

The Holiday Ferret's Guide to Florida, USA

Florida is considered a perfect place to escape the unpleasantness of winter. Conde Nast recommends the months of October through April as the ideal time to visit the state to avoid humid conditions and storms, but if you want a discount, consider traveling in the off-season. Be aware that despite Florida's mild winters, January and February can bring colder temperatures, especially in the northern parts of the state.

Attractions

For racing fans, Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach is the site of NASCAR stock car and pickup truck races. Nearby, Canaveral National Seashore sits on the Atlantic Coast just east of Orlando, adjacent to NASA's Kennedy Space Center. Because of its location, the land is also referred to as the "Space Coast." At the seashore, visitors have access to undeveloped beaches for surfing and swimming. View rocket launches from either the Cape Canaveral waterfront or from the visitor complex at Kennedy, where bus tours of the facility and full-day experiences are available.

Theme Parks

Two major theme parks are located in the Orlando area. Universal Studios Orlando features The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. At this park, visitors have the chance to become a part of their



favorite television and movies, going behind the scenes and experiencing interactive rides and attractions. The park offers live performances for kids based on their age group. Walt Disney World Resort boasts both theme parks and water parks. The Magic Kingdom contains six themed lands and hosts the resort's spectacular fireworks show. Inside Epcot, guests experience Future World and the foods and cultures of 11 countries. At Disney's Hollywood Studios, visitors become part of the show with attractions such as the American Idol

Experience. Disney's Animal Kingdom provides expeditions and animal adventures. Disney's Blizzard Beach has one of the world's tallest and fastest free-falling waterslides, while Typhoon Lagoon has raft rides, a surf pool, and the opportunity to snorkel with sharks. Disney's FASTPASS reservation system reduces time spent waiting in line for rides.

State Parks

Florida's state parks are a good option for families looking for outdoor adventure. The parks usually offer paved and primitive trails for hiking and biking, water trails for canoeing, ranger-led walks and educational programs, playgrounds and outdoor sports facilities. Many parks rent

horses, bicycles, beach gear, boats and boating equipment. Historic parks contain sites



significant to the Civil War, Spanish exploration and Native American culture. Some parks preserve special habitats, such as Collier-Seminole State Park near Naples, where visitors can enter the Everglades, and John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, where guests can tour mangrove swamps and tropical hammocks and go diving and snorkeling. Several parks, including Ponce de Leon Springs, close to Orlando and Daytona Beach, allow visitors to snorkel in clear spring waters. Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park, near Wakulla Springs, provides riverboat

and glass bottom boat tours and cruises. Lovers Key State Park, just outside Fort Myers Beach, allows guests to view West Indian manatees, bottlenose dolphins and bald eagles.

Beaches

Florida is well known for white sugar sand beaches stretching alongside sparkling clear blue or



emerald green waters. The beach at Cayo Costa State Park on the Gulf consistently makes "best beach" lists and is recommended by Moon Travel Guides. Dr. Stephen Leatherman, also known as "Dr. Beach," lists many of the state park beaches of the Northwest Region among the best in the nation, including those at St. Joseph Peninsula State Park near Port St. Joe, a sea turtle nesting site, and Bill Baggs Cape Florida

State Park near Key Biscayne. Just outside Tampa, Caladesi Island State Park and Honeymoon Island sit on the Great Florida Birding Trail and offer romantic hideaways, good shelling and a variety of water activities, including surfing. Julian G. Bruce St. George Island State Park in the northwest has undeveloped beaches, while Fort Clinch State Park north of Jacksonville includes an abandoned fort, and beachcombers will find shark's teeth strewn along the shores of its peninsula.

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