

# Florida

Hi! My name is Donna Eacho, and I would like to tell you about my home state of Florida—the Sunshine State!

Florida was the first part of the continental United States to be visited by Europeans, when the Spanish explorer, Ponce de Leon, arrived in 1513. He claimed the land for Spain and named it la Florida meaning “land of flowers.” In 1565, the Spanish founded the settlement of St. Augustine, the oldest permanent European settlement in the United States. Florida became the 27<sup>th</sup> state of the union in 1845.

By 1900, Florida had a population of only half a million people, but a land rush in the 1920’s –when my grandparents moved to the state—began an era of growth. Now, Florida is the fourth most populated state in the country, with 19 million people.

Most of Florida is a peninsula situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico with its highest point being only 100 meters above sea level. We enjoy a sub-tropical climate and almost 2000 kilometers of beaches. Historically, the Florida economy was based on agriculture, and Florida still produces the majority of the citrus, sweet corn and green beans in the country. Now the number one industry is tourism. People from all over the world flock to our beaches and amusement parks, especially to Walt Disney World. Located near Orlando, in central Florida, Disney World is the world’s most visited entertainment resort with over 17 million visitors per year. Florida’s amusement parks have certainly changed since my childhood!

Florida is also home to the Kennedy Space Center, the launch site for every United States human space flight since 1968.

While the capital of Florida is Tallahassee, the largest metropolitan area is Miami. In 2008, *Forbes* magazine ranked Miami "America's Cleanest City." Because of its large Hispanic population, Miami is nicknamed the "Capital of Latin America." It is the second largest U.S. city with a Spanish-speaking majority, and a rich cultural history from its large Cuban-American population. Miami is also the number one cruise passenger port in the world. The trendy South Beach area of Miami is home to the Art Deco Historic District with over 800 historic buildings from the 1920’s-1940’s.

One of the most fascinating parts of the state is the Everglades, the largest subtropical wilderness in the United States. The Everglades boasts many rare and endangered species. It has been designated a World Heritage Site and International Biosphere Reserve.

Florida is also home to the beautiful coral archipelago called the Florida Keys. Key West, the southernmost point in the continental United States, was the site of President Harry Truman’s “winter White House.” It is also where authors Ernest Hemmingway and Tennessee Williams wrote some of their most famous works.

I hope you have enjoyed learning a little about my beautiful home state of Florida and that you will someday enjoy a sun filled holiday there.