$ less than \$10
  - \$\$ \$10–20
  - \$\$\$ more than \$20

## Gay & Lesbian Travelers

Florida is not uniformly anything, and it's not uniformly embracing of gay life. The state is largely tolerant, particularly in major tourist destinations, beaches and cities, but this tolerance does not always extend into the more rural and Southern areas of northern Florida. However, where Florida does embrace gay life, it does so with a big flamboyant bear hug. Miami and South Beach are as 'out' as it's possible to be, with some massive gay festivals. Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Key West have long supported vibrant gay communities and are now regarded as some of the 'gayest' destinations in the world. Notable gay scenes and communities also exist in Orlando, Jacksonville, Pensacola, and, to far lesser degrees, in Daytona Beach, Tampa and Sarasota.

Good gay-and-lesbian resources include the following:

**Damron** (<https://damron.com>) Damron, an expert in LGBT travel, offers a searchable database of LGBT-friendly and specific travel listings. Publishes

popular national guidebooks, including *Women's Traveller*, *Men's Travel Guide* and *Damron Accommodations*.

**Gay Cities** ([www.gaycities.com](http://www.gaycities.com)) Everything gay about every major city in the US and beyond.

**Gay Yellow Network** ([www.glyp.com](http://www.glyp.com)) City-based yellow-page listings include six Florida cities.

**Gayosphere** ([www.gayosphere.com](http://www.gayosphere.com)) The new website from the creators of Fun Maps, bringing you all the naughty and nice hot spots for gay travelers in Florida's major cities and beyond.

**Out Traveler** ([www.out-traveler.com](http://www.out-traveler.com)) Travel magazine specializing in gay travel.

**Purple Roofs** ([www.purple-roofs.com](http://www.purple-roofs.com)) Lists queer accommodations, travel agencies and tours worldwide.

## Health

Florida (and the USA generally) has a high level of hygiene, so infectious diseases are not a significant concern for most travelers. There are no required vaccines, and tap water is safe to drink. Despite Florida's plethora of intimidating wildlife, the main concerns for travelers

are sunburn and mosquito bites – as well as arriving with adequate health insurance in case of accidents.

## Animal & Spider Bites

Florida's critters can be cute, but they can also bite and sting. Here are a few to watch out for:

**Alligators and snakes** Neither attack humans unless startled or threatened. If you encounter them, simply back away calmly. Florida has several venomous snakes, so always immediately seek treatment if bitten.

**Bears and wildcats** Florida is home to a small population of black bears and predatory felines such as the lynx and Florida panther: one of the rarest and most endangered species on the planet. All are generally incredibly hard to spot and live deep in wilderness areas. Should you be lucky (or unlucky) enough to encounter these critters in the wild, stay calm, do not provoke the animal and don't be afraid to make a little noise (talking, jiggling keys) to alert the animal of your presence. In the rare and unfortunate event of an attack, do your best to defend yourself and retreat to a covered position as soon as possible.

**Jellyfish and stingrays** Florida beaches can see both; avoid swimming when they are present (lifeguards often post warnings). Treat stings immediately; they hurt but aren't dangerous.

**Spiders** Florida is home to two venomous spiders – the black widow and the brown recluse. Seek immediate treatment if bitten by any spider.

## Health Care

In general, if you have a medical emergency, go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital. If the problem isn't urgent, call a nearby hospital and ask for a referral to a local physician; this is usually cheaper than a trip to the emergency room. Stand-alone, moneymaking urgent-care centers provide

good service, but can be the most expensive option.

Pharmacies (called drugstores) are abundantly supplied. However, some medications that are available over the counter in other countries require a prescription in the US. If you don't have insurance to cover the cost of prescriptions, these can be shockingly expensive.

## Health Insurance

The US offers some of the finest health care in the world. The problem is that it can be prohibitively expensive. It's essential to purchase travel health insurance if your policy doesn't cover you when you're abroad.

Citizens of some Canadian provinces may have a certain level of reciprocal health cover within the US: check with your provincial health-care provider before traveling. Citizens from all other nations should not even think about travel to the States without adequate travel insurance covering medical care. Find out in advance whether your insurance plan will make payments directly to the providers or if they will reimburse you later for any overseas health expenditures.

Accidents and unforeseen illnesses do happen and horror stories are common of people's vacations turning into nightmares when they're hit with hefty hospital bills for seemingly innocuous concerns. On a more serious note, hospital bills for car accidents, falls or serious medical emergencies can run into the tens of thousands of dollars. Look for an insurance policy that provides at least \$1 million of medical coverage. Policies with unlimited medical coverage are also available at a higher premium, but are usually not necessary. You may be surprised at how inexpensive good insurance can be.

Bring any medications you may need in their original containers, clearly labeled. A signed, dated letter from

your physician that describes all of your medical conditions and medications (including generic names) is also a good idea.

## Infectious Diseases

In addition to more-common ailments, there are several infectious diseases that are unknown or uncommon outside North America. Most are acquired by mosquito or tick bites.

**Giardiasis** Also known as traveler's diarrhea. A parasitic infection of the small intestines, typically contracted by drinking feces-contaminated fresh water. Never drink untreated stream, lake or pond water. Easily treated with antibiotics.

**HIV/AIDS** HIV infection occurs in the US, as do all sexually transmitted diseases: incidences of syphilis are on the rise. Use condoms for all sexual encounters.

**Lyme Disease** Though more common in the US northeast than Florida, Lyme disease occurs here. It is transmitted by infected deer ticks, and is signaled by a bull's-eye rash at the bite and flulike symptoms. Treat promptly with antibiotics. Removing ticks within 36 hours can avoid infection.

**Rabies** Though rare, the rabies virus can be contracted from the bite of any infected animal; bats are most common, and their bites are not always obvious. If bitten by any animal, consult with a doctor, since rabies is fatal if untreated.

**West Nile Virus** Extremely rare in Florida, West Nile Virus is transmitted by culex mosquitoes. Most infections are mild or asymptomatic, but serious symptoms and even death can occur. There is no treatment for West Nile Virus. For the latest update on affected areas, see the **US Geological Survey disease maps** (<http://diseasemaps.usgs.gov>).

## Useful Websites

Consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available. There is a vast wealth of

travel-health advice on the internet.

Good sources include the following:

**MD Travel Health** ([www.mdtravelhealth.com](http://www.mdtravelhealth.com)) Provides complete, updated and free travel-health recommendations for every country.

**World Health Organization** ([www.who.int/ith](http://www.who.int/ith)) The superb book *International Travel and Health* is available free online.

## Insurance

It's expensive to get sick, crash a car or have things stolen from you in the US. Make sure you have adequate coverage before arriving. To insure yourself for items that may be stolen from your car, consult your homeowner's (or renter's) insurance policy or invest in travel insurance.

Worldwide travel insurance is available at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel-insurance](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel-insurance). You can buy, extend and claim online anytime – even if you're already on the road.

## Internet Access

The USA and Florida are wired. Nearly every hotel and many restaurants and businesses offer high-speed internet access. With few exceptions, most hotels and motels offer in-room wi-fi: generally free of charge, but do check for connection rates.

Many cafes and all McDonald's offer free wi-fi and most transportation hubs are wi-fi hot spots. Public libraries provide free internet terminals, though sometimes you must get a temporary nonresident library card (\$10).

For a list of wi-fi hot spots (plus tech and access info), visit **Wi-Fi Alliance** ([www.wifi.org](http://www.wifi.org)) and **Wi-Fi Free Spot** ([www.wififreespot.com](http://www.wififreespot.com)).

## INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

### Entering the Region

A passport is required for all foreign citizens. Unless eligible under the Visa Waiver Program, foreign travelers must also have a tourist visa.

Travelers entering under the Visa Waiver Program must register with the US government's program, **ESTA** (<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>), at least three days before arriving; earlier is better, since if denied, travelers must get a visa. Registration is valid for two years.

Upon arriving in the US, all foreign visitors must register in the US-Visit program, which entails having two index fingers scanned and a digital photo taken. For information on US-Visit, see the **Dept of Homeland Security** ([www.dhs.gov/us-visit](http://www.dhs.gov/us-visit)) website.

### Visas

All visitors should reconfirm entry requirements and visa guidelines before arriving. You can get visa information through [www.usa.gov](http://www.usa.gov), but the **US State Dept** ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov)) maintains the most comprehensive visa information, with lists of consulates and downloadable application forms. **US Citizenship & Immigration Services** (USCIS; [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)) mainly serves immigrants, not temporary visitors.

The **Visa Waiver Program** allows citizens of three dozen countries to enter the USA for stays of 90 days or less without first obtaining a US visa. See the ESTA website for a current list. Under this program you must have a nonrefundable return ticket and an 'e-passport' with digital chip. Passports issued/renewed before October 26, 2006, must be machine-readable.

Visitors who don't qualify for the Visa Waiver Program need a visa. Basic requirements are a valid passport, recent photo, travel details and often proof of financial stability. Students and adult males also must fill out supplemental travel documents.

The validity period for a US visitor visa depends on your home country. The length of time you'll be allowed to stay in the USA is determined by US officials at the port of entry. To stay longer than the date stamped on your passport, visit a local **USCIS** ([www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov)) office.

### Customs

For a complete, up-to-date list of customs regulations, visit the website of **US Customs & Border Protection** ([www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov)). Each visitor is allowed to bring into the US duty-free 1L of liquor (if you're 21 or older) and 200 cigarettes (if you're 18 or older) and up to \$100 in gifts and purchases.

### Embassies & Consulates

To find a US embassy in another country, visit [www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov). Most foreign embassies in the US have their main consulates in Washington, DC, but some have representation in Miami. Except for the Italian consulate, the following consulates are all in Miami:

**Brazilian Consulate** (☎305-285-6200; <http://miami.itamaraty.gov.br/en-us>; 80 SW 8th St, Suite 2600)

**Canadian Consulate** (☎305-579-1600; <http://can-am.gc.ca/miami/menu.aspx>; 200 S Biscayne Blvd, Suite 1600)

**French Consulate** (☎305-403-4150; [www.consulfrance-miami.org](http://www.consulfrance-miami.org); 1395 Brickell Ave, Suite 1050)

**German Consulate** (☎305-358-0290; [www.germany.info](http://www.germany.info); 100 N Biscayne Blvd, Suite 2200)

**Italian Consulate** (☎305-374-6322; [www.consami.esteri.it/Consolato\\_Miami](http://www.consami.esteri.it/Consolato_Miami); 4000 Ponce de Leon Blvd, Suite 590, Coral Gables)

**Mexican Consulate** (☎786-268-4900; <http://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/miami>; 1399 SW 1st Ave)

**Netherlands Consulate** (☎877-388-2443; <http://miami.the-netherlands.org>; 701 Brickell Ave, Suite 500)

**UK Consulate** (☎305-400-6400; <http://ukinusa.fco.gov.uk/florida>; 1001 Brickell Bay Dr, Suite 2800)

## Legal Matters

In everyday matters, if you are stopped by the police, note that there is no system for paying traffic tickets or other fines on the spot. The patrol officer will explain your options to you; there is usually a 30-day period to pay fines by mail.

If you're arrested, you are allowed to remain silent, though never walk away from an officer; you are entitled to have access to an attorney. The legal system presumes you're innocent until proven guilty. All persons who are arrested have the right to make one phone call. If you don't have a lawyer or family member to help you, call your embassy or consulate. The police will give you the number on request.

## Drinking & Driving

To purchase alcohol, you need to present a photo ID to prove your age. Despite what you sometimes see, it's illegal to walk with an open alcoholic drink on the street. More importantly, don't drive with an 'open container'; any liquor in a car must be unopened or else stored in the trunk. If you're stopped while driving with an open container, police will treat you as if you were drinking and driving. Refusing a breathalyzer, urine or blood test is treated as if you'd taken the test and failed. A DUI (driving under the influence) conviction is a serious offense, subject to stiff fines and even imprisonment.

## Money

Prices quoted in this book are in US dollars (\$).

The ease and availability of ATMs have largely negated the need for traveler's checks. However, traveler's checks in US dollars are accepted like cash at most midrange and top-end businesses (but rarely at budget

places). Personal checks not drawn on US banks are generally not accepted. Exchange foreign currency at international airports and most large banks in Miami, Orlando, Tampa and other Florida cities.

Major credit cards are widely accepted, and they are required for car rentals. Most ATM withdrawals using out-of-state cards incur surcharges of \$2 or so.

## Tippling

Tippling is standard practice across America. In restaurants, for satisfactory to excellent service, tipping 15% to 25% of the bill is expected; less is OK at informal diners. Bartenders expect \$1 per drink; cafe baristas a little change in the jar. Taxi drivers and hairdressers expect 10% to 15%. Skycaps at airports and porters at nice hotels expect \$1 a bag or so. If you spend several nights in a hotel, it's polite to leave a few dollars for the cleaning staff.

## Opening Hours

Standard business hours are as follows:

**Banks** 8:30am to 4:30pm Monday to Thursday, to 5:30pm Friday; sometimes 9am to 12:30pm Saturday.

**Bars** Most bars 5pm to midnight; to 2am Friday and Saturday.

**Businesses** 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

**Post offices** 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday; sometimes 9am to noon Saturday.

**Restaurants** Breakfast 7am to 10:30am Monday to Friday; brunch 9am to 2pm Saturday and Sunday; lunch 11:30am to 2:30pm Monday to Friday; dinner 5pm to 9:30pm, later Friday and Saturday.

**Shops** 10am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, noon to 5pm Sunday; shopping malls keep extended hours.

## Photography

All camera supplies (print and slide film, digital memory, camera batteries) are readily available in local drugstores, which also usually provide inexpensive film developing (including one-hour service) and burning of photo CDs and DVDs.

Don't pack unprocessed film (including the roll in your camera) into checked luggage because exposure to high-powered X-ray equipment will cause it to fog. As an added precaution, 'hard check' film separately from carry-on bags at airport security checkpoints.

When photographing people, politeness is usually all that's needed (though street performers appreciate a tip).

For a primer on taking good shots, consult *Lonely Planet's Guide to Travel Photography*.

## Post

The **US Postal Service** (USPS; ☎800-275-8777; www.usps.com) is reliable and inexpensive. For exact rates, refer to www.postcalc.usps.com.

You can have mail sent to you 'c/o General Delivery' at most big post offices (it's usually held for 30 days). Most hotels will also hold mail for incoming guests.

## Public Holidays

On the following national public holidays, banks, schools and government offices (including post offices) are closed, and transportation, museums and other services operate on a Sunday schedule. Many stores, however, maintain regular business hours. Holidays falling on a weekend are usually observed the following Monday.

**New Year's Day** January 1  
**Martin Luther King, Jr Day** Third Monday in January

**Presidents Day** Third Monday in February

**Easter** March or April

**Memorial Day** Last Monday in May

**Independence Day** July 4

**Labor Day** First Monday in September

**Columbus Day** Second Monday in October

**Veterans Day** November 11

**Thanksgiving** Fourth Thursday in November

**Christmas Day** December 25

## Safe Travel

When it comes to crime, there is Miami, and there is the rest of Florida. As a rule, Miami suffers the same urban problems facing other major US cities such as New York and Los Angeles, but it is no worse than others. The rest of Florida tends to have lower crime rates than the rest of the nation, but any tourist town is a magnet for petty theft and car break-ins.

If you need any kind of emergency assistance, such as police, ambulance or firefighters, call 911. This is a free call from any phone.

## Hurricanes

Florida hurricane season extends from June through November, but the peak is September and October. Relatively speaking, very few Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico storms become hurricanes, and fewer still are accurate enough to hit Florida, but the devastation they wreak when they do can be enormous. Travelers should take all hurricane alerts, warnings and evacuation orders seriously.

Hurricanes are generally sighted well in advance, allowing time to prepare. When a hurricane threatens, listen to radio and TV news reports. For more information on storms and preparedness, contact the following:

**Florida Division of Emergency Management** ([www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org)) Hurricane preparedness.

**Florida Emergency Hotline** (800-342-3557) Updated storm warning information.

**National Weather Service** ([www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov))

## Telephone

Always dial '1' before toll-free (800, 888 etc) and domestic long-distance numbers. Some toll-free numbers only work within the US. For local directory assistance, dial 411.

To make international calls from the US, dial 011 + country code + area code + number. For international operator assistance, dial 0. To call the US from abroad, the international country code for the USA is 1.

Pay phones are readily found in major cities, but are becoming rarer. Local calls cost 50¢. Private prepaid phonecards are available from convenience stores, supermarkets and drugstores.

Most of the USA's cell-phone systems are incompatible with the GSM 900/1800 standard used throughout Europe and Asia. Check with your service provider about using your phone in the US. In terms of coverage, Verizon has the most extensive network, but AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile are decent. Cellular coverage is generally excellent, except in the Everglades and parts of rural northern Florida.

## Tourist Information

Most Florida towns have some sort of tourist information center that provides local information; be aware that chambers of commerce typically only list chamber members, not all the town's hotels and businesses. This

guide provides visitor center information throughout.

To order a packet of Florida information prior to coming, contact **Visit Florida** ([www.visitflorida.com](http://www.visitflorida.com)).

## Travelers with Disabilities

Because of the high number of senior residents in Florida, most public buildings are wheelchair accessible and have appropriate restroom facilities. Transportation services are generally accessible to all, and telephone companies provide relay operators for the hearing impaired. Many banks provide ATM instructions in braille, curb ramps are common and many busy intersections have audible crossing signals.

A number of organizations specialize in the needs of disabled travelers:

### Access-Able Travel

**Source** ([www.access-able.com](http://www.access-able.com)) An excellent website with many links.

### Flying Wheels Travel

(800-451-5005; <http://flying-wheelstravel.com>) A full-service travel agency specializing in disabled travel.

### Mobility International

**USA** ([www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org)) Advises disabled travelers on mobility issues and runs an educational exchange program.

### Travelin' Talk Network

([www.travelintalk.net](http://www.travelintalk.net)) Run by the same people as Access-Able Travel Source; a global network of service providers.

## Volunteering

Volunteering can be a great way to break up a long trip, and it provides memorable opportunities to interact with locals and the land in ways you never would when just passing through.

**Volunteer Florida** ([www.volunteerflorida.org](http://www.volunteerflorida.org)), the primary state-run organization, coordinates volunteer

## GOVERNMENT TRAVEL ADVICE

**Australia** ([www.smarttraveller.gov.au](http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au))

**Canada** ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php))

**Germany** ([www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de))

**New Zealand** ([www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz))

**UK** ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk))

**USA** ([www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov))

centers across the state. Though it's aimed at Floridians, casual visitors can find situations that match their time and interests.

Florida's state parks would not function without volunteers. Each park coordinates its own volunteers, and most also have the support of an all-volunteer 'friends' organization (officially called Citizen Support Organizations). Links and contact information are on the website of **Florida State Parks** ([www.floridastateparks.org/getinvolved/volunteer.cfm](http://www.floridastateparks.org/getinvolved/volunteer.cfm))

Finally, **Habitat for Humanity** ([2305-634-3628](tel:305-634-3628); [www.miamihabitat.org](http://www.miamihabitat.org); 3800 NW 22nd Ave, Miami) does a ton of work in Florida, building homes and helping the homeless.

## Women Travelers

Women traveling by themselves or in a group should encounter no particular problems unique to Florida. Indeed, there are a number of excellent resources to help traveling women.

The community resource **Journeywoman** ([www.journeywoman.com](http://www.journeywoman.com)) facilitates women exchanging travel tips, with links to resources.

These two national advocacy groups might also be helpful:

➔ **National Organization for Women** (NOW; [202-628-8669](tel:202-628-8669); [www.now.org](http://www.now.org))

➔ **Planned Parenthood** ([2800-230-7526](tel:800-230-7526); [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org))

In terms of safety issues, single women need to exhibit the same street smarts as any solo traveler, but they are sometimes more often the target of unwanted attention or harassment. Some women like to carry a whistle, mace or cayenne-pepper spray in case of assault. These sprays are legal to carry and use in Florida, but only in self-defense. Federal law prohibits them being carried on planes.

If you are assaulted, you can call the **police** ([2911](tel:911)) or a rape-crisis hotline; telephone books have listings of local organizations, or contact the 24-hour **National Sexual Assault Hotline** ([2800-656-4673](tel:800-656-4673); [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)), or go straight to a hospital. Police can sometimes be insensitive with assault victims, while a rape-crisis center or hospital will advocate on behalf of victims and can act as a link to other services, including the police.

## Work

Seasonal service jobs in tourist beach towns and theme parks are common and often easy to get, if low-paying.

If you are a foreigner in the USA with a standard non-immigrant visitors visa, you are expressly forbidden to take paid work in the USA and will be deported if you're caught working illegally. In addition, employers are required to establish the bona fides of their employees or face fines. In particular, southern Florida is notorious for large numbers of foreigners working illegally, and immigration officers are vigilant.

To work legally, foreigners need to apply for a work visa before leaving home. For non-student jobs, temporary or permanent, you need to be sponsored by a US employer, who will arrange an H-category visa. These are not easy to obtain.

Student-exchange visitors need a J1 visa, which the following organizations will help arrange:

**American Institute for Foreign Study** (AIFS; [2866-906-2437](tel:866-906-2437); [www.aifs.com](http://www.aifs.com))

**BUNAC** ([2203-264-0901](tel:203-264-0901); [www.bunac.org](http://www.bunac.org)) British Universities North American Club.

**Camp America** ([2800-727-8233](tel:800-727-8233); [www.campamerica.aifs.com](http://www.campamerica.aifs.com))

**Council on International Educational Exchange** (CIEE; [2800-407-8839](tel:800-407-8839); [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org))

**InterExchange** ([2212-924-0446](tel:212-924-0446); [www.interexchange.org](http://www.interexchange.org)) Camp and au-pair programs.

# Transportation

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Nearly all international travelers to Florida arrive by air, while most US travelers prefer air or car. Florida is bordered by Alabama to the west and north, and Georgia to the north. Major interstates into Florida are the I-10 from the west (Alabama), and the I-75 and I-95 from the north (Georgia).

Getting to Florida by bus is a distant third option, and by train an even more distant fourth. Major regional hubs in Florida include Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Tampa and Jacksonville.

Flights, cars and tours can be booked online at [lonelyplanet.com/bookings](http://lonelyplanet.com/bookings).

## Air

Unless you live in or near Florida and have your own wheels, flying to the region

and then renting a car is the most time-efficient option. Depending on your plans, you'll be missing out on lots of the best bits without the freedom and convenience of a vehicle.

## Airports & Airlines

Whether you're coming from within the US or from abroad, the entire state is well served by air, with a number of domestic and international airlines operating services into Florida.

Major airports:

**Orlando International Airport** (MCO; ☎407-825-2001; [www.orlandoairports.net](http://www.orlandoairports.net); 1 Jeff Fuqua Blvd) Handles more passengers than any other airport in Florida. Serves Walt Disney World, the Space Coast and the Orlando area.

**Miami International Airport** (MIA; ☎305-876-7000; [www.miami-airport.com](http://www.miami-airport.com); 2100 NW 42nd Ave) One of Florida's busiest international airports. It serves metro Miami, the Ever-

glades and the Keys, and is a hub for American, Delta and US Airways.

**Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport** (FLL; ☎866-435-9355; [www.broward.org/airport](http://www.broward.org/airport); 320 Terminal Dr) Serves metro Fort Lauderdale and Broward County. It's about 30 miles north of Miami: be sure to check flights into Fort Lauderdale as they are often cheaper or have availability when flights into Miami are full.

**Tampa International Airport** (TPA; ☎813-870-8700; [www.tampaairport.com](http://www.tampaairport.com); 4100 George J Bean Pkwy) Florida's third-busiest airport is located 6 miles southwest of downtown Tampa and serves the Tampa Bay and St Petersburg metro area.

Other airports with international traffic include Daytona Beach (DAB) and Jacksonville (JAX).

Most cities have airports and offer services to other US cities; these include Palm Beach (PBI; actually in

## CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Every form of transportation that relies on carbon-based fuel generates CO<sub>2</sub>, the main cause of human-induced climate change. Modern travel is dependent on aeroplanes which might use less fuel per kilometer per person than most cars but travel much greater distances. The altitude at which aircraft emit gases (including CO<sub>2</sub>) and particles also contributes to their climate change impact. Many websites offer 'carbon calculators' that allow people to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey and, for those who wish to do so, to offset the impact of the greenhouse gases emitted with contributions to portfolios of climate-friendly initiatives throughout the world. Lonely Planet offsets the carbon footprint of all staff and author travel.

West Palm Beach), Sarasota (SRQ), Tallahassee (TLH), Gainesville (GNV), Fort Myers (RSW), Pensacola (PNS) and Key West (EYW).

## Tickets

It helps to know that in the US there are a number of APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) fares of 7, 14, 21 and 28 days available, which can really save you money. It is prudent to compare flights into the state between the handful of significant airline hubs. The distance between Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and Miami, for example, is not so great, yet each city has a major airport. Rates can sometimes fluctuate widely between these destinations, depending on season and demand. If you're lucky, you could save money by flying into one airport and out of the other, or, flying into an airport a little further from your destination, and driving. The combination of Miami and Fort Lauderdale often works well in this regard.

## Land

### Bus

For bus trips, **Greyhound** (☎800-231-2222; [www.greyhound.com](http://www.greyhound.com)) is the main long-distance operator in the US. It serves Florida from most major cities. It also has the only scheduled statewide service.

## CAR TRAVEL TIMES

Sample distances and times from various points in the US to Miami:

CITY	DISTANCE (MILES)	DURATION (HR)
Atlanta	660	10½
Chicago	1380	23
Los Angeles	2750	44
New York City	1280	22
Washington, DC	1050	17

Standard long-distance fares can be relatively high: bargain airfares can undercut buses on long-distance routes, and on shorter routes, renting a car can be cheaper. Nonetheless, discounted (even half-price) long-distance bus trips are often available by purchasing tickets online seven to 14 days in advance. Then, once in Florida, you can rent a car to get around. Inquire about multiday passes.

### Car & Motorcycle

Driving to Florida is easy; there are no international borders or entry issues. Incorporating Florida into a larger USA road trip is very common, and having a car while in Florida is often a necessity: there's lots of ground to cover and some of the most interesting places and state parks are only accessible by car.

### Train

From the East Coast, **Amtrak** (☎800-872-7245; [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)) makes a comfortable, affordable option for getting to Florida. Amtrak's *Silver Service* (which includes *Silver Meteor* and *Silver Star* trains) runs between New York and Miami, with services that include Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, plus smaller Florida towns in between.

There is no direct service to Florida from Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago or the Midwest. Trains from these destinations connect to the *Silver Service* route, but the transfer adds a day or so to your travel time.

Amtrak's *Auto Train* takes you and your car from the Washington, DC, area to the Orlando area; this saves you gas, the drive and having to pay for a rental car. The fare for your vehicle isn't cheap, though, depending on its size and weight. The *Auto Train* leaves daily from Lorton, VA, and goes only to Sanford, FL. It takes about 18 hours, leaving in the afternoon and arriving the next morning. On the *Auto Train*, you pay for your passage, cabin and car separately. Book tickets in advance. Children, seniors and military personnel receive discounts. See p518 for sample train fares.

## BUS FARES

Sample one-way advance-purchase and standard fares between Miami and some major US cities:

CITY	FARE (ADVANCE/STANDARD)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY (PER DAY)
Atlanta	\$82/148	16-18	4-6
New Orleans	\$139/154	23-24	3-4
New York City	\$166/184	33-35	4-6
Washington, DC	\$154/178	27-29	4-6



## TRAIN FARES

Sample one-way fares (from low to high season) and durations from NYC to points in Florida:

FROM	TO	FARE	DURATION (HR)
New York City	Jacksonville	\$172-291	18-20
New York City	Miami	\$185-314	28-31
New York City	Orlando	\$175-297	22-23
New York City	Tampa	\$176-299	26

## Sea

Florida is nearly completely surrounded by the ocean, and it's a major cruise-ship port. Fort Lauderdale is the largest transatlantic harbor in the US. Adventurous types can always sign up as crew members for a chance to travel the high seas.

## GETTING AROUND

Once you reach Florida, traveling by car is the best way of getting around – it allows you to reach areas not otherwise served by public transportation.

## Air

The US airline industry is reliable and safe, and serves Florida extremely well, both from the rest of the country and within Florida. However, the industry's continuing financial troubles have resulted in a series of high-profile mergers in recent years: Midwest joined Frontier; Orlando-based Air Tran merged into Southwest; Continental merged with United, and the American Airlines merger with US Airways to form the world's largest airline was finalized in 2014.

In general, this has led to the abolition of some routes, fewer flights, fuller airplanes, less perks, more fees and higher fares. Airport security screening procedures also

keep evolving; allow extra time.

Air service between Florida's four main airports – Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Orlando International and Tampa – is frequent and direct. Smaller destinations such as Key West, Fort Myers, Pensacola, Jacksonville, Tallahassee and West Palm Beach are served, but less frequently, indirectly and at higher fares.

### Airlines in Florida

Domestic airlines operating in Florida:

**American** (AA; ☎800-433-7300; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)) Has a Miami hub and service to and between major Florida cities.

**Cape Air** (9K; [www.flycapeair.com](http://www.flycapeair.com)) Convenient connections between Fort Myers and Key West.

**Delta** (DL; ☎800-455-2720; [www.delta.com](http://www.delta.com)) International carrier to main Florida cities, plus flights from Miami to Orlando and Tampa.

**Frontier** (F9; ☎800-432-1359; [www.frontierairlines.com](http://www.frontierairlines.com)) Services Tampa, Orlando and Fort Lauderdale from Denver, Minneapolis and the Midwest.

**JetBlue** (JB; ☎800-538-2583; [www.jetblue.com](http://www.jetblue.com)) Serves Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and smaller Florida cities from the East and West Coast.

**Southwest** (WN; ☎800-435-9792; [www.southwest.com](http://www.southwest.com)) One of the US' leading low-cost carriers, offering free baggage and, at times, extremely low fares.

**Spirit** (NK; ☎801-401-2220; [www.spiritair.com](http://www.spiritair.com))

Florida-based discount carrier serving Florida cities from East Coast US, Caribbean, and Central and South America.

**United** (UA; ☎800-824-6400; [www.united.com](http://www.united.com)) International flights to Orlando and Miami; domestic flights to and between key Florida cities.

## Air Passes

International travelers who plan on doing a lot of flying, both in and out of the region, might consider buying an air pass. Air passes are available only to non-US citizens, and must be purchased in conjunction with an international ticket.

Conditions and cost structures can be complicated, but all include a certain number of domestic flights (from three to 10) that must be used within a set time frame, generally between 30 and 60 days. In most cases, you must plan your itinerary in advance, but dates (and even destinations) can sometimes be left open. Talk with a travel agent to determine if an air pass would save you money based on your plans.

The two main airline alliances offering air passes are **Star Alliance** ([www.staralliance.com](http://www.staralliance.com)) and **One World** ([www.oneworld.com](http://www.oneworld.com)).

## Bicycle

Regional bicycle touring is very popular. Flat countryside and scenic coastlines make for great itineraries. However, target winter to spring; summer is unbearably hot and humid for long-distance biking.

Some Florida biking organizations organize bike tours. Renting a bicycle is easy throughout Florida.

Some other things to keep in mind:

**Helmet laws** Helmets are required for anyone aged 16 and younger. Adults are not required to wear helmets, but should for safety.

**Road rules** Bikes must obey auto rules; ride on the right-hand side of the road, with traffic, not on sidewalks.

**Transporting your bike to Florida** Bikes are considered checked luggage on airplanes, but often must be boxed and fees can be high (more than \$200).

**Theft** Bring and use a sturdy lock (U-type is best). Theft is common, especially in Miami Beach.

For more information and assistance, a few organizations can help:

**Better World Club** (☎866-238-1137; www.betterworldclub.com) Offers a bicycle roadside assistance program.

**International Bicycle Fund** (www.ibike.org) Comprehensive overview of bike regulations by airline, and lots of advice.

**League of American Bicyclists** (www.bikeleague.org) General advice, plus lists of local cycle clubs and repair shops.

## Boat

Florida is a world center for two major types of boat transportation: privately owned yachts and cruise ships.

Each coastal city has sightseeing boats that cruise harbors and coastlines. It really pays (in memories) to get out on the water. Water-taxi services along Intracoastal Waterways are a feature in Fort Lauderdale and around Sanibel Island and Pine Island on the Gulf.

## Cruises

Florida is a huge destination and departure point for cruises of all kinds. Miami likes to brag that it's the 'cruise capital of the world,' and Walt Disney World runs its own **Disney Cruise Line** (☎800-951-3532; www.disneycruise.disney.go.com), which has a number of three- to seven-night cruises throughout the Caribbean, including to

Disney's own private island, Castaway Cay.

For specials on other multiday and multiday cruises, see the following:

**Cruise.com** (www.cruise.com)

**CruiseWeb** (www.cruiseweb.com)

**Vacations to Go** (www.vacations.togo.com)

**CruisesOnly** (www.cruisesonly.com)

Florida's main ports:

**Port Canaveral** (www.portcanaveral.com) On the Atlantic Coast near the Kennedy Space Center; gives Miami a run for its money.

**Port Everglades** (www.porteverglades.net) Near Fort Lauderdale, and the third-busiest Florida port.

**Port of Miami** (☎305-347-4800; www.miamidade.gov/portofmiami) At the world's largest cruise-ship port, the most common trips offered are to the Bahamas, the Caribbean, Key West and Mexico.

**Port of Tampa** (www.tampaport.com) On the Gulf Coast; rapidly gaining a foothold in the cruise market.

Major cruise companies:

**Carnival Cruise Lines** (☎800-764-7419; www.carnival.com)

**Norwegian Cruise Line** (☎866-234-7350; www.ncl.com)

**Royal Caribbean** (☎866-562-7625; www.royalcaribbean.com)

## Bus

The only statewide bus service is by **Greyhound** (☎800-231-2222; www.greyhound.com), which connects all major and mid-sized Florida cities, but not always smaller towns (even some popular beach towns). Regional or city-run buses cover their more limited areas much better; used together, these bus systems make travel by bus possible, but time-consuming.

It's always a bit cheaper to take a Greyhound bus during the week than on the weekend. Fares for children are usually about half the adult fare.

## GREYHOUND BUS FARES

To get you started, here are some round-trip Greyhound bus fares and travel times around Florida:

FROM	TO	FARE	DURATION (HR)
Daytona Beach	St Augustine	\$29	1
Fort Lauderdale	Melbourne	\$58	4
Jacksonville	Tallahassee	\$54	3
Melbourne	Daytona Beach	\$34	3½
Miami	Key West	\$58	4½
Miami	Naples	\$46	3
Panama City	Pensacola	\$49	3
St Augustine	Jacksonville	\$24	1
Naples	Tampa	\$59	5
Tampa	Orlando	\$38	2
Tallahassee	Panama City	\$39	2½

## Car & Motorcycle

By far the most convenient and popular way to travel around Florida is by car. While it's quite possible to avoid using a car on single-destination trips – to Miami, to Orlando theme parks or to a self-contained beach resort – relying on public transit can be inconvenient for even limited regional touring. Even smaller, tourist-friendly towns such as Naples, Sarasota or St Augustine can be frustrating to negotiate without a car. Motorcycles are also popular in Florida, given the flat roads and warm weather (summer rain excepted).

### Automobile Associations

The **American Automobile Association (AAA)**; ☎800-874-7532; [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com) has reciprocal agreements with several international auto clubs (check with AAA and bring your membership card). For members, AAA offers travel insurance, tour books, diagnostic centers for used-car buyers and a greater number of regional offices, and it advocates politically for the auto industry. It also has a handy online route planner that can help you calculate the exact mileage and estimated fuel costs of your intended itinerary.

An ecofriendly alternative is the **Better World Club** (☎866-238-1137; [www.betterworldclub.com](http://www.betterworldclub.com)), which donates 1% of earnings to assist environmental cleanup; offers ecologically sensitive choices for services; and advocates politically for environmental causes. Better World also has a roadside-assistance program for bicycles.

In both organizations, the central member benefit is 24-hour emergency roadside assistance anywhere in the USA. Both clubs also offer trip planning and free maps, travel-agency services, car

insurance and a range of discounts (car rentals, hotels etc).

### Driver's License

Foreign visitors can legally drive in the USA for up to 12 months with their home driver's license. However, getting an International Driving Permit (IDP) is recommended; this will have more credibility with US traffic police, especially if your home license doesn't have a photo or is in a foreign language. Your automobile association at home can issue an IDP, valid for one year, for a small fee. You must carry your home license together with the IDP at all times. To drive a motorcycle, you need either a valid US state motorcycle license or an IDP specially endorsed for motorcycles.

### Insurance

Don't put the key into the ignition if you don't have insurance: it's legally required, and you risk financial ruin without it if there's an accident. If you already have auto insurance (even overseas), or if you buy travel insurance, make sure that the policy has adequate liability coverage for a rental car in Florida; it probably does, but check.

Rental-car companies will provide liability insurance, but most charge extra for the privilege. Always ask. Collision-damage insurance for the vehicle is almost never included in the US. Instead, the provider will offer an optional Collision Damage Waiver (CDW) or Loss Damage Waiver (LDW), usually with an initial deductible of \$100 to \$500. For an extra premium, you can usually get this deductible covered as well. However, most credit cards now offer collision-damage coverage for rental cars if you rent for 15 days or less and charge the total rental to your card. This is a good way to avoid paying extra fees to the rental company, but note that if there's an accident, you sometimes must pay the

rental car company first and then seek reimbursement from the credit-card company. Check your credit-card policy. Paying extra for some or all of this insurance increases the cost of a rental car by as much as \$10 to \$30 a day.

Travel insurance, either specific paid policies or free insurance provided by your credit-card company (when your travel arrangements are purchased on their credit cards), often includes cover for rental-car insurances up to the full amount of any deductible. If you plan on renting a vehicle for any significant period of time, the cost of travel insurance, which includes coverage for rental vehicles, is often way cheaper than purchasing the optional insurance from the car-rental company directly. Be prudent and do your research to avoid getting a shock when you go to sign your car-rental contract and discover all the additional charges.

### Rental CAR

Car rental is a very competitive business. Most rental companies require that you have a major credit card; that you be at least 25 years old; and that you have a valid driver's license (your home license will do). Some national companies may rent to drivers between the ages of 21 and 24 for an additional charge. Those under 21 are usually not permitted to rent at all.

Additional drivers are not usually covered under the base rate and an additional daily surcharge will be applied. If someone other than the parties authorised on the rental contract is driving the vehicle and has an accident, all paid insurances will be void: you don't want this to happen. If anyone else is likely to drive the vehicle, they need to be present at the time of collection and are required to submit their driver's license

and pay the extra fee. If the additional driver is not able to be present at the time of collection, it is possible to drive into any branch of the rental company and add the additional driver on to your rental agreement at a later date. Charges may be backdated to the day of collection.

Good independent agencies are listed by **Car Rental Express** ([www.carrentalexpress.com](http://www.carrentalexpress.com)), which rates and compares independent agencies in US cities; it's particularly useful for searching out cheaper long-term rentals.

National car-rental companies include the following:

**Alamo** (☎877-222-9075; [www.alamo.com](http://www.alamo.com))

**Avis** (☎800-331-2112; [www.avis.com](http://www.avis.com))

**Budget** (☎800-527-0700; [www.budget.com](http://www.budget.com))

**Dollar** (☎800-800-4000; [www.dollar.com](http://www.dollar.com))

**Enterprise** (☎800-261-7331; [www.enterprise.com](http://www.enterprise.com))

**Hertz** (☎800-654-3131; [www.hertz.com](http://www.hertz.com))

**National** (☎800-468-3334; [www.nationalcar.com](http://www.nationalcar.com))

**Rent-a-Wreck** (☎877-877-0700; [www.rentawreck.com](http://www.rentawreck.com))

**Thrifty** (☎800-367-2277; [www.thrifty.com](http://www.thrifty.com))

Rental cars are readily available at all airport locations and many downtown city locations. With advance reservations for a small car, the daily rate with unlimited mileage is about \$35 to \$55, while typical weekly rates are \$200 to \$400, plus myriad taxes and fees. If you rent from a downtown location, you can save money by avoiding the exorbitant airport fees.

An alternative in Miami is **Zipcar** ([www.zipcar.com](http://www.zipcar.com)), a car-sharing service that charges hourly and daily rental fees with free gas, insurance and limited mileage included; prepayment is required.

Picking that one-way rentals (picking up in one city and

dropping off in another) will often incur a prohibitive one-way drop fee. Experimenting with your routing, or returning the vehicle to the same or a nearby city to where you collected your vehicle, may help avoid this penalty. Also check if the location that you're collecting the car from is franchised or centrally owned: sometimes the latter will help get any one-way fees waived.

### MOTORCYCLE

To straddle a Harley across Florida, contact **EagleRider** (☎888-900-9901; [www.eaglerider.com](http://www.eaglerider.com)), which has offices in Daytona Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, St Augustine and Orlando. It offers a wide range of models, which start at \$150 a day, plus liability insurance. Adult riders (over 21) are not required by Florida law to wear a helmet, but you should for your own safety.

### MOTORHOME (RV)

Forget hotels. Drive your own. Touring Florida by recreational vehicle (RV) can be as low-key or as over-the-top as you wish.

After settling on the vehicle's size, consider the impact of gas prices, gas mileage, additional mileage costs, insurance and refundable deposits; these can add up quickly. Typically, RVs don't come with unlimited mileage, so estimate your mileage up front to calculate the true rental cost.

Inquire about motorhome relocations: sometimes, you can get amazing deals where you're effectively being paid to move the vehicle between cities for its owner – but you'll need to be extremely flexible with your dates and routes.

### Adventures On Wheels

(☎800-943-3579; [www.wheels9.com](http://www.wheels9.com)) Office in Miami.

**CruiseAmerica** (☎800-671-8042; [www.cruiseamerica.com](http://www.cruiseamerica.com))

The largest national RV-rental firm has offices across South Florida.

### Recreational Vehicle

**Rental Association** (☎703-591-7130; [www.rvda.org](http://www.rvda.org)) Good resource for RV information and advice, and helps find rental locations.

### Road Rules

If you're new to Florida or US roads, here are some basics:

- ➔ The maximum speed limit on interstates is 75mph, but that drops to 65mph and 55mph in urban areas. Pay attention to the posted signs. City-street speed limits vary between 15mph and 45mph.
- ➔ Florida police officers are strict with speed-limit enforcement, and speeding tickets are expensive. If caught going over the speed limit by 10mph, the fine is \$155. Conversely, you may be fined if you're driving too slowly on an interstate.
- ➔ All passengers in a car must wear seat belts; the fine for not wearing a seat belt is \$30. All children under three must be in a child safety seat.
- ➔ As in the rest of the US, drive on the right-hand side of the road. On highways, pass in the left-hand lane (but anxious drivers often pass wherever space allows).
- ➔ Right turns on a red light are permitted after a full stop. At four-way stop signs, the car that reaches the intersection first has right of way. In a tie, the car on the right has right of way.

## Hitchhiking

Hitchhiking is never entirely safe in any country, and we don't recommend it. Travelers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they go in pairs and if they let someone know where they are planning to go. Be sure to ask the driver where he or she is going rather than telling the person where you want to go.

## Local Transportation

### Bus

Local bus services are available in most cities; along the coasts, service typically connects downtown to at least one or two beach communities. Some cities (such as Tampa and Jacksonville) have high-frequency trolleys circling downtown, while some coastal stretches are linked by seasonal trolleys that ferry beach-goers between towns (such as between St Pete Beach and Clearwater).

Fares generally cost between \$1 and \$2. Exact change upon boarding is usually required, though some

buses take \$1 bills. Transfers – slips of paper that will allow you to change buses – range from free to 25¢. Hours of operation differ from city to city, but generally buses run from approximately 6am to 10pm.

### Metro

Walt Disney World has a monorail and Tampa has an old-fashioned, one-line streetcar, but the only real metro systems are in and near Miami. In Miami, a driverless Metromover circles downtown and connects with Metrorail, which connects downtown north to Hialeah and south to Kendall.

Meanwhile, north of Miami, Hollywood, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach (and the towns between them) are well connected by

Tri-Rail's double-decker commuter trains. Tri-Rail runs all the way to Miami, but the full trip takes longer than driving.

## Train

**Amtrak** (☎800-872-7245; [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)) trains run between a number of Florida cities. For the purpose of getting around Florida, its service is extremely limited, and yet for certain trips its trains can be very easy and inexpensive. In essence, daily trains run between Jacksonville, Orlando and Miami, with one line branching off to Tampa. In addition, the Thruway Motorcoach (or bus) service gets Amtrak passengers to Daytona Beach, St Petersburg and Fort Myers.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'