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FLORIDA



[Images of Florida](#)

[Florida Maps](#)

[Experience Florida](#)

[Miami and Miami Beach](#)

[The Everglades](#)

[The Florida Keys](#)

[Fort Lauderdale](#)

[Palm Beach and the Treasure Coast](#)

[The Tampa Bay Area](#)

[The Lower Gulf Coast](#)

[Orlando and Environs](#)

[Walt Disney World](#)

[Universal Orlando](#)

[SeaWorld Orlando](#)

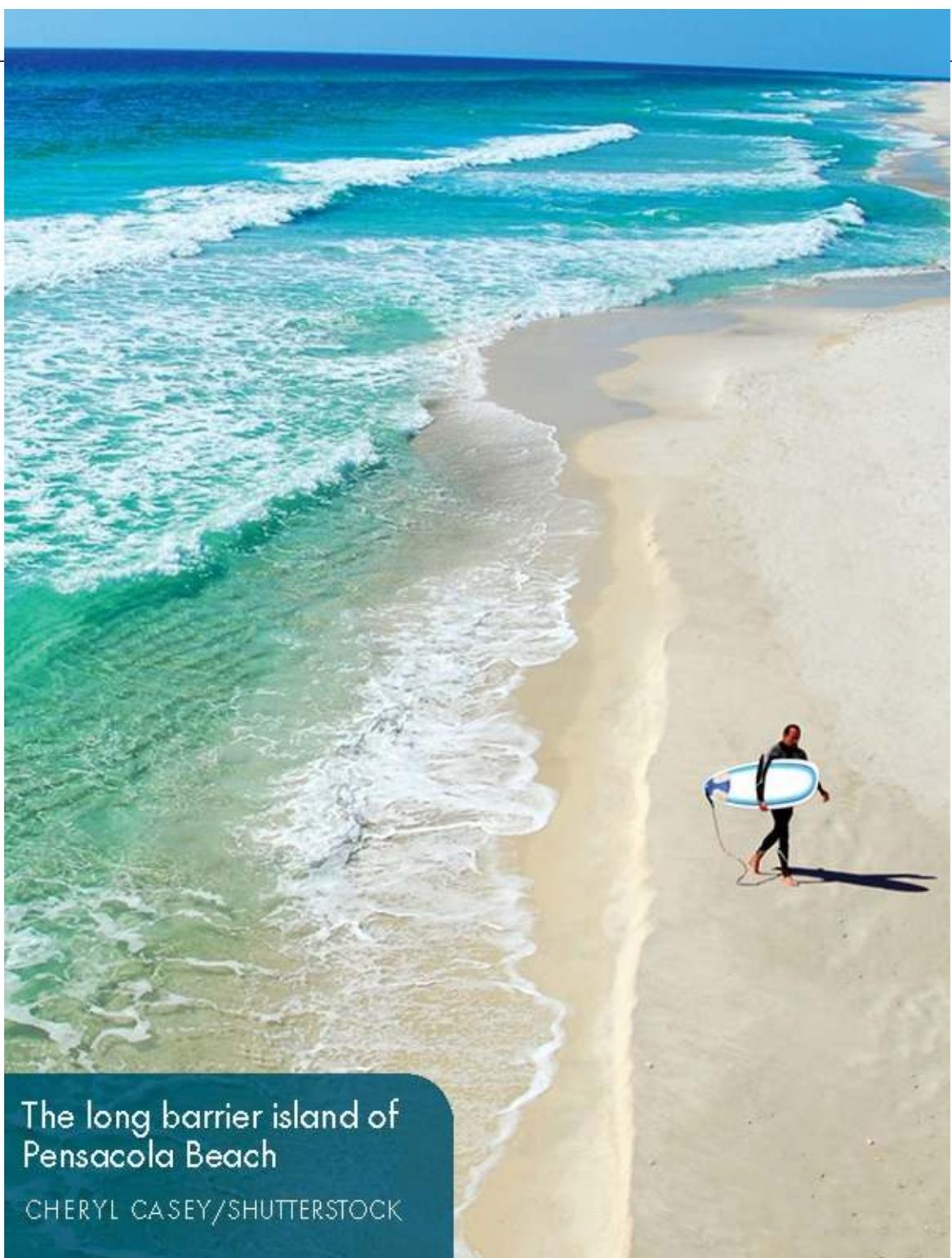
[Northeast Florida](#)

[The Panhandle](#)

[Travel Smart Florida](#)

[About Our Writers](#)

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The long barrier island of
Pensacola Beach

CHERYL CASEY/SHUTTERSTOCK



Independence Day on the
beach in Naples

DENNIS GUYITT/ISTOCKPHOTO



The Castillo de San
Marcos, St. Augustine

ROBERTO A. SANCHEZ/
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Looe Key National
Marine Sanctuary

VISIT FLORIDA



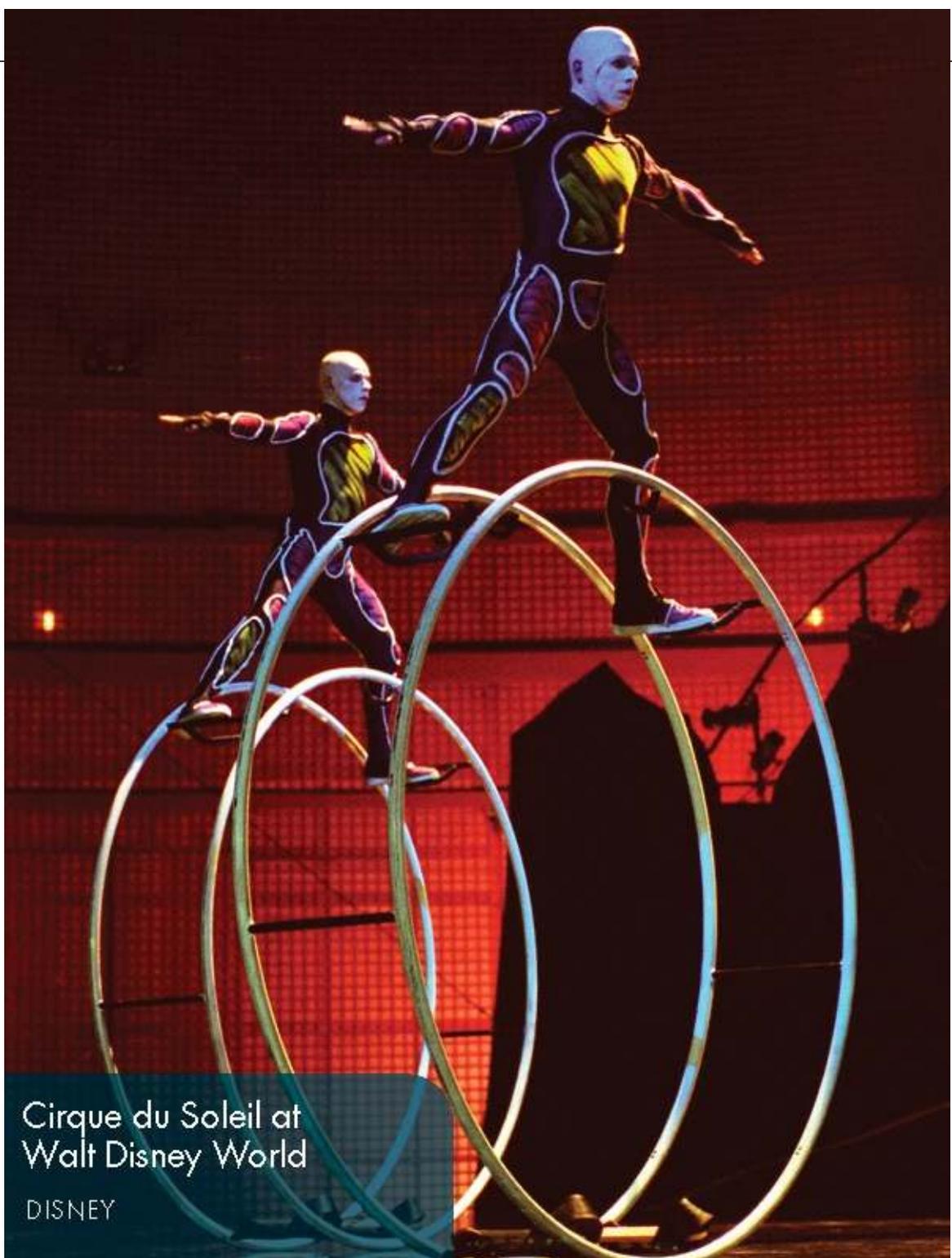
Towering rocket at
Cape Canaveral

PAUL GIAMOU/ISTOCKPHOTO



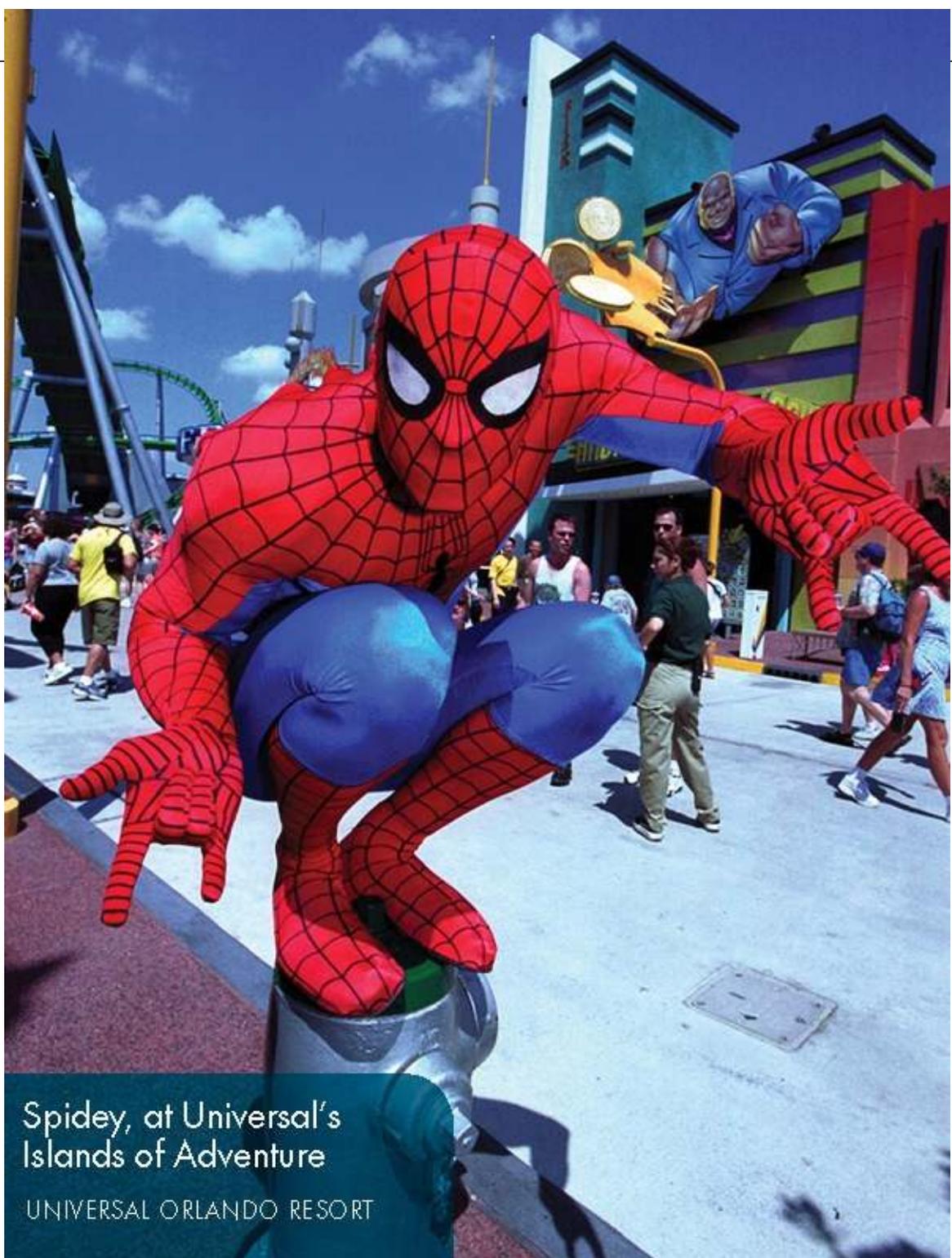
Sunset behind Cinderella's
Castle, the Magic Kingdom

ORLANDO CVB



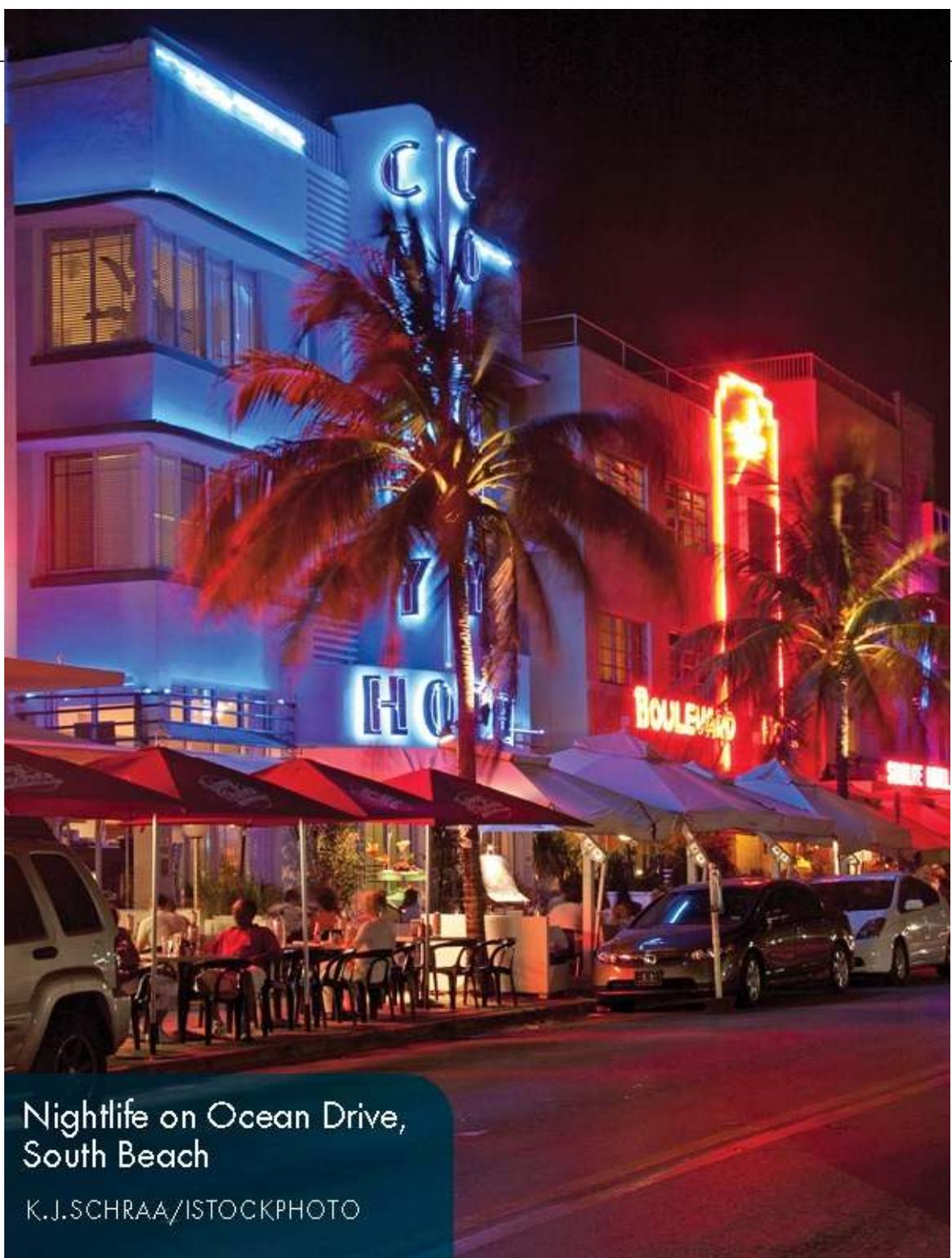
Cirque du Soleil at
Walt Disney World

DISNEY



Spidey, at Universal's
Islands of Adventure

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO RESORT



Nightlife on Ocean Drive,
South Beach

K.J.SCHRAA/ISTOCKPHOTO



Spiny denizen of
Everglades National Park

PAUL GIAMOU/ISTOCKPHOTO

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FLORIDA MAPS

Main Table of Contents

MIAMI AND MIAMI BEACH

Downtown Miami

Coral Gables and Coconut Grove

South Beach

THE EVERGLADES

The Everglades

THE FLORIDA KEYS

Key West: Old Town

Key West: New Town

FORT LAUDERDALE

Fort Lauderdale: Downtown

Western Suburbs and Beyond

North on Scenic A1A

South Broward to Hollywood

PALM BEACH AND THE TREASURE COAST

Palm Beach and West Palm Beach

Palm Beach to Boca Raton

Treasure Coast

THE TAMPA BAY AREA

Downtown Tampa

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay: Map 1

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay: Map 2

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay: Map 3

St. Petersburg and Vicinity

Downtown St. Petersburg

Sarasota County

THE LOWER GULF COAST

Fort Myers Area and the Coastal Islands

Naples

ORLANDO AND ENVIRONS

Central Orlando

International Drive

WALT DISNEY WORLD

The Magic Kingdom: Map 1

The Magic Kingdom: Map 2

The Magic Kingdom: Map 3

Epcot: Map 1

Epcot: Map 2

Epcot: Map 3

Epcot: Map 4

Disney's Hollywood Studios: Map 1

Disney's Hollywood Studios: Map 2

Disney's Hollywood Studios: Map 3

Disney's Animal Kingdom: Map 1

Disney's Animal Kingdom: Map 2

Disney's Animal Kingdom: Map 3

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

Universal Studios: Map 1

Universal Studios: Map 2

Universal Studios: Map 3

Islands of Adventure: Map 1

Islands of Adventure: Map 2

Islands of Adventure: Map 3

SEAWORLD ORLANDO

SeaWorld Orlando: Map 1

SeaWorld Orlando: Map 2

SeaWorld Orlando: Map 3

SeaWorld Orlando: Map 4

Discovery Cove: Map 1

NORTHEAST FLORIDA

Jacksonville

Jacksonville Area

St. Augustine

The Space Coast

THE PANHANDLE

The Emerald Coast and Inland Towns

The Tallahassee Area



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EXPERIENCE FLORIDA

Main Table of Contents

What's Where

Top Things to Do in Florida

When to Go

FAQs

If You Like

Florida's Best Beaches

Great Itineraries



WHAT'S WHERE

[Next Chapter | Table of Contents](#)

Miami and Miami Beach. Greater Miami is hot—and we're not just talking about the weather. Art-deco buildings and balmy beaches set the scene. Vacations here are as much about lifestyle as locale, so prepare for power shopping, club-hopping, and decadent dining.

The Everglades. Covering more than 1.5 million acres, the fabled “River of Grass” is the state’s greatest natural treasure. Biscayne National Park (95% of which is underwater) runs a close second. It’s the largest marine park in the United States.

The Florida Keys. This slender necklace of landfalls, strung together by a 113-mile highway, marks the southern edge of the continental United States. It’s nirvana for anglers, divers, literature lovers, and Jimmy Buffett wannabes.

Fort Lauderdale with Broward County. The town *Where the Boys Are* has grown up. The beaches that first attracted college kids are now complemented by luxe lodgings and upscale entertainment options.

Palm Beach with the Treasure Coast. This area scores points for diversity. Palm Beach and environs are famous for their golden sand and glitzy residents, whereas the Treasure Coast has unspoiled natural delights.

The Tampa Bay Area. Tampa’s Busch Gardens and Ybor City are only part of the area’s appeal.

Culture vultures flock to St. Petersburg and Sarasota for concerts and museums, and eco-adventurers veer north to the Nature Coast.

The Lower Gulf Coast. Blessed with beaches, this was the last bit of coast to be settled. But as Naples's manicured golf greens and Fort Myers's mansions-cum-museums prove, it is far from uncivilized.

Orlando and Environs. Theme parks are what draw most visitors to the area, yet downtown Orlando, Kissimmee, and Winter Park have enough sights, shops, and restaurants to make them destinations in their own right.

Walt Disney World. The granddaddy of attractions, Disney is four theme parks in one—Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, Epcot, and Hollywood Studios. Plus, it has a pair of water parks and Downtown Disney (an entertainment zone featuring Cirque du Soleil).

Universal Orlando. The movies are brought to life at Universal Studios, while Islands of Adventure delivers gravity-defying rides and special-effects surprises—and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Nearby Wet 'n Wild is full of watery adventures.

SeaWorld Orlando. Marine mammals perform in SeaWorld's meticulously choreographed shows, and thrill seekers find their adrenaline rush on coasters. Sister park Discovery Cove offers a daylong swim-with-the-dolphins escape. At Aquatica water park, one slide even dips into a dolphin habitat.

Northeast Florida. Though time rewinds in historic St. Augustine, it's on fast-forward in Daytona Beach and the Space Coast, where horse-drawn carriages are replaced by race cars and rocket ships.

The Panhandle. Southern gentility and redneck rambunctiousness make the Panhandle a colorful place—but it's the green gulf waters and sugar-white sand that keep devotees coming back.

[Beginning of Chapter](#) | [Next Chapter](#) | [Table of Contents](#)



TOP THINGS TO DO IN FLORIDA

[Previous Chapter](#) | [Next Chapter](#) | [Table of Contents](#)

WALT DISNEY WORLD

Like one of Snow White's dwarfs, Orlando was sleepy until Uncle Walt turned this swampland into the world's most famous tourist attraction. Nowadays Walt Disney World is a 39-square-mile complex and growing, with four separate parks, scores of hotels, and satellite attractions. Thanks to innovative rides and dazzling animatronics, these parks feature prominently in every child's holiday fantasy. Walt Disney World also has grown-up amenities, including championship golf courses, sublime hotels and spas, and fine restaurants. If you have time for only one megapark, choose the original: Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom.

SOUTH BEACH

You can't miss the distinctive forms, vibrant colors, and extravagant flourishes of SoBe's architectural gems. The world's largest concentration of art deco edifices is right here. The neighborhood also has enough beautiful people to qualify for the Register of Hippest Places. The glitterati, along with assorted vacationing hedonists, are drawn by übertrendy shops and a surfeit of celeb-studded clubs. Divine eateries are the icing—umm, better make that the ganache—on South Beach's proverbial cake.

KEY WEST

These 800-plus islands in the Florida Keys are at once a unique landmass and a mass of contradictions. At the far end of this island chain, Key West is the main attraction. Its laid-back vibe is intoxicating. Eating, drinking, water sports, sunset cruises, kayaking, and more drinking are high on the agenda. Visitors never grow tired of the walking tours through the gingerbread-house-filled streets and channeling the spirit of Ernest Hemingway, who lived and worked here. Today, touring his former digs and toasting his memory at Sloppy Joe's Bar on Duval Street is almost mandatory.

SHOPPING IN FORT LAUDERDALE AND MIAMI

The Sunshine State is a shopaholic's dream. Visitors travel from overseas with the sole purpose of shopping weekends at Fort Lauderdale's 2-mile, alligator-shape Sawgrass Mills outlet mall. The alfresco addition to the mall, the Shops at Colonnade, caters to well-heeled patrons with a David Yurman jewelry outlet and other shops, including Valentino, Prada, Burberry, Kate Spade New York, and Barneys New York. For more high-end shoppers, Bal Harbour Shops in the swanky Miami suburb is a collection of 100 haute couture shops, boutiques, and department stores. Restaurants and cafés, in tropical garden settings, overflow with style-conscious diners.

UNIVERSAL ORLANDO

With rides and attractions more geared toward adults and teens, Universal's two theme parks—Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure—deliver gravity-defying rides and special-effects extravaganzas based on popular television shows and films. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is the newest “land” at Islands of Adventure, where you'll get to see Hogwarts Castle and drink butter beer!

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

Though there are enough wide-open expanses to justify the area's moniker, it was NASA that put the “space” in Space Coast—and this is its star attraction. Space memorabilia and aeronautic antiques, ranging from Redstone rockets to the *Apollo XIV* command module, turn an outing here into a trip back in time for anyone who lived through the space race. More down-to-earth types can also visit the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (originally created as a buffer for the space program) and Canaveral National Seashore.

TAMPA BAY

As a vibrant city with exceptional beaches, Tampa Bay is perfect for indecisive folks who want to enjoy surf and sand without sacrificing urban experiences. Families will love Busch Gardens, a major zoo and theme park. Football and hockey fans will relish the chance to see the Buccaneers and Lightning play. Baseball is big, too: the Rays are based here, and the Yankees descend annually for spring training.

THE DALÍ MUSEUM

St. Petersburg is home to a museum dedicated to the work of Salvador Dalí, showcasing the most

comprehensive collection of the surrealist's artwork. This is the kind of first-class museum you'd expect to find in Paris or Madrid, but instead it's here on the Gulf Coast. The state-of-the-art glass building housing the museum is quite a spectacle in and of itself.

SPORTFISHING

Islamorada in the Florida Keys holds steadfast to its claim as Sportfishing Capital of the World. Up in the Panhandle, Destin proves it is the World's Luckiest Fishing Village each October by inviting anglers young and old to compete in the monthlong Destin Fishing Rodeo. However, if you'd prefer to throw fish rather than catch them, head to Pensacola in late April for the Interstate Mullet Toss. (Participants line up to throw dead fish across the Florida–Alabama state line.)

SURFING IN COCOA BEACH

Cocoa Beach, on the northeast coast, is Surf City for Floridians. Baby boomers may remember it as the place where Major Nelson dreamed of Jeannie. The community is better known today as the hometown of surfing's biggest celeb, Kelly Slater. He has won a record-breaking 10 world championships, and totally tubular types can learn to emulate him at the Ron Jon Surf School.

PALM BEACH

If money could talk, you'd hardly be able to hear above the din in Palm Beach. The upper crust started calling it home—during winter at least—in the early 1900s. And today it remains a ritzy, glitzy enclave for both old money and the nouveau riche (a coterie led by the Donald himself, who owns the landmark Mar-a-Lago Club). Simply put, Palm Beach is the sort of place where shopping is a full-time pursuit and residents don't just wear Polo—they play it. Ooh and aah to your heart's content; then, for more conspicuous consumption, continue south on the aptly named Gold Coast.

BROWARD'S INLAND WATERWAYS

Mariners should set their compass for Fort Lauderdale (aka the Venice of America), where vessels from around the world moor along some two dozen finger isles between the beach and the mainland. Tourists can cruise Broward County's 300 miles of inland waterways by water taxi and tour boat, or bob around the Atlantic in a chartered yacht. If you're in a buying mood, come in late October for the annual Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show. Billed as the world's largest, it has \$3 billion worth of boats in every conceivable size, shape, and price range.

LITTLE HAVANA

On the streets of Miami's Little Havana, just west of downtown, salsa tunes blare and the smell of spicy chorizo fills the air. (You can get a good whiff of tobacco, too, thanks to the cigar makers who still hand-roll their products here.) For nearly 50 years, the neighborhood's undisputed heart has been Calle Ocho, the commercial thoroughfare that hosts Carnival Miami. The roaring 10-day block party each March culminates with the world's longest conga line. Ambience- and amenity-wise, it is as close as you'll get to Cuba without running afoul of the federal government.

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