

Welcome to Florida

A hundred worlds – from magic kingdoms and Latin American and Caribbean capitals to mangrove islands, wild wetlands and artist colonies – are all contained within this flat peninsula.

Seaside Fantasy

Maybe there's no mystery to what makes the Florida peninsula so intoxicating. Beaches as fine and sweet as powdered sugar, warm waters, rustling mangroves: all conspire to melt our workaday selves. We come to Florida to let go – of worries and winter, of inhibitions and reality. Some desire a beachy getaway of swimming, seafood and sunsets. Others seek the hedonism of South Beach, spring break and Key West. Still more hope to lose themselves within the phantasmagorical realms of Walt Disney World® and Orlando's theme parks.

Sexy Swamps

Within Florida's semitropical wilderness, alligators prowl the waterways, herons strut through ponds, manatees winter in springs and sea turtles nest in summer. Osprey and eagles, dolphins and tarpon, coral-reef forests, oceans of saw grass: despite the best efforts of 21st-century humans, overwhelming portions of Florida remain untamed. In a nation where natural beauty is often measured by topography, flat Florida is underappreciated by outdoors fanatics, but here you can paddle a kayak over the back of a sleeping Jurassic-era alligator, and meet loggerheads and manatees underwater, eye to eye.

Tropical Mosaic

While many know Florida for beaches and theme parks, few understand that this is one of the most populous states in the country, a bellwether for the American experiment. And that experiment – and this state – is more diverse than ever. From rural hunters and trappers in the geographically northern, culturally Southern climes, to Jewish transplants sitting side by side with Latin arrivals from every Spanish-speaking nation in the world, it's hard to beat Florida when it comes to experiencing the human tapestry at its most colorful and vibrant.

Culture By the Coast

Tan, tropical Florida is smarter and more culturally savvy than its appearance suggests. This state, particularly South Florida, has a reputation for attracting eccentrics and idiosyncratic types from across the US, Latin America and Europe. Many of these folks, and their descendants, have gone on to create or provide patronage for the arts, as evidenced by enormous concert spaces in Miami, a glut of museums on the Gulf Coast, and a long, literary tradition – Florida has produced more than its fair share of great American authors.



Why I Love Florida

By Adam Karlin, Writer

I was raised on wetlands and I'm drawn to wetlands, and I can't think of a state that better combines that favored biome with some of my other great travel loves – good food, ethnic entrepôts, warm weather and nice beaches. What can I say? Give me the ocean on one hand, swamps on the other and some fried conch and iced tea for lunch and I'm happy as a clam (which are great fried at a dockside restaurant, by the way).

For more about our writers, see p544