



At 451 years old, this city's Old World appeal stands out in a state known for condominiums and theme parks. Even tourists who don't know a musket from a mullet enjoy following the footsteps of Indians, Europeans and Africans, pirates, and other brave, bold souls.

St. Augustine's Castillo de San Marcos (now a National Monument) safeguarded the city through 340 years and five governments. The oldest masonry fort and only existing 17th-century military construction in the continental U.S., the Castillo protected this outpost of Spain's New World empire. Standing atop the

gun deck, with a sentry's view of Matanzas Bay and the Atlantic, it's easy to see why this is North America's oldest continuously occupied European settlement.

When Juan Ponce de León sailed past this coast in 1513, he claimed "La Florida" for Spain. By the mid-1500s, Spanish treasure fleets sailed the Gulf Stream between Europe and North America, fueling Spain's power but also attracting pirates. When Spain needed an outpost, Adm. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés came to the rescue. "King Phillip II gave him three objectives," says Castillo guide Candy Fleming: "eliminate the French



TOP: The walls of the ancient Castillo de San Marcos date to 1695. ABOVE: A re-enactor samples 16th-century food.

EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Programs are included with admission.

- **HISTORIC ADVENTURE TOURS** take visitors through three centuries of everyday life in St. Augustine. Daily. (904) 342-2857, colonialquarter.com
- **HISTORIC WEAPONS FIRINGS** at the Castillo demonstrate weapons and relate experiences of colonial soldiers. Fridays and weekends hourly 10:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m. (904) 829-6506, nps.gov/casa/index.htm
- **CASTILLO CANDLELIGHT TOURS** reflect the personal histories of St. Augustine's early residents. Monthly, Oct.–April.
- **SCHOOL OF THE 16TH CENTURY** demonstrates domestic, military, and religious activities of Spanish colonials at the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park. First Sat. in Feb.
- **SEARLE'S SACK OF ST. AUGUSTINE** re-enacts a 1668 pirate attack with a re-enactors' encampment and living history demonstrations. First Sat. in March. Held throughout town and at the Fountain of Youth Park. searlesbucs.com
- **ISACO SOUTHEAST NATIVE AMERICAN GATHERING** shares history, culture, and customs at the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park. Nov. 21-22. (904) 829-3168, fountainofyouthflorida.com
- **CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE SPANISH COLONIAL KITCHEN** at Fort Matanzas National Monument. Dec. 3. (904) 471-0116, nps.gov/foma
- **COLONIAL NIGHTWATCH WEEKEND** honors the British period, 1763–1784, with a re-enactors' encampment and candlelight promenade through downtown. Dec. 3.



LEFT: This view shows an interior wall of the Castillo, built like a hollow square. BELOW: The Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park features Timucua re-enactors. BOTTOM LEFT: On the western shore of Matanzas Bay on Florida's northeast coast, the bell tower at the Castillo greets another dusk.

at Fort Caroline (est. 1564); convert the Timucua Indians; and establish a settlement. Menéndez accomplished all three.”

Settled in 1565, 55 years before Plymouth Rock, St. Augustine became a colony of multicultural inhabitants. By the mid-1700s, the Castillo had transformed a swampy garrison into the kingpin of Spanish colonies. Constructed between 1672 and 1695, the Castillo owes its longevity to coquina, a porous limestone containing seashell fragments. The indigenous material breathes with humidity and compresses under cannon fire—“like firing a BB gun into Styrofoam,” Fleming explains. Designed as a hollow square with four diamond-shaped bastions, the Castillo has a moat, ravelin, courtyard, and gun deck with 70 cannons. Interior rooms include a magazine, chapel, storage areas, and guard rooms. After repeated renovations, the fortress looks as

it would have in 1756. The basic structure, eastern wall, powder room, and a royal family coat of arms date from the 1600s.

Except for 20 or 30 on-duty soldiers and civilians during wartime, no one lived inside the Castillo. In 1702, it protected the colonists during a 50-day siege with the British. The fort seems spacious until you picture 1,500 people inside, rationing water and surrounded by the sounds of cannon fire and frightened livestock braying from a dry moat.

The fruits, vegetables, seafood, and olive oil eaten by Spaniards made for a healthier diet than that of British rivals. Hailing from a hot seaside country, “Spaniards knew how to work with our climate, even locating ‘La Necesaria’ (the latrine) so that waste washed out with the tide,” Fleming says. In contrast, when the British controlled the fort, they installed windows in the guard room, virtually turning it into an oven.

In 1763, depleted by the French and Indian War, Spain ceded Florida to Britain in exchange for Havana, Cuba. Castillo de San Marcos became Fort Marks. The Treaty of Paris returned Florida to Spain in 1783. The Second Spanish Period lasted until 1821, when Florida joined the U.S. The renamed



Fort Marion housed Indian prisoners, including Seminole Chief Osceola, and later Geronimo’s wife and children. Confederates occupied the fort briefly during the Civil War. “The fort changed hands five times without a single shot being fired, proving that ‘the pen is mightier than the sword,’” Fleming says.

Menéndez would not recognize his colony today, its bustling Bayfront lined with restaurants. The Castillo endures in the midst of modernity, an embodiment of Spain’s determination. As 19th-century guide George Brown remarked, “It’s one of few places on the continent that takes us back to the feudal ages.” m





A City of Firsts

America's first Christian church, first hospital, and first school were established in St. Augustine. The nation's first town plan was created here in 1573. Visitors today walk on streets whose names are on 16th-century maps.

Some historians believe the first Thanksgiving occurred after Menéndez landed in 1565. A priest sang a hymn of thanksgiving for the safe ocean passage, followed by the Europeans and Indians feasting together. The first Christian burials of Native Americans happened around 1587 at the Timucua village of Seloy—now part of the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park, where a reconstructed mission church, boatyard, and Indian and Spanish villages depict early life.

At the invitation of the Spanish governor, nearly 100 slaves fled the Carolinas in 1738 to establish Fort Mose, the New World's first legally sanctioned free African settlement. The first recorded birth of an African child in the New World was noted in St. Augustine's Catholic Parish records in 1606.

TOP: Modern-day conquistadors in a re-enactment at the Castillo, the oldest military fort in the continental United States.



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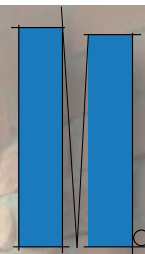
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