

Fun Florida Facts for Kids

State Nickname: Sunshine State

Date of Statehood: March 3, 1845

State Bird: Mockingbird

State Flower: Orange Blossom

State Wildflower: Coreopsis

State Capital: Tallahassee

State Motto: In God We Trust

State Tree: Sabal Palm

State Beverage: Orange Juice

State Reptile: American Alligator

State Butterfly: Zebra Longwing

State Animal: Florida Panther

State Flag: Flag of Florida



Did You Know?

Florida's flag was originally just the state seal on a white background. In the late 1890s, a red saltire—also known as St. Andrew's Cross—was added so the flag wouldn't resemble a white flag of truce when hanging still. The design was officially adopted by the Florida legislature in 1900.

Fun Facts About Florida

Fun Fact #1: Florida ranks #26 in size among U.S. states, at 53,997 square miles.

Fun Fact #2: St. Augustine, Florida is the oldest city in the United States—it's been continuously occupied since 1565. This beats Jamestown by 42 years, and the Plymouth Rock Pilgrims by 55 years.

Fun Fact #3: Florida is known as the lightning capital of the United States, with an average of 1.2 million lightning strikes annually.

Fun Fact #4: The largest cities in Florida are Jacksonville, which has nearly a million people, followed by Miami, Tampa, and Orlando.

Fun Fact #5: Florida is the only place in the world where alligators and crocodiles live side-by-side. While the American alligator can be found in freshwater throughout Florida, the American crocodile mainly lives in south Florida, in brackish and saltwater. Alligators and crocodiles coexist in Florida's brackish water.

Fun Fact #6: The Spaniards called this place La Florida, which means "place of flowers."

Fun Fact #7: Florida has plenty of fossils, but none of them are of dinosaurs. During the age of the dinosaurs, Florida was completely underwater. The oldest fossil found in the state is of a sea turtle, from 100 million years ago.

Fun Fact #8: Today, sea turtles still love Florida! Three different species regularly crawl ashore here to lay their eggs on its sandy beaches: loggerheads, leatherbacks, and green turtles. (A few Kemp's ridley and hawksbill turtles nest here too.)

Fun Fact #9: Florida's major industries include tourism and agriculture. The state is also known for aviation and aerospace, with many rocket launches happening from Kennedy Space Center and nearby Cape Canaveral Air Force Base.

Fun Fact #10: Did you know that it actually snowed in Florida in 1977? People in Miami saw snowflakes for the first time ever—it was so rare that some kids thought it was sugar falling from the sky!

Geography Facts About Florida

Regions: Coastal Plains, Central Highlands, Florida Everglades, Panhandle, Florida Keys

Climate: Humid subtropical to tropical

Location: Florida is bordered by Georgia and Alabama to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the west, and the Straits of Florida to the south.

Landmarks: DisneyWorld, Kennedy Space Center, South Beach, Castillo de San Marcos, Seven Mile Bridge, Sunshine Skyway Bridge, Ocala National Forest, Weeki Wachee Springs, Florida Reef

National Parks: Everglades National Park, Biscayne National Park, Dry Tortugas National Park

Florida Keys: This curved chain of small islands stretches 225 miles from the southern tip of Florida's mainland to the Dry Tortugas in the Gulf of Mexico. Key West, at its lower end, is the southernmost point in the United States.

Ocean Front: Florida has the second longest coastline (after Alaska) in the U.S. When you add in all the islands, inlets, and bays, the coastline totals 8,436 miles!

River Systems: The longest river in Florida is the St. John's River, which stretches nearly 300 miles. There are nearly 26,000 miles of rivers in the state. Other major river systems include the Suwanee, Apalachicola, Peace, Withlacooche, St. Mary's, and Ocklawaha.

Lakes: Florida's largest freshwater lake is Okeechobee. It's about 35 miles long and is the third largest freshwater lake contained entirely inside the U.S. Okeechobee is the Hitchiti Indian name for "big water."

Florida Everglades: The Florida Everglades is a vast wetland ecosystem in southern Florida, filled with sawgrass marshes, mangroves, and diverse wildlife. Though sometimes called a swamp, the water here is actually always on the move (though very slowly) toward the south—a phenomenon known as "sheet flow."

Highest Point: Britton Hill on the Lake Wales Ridge is 345 feet above sea level. It's the lowest "highest point" of any state in the U.S.

Wildlife and Nature Facts About

Common Reptiles and Amphibians: American alligator, box turtle, gopher tortoise, green anole, southern toad, Florida cottonmouth, American tree frog

Common Mammals: White-tailed deer, marsh rabbit, nine-banded armadillo, eastern gray squirrel, bobcat, cotton mouse, Virginia opossum, striped skunk, raccoon, bottlenose dolphin

Common Birds: Northern cardinal, red-bellied woodpecker, great egret, great blue heron, tricolored heron, bald eagle, osprey, wood stork, anhinga, double-crested cormorant, roseate spoonbill

Common Fish: Tarpon, Florida gar, snook, red drum, grouper, mangrove snapper, sheepshead, pinfish, blacktip shark, bull shark, tiger shark, hammerhead shark, bonnethead shark

Common Trees: Scrub pine, live oak, pin oak, red cypress, sabal palm, coconut palm, southern magnolia, bald cypress, longleaf pine, wax myrtle

Common Plants and Flowers: Blanketflower, beach sunflower, firebush, tickseed, hibiscus, coontie, beautyberry, buttonwood, muhly grass, lovegrass, sea oats, Spanish needle

Selected Endangered Species: Florida panther, West Indian manatee, Florida scrub jay, Schaus swallowtail butterfly, Key deer, Miami blue butterfly, Florida grasshopper sparrow, loggerhead sea turtle

Selected Invasive Animal Species: Burmese python, Cuban tree frog, cane toad, green iguana, brown anole, fire ant, lionfish

Selected Invasive Plant Species: Australian pine, skunk vine, Brazilian pepper, water hyacinth, heavenly bamboo, kudzu, callery pear, castor bean, Mexican petunia, wedelia, Caesar weed, oyster plant

Did You Know?

Since the accidental introduction of Burmese pythons into the Florida Everglades in the 1990s, small mammal populations have declined by as much as 99%, and some (rabbits and foxes) have disappeared entirely. Even local bobcats are prey for this voracious snake, and their population has declined by more than 87% since 1997.

Florida History Facts

First Inhabitants: The first people came to the Florida peninsula around 14,000 years ago, following big game animals like mastodons, mammoths, and bison. Over time, the combination of climate change (higher sea levels and more rainfall) and human hunting caused these mammals to become extinct.

Native Americans: There were likely around 250,000 indigenous people living in Florida when the Spanish arrived. The Timucua, who made up the majority, lived in the north and farmed the land. The Calusa were expert fishermen who built villages in the southern part of the peninsula, mainly on the coast. By the late 1700s, these native groups were nearly gone due to disease, war, and loss of land.

Did You Know?

The Calusa lived mainly on shellfish and created huge midden mounds of the discarded shells. Some of these mounds were so big they created entire islands for people to live on!

First European Visitors: In 1513, Juan Ponce de León of Spain was the first documented European to set foot in Florida. He claimed the land for Spain, but assumed it was an island instead of a peninsula of the mainland.

Spanish Occupation: Many Spanish explorers tried to establish settlements in Florida, but were defeated by the difficult weather, harsh environment, and local native people. In 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés led an expedition to found St. Augustine, which still stands today.

British Occupation: For the next few centuries, countries like France, Spain, and England fought over Florida as a valuable territory. The Spanish traded Florida to the British in 1763 in exchange for Havana, but the English returned it to them after just 20 years.

U.S. Colony: In the following decades, as the United States became its own country, more settlers moved into the territory. Eventually, in 1819, Spain ceded the territory to the U.S. through a treaty.

Seminole Wars: Between 1817 and 1858, there were three major conflicts between the U.S. Army and the Seminole people, who were made up of different Native groups and others pushed from lands farther north. Even though many were killed or forced to move, some Seminoles escaped into the Everglades, where their families still live today.

U.S. Statehood: Florida officially became the 27th U.S. state on March 3, 1845. Some thought it should come into the union as two separate states, East Florida and West Florida, as the British had divided the territory, but in the end it became one single state.

Florida History Facts Continued

Civil War: Florida seceded from the Union in 1861 as a Confederate state. Several battles were fought in the state, including one at Olustee.

Did You Know?

The Union held onto Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas throughout the war. They used it as part of the southern blockade and as a prison. Its most famous prisoner was Dr. Samuel Mudd, who set the leg of John Wilkes Booth the morning after he assassinated Abraham Lincoln.

Cattle Country: Cattle ranching in Florida began in the 1500s with the early Spanish colonizers. Today, Florida is still one of the top cattle-producing states, with ranches that have been passed down through families for generations.

Citrus Groves: The Spanish also brought citrus trees to Florida, and the state has become well-known as a top producer of oranges and orange juice.

Did You Know?

Florida is the nation's leading producer of sugarcane and sugar. About 25% of the cane sugar made in the U.S. comes from the Sunshine State.

Vital Railroads: Miami began as a small settlement, but it grew quickly after Julia Tuttle, known as the "Mother of Miami," convinced a railroad company to extend down to the area in 1896. On the west coast, Tampa benefited from Henry Plant's railroad around the same time.

Cuban Refugees: After Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959, thousands fled the country. Within a few years, more than 200,000 Cubans had arrived in Florida, mainly to Miami. Others followed in the years to come, and the Cuban refugee population is now more than one million.

Disney's Land: After the success of Disneyland in California, Walt Disney wanted a place to build new, bigger theme parks. He chose Florida as the perfect place, and Walt Disney World opened in 1971 near Orlando.

Did You Know?

50 million people visit DisneyWorld every year. Magic Kingdom is the most popular park, followed by Epcot, Hollywood Studios, and Animal Kingdom.

Hurricane History: Since 1850, every part of Florida has been affected by hurricanes. The strongest on record was the Labor Day Hurricane of 1935, which hit the Florida Keys with 185 mph winds. 1992's Hurricane Andrew destroyed large parts of the Miami area. In 2022, Hurricane Ian came ashore near Fort Myers and caused an estimated \$109 billion dollars in damage.