

Florida

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Edited by Bernie McGovern



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PREFACE

The *Florida Almanac*, now in its seventeenth edition, was first produced in 1972 in response to a newspaper editor's complaint about the lack of one source for information on the state. Subsequent editions have grown to reflect Florida's increasing population, laws, university enrollments, sports activities, zip codes, and landmarks.

Over the years this almanac has become the most widely used and quoted reference book about the state. It is now an essential part of any family, academic, corporate, and political reference shelf.

The *Florida Almanac* also is much used in the North by people planning to relocate to the state. They are eager to learn all about their exciting future home.

We thank the many people whose interest in the state has prompted them to purchase each of the previous sixteen editions so that they may stay on top of new developments. To those of you who are reading the *Florida Almanac* for the first time, we can promise that you will find much useful and fascinating information contained in these pages.

THE Editors

INTRODUCTION

THE SUNSHINE STATE

Florida is a peninsula of superlatives, geographically and socially. For example:

- Florida is the youngest part of the continental United States—the nation’s last landmass, say geologists, to emerge from the ocean.
- The state has more tidal shoreline than any other except Alaska.
- With 53 inches of annual rainfall, Florida is one of the wettest states, yet it is in the same latitudinal belt as great deserts such as the Sahara and the Arabian Desert.
- The state has the country’s largest number (27) of first-magnitude springs, which are defined as discharging at least 100 cubic feet of fresh water per second.
- Within the state’s boundaries are 7,800 lakes, the largest being the 448,000-acre Lake Okeechobee, the nation’s second largest freshwater lake wholly within the U.S.
- Florida’s southern tip is only 1,700 miles from the Equator, yet two-thirds of the nation’s population is within a two-day drive of the state.
- The state’s 58,560 square miles make it larger than England and Wales combined, and if the Continental Shelf around Florida were raised by just 500 feet, Florida would double in size.
- Because Jacksonville is directly south of Cleveland and Pensacola directly south of Chicago, Florida is more a Midwestern than an Eastern state, yet all but a portion of the Panhandle is in the Eastern Time Zone.
- The state misses being within the Tropic Zone by less than 100 miles.
- Florida lightning packs more punch than lightning anywhere else, a robust bolt sending out an average current of 45,000 amps, enough to momentarily supply the electrical needs of 300 homes.
- Cities in the Panhandle may record two dozen days a year of below-freezing temperatures, but, 800 miles to the south, the Miami airport has recorded only four winter seasons of freezing temperatures since 1952.
- Florida is the nation’s fourth most populous state, with an estimated 17.8 million people, yet nearly half of the state is covered with uninhabited forests.
- Regions such as Tampa/St. Petersburg have an unusually high number of days with thunderstorms, more than 100, yet St. Petersburg,

between 1967 and 1969, registered a record 768 consecutive days of sunshine.

- Florida, over the centuries, has belonged to five different nations—Spain, England, France, the Confederacy, and the United States.

- Eight Indian tribes—the Timucuan, Tocobaga, Apalachee, Tequesta, Calusa, Ais, Seminole and Miccosukee—have called Florida their home.

- The state has 34 major rivers, including the famous Suwannee and the unusual north-flowing St. Johns.

- More available groundwater flows beneath Florida than under any other state, all of it stored in major aquifers.

- Florida beaches, if arranged to lie in a straight line, would extend 1,800 miles.

- Of the state's 67 counties, 26 have populations under 50,000, and two have populations of less than 8,000.

- The 2000 federal census revealed that Florida had the second fastest-growing metropolitan area in the U.S.: Naples, in Collier County on the southwest Gulf Coast.

- Since 1955, nearly two-thirds of Florida's new residents have moved to the state from New York, Ohio, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, and Georgia.

Undeniably, Florida stands out among North American locales as uniquely blessed with natural resources, a sensational climate, and a rich history. Such amenities, no doubt, explain why the state's growth has accelerated since the turn of the century. Florida's population is growing at a net rate of 1,108 people each day.