

# Florida

By Tom Kirvan

## FROM BEACHES TO SPACE EXPLORATION

It's a state where summer is a year-round proposition.

Florida, otherwise known as the Sunshine State, is located in the southeastern United States, bordering Georgia and Alabama to its north. With a population surpassing 21 million residents, Florida ranks as one of the most populous states in the country. Its capital city, Tallahassee, situated in the northern region, serves as the political and administrative center.

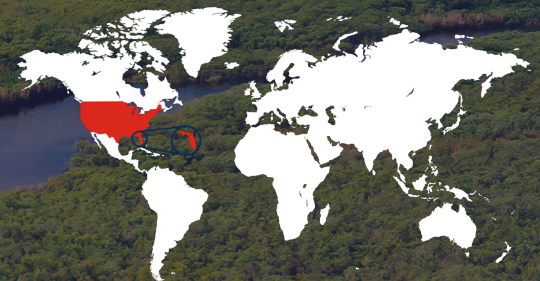
Florida's distinctive geographic features are as varied as they are captivating. The state boasts more than 1,300 miles of coastline along the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, offering an abundance of pristine beaches, mangrove swamps, and barrier islands. The Florida Everglades, a vast wilderness in the southern part of the state, is the largest tropical wilderness of any kind in the United States. This unique ecosystem is home to an array of wildlife, including alligators, manatees, and a diverse range of bird species.

Despite its relatively low elevation, Florida's terrain encompasses a variety of landscapes, from rolling hills and lush forests in the north to the flat, marshy expanses of the Everglades in the south. The highest point of elevation in Florida is Britton Hill, reaching a modest 345 feet above sea level in the northern part of the state.

One must-see tourist attraction that encapsulates the essence of Florida is the Walt Disney World Resort. Located near Orlando, this sprawling entertainment complex is the epitome of family-friendly fun, featuring four theme parks, two water parks, and countless attractions, shows, and dining options.

Beyond Disney World, Florida is home to a multitude of other major tourist destinations, each offering its own unique blend of geography, culture, and history:

- **Miami:** Known for its vibrant nightlife, cultural diversity, and iconic Art Deco architecture, Miami is a bustling metropolis with a distinct Latin flavor. Visitors can explore neighborhoods like Little Havana, South Beach, and Wynwood, where they can enjoy world-class cuisine, vibrant street art, and pulsating nightlife.
- **Key West:** Located at the southernmost tip of the Florida Keys, Key West is a laid-back island paradise known for its colorful sunsets, quirky charm, and literary legacy. Visitors can explore historic sites like the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum, stroll along Duval Street, or simply relax on the beach and soak in the island's relaxed vibe.
- **Orlando:** In addition to Walt Disney World, Orlando is home to a number of other theme parks, including Universal Studios Florida,



## Fast Facts

Capital: Tallahassee  
Largest City: Jacksonville  
Languages: English and Spanish  
Population: 22.6 million  
Longest River: St. Johns River, 310 miles  
Must-see Attraction: Walt Disney World

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SeaWorld Orlando, and LEGOLAND Florida. Beyond the theme parks, visitors can explore attractions like the Orlando Science Center, the Orlando Museum of Art, and the Harry P. Leu Gardens.

- **St. Augustine:** Founded in 1565 by Spanish explorers, St. Augustine lays claim to being the oldest continuously inhabited European-established settlement in the United States. Visitors can explore historic landmarks such as the Castillo de San Marcos, stroll along cobblestone streets lined with colonial architecture, and learn about the city's rich history at museums like the Lightner Museum and the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum.
- **Everglades National Park:** Spanning more than 1.5 million acres in the southern part of the state, the Everglades is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an International Biosphere Reserve. Visitors can explore the park's unique ecosystem by airboat, kayak, or hiking trail, encountering a diverse array of wildlife, including alligators, manatees, and endangered species like the Florida panther and the American crocodile.

Cape Canaveral, located on Florida's Atlantic coast, has played a crucial role in America's space program. It serves as the primary launch site for NASA spacecraft, including the Apollo lunar missions. Today, Cape Canaveral continues to be a hub for space exploration, hosting launches for satellites, space probes, and crewed missions to the International Space Station.

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