

Suggested Itinerary: Orlando to Miami, Florida

Conveniently located in Central Florida, Orlando has endless activities to entertain visitors, starting with its famous theme parks. Those who venture beyond this magical city will find that the Sunshine State offers stunning beaches, beautiful state and national parks, sophisticated cities and world-class culture.

Orlando Area

Suggested: 4 - 6 days

Home to more than a dozen theme parks, the Orlando area needs no introduction to many visitors. Most travellers, especially those with children, know about its largest parks – Walt Disney World’s Magic Kingdom, Epcot and Animal Kingdom; Universal Orlando’s Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure; and several SeaWorld’s SeaWorld Orlando, Aquatica Orlando and Discovery Cove. Here, families can enjoy exciting rides and shows, visits with storybook characters, parades, and fireworks. Nearby, Old Town Kissimmee features old-fashioned carnival rides, entertainment and shops. Less than an hour southwest of Orlando in Winter Haven, LEGOLAND offers more fun, and is especially appreciated by younger children. After visiting the major attractions, travellers will find that shopping opportunities also abound, including Orlando International Premium Outlets (discounted top brands), The Mall at Millenia (upscale fashions) and International Drive’s souvenir shops. Also on ‘I-Drive’, visitors will find restaurants, mini golf, go kart tracks, helicopter tours and other activities.

Tampa Bay

Suggested: 2 - 3 days

About 90 minutes west of Orlando, Tampa is home to Busch Gardens, an African-themed park with animal viewing areas and thrilling rides. While in Tampa, also plan to visit the award-winning Lowry Park Zoo, home to giant tortoises, African penguins, Florida panthers, Asian elephants and many other species. Across town, at the Florida Aquarium, see a coral reef, swim with sharks (reserve ahead of your visit) and take a dolphin-watching cruise. Nearby, the historic Ybor City neighbourhood was once the centre of Latin life in Tampa and home to many Cuban and Spanish cigar factories. Today, it's a lively dining and nightlife destination (where you can still see cigars being hand-rolled).

The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel

Suggested: 3 - 4 days

From Tampa, head south for approximately two-and-a-half hours on highway I-75. Stop at Fort Myers, home to the historic Edison and Ford Winter Estates, where friends and famous inventors Thomas Edison and Henry Ford spent winters in adjacent homes. Tour the homes, a fascinating museum, research laboratory and 21-acre botanical garden. After your look at local history, it's time to head to the beach - some of the prettiest along Florida's Gulf coast. For an active, sporty beach experience, stay in Fort Myers Beach. For serenity and beautiful white sands, choose the laid-back barrier islands of Sanibel and Captiva, also known for stellar shell collecting. Here, warm waters are perfect for swimming, and paved bicycle paths lead to casual, funky restaurants and shops. Paddlers will want to kayak the J.N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel to see alligators and local water birds.

Everglades National Park, near Naples

Suggested: 2 days

A UNESCO World Heritage site, Everglades National Park is the only ecosystem of its kind in the world – not a swamp, but rather a ‘river of grass’ that provides important habitat for numerous rare and endangered species such as the shy American crocodile and the Florida panther. Join a kayak or canoe tour or ‘swamp hike’ in wetlands past hardwood hammocks to see alligators, manatees, white-tailed deer and more than 350 species of birds. Some park activities are seasonal, so check ahead. Also be aware that there are multiple entrances to the park. Visitors who enter at the Gulf Coast Visitor Center, east of Naples, will find accommodation and seafood restaurants in Everglades City or Naples. Travellers who enter at the Ernest Coe Visitor Center in Homestead will find amenities in Homestead, Florida City or Miami. Outside the official boundaries of Everglades National Park, outfitters offer airboat rides for visitors to zip through the watery wilderness.

Miami

Suggested: 2 - 4 days

Just beyond the eastern edge of the Everglades lies Miami, a bustling, cosmopolitan city with a distinctly Latin flavour. In the Little Havana neighbourhood, taste traditional Cuban dishes, sip on café con leche and watch a lively dominoes game in a public park. Head to famous South Beach to rub elbows with glamorous people, tour Art Deco landmarks and enjoy some of the USA’s best nightlife. Miami’s beaches range from pristine parks (such as Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park) to beaches with plenty of amenities and activities to keep everyone happy. Shoppers will want to save time to browse luxury designer boutiques on Lincoln Road, the Design District and the Bal Harbour Shops, or find great deals at Doral’s Dolphin Mall. The city’s many museums (such as Vizcaya Museum and Gardens and Wynwood Walls) and lush botanic gardens (Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden and the Miami Beach Botanical Garden) are also great sightseeing stops.

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