Florida: the big picture





Sunshine and postcard **beaches** , **theme parks** and beautiful cars... Behind these clichés, **Florida** holds many other treasures: the **Everglades** and their unique ecosystem; the **Keys archipelago**, with its **coral reef** and Caribbean-flavored **Key West**; **St. Augustine** and its rich architectural heritage; exuberant **Miami**, with **Little Havana** and **Miami Beach**'s **Art Deco**; the **Cedar Key** archipelago and the charm of the **Old South**... Get ready for wonderful surprises!



Day 1

Arrival at Orlando airport and pick up your rental car. Drive to your hotel in Cocoa Beach, on the Atlantic coast.

Check-in at the hotel. Cocoa Beach is the gateway to the Kennedy Space Center, scheduled for the next day.

Overnight in Cocoa Beach.

Optional: you may start with the theme parks (2 or 3 nights). In that case, overnight in Kissimmee or nearby.



Day 2

Spend the day at the Kennedy Space Center, from where all Apollo missions launched to the Moon, and where rockets still lift off today.

Up to 14,000 people work on the 567 km² site, though visitors cannot access NASA's operational facilities.

If you feel like an astronaut, see the Saturn V rocket and much more at the Rocket Garden: an Apollo capsule, a lunar rover, a space shuttle (try the Shuttle Launch Experience… guaranteed thrills).

The orientation tour takes 2 to 3 hours by bus. It’s the only way to access NASA’s restricted area. From the observation platform, you may even catch preparations for a launch...

Overnight in Cocoa Beach.



Day 3

We suggest an inland route away from the heavily urbanized coast. It goes through the lovely little town of Mt Dora, on the shores of Lake Dora—we really like this place.

You then cross the vast Ocala National Forest, famous for its stretches of flooded forests and its natural warm-water springs. Along the way, Lake George is a paradise for water sports and fishing, and a nice spot for river kayaking.

You reach the coast after crossing the St John's River. Arrive in St Augustine via the Bridge of Lions, over the Matanzas River.

St Augustine is the oldest European settlement in the U.S., founded by the Spanish in 1565. Even if, for Europeans, the “fortifications” of Castillo de San Marcos and the old-town lanes have little in common with Carcassonne or Siena, it’s still very pleasant to wander the narrow streets—or just relax on the beach.

Overnight in St Augustine.



Day 4

You cross Florida to reach the west coast on the Gulf of Mexico, to Cedar Key. A well-hidden gem at the end of a long forest road. Welcome to an other Florida, far from the beach resorts.

No hotel complexes, malls or fast-food chains… just a fishing harbor with old wooden piers and picturesque lanes lined with a few antique shops, art galleries and restaurants.

Sunrises and sunsets are spectacular here—and you’ll be (almost) alone to enjoy them.

Cedar Key is part of an archipelago of around a hundred barrier islands.

It’s an ideal place for nature hikes, kayaking and wildlife watching. There are even bears in the area!

Overnight in Cedar Key (or Crystal River, depending on availability).



Day 5

If you don’t choose a second night in Cedar Key, head to Crystal River and Homosassa Springs, home to manatees that come here mainly in winter, attracted by the warm-water springs.

These magnificent and peaceful animals are endangered, victims of hunting, habitat loss and boat strikes. While sightings are unlikely in summer, Homosassa Springs rescues and cares for injured manatees in a basin topped by a floating observatory.

Then head to the Gold Coast. Beyond famous beach towns, the area has other draws, starting with St Petersburg and its Dalí Museum.

Tampa comes next, with the Cuban district of Ybor City. And the “mini Keys”, beloved by retirees and anglers: Longboat, Lido, Siesta, Casey...

Overnight in Tampa Bay (St Pete Beach, Bradenton Beach or nearby).



Day 6

Time for a day without packing and unpacking.

Options are wide: beach, culture, shopping, water activities...

Tampa is a big city of skyscrapers, but lively and modern.

Less than an hour away (via the huge bridge crossing Tampa Bay), Sarasota also has great attractions.

Start with the superb Ringling Museum of Art, with Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces, Spanish masters and Rubens. Don’t miss the sumptuous Cá d'Zan Venetian-inspired mansion, the main residence of the Ringlings.

Overnight in Tampa Bay (St Pete Beach, Bradenton Beach or nearby).



Day 7

Venice is a charming seaside town, with the beautiful Caspersen Beach. Further south, cross the bridge to Gasparilla Island and stroll through Boca Grande, with restored wooden buildings...

Beyond popular Sanibel and Captiva, the coast also has quiet islands preserved from mass tourism, like Cayo Costa and its 15 km dune beach. From Pine Island, take a short boat trip to Cabbage Key and step into the

legendary Cabbage Key Inn, whose restaurant walls are covered with $1 bills...

Arrive in Naples, said to have the highest number of golf courses per capita in Florida. This upscale resort has many wealthy residents, including Bill Gates and Steven Spielberg. Admire the avenues lined with colonial villas and immaculate gardens!

Overnight in Naples (or nearby, depending on price and availability).

Note: option to choose 2 nights in Everglades City instead of Naples.



Day 8

One full day is not too much to explore the park's western side, less visited than the eastern side near Miami.

Besides classic airboat rides, you can watch the touristy feeding of alligators, or learn about Seminole culture at the Ah-Tha-Thi-Ki Museum in the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation.

The best way to discover the park's incredible biodiversity is on foot, by kayak or paddle, or even by bike.

Close encounters with alligators guaranteed… and they're far less bloodthirsty than you might think.

Overnight in Naples (or Everglades City).



Day 9

Head for the Atlantic coast. On the way, stop at Shark Valley. No sharks here, but a great place to discover the Everglades wildlife. You will encounter alligators roaming freely. Bike rental available on site.

Arrival in Miami, a cosmopolitan city offering beaches and sunshine 365 days a year. A vibrant mix of cultures is everywhere!

Cross the bridge leading to Miami Beach, your destination. A century ago, this strip of land was just a sandy island accessible only by boat. Today, the "American Riviera" proudly displays its architectural heritage, particularly in South Beach, home to the largest concentration of Art Deco buildings in the world.

The atmosphere is somewhat comparable to New York's SoHo district, chic and bohemian. A stroll along Ocean Drive will convince you!

Overnight in Miami Beach.



Day 10

Among the must-sees in Miami, the Design District (or “AMIRI”) features fashion boutiques, art galleries, antique dealers, architecture firms and other Art Deco-style buildings.

To the west, the large Cuban neighborhood of Little Havana has kept its authenticity. Great atmosphere, especially along Calle 8!

South of Downtown Miami, the Vizcaya Museum and Gardens are well worth a visit for their exceptional richness.

If you feel like a cruise, explore Biscayne National Park, only accessible by boat (or by kayak). Dolphins, turtles and pelicans live here.

Beyond beaches and nightlife, Miami has excellent museums, such as the Wolfsonian-FIU, the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami (MoCA), and the very interesting Museum of Science.

Overnight in Miami Beach.



Day 11

Drive to Key West, the southernmost point in the United States. You cross the Florida Keys archipelago via the incredible Overseas Highway, a road spanning no fewer than 42 bridges, linking the different Keys islands!

Key Largo, the largest, is known for its diving spots.

Further on, Islamorada has proclaimed itself the “world capital of sport fishing”.

Grassy Key is home to the Dolphin Research Center, a scientific facility and rehabilitation center for sick or injured dolphins (and those impacted by tourist exploitation in Florida theme parks). A must.

Walk on the famous 7-Mile Bridge, with sweeping views over Pigeon Key. Bahia Honda hides the most beautiful beach in the Keys! Arrival at the end of the road: Key West.

Overnight in Key West.

Day 12



Key West has an unmistakable Caribbean vibe.

Hop on a trolley to tour the old town, stroll through Fort Zachary Taylor State Park (beach + Civil War-era fort), walk Duval Street and Fleming Street with their lovely wooden houses, and visit Ernest Hemingway's home.

Explore the mangrove forests by kayak or paddleboard, home to nurse sharks and stingrays.

To go to the very end of Florida, take a fast boat (or a seaplane) to the Dry Tortugas and Fort Jefferson. Now a national park, the area boasts beautiful coral reefs and immaculate white-sand beaches.

Watch the sunset from Mallory Square: you won't be alone, but what a show!

Overnight in Key West.



Day 13

Enjoy your morning in the tropical paradise of Key West before heading to the airport.

Return your car at the airport.

Return flight to Europe (arrival the next day).

Extension (e.g., Orlando parks) or itinerary changes: contact us

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Accommodation