

UNITED STATES FLORIDA **GUIDE**

The 10 Best Small Towns in Florida

Written by CHERYL RODEWIG | Updated 10/26/20



Paige Miller Photography / Getty Images

Imagine a typical Florida vacation and you might picture theme parks and crowded beaches. But there's magic here in the Sunshine State beyond Orlando and Miami. Explore some of Florida's best small towns to soak up the charm of quiet coastlines, historic downtowns, and immersive nature experiences like scuba diving in a prehistoric cave or swimming with manatees. Consider this list a treasure map to get you started.

01 Matlacha

of 10



Barry Winiker / Getty Images

An artsy island community, Matlacha (pronounced "matt-la-shay") is quirky and colorful. Funky art overflows outside the bright-hued buildings off Pine Island Road, the town's single thoroughfare. If you fancy gallery-hopping, [Matlacha Menagerie](#), [Leoma Lovegrove Gallery & Gardens](#), and Wild Child Art Gallery are all within a few feet of each other.

Lodging and dining aren't far either. You can rent one of five affordable homes at the [Matlacha Tiny Village](#), each with their own deck, grill, and kayak launch. Then stroll down the street to [Blue Dog Bar & Grill](#) or [Olde Fish House Marina](#) for dockside dining on locally sourced seafood.

Continue to 2 of 10 below.

02 Crystal River

of 10



33karen33 / Getty Images

Citrus County is the only place in the country you can swim with manatees, and Crystal River, with its proximity to the warm springs of Kings Bay, is a wintertime hub for these gentle giants. As you float on the water, one just might approach you for a nuzzle. If that's not enough manatee love for you, see them hanging out at [Three Sisters Springs](#), or celebrate them at the [Florida Manatee Festival](#) in January.

In summer, it's scallop season and there are [plenty of tours](#) available. You should also save time to wander downtown. At Heritage Village, you can feel nostalgic while sipping a Coke float and browsing the general store. Farther down Citrus Avenue is the Coastal Heritage Museum, on the National Register of Historic Places, and several restaurants including the award-winning [Vintage on 5th](#).

Continue to 3 of 10 below.

03 Viera

of 10



Dennis Govoni / Getty Images

About 25 miles from Cape Canaveral lies Viera, a fairly young town converted from pasture land to a planned community in the 1980s. If you're feeling outdoorsy, visit the [Viera Wetlands](#), beloved by birdwatchers, or the [Brevard Zoo](#), where you can feed a giraffe or kayak through the habitats. Don't miss the free, bike-friendly boardwalk at the zoo's entrance. You can rent a set of wheels from [Space Coast Bike Tours](#).

Nearby, the landscaped plaza of [The Avenue Viera](#) serves as a modern town center with shopping, concerts, a splash pad, and more. Try [Pizza Gallery & Grill](#) for creative pies in an art-filled setting or the hip [28 North Gastropub](#) for sustainable brews and bites.

Continue to 4 of 10 below.

04 Williston

of 10

With a population under 3,000 and a landscape that's mainly rural, Williston has elbow room in spades. Stroll down Main Street alongside Heritage Park and admire the new city hall and [The Ivy House](#)—built in 1912 and converted into a restaurant. Stop here for Southern specialties like fried green tomatoes and buttermilk walnut pie.

The town's real appeal, though, lies in its unusual attractions beyond downtown. The nonprofit [Kirby Family Farm](#) hosts events like Wild West shootouts and holiday rides on their late-1800s locomotive. Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens—a former limestone quarry—showcases flowers, waterfalls, ponds, and bridges. Meanwhile, Devil's Den offers snorkeling and scuba diving in a cave filled year-round with clear, 72-degree spring water.

Continue to 5 of 10 below.

05 Micanopy

of 10



Michael Warren / Getty Images

The oldest municipality in Florida without beachfront property, Micanopy dates back to 1821. Often called the town that time forgot, it's the quintessential sleepy Southern town lovingly caricatured in the rom-com "Doc Hollywood," filmed on site.

Cholokka Boulevard, the town's main street, is lined with moss-covered oaks, antique stores, and Florida cracker houses (one of these containing the [Mosswood Farm Store & Bakehouse](#) and its artisan wood-fired bread). You'll find the town hall and library in an 1895 brick schoolhouse and the [Micanopy Historical Society Museum](#) in an 1886 warehouse. Across the street, the majestic Greek Revival [Herlong Mansion Bed & Breakfast](#) offers modern comforts in a remodeled 1845 homestead.

Continue to 6 of 10 below.

06 Longboat Key

of 10



Diana Robinson Photography / Getty Images

Stretching for 11 miles on a thin barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico, Longboat Key is a popular but uncrowded destination for shelling, swimming, and watersports. If you tire of the 12 beaches, head to [Quick Point Nature Preserve](#) and get lost in the mangroves that are home to egrets, ibises, herons, and ospreys.

On the north end of town, Longbeach Village, a former fishing settlement patrolled by roaming peacocks, preserves Old Florida homes from the 1930s and a laid-back pace from bygone days. Most dining is waterfront, but the 40-year-old [Euphemia Haye Restaurant](#) serves a made-from-scratch menu (and a dessert bar of gourmet pies) in a cottage surrounded by tropical foliage.

Continue to 7 of 10 below.

07 Lake Placid

of 10



Dennis Macdonald / Getty Images

Lake Placid had various names throughout the early 20th century until Dr. Melvil Dewey, of Dewey Decimal fame, likened it to his lake-filled home in New York. While the area boasts 27 lakes, it's better known today for its massive caladium flower fields and collection of nearly 50 murals. The town takes the art seriously. It has a mural society, a [murals website](#), and a team of mural volunteers to greet tour groups. There's also a historic train depot (with a train mural) and a clown museum (with a clown mural). If you get hungry from all that mural-spotting, La Pupusa Queen is a favorite with locals for hearty, homemade Salvadoran cuisine.

Continue to 8 of 10 below.

08 Islamorada

of 10



Chad Riley / Getty Images

More relaxed than Key Largo, its sister city to the north, the six-island village of Islamorada is known as the Sport-Fishing Capital of the World. Hit up the restaurants and galleries at the Morada Way Arts & Cultural District, or explore one of the five state parks, from an ancient coral reef to a 1733 Spanish shipwreck to an undeveloped island accessible only by boat.

At some point, you'll probably end up at [Robbie's](#), a one-stop-shop for eco-tours, watercraft rentals, sunset cruises, souvenirs, and dining (including an offer to cook your catch). But their cheapest activity might be the best: feeding the giant tarpons off the marina.

Continue to 9 of 10 below.

09 Marianna

of 10

Marianna's classic downtown is filled with history, including a Civil War battlefield, the Historic First National Bank building, two 19th-century graveyards, and an elegant neoclassical mansion that houses the visitors center. After touring the sites, cool down with a treat from [Southern Craft Creamery](#), serving ice cream made with milk sourced from the family farm just 6 miles away. If you're there on a Saturday, be sure to pick up some satsuma citrus preserves from the farmers market.

Just a few minutes north of downtown, Marianna has another historic attraction, but the history here is geological. [Florida Caverns State Park](#) features the only dry cave tour in Florida.

Continue to 10 of 10 below.

10 Alys Beach

of 10



TerryKelly / Getty Images

Some small towns seem made for Instagram. Alys Beach is just such a place. Turquoise water, manicured lawns, contemporary sculptures, and bright white Mediterranean-style houses deliver photo-worthy landscapes. The effect is by design. Alys Beach is one of several New Urbanist planned communities off Scenic Highway 30A on the Gulf Coast.

Less than 160 acres, it's pleasantly walkable. Nature blends with art throughout, from a pair of teak horses amid the underbrush at Lake Marilyn to a painted bronze woman dancing in an open courtyard. Dine al fresco if you can, whether it's seafood on the porch at [George's](#), handmade pastries outside [Charlie's Donut Truck](#), or cocktails and charcuterie under a red umbrella at the [NEAT Tasting Room & Bottle Shop](#) as you watch the sun go down.