

Florida  
**Trend**  
THE MAGAZINE OF FLORIDA BUSINESS



# Reasons To Love Florida: A COUNTY GUIDE

# WELCOME!



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Welcome to Florida Trend's newest publication—"67 Reasons to Love Florida."

You've probably already guessed that those 67 reasons match the number of counties in the State of Florida. For each county, Florida Trend has compiled the most relevant details including population, density, county seat, major cities, colleges, hospitals, and transportation options.

Since Florida Trend is a business magazine, you won't be surprised we list the size of the labor force, top industries, and major companies.

In addition, we have listed the main attractions in each county, from a special museum to a spectacular park to a wonderful campground. You can readily see that Florida is a hugely diverse state, ranging from gorgeous coral reefs in Monroe County in the far south to pristine beaches and Blue Angels flying practices in Escambia County at the northwest.

Most of those counties are growing just like the state—today Florida counts 21.3 million residents, but the number is increasing by more than 300,000 each year. According to U.S. census figures, Florida became the third largest state, surpassing New York, in 2014, and topped the 20 million mark in 2015. Now in 2019, we're well on the way to nearly 22 million. Amazing growth is exciting, but also delivers challenges—as we must be aware of the strain it can cause on state resources like roads, schools, water and other resources.

So sit back and learn about Florida's 67 diverse counties. They all offer something special—and they all welcome you as a visitor or long-term resident.

With best regards,  
— *David G. Denor*  
Publisher  
[ddenor@floridatrend.com]

# 67 Reasons to Love Florida: A County Guide

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Northwest Florida

Bay County .....8  
 Calhoun County.....18  
 Escambia County .....37  
 Franklin County.....41  
 Gadsden County .....43  
 Gulf County .....49  
 Holmes County.....65  
 Jackson County .....69  
 Jefferson County .....71  
 Leon County .....81  
 Liberty County .....86  
 Madison County .....88  
 Okaloosa County .....106  
 Santa Rosa County .....135  
 Taylor County .....147  
 Wakulla County .....154  
 Walton County .....156  
 Washington County.....158

### Northeast Florida

Alachua County .....4  
 Baker County.....6  
 Bradford County .....10  
 Clay County .....24  
 Columbia County.....28  
 Dixie County.....32  
 Duval County.....34  
 Flagler County.....39  
 Gilchrist County.....45  
 Hamilton County.....51  
 Lafayette County .....73  
 Levy County .....84  
 Marion County .....92  
 Nassau County .....104  
 Putnam County .....128  
 Saint Johns County.....130  
 Suwannee County .....145  
 Union County .....149

### Central Florida

Brevard County.....12  
 Glades County .....47  
 Highlands County.....59  
 Indian River County.....67  
 Lake County .....75  
 Martin County .....94  
 Okeechobee County .....108  
 Orange County .....110  
 Osceola County.....114  
 Polk County .....125  
 Saint Lucie County.....132  
 Seminole County .....140  
 Volusia County .....151

### Gulf Coast Florida

Citrus County.....22  
 DeSoto County .....30  
 Hardee County .....53  
 Hernando County .....57  
 Hillsborough County .....61  
 Manatee County.....90  
 Pasco County .....120  
 Pinellas County .....122  
 Sarasota County .....137  
 Sumter County .....143

### South Florida

Broward County .....15  
 Charlotte County .....20  
 Collier County.....26  
 Hendry County .....55  
 Lee County .....78  
 Miami-Dade County .....97  
 Monroe County .....101  
 Palm Beach County .....117

➤ You can easily navigate this digital edition of FLORIDA TREND’s 67 Reasons to Love Florida: A County Guide by clicking on the name of the county you are interested in reviewing. When finished, simply click on the FLORIDA TREND logo at the bottom of the page you are currently on, and you will automatically be brought back to this Table of Contents.

# Alachua County

## Key facts

**Population:** 269,956

**Land size (square miles):** no change

**Population density:** 305 per square mile

**Per capita income:** \$43,839

**Time zone:** Eastern

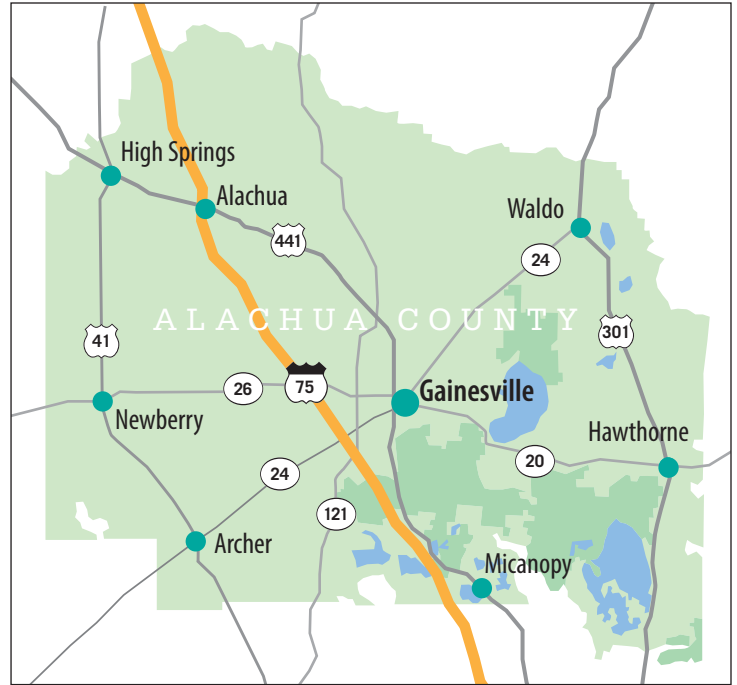
**Climate:** Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit)  
 January 66/42  
 July 91/72

**County seat:** Gainesville

**Largest cities/towns:**

Gainesville	(pop. 132,249)
Alachua	(pop. 9,982)
High Springs	(pop. 6,033)
Newberry	(pop. 5,942)
Hawthorne	(pop. 1,519)

**Who lives here:** Some of Florida's most highly educated people: 41% of Gainesville residents over age 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the national average of 31%.



## Names to know

**County manager:** Michele L. Lieberman

**County commissioners:**

District 1	– Mike Byerly
District 2	– Marihelen Wheeler
District 3	– Robert "Hutch" Hutchinson
District 4	– Ken Cornell
District 5	– Charles "Chuck" Chestnut IV

**Tax collector:** John Power

**School superintendent:** Karen Clarke

## Business

**Labor force:** 137,339

**Primary industries:** Life sciences; information technology; manufacturing; distribution

**Notable private employers:** Brammer Bio; RTI Surgical; Nationwide Insurance; Exactech; Info Tech; Nanotherapeutics; Walmart Distribution Center

**Sales tax rate:** 7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Alachua County Public Schools</b> 22 elementary schools 9 middle schools 7 high schools 14 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Barry University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences</b> Ocala/Gainesville: 1500 SW 1 <sup>st</sup> Avenue, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Ocala  <b>University of Florida</b> Main campus: Office of Admissions, 201 Criser Hall, Gainesville  <b>Saint Leo University</b> Gainesville Education Center: 4650 NW 39th Place, Suite B, Gainesville
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Santa Fe College</b> Northwest (main) campus: 3000 NW 83rd Street, Gainesville Blount Center, 401 NW 6th Street, Gainesville Davis Center: 17500 SW Archer Road, Archer Kirkpatrick Center, Northeast Campus: 3737 NE 39th Ave., Gainesville Perry Center for Emerging Technologies: 14180 NW 119th Terrace, Alachua

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	North Florida Regional Medical Center, Gainesville – 432 beds UF Health Shands Hospital, Gainesville – 1,041 beds
<b>Children’s hospitals:</b>	UF Health Shands Children’s Hospital – 208 beds
<b>State/federal hospitals:</b>	Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center, Gainesville – 273 beds

## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Gainesville Regional Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Atlanta; south to Tampa and Miami SR 24, connecting to U.S. 301 – northeast to Jacksonville

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** The University of Florida campus (student-guided walking tours are available Monday through Friday); Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art; Florida Museum of Natural History (do check out the Butterfly Garden!); Santa Fe College Teaching Zoo, one of only two such facilities in the U.S.; Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings State Historic Park, where the author wrote her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Yearling* and other works.

**Notable events:** Hoggetowne Medieval Faire at Alachua County Fairgrounds (January); Florida Bat Festival at Lubee Bat Conservancy, which is rarely open to the public (October); Downtown Festival and Art Show (November)

**Natural wonders:** Devil’s Millhopper Geological State Park, featuring a 120-foot deep, 500-foot wide sinkhole believed to have formed 10,000 years ago; Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, home to alligators, bison and more than 270 bird species.

**Sports and recreation:** Cheer for the University of Florida Gators throughout the year at a variety of men’s and women’s athletic events, including baseball, basketball, football, gymnastics, soccer, swimming, tennis, track and field, volleyball and lacrosse; tickets available online.

## Like Nowhere Else

The University of Florida is home to HiPerGator 2.0, the third most powerful university supercomputer in the U.S. that is capable of holding 21 million times more data than the computer program on Apollo 11 that put man on the moon. 2.0’s real value, however, isn’t the power of its memory, but what researchers can do with all that power – tackle climate change, eradicate poverty and solve a whole host of other global problems in ways that were unimaginable a few years ago.

# Baker County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	28,355
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	585
<b>Population density:</b>	48 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$30,355
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/40 July 92/70
<b>County seat:</b>	Macclenny
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Macclenny (pop. 6,518) Sanderson (pop. 5,553) Glen St. Mary (pop. 453) Olstee (pop. 296)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	People who like to put down roots: Close to 80% of county residents live in houses they own compared to 65% statewide and 64% across the U.S.

## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Kennie Downing
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – James A. Croft District 2 – Jimmy Anderson District 3 – Cathy Rhoden District 4 – James G. Bennett District 5 – Bobby Steele
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Amy Dugger
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Sherrie E. Raulerson

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	11,869
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Logistics and distribution; manufacturing; forestry
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Walmart Distribution Center; Insteel Wire Products; Sanderson Pipe Corporation
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Baker County School District</b> 2 elementary schools (K-3) 1 intermediate school (4-5) 1 middle school (6-8) 1 high school (9-12)
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida Gateway College</b> Main campus: 149 SE College Place, Lake City Public Service Training Campus: 20530 U.S. Highway 90, Olustee

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Ed Fraser Memorial Hospital, Macclenny – 25 beds
<b>State/federal hospitals:</b>	Northeast Florida State Hospital, Macclenny – 1,138 beds

## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – east to Jacksonville; west to Pensacola and New Orleans US 90 – east to Jacksonville; west to Tallahassee, Marianna, Milton
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Heritage Park Village; Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park

**Notable events:** Annual Reenactment of the Civil War Battle of Olustee (mid-February); spoiler alert: the Confederates win; Baker County Fair (September); Christmas Craft Show and Lighted Parade in Macclenny (December)

**Natural wonders/recreation:** Camping, fishing, hiking, hunting and horseback riding in Osceola National Forest; ATV trails, hiking and horseback riding along the river at the 2,568-acre St. Marys Shoals Park located north of Macclenny on the Florida/Georgia border; swimming and boating on the 800-acre Ocean Pond

## Like Nowhere Else

Founded in 1861, Baker County was the site of Florida's largest and bloodiest Civil War battle – the Battle of Olustee – which took place on February 20, 1864, and is today commemorated at Olustee Battlefield Historic Park. More than 10,000 troops took part, including the famed African-American 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment depicted in the 1989 film "Glory." Although the movie does not cover the Battle of Olustee, some scenes were filmed at Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park. The battle ended after just five hours with 2,807 casualties.

# Bay County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	185,287
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	758
<b>Population density:</b>	244 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$42,992
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 62/39 July 89/71
<b>County seat:</b>	Panama City
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Panama City (pop. 39,986) Lynn Haven (pop. 20,922) Callaway (pop. 15,144) Panama City Beach (pop. 12,757) Springfield (pop. 9,437)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	More than 10,000 active duty and civilian personnel at two military installations: Naval Support Activity Panama City and Tyndall Air Force Base; military veterans residing in Bay County number close to 23,000.

### Names to know

**County manager:** Robert "Bob" Majka Jr.

**County commissioners:** District 1 – Tommy Hamm  
District 2 – Robert Carroll  
District 3 – William Dozier  
District 4 – Keith Baker  
District 5 – Philip Griffitts

**Tax collector:** Chuck Perdue

**School superintendent:** Bill Husfelt

## Business

**Labor force:** 89,251

**Primary industries:** Manufacturing; tourism/hospitality; health care

**Notable private employers:** Bay Medical Sacred Heart; Berg Steel Pipe Corporation; Eastern Shipbuilding Group; Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center; Merrick Industries; WestRock

**Sales tax rate:** 7%





## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Bay District Schools</b> Bay District Schools 19 elementary schools 6 middle schools 5 high schools 3 combined-grade level schools (K-8) 3 special purpose schools 8 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Florida State University</b> Panama City campus: 4750 Collegiate Drive, Panama City
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Gulf Coast State College</b> Main campus: 5230 Highway 98, Panama City North Bay campuses: EOC Building, 700 Highway 2300, Southport Abbott Building, 637 Highway 2300, Southport Tyndall Education Center: Building 1230, Tyndall AFB

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Bay Medical Sacred Heart, Panama City – 323 beds Gulf Coast Regional Medical Center, Panama City – 238 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport
<b>Seaports:</b>	Port Panama City
<b>Major highways:</b>	US 98 – west to Pensacola along the Gulf shoreline; east to St. Teresa, then turning inland to Perry in Taylor County US 231 – north to intersect with I-10 or continue north into Georgia SR 77 – north to I-10 and Chipley

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Science & Discovery Center of Northwest Florida; Gulf World Marine Park; Wonderworks; Panama City Centre for the Arts; Shipwreck Island Water Park; Camp Helen State Park, where prehistoric middens and mounds indicate that humans inhabited this area some 4,000 years ago

**Notable events:** Saint Andrews Mardi Gras, 2-day festival and parade (February); Sea Breeze Jazz Festival (April); Annual Thunder Beach Motorcycle Rally (May and October)

**Natural wonders:** 27 miles of gloriously white, sugar-sand beaches along the Gulf coast; St. Andrews State Park (the beach here has been named “America’s Best” by Dr. Beach, aka Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman)

**Sports and recreation:** For active family fun, head to the 76-acre HG Harders Recreation Complex in Panama City, offering five softball and two baseball fields, nine soccer/football fields, tennis courts, a model boat pond, a model airstrip playground and cross country trail.

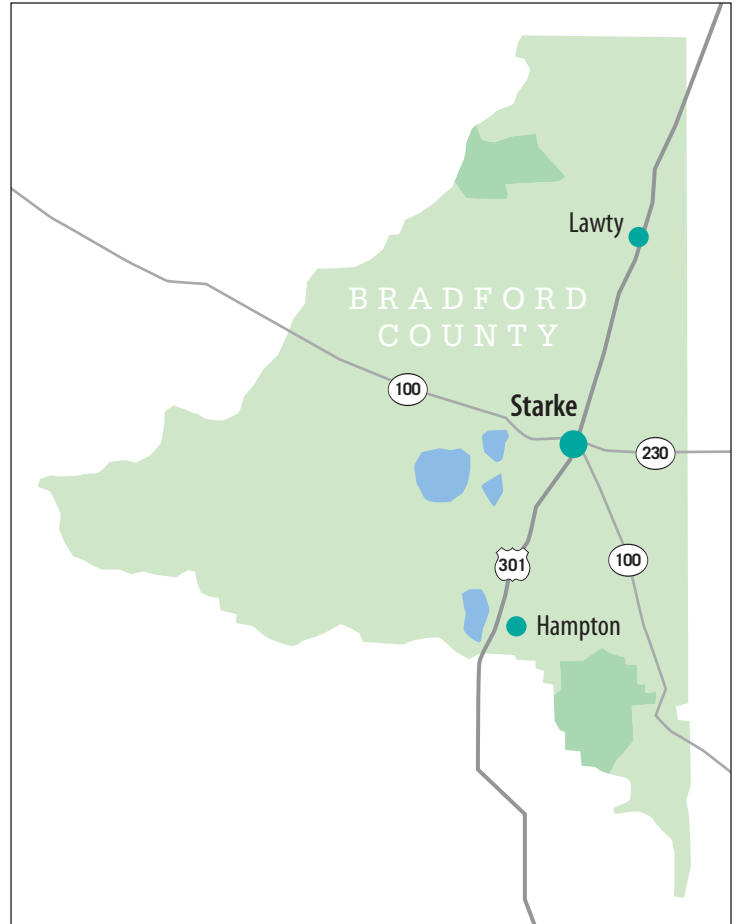
## Like Nowhere Else

Florida boasts 663 miles of sandy beaches, and Bay County lays claim to the whitest ones. The legendary powdery, pure white sand that adorns these Gulf shores is said to be the result of quartz crystals that were bleached, ground, smoothed and polished as they washed their way down from the Appalachian Mountains to the sea centuries ago and were deposited by surf and tides to form the pristine shoreline we know today. For a bit of beachcombing and a glimpse of what coastal Florida looked like before the condos came, head for Shell Island, a seven-and-a-half mile slice of undeveloped beach just off shore; boats depart daily from St. Andrews State Park and Panama City.

# Bradford County

## Key facts

Population:	27,732
Land size (square miles):	294
Population density:	94 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$29,620
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/40 July 91/70
County seat:	Starke
Largest cities/towns:	Starke (pop. 5,370) Lawtey (pop. 723) Hampton (pop. 496)
Who lives here:	People with jobs. At just 3.3%, Bradford County's average unemployment rate in 2018 was among the lowest in Florida. Unemployment for the same period averaged 3.6% across the state and 3.9% nationwide.



## Names to know

County manager: Brad Carter

County commissioners:  
 District 1 – Ross Chandler  
 District 2 – Kenny Thompson  
 District 3 – Chris Dougherty  
 District 4 – Danny Riddick  
 District 5 – Frank Durrance

Tax collector: Teresa G. Phillips

School superintendent: open



## Business

Labor force: 11,304

Primary industries: Mining/manufacturing; health care; logistics and distribution

Notable private employers: Chemours (formerly DuPont Titanium Technologies); Davis Express (trucking); Shands Starke Regional Medical Center

Sales tax rate: 7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Bradford County School District</b> 5 elementary schools 1 middle school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Santa Fe College</b> Andrews Center: 209 W. Call Street, Starke Watson Center: 4150 State Road 21, Keystone Heights

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Shands Starke Regional Medical Center, Starke – 49 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 301 – north to Jacksonville; south to Tampa SR 100 – northwest to Lake Butler; connects with I-10 near Lake City SR 230 – east to Green Cove Springs
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*Word to the wise: US 301 through Bradford County is widely known – even officially designated by AAA – as a speed trap. To avoid a ticket, pay close attention to posted limits.*

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Call Street Historic District in downtown Starke (23 buildings in all, some of which date to the 1870s); Camp Blanding Museum and Memorial Park; Florida International Rally and Motorsport Park

**Notable events:** Bradford County Fair featuring rides, games, livestock exhibits and a strawberry pie-eating contest (March); Annual Strawberry Festival (April)

**Sports and recreation:** Numerous lakes provide opportunities for boating, fishing and swimming; Lakes Sampson, Crosby, Rowell and Hampton are among the largest and most popular.

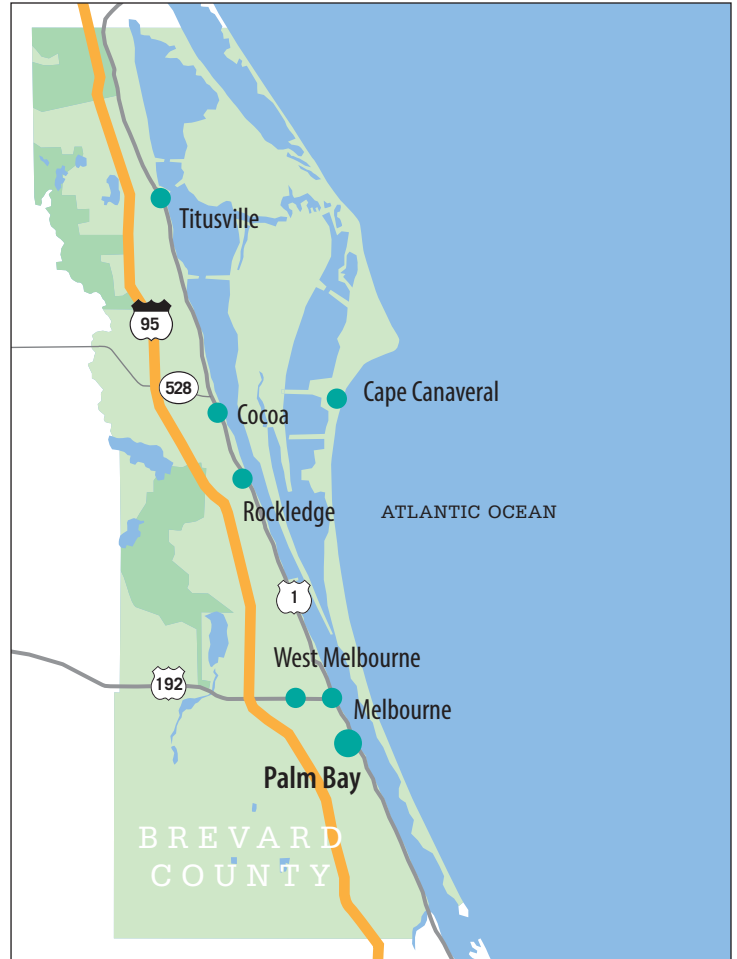
## Like Nowhere Else

It's not unusual for a county to have government buildings within its boundaries, but Bradford County has perhaps the most unusual combination of such: a premier National Guard training center and Florida's largest prison. Camp Blanding Joint Training Center, where military recruits were prepped for battle during World War II, today serves as the primary reservation and training base for the Florida National Guard, not to mention an occasional movie set. Remember "G.I. Jane" starring Demi Moore? It was filmed at Camp Blanding. Just 10 miles away, Florida State Prison houses some 1,400 inmates and the state's only execution chamber. It was here in the 1990s that an electric chair – nicknamed "Old Sparky" – became notorious after several malfunctions, prompting Florida to mandate lethal injection as its standard method of execution.

# Brevard County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	596,849	
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,016	
<b>Population density:</b>	587 per square mile	
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$44,137	
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern	
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit)	
	January	70/50
	July	92/74
<b>County seat:</b>	Titusville	
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Palm Bay	(pop. 111,657)
	Melbourne	(pop. 82,011)
	Titusville	(pop. 46,263)
	Rockledge	(pop. 27,476)
	West Melbourne	(pop. 22,089)
	Cocoa	(pop. 18,532)
	Cape Canaveral	(pop. 10,413)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Tech-savvy workforce. Brevard boasts 48 engineers per 1,000 workers, more than any of the nation's 25 most populated metros and ranks first in Florida (6th nationwide) for the most highly concentrated high-tech economy.	



## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Frank Abbate
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Rita Pritchett District 2 – Bryan Lober District 3 – John Tobia District 4 – Curt Smith District 5 – Kristine Isnardi
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Lisa Cullen
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Mark W. Mullins



## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	276,558
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Aerospace/defense; manufacturing; logistics and transportation
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Harris Corporation; Embraer; Northrop Grumman; Lockheed Martin; The Boeing Company
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Brevard Public Schools</b>            56 elementary schools            11 middle schools            12 high schools            4 junior/senior schools            2 alternative schools            15 charter schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Barry University, Adrian Dominican School of Education</b>            Melbourne: Wickham Oaks Business Park, 410 N. Wickham Road, Suite 103, Melbourne</p> <p><b>Barry University, School of Professional &amp; Career Education</b>            Cape Canaveral: Port Authority Maritime Center, 445 Challenger Road, Suite 109, Cape Canaveral            Melbourne: Wickham Oaks Business Park, 410 N. Wickham Road, Suite 103, Melbourne</p> <p><b>Florida Institute of Technology</b>            Melbourne (main) campus: 150 W. University Blvd., Melbourne</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b>            Melbourne: 900 South Babcock Street, Melbourne            Patrick Air Force Base: 1020 Central Avenue, Suite C-15, Patrick AFB</p> <p><b>University of Central Florida</b>            UCF Cocoa: 1519 Clearlake Road, Building 3, Cocoa            UCF Palm Bay: 250 Community College Parkway, Building 3, Palm Bay</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>Eastern Florida State College</b>            Melbourne (main) campus: 3865 North Wickham Road, Melbourne            Cocoa campus: 1519 Clearlake Road, Cocoa            Palm Bay campus: 250 Community College Parkway, Palm Bay            Titusville campus: 1311 North US 1, Titusville</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	<p>Health First Cape Canaveral Hospital, Cocoa Beach – 150 beds            Health First Holmes Regional Medical Center, Melbourne – 514 beds            Health First Viera Hospital, Melbourne – 84 beds            Melbourne Regional Medical Center, Melbourne – 119 beds            Health First Palm Bay Hospital, Palm Bay – 120 beds            Rockledge Regional Medical Center, Rockledge – 298 beds            Parish Medical Center, Titusville – 210 beds</p>
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Orlando Melbourne International Airport
<b>Seaports:</b>	Port Canaveral
<b>Spaceport:</b>	Cape Canaveral Spaceport
<b>Major highways:</b>	<p>I-95 – north to Jacksonville and Savannah; south to Miami            US 1 – north along the Atlantic coast to Daytona Beach; south to Miami and Key West            US 192 – northeast to Kissimmee            SR 528 (Beachline Expressway – toll) – east to Orlando and Florida’s Turnpike</p>

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex; Sebastian Inlet State Park (never closes); Historic Cocoa Village; Brevard Zoo; Eastern Florida State College Planetarium & Observatory; Florida Institute of Technology Botanical Gardens; East Coast Surfing Hall of Fame; Ron Jon Surf Shop

**Notable events:** Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival, Titusville (January); Easter Surfing Festival, Cocoa Beach (Easter weekend); Melbourne Art Festival (April); BBQ and Blues, Historic Cocoa Village (June); Eau Gallie Fine Arts Festival, Melbourne (November); quarterly Art and Craft Fairs, Historic Cocoa Village (March, May, October, December)

**Natural wonders:** 71 miles of Atlantic coastline; Canaveral National Seashore, longest undeveloped stretch of beachfront on Florida's east coast (24 miles); Merritt Island National Refuge, home to many threatened or endangered species, none of which seem bothered by lift-offs at the Kennedy Space Center next door; Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge (sea turtle nesting habitat)

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing, boating and surfing all up and down the Atlantic coast; permitted public sea turtle watching at various sites in June and July (reservations required); AAU International Men's Fast Pitch Softball Tournament (January); Thunder on Cocoa Beach Space Coast Super Boat Grand Prix (May)

## Like Nowhere Else

If medals were awarded for "being like nowhere else in the world," Brevard County might easily take the gold, for this is the birthplace of American space exploration. The county was deliberately chosen by NASA to be its launch site for three primary reasons: beachfront property (better to drop rocket debris in the ocean than on land); its eastward rotational push (like swimming with the current instead of against it); and security (Patrick Air Force Base was already here). Among the crowning achievements that originated in Brevard are man's first landing on the moon in 1969, the maiden voyage of the first space shuttle – Columbia – in 1981 and the completion of the International Space Station in 2011. The shuttles no longer fly, but NASA and Cape Canaveral remain heavy hitters with regard to space access and thanks to private investors, the launch pads here are today busier than ever.

# Broward County

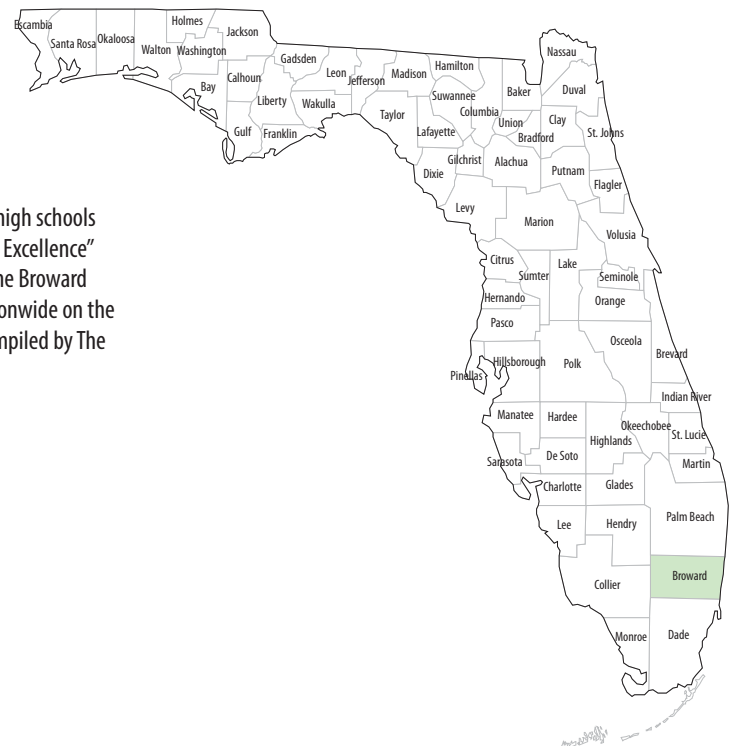
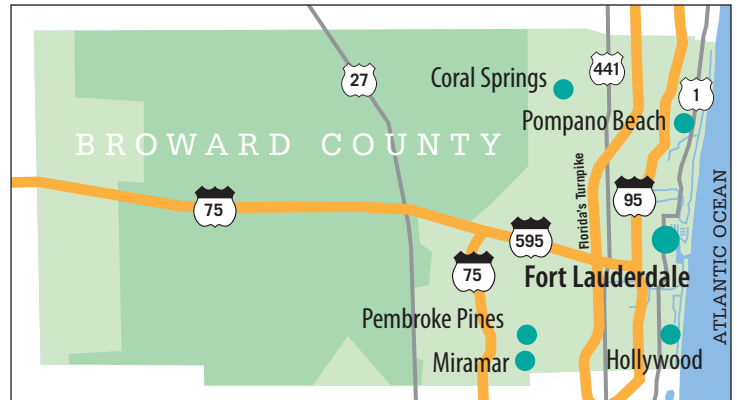
## Key facts

Population:	1,951,260
Land size (square miles):	1,210
Population density:	1,613 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$49,165
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 76/59 July 90/75

County seat: Fort Lauderdale

Largest cities/towns:	Fort Lauderdale	(pop. 180,072)
	Pembroke Pines	(pop. 170,712)
	Hollywood	(pop. 153,627)
	Miramar	(pop. 140,328)
	Coral Springs	(pop. 133,037)
	Pompano Beach	(pop. 110,473)

**Who lives here:** Smart teens in serious schools. Eleven Broward County high schools earned “A” grades and were named “2017-18 Schools of Excellence” by the Florida Department of Education. In addition, nine Broward County high schools were cited among the top 250 nationwide on the “America’s Most Challenging High Schools 2018” list compiled by The Washington Post.



## Names to know

County administrator: Bertha Henry

County commissioners:

- District 1 – Nan H. Rich
- District 2 – Mark D. Bogen
- District 3 – Michael Udine
- District 4 – Lamar P. Fisher
- District 5 – Steve Geller
- District 6 – Beam Furr
- District 7 – Tim Ryan
- District 8 – Barbara Sharief
- District 9 – Dale V. C. Holness

Tax collector: Tom Kennedy

School superintendent: Robert W. Runcie

## Business

Labor force: 1,036,212

Primary industries: Technology; manufacturing; marine industries; financial and professional services; tourism

Notable private employers: Memorial Healthcare System; American Express; Citrix; AutoNation; DHL Solutions Americas; Ultimate Software; Chiquita Brands International; International; Virgin Voyages

Sales tax rate: 7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Broward County Public Schools</b>            136 elementary schools            38 middle schools            32 high schools            12 alternative schools            8 combined-grade level schools (K-8, 6-12)</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Barry University, Adrian Dominican School of Education</b>            Coral Springs: 3205 N. University Ave., Coral Springs            Pembroke Pines: 15900 Pines Blvd., Suite 200, Pembroke Pines</p> <p><b>Barry University, School of Professional &amp; Career Education</b>            Davie: 4900 S. University Drive, Suites 203–205, Davie            Pembroke Pines: 15900 Pines Blvd., Suite 200, Pembroke Pines            Barry University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences            South Florida-Hollywood: 421 North 21st Avenue, Hollywood</p> <p><b>Florida Atlantic University</b>            FAU Dania Beach Research Center (SeaTech): 101 North Beach Drive, Dania Beach            FAU Davie: 3200 College Avenue, Davie            FAU Fort Lauderdale: 111 East Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale</p> <p><b>Florida International University</b>            FIU at I-75: 1930 SW 145th Ave., Miramar</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b>            Fort Lauderdale (main campus), 1500 NW 49th Street, Fort Lauderdale            Graduate School: 1900 West Commercial Blvd., Fort Lauderdale            Pembroke Pines: 1640 SW 145th Avenue, Pembroke Pines</p> <p><b>Nova Southeastern University</b>            Main campus: 3301 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale            East Campus: 3100 SW 9th Avenue, Fort Lauderdale            Ocean Campus: 8000 N. Ocean Drive, Dania Beach</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>Broward College</b>            A. Hugh Adams Central (main) Campus: 3501 SW Davie Road, Davie            North Campus: 1000 Coconut Creek Blvd., Coconut Creek            Tigertail Lake Center: 580 Gulfstream Way, Dania Beach            Cypress Creek Administrative Center: 6400 NW 6th Way, Fort Lauderdale            Miramar Town Center: 2050 Civic Center Place, Miramar            Miramar West Center: 1930 SW 145th Avenue, Miramar            Judson A. Samuels South Campus: 7200 Pines Blvd., Pembroke Pines            Pines Center: 16957 Sheridan Street, Pembroke Pines            Weston Center: 4205 Bonaventure Blvd., Weston</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	<p>Broward Health Coral Springs, Coral Springs – 200 beds            Broward Health North, Deerfield Beach – 409 beds            Broward Health Imperial Point, Fort Lauderdale – 204 beds            Broward Health Medical Center, Fort Lauderdale – 716 beds            Florida Medical Center—A Campus of North Shore, Fort Lauderdale – 459 beds            Holy Cross Hospital, Fort Lauderdale – 557 beds            Memorial Regional Hospital, Hollywood – 593 beds            Memorial Regional Hospital South, Hollywood – 216 beds            Northwest Medical Center, Margate – 228 beds</p>
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Memorial Hospital Miramar, Miramar – 178 beds  
 Memorial Hospital Pembroke, Pembroke Pines – 301 beds  
 Memorial Hospital West, Pembroke Pines – 486 beds  
 Plantation General Hospital, Plantation – 264 beds  
 Westside Regional Medical Center, Plantation – 224 beds  
 University Hospital & Medical Center, Tamarac – 317 beds  
 Cleveland Clinic Florida, Weston – 155 beds

**Children's hospitals:** Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital, Hollywood – 226 beds  
 The Salah Foundation Children's Hospital at Broward Health, Fort Lauderdale – 125 beds

**State/federal hospitals:** South Florida State Hospital, Pembroke Pines – 350 beds

## Transportation

**Commercial airports:** Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport

**Seaports:** Port Everglades

**Passenger rail:** Tri-Rail: the commuter rail line linking Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties  
 Virgin Trains USA: High-speed rail service between West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami; service to Orlando is slated to begin in 2022.  
 Amtrak: Silver Service from Deerfield Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood  
 North to New York and Washington DC through Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston; south to Miami

**Major highways:** I-95 – north to Palm Beach and Jacksonville; south to Miami  
 I-595 – east to Fort Lauderdale; west to I-75  
 I-75 (Alligator Alley) – west to Naples, then north to Fort Myers and Tampa  
 Florida's Turnpike – north to Fort Pierce and Kissimmee; south to Miami suburbs and Homestead  
 US 27 – north to the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee; south to Miami through Weston  
 US 1 – north along the Atlantic coast to Fort Pierce; south to Miami and Key West

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Fort Lauderdale Museum of Discovery and Science; NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale; Riverwalk Arts and Entertainment District/Las Olas Boulevard, downtown Fort Lauderdale; Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Hollywood; Buehler Planetarium and Observatory at Broward College, Davie

**Notable events:** Las Olas Art Fair, Fort Lauderdale (January, March, October); Seminole Tribal Fair, Hollywood (February); South Florida Ukelele Fest, Fort Lauderdale (March); Rock the Ocean Tortuga Music Festival, Fort Lauderdale Beach (April); Fleet Week, Fort Lauderdale (May); Brazilian Festival, Pompano Beach (October); Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, (October/November); Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival (November); Seminole Hard Rock Winterfest Boat Parade, Fort Lauderdale (December)

**Natural wonders:** Flamingo Gardens and Everglades Wildlife Sanctuary, Davie; Butterfly World, Coconut Creek; airboat rides in the Everglades, just a short drive inland

**Sports and recreation:** Many opportunities for water-based activity – boating, swimming, deep-sea fishing; also golf and tennis; Florida Panthers NHL hockey at the BB&T Center in Sunrise; Fort Lauderdale Strikers NASL soccer at Central Broward Stadium in Fort Lauderdale

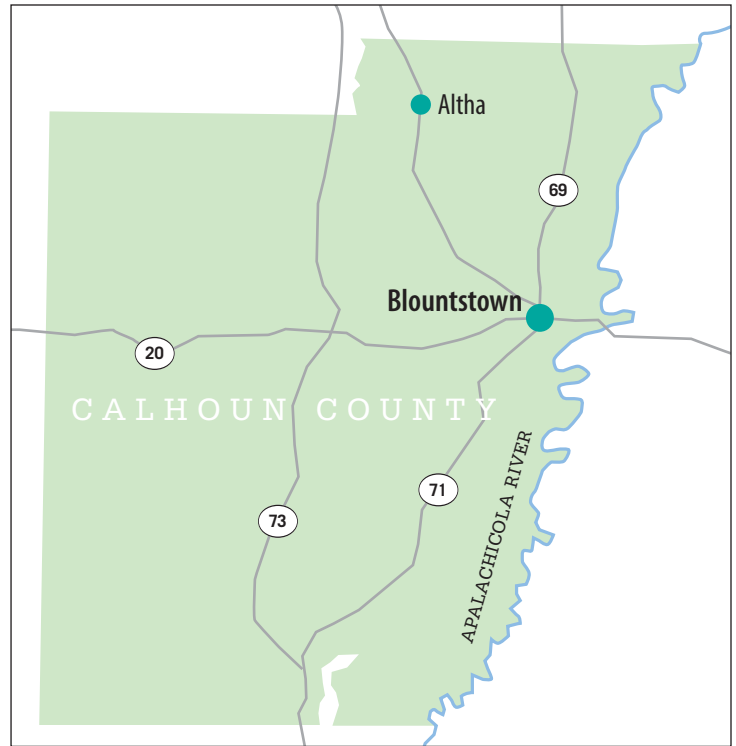
## Like Nowhere Else

Nicknamed the "Venice of America," Greater Fort Lauderdale boasts more than 300 miles of easy-to-navigate inland canals, 100 marinas, and some 50,000 registered yachts, not to mention the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show, which is said to be the world's largest. At one time, this city was also a top spring break destination, thanks in large part to the 1960 hit film "Where the Boys Are," that was set here. At its peak in the 1980s, spring break in Broward County drew upwards of 250,000 college students each spring. Today, Fort Lauderdale is better known for its affluent lifestyle, upscale shopping venues and trendy restaurants.

# Calhoun County

## Key facts

Population:	14,587
Land size (square miles):	567
Population density:	26 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$26,010
Time zone:	Central
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 63/41 July 91/71
County seat:	Blountstown
Largest cities/towns:	Blountstown (pop. 2,454) Altha (pop. 526)
Who lives here:	63% of Calhoun County's population is working age (18-64) and they apparently like to stay put. Close to 90% reside in the same house they lived in a year ago and of those that did relocate, fewer than 7% moved to a different county in Florida and only 2% moved to another state.



## Names to know

Clerk of the court:	Carla Hand
County director of operations:	Joe Wood
County commissioners:	District 1 – Danny Wise District 2 – Darrell McDougald District 3 – Jeral Hall District 4 – Dennis Jones District 5 – Gene Bailey
Tax collector:	Becky Smith
School superintendent:	Ralph Yoder



## Business

Labor force:	5,082
Primary industries:	Lumber/forestry; plant propagation; distribution
Notable private employers:	Big River Cypress & Hardwood; Oglesby Plants International; Shelton Trucking
Sales tax rate:	7.5%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Calhoun County School District</b> 1 elementary school 1 middle school 1 high school 2 combined-grade schools (K-8, K-12)
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Chipola College</b> Main campus: 3094 Indian Circle, Marianna

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospital:</b>	Calhoun-Liberty Hospital, Blountstown – 25 bed Calhoun-Liberty Hospital, Blountstown – 25 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	SR 20 – east to Tallahassee; west to US 231, then on to Walton and Okaloosa counties SR 73 – south to SR 71 and Port St. Joe; north to Marianna SR 69 – north from Blountstown to I-10
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Panhandle Pioneer Settlement; Florida's National Scenic Trail, a portion of which cuts across Calhoun County near its northern border with Jackson County; T. H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park on the Gulf of Mexico at Port St. Joe is within an hour's drive

**Notable events:** North Florida Wildflower Festival, Blountstown (April); Panhandle Folk Life Days at Panhandle Pioneer Settlement (April); Sugar Cane Syrup Making Day at Panhandle Pioneer Settlement (November); Christmas on the Square, Blountstown (December); Christmas parades, Blountstown and Altha (early December)

**Natural wonders:** Wide open spaces and pristine timberland; Apalachicola and Chipola Rivers

**Sports and recreation:** Canoeing, boating and fishing on the Apalachicola River; canoeing, kayaking, tubing, rafting and snorkeling on the Chipola River (beware the "Look and Tremble" shoal!); hiking and biking along the paved Blountstown Greenway Trail

## Like Nowhere Else

Calhoun County got its start in 1838 as part of an effort to boost commercial prospects for a town – St. Joseph – that no longer exists. The plan was to break Apalachicola's hold on the lucrative cotton market by diverting thousands of bales of cotton by rail to St. Joseph, and shipping them directly to England. For a brief time, the plan worked – that is, until St. Joseph was hit by twin catastrophes. In 1841, a yellow fever epidemic claimed the lives of an estimated 10,000 town residents and, in September 1844, a hurricane virtually swept it out of existence. But while St. Joseph is physically gone, it is not forgotten, for it was here that Florida's first territorial constitution was written and adopted. An exhibit at the Florida Constitution Museum in Port St. Joe depicts the room where the convention assembled on December 3, 1838, in St. Joseph.

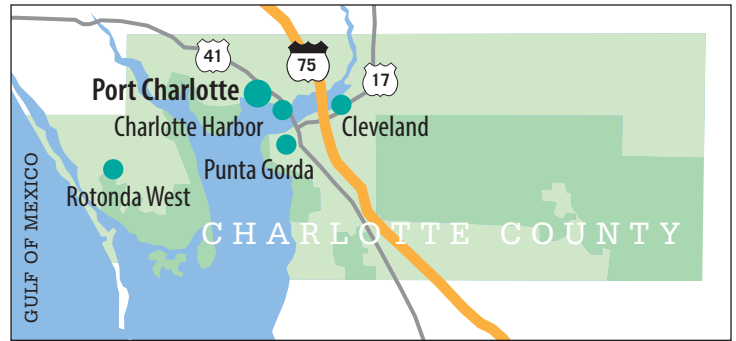
# Charlotte County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	184,998
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	680
<b>Population density:</b>	272 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$41,239
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 75/59 July 92/74

<b>County seat:</b>	Punta Gorda
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Port Charlotte (pop. 59,654) Punta Gorda (pop. 19,761) Rotonda (pop. 12,327) Charlotte Harbor (pop. 3,870) Cleveland (pop. 3,185)

**Who lives here:** A potential customer base of 20 million. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a population of just under 185,000 resides within the boundaries of Charlotte County; however, given Charlotte's strategic location along I-75 between Miami and Tampa, more than 4 million people live within 90 miles and 75% of Florida's entire population – a whopping 20 million – is within 150 miles.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Ray Sandrock
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Ken Doherty District 2 – Christopher Constance District 3 – Bill Truex District 4 – Stephen R. Deutsch District 5 – Joe Tiseo
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Vickie L. Potts
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Steve Dionisio

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	70,953
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Distribution; manufacturing; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Cheney Brothers; Bayfront Health; Fawcett Memorial Hospital
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Charlotte County Public Schools</b> 10 elementary schools 4 middle schools 3 high schools 2 alternative schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida SouthWestern State College</b> Charlotte campus: 26300 Airport Road, Punta Gorda

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Englewood Community Hospital, Englewood – 100 beds Bayfront Health Port Charlotte, Port Charlotte – 254 beds Fawcett Memorial Hospital, Port Charlotte – 237 beds Bayfront Health Punta Gorda, Punta Gorda – 208 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Punta Gorda Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Tampa; south and west (Alligator Alley) to Miami US 17 – north to Bowling Green and Winter Haven US 41 – north to Sarasota and Tampa; south to Naples, then west (Tamiami Trail) to Miami

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** A. C. Freeman (Victorian-era) House; Blanchard House Museum of African-American History and Culture; Peace River Wildlife Center; Octagon Wildlife Sanctuary; Florida Tracks and Trails (ATV and motocross trails, paintball)

**Notable events:** Punta Gorda Craft Festival (January); Punta Gorda Wine and Jazz Festival (February); Florida International Air Show, Punta Gorda (March); Punta Gorda Hibiscus Festival (May); Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival, Port Charlotte (November); Punta Gorda Lighted Boat Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge, located in the Cape Haze area of Charlotte Harbor (accessible by boat only); Babcock/Webb Wildlife Management Area; Babcock Ranch Preserve; sheltered waters and spectacular sunsets at Charlotte Beach Park

**Sports and recreation:** Baseball is HUGE here! Charlotte Sports Park in Port Charlotte hosts the MLB Tampa Bay Rays for spring training as well as their Class A-Advanced Affiliate Charlotte Stone Crabs during the regular season (April-September); in February and March, NCAA Division I and III college baseball teams gather to compete in the Annual Snowbird Baseball Classic at venues all across the county; elsewhere, ample opportunities for swimming, boating, kayaking, fishing and diving

## Like Nowhere Else

There seems to be no definitive logic supporting the fear that some people have about Friday the 13th . . . unless, of course, they were residents of Charlotte County, Florida, on Friday, August 13, 2004. At precisely 8:45 p.m. on that day, the eye of Hurricane Charley passed over Punta Gorda; subsequently, its eyewall struck that city and neighboring Port Charlotte with devastating results. Originally predicted to make landfall at Tampa, Charley surprised nearly everyone by suddenly veering to the right some 115 miles south and heading ashore as a strong Category 4 storm. Although many Florida communities felt the hurricane's effects as it crossed the peninsula, finally exiting at Ormond Beach the next day, Punta Gorda and Port Charlotte took the brunt – 11,000 homes destroyed, 27,000 roofs and 42,000 pool cages ripped apart – but you'd never know it today. Charlotte County has bounced back with new and stronger construction, including a state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center that is the envy of all others in Florida and built to withstand an even stronger punch than the one delivered by Charley. It was put to the test in September 2017 when Hurricane Irma slammed into Florida's Gulf Coast. Charlotte County did not take a direct hit this time and the EOC continues to stand proud.

# Citrus County

## Key facts

Population:	147,929												
Land size (square miles):	582												
Population density:	254 per square mile												
Per capita income:	\$38,511												
Time zone:	Eastern												
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/42 July 92/71												
County seat:	Inverness												
Largest cities/towns:	<table> <tr> <td>Homosassa Springs</td> <td>(pop. 13,217)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pine Ridge</td> <td>(pop. 9,811)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Citrus Springs</td> <td>(pop. 9,011)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hernando</td> <td>(pop. 8,254)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Inverness</td> <td>(pop. 7,304)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Crystal River</td> <td>(pop. 3,118)</td> </tr> </table>	Homosassa Springs	(pop. 13,217)	Pine Ridge	(pop. 9,811)	Citrus Springs	(pop. 9,011)	Hernando	(pop. 8,254)	Inverness	(pop. 7,304)	Crystal River	(pop. 3,118)
Homosassa Springs	(pop. 13,217)												
Pine Ridge	(pop. 9,811)												
Citrus Springs	(pop. 9,011)												
Hernando	(pop. 8,254)												
Inverness	(pop. 7,304)												
Crystal River	(pop. 3,118)												

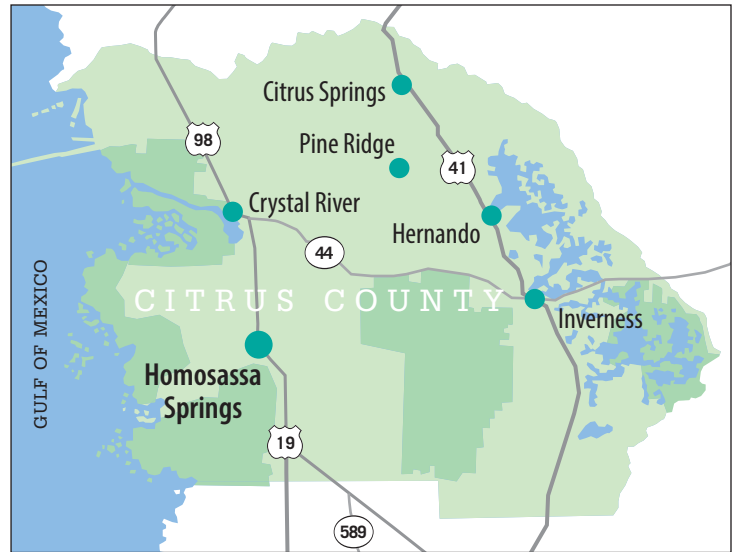
**Who lives here:** People who like living slightly off the beaten path – close enough to enjoy the urban amenities that a region like Tampa Bay has to offer, yet far enough from city lights to see a sky full of stars at night.

## Names to know

County administrator:	Randy Oliver
County commissioners:	District 1 – Jeff Kinnard District 2 – Ronald E. Kitchen District 3 – Jimmie T. Smith District 4 – Scott E. Carnahan District 5 – Brian Coleman
Tax collector:	Janice A. Warren
School superintendent:	Sandra “Sam” Himmel

## Business

Labor force:	47,799
Primary industries:	Manufacturing and light assembly; health care; professional and technical services; energy
Notable private employers:	Sibex; Technology Conservation Group; Turbine Broach Company; Citrus Memorial Hospital; Duke Energy
Sales tax rate:	6%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Citrus County School District</b> 11 elementary schools 4 middle schools 3 high schools 2 alternative schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>College of Central Florida</b> Citrus campus: 3800 South Lecanto Highway, Lecanto

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Bayfront Health Seven Rivers, Crystal River – 128 beds Citrus Memorial Hospital, Inverness – 204 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 19 – north to Tallahassee; south to Clearwater and St. Petersburg SR 589 Suncoast Parkway (toll) – south from county line to Tampa; north to Hernando County line SR 44 – east to US 41 and I-75
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Crystal River Archaeological State Park; Crystal River Preserve State Park; Ellie Schiller Homosassa State Park; Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins Historic State Park; Fort Cooper State Park; newly-renovated Citrus County Speedway and Track; 100-year old Citrus County Courthouse

**Notable events:** Florida Manatee Festival, Crystal River (February); Citrus County Fair (March/April); Great American Cooter Fest, Inverness (October); Stone Crab Jam, Crystal River (November); Homosassa Arts, Crafts and Seafood Festival, Historic Old Homosassa (November); Crystal River Christmas Parade (December); Inverness Christmas Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge; Kings Bay and Three Sisters Springs; Chassahowitzka River and coastal swamps

**Sports and recreation:** Ample opportunities for swimming, fishing, scalloping, birdwatching and manatee viewing; hiking and biking along portions of the Withlacoochee State Trail and the Great Florida Birding Trail; boating, canoeing and kayaking along Crystal River.

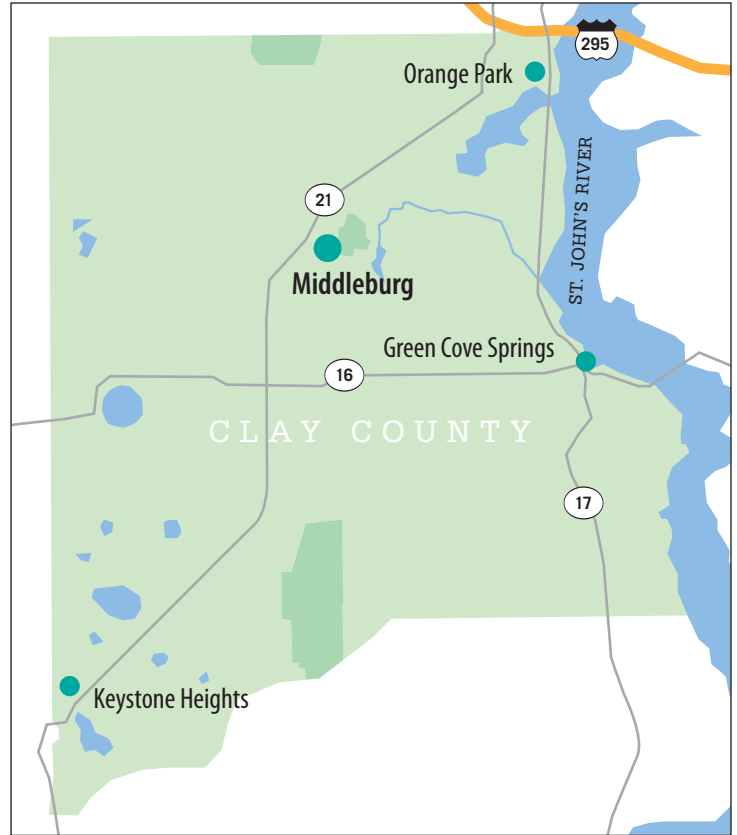
## Like Nowhere Else

Nearly every county along Florida's west central Gulf coast anticipates an influx of "snowbirds" in winter, but only one expects the visitors to be mostly manatees. Since 1983, Citrus County has been home to Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, the only refuge in the world created specifically for the protection of the endangered Florida manatee. These gentle giants of the sea simply can't handle the cold. When water temps dip below 68°F for extended periods of time, manatees are susceptible to dying from hypothermia; to survive, they must seek a more favorable environment, and they have found one in Kings Bay, where the headwaters of Crystal River encompass more than 70 natural, warm water springs. Like humans to hot tubs on a chilly evening at the spa, hundreds of manatees – as many as 600 on an extremely cold day – flock here every winter to enjoy a constant flow of 72° water. Most of the refuge is accessible by water only, and visitors are welcome to use their own boats or rented vessels or join a guided tour to view the manatees underwater. Swimming/snorkeling is allowed under strict conditions, using "passive observation" techniques – no touching, please! From November through March, when manatees are most abundant, limited land access for above-water viewing is available at Three Sisters Spring.

# Clay County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	216,072
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	604
<b>Population density:</b>	358 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$42,111
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 64/45 July 90/74
<b>County seat:</b>	Green Cove Springs
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Middleburg (pop. 13,316) Orange Park (pop. 8,705) Green Cove Springs (pop. 7,966) Keystone Heights (pop. 1,472)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Many commuters. Clay County shares a border with Duval County to the north and is considered part of the greater Jacksonville metropolitan area. Not surprisingly, close to 55% of the people who live here commute to jobs in Jacksonville. First Coast Expressway, a new multi-lane limited access toll road that will eventually connect I-95 to I-10 through Clay County and thus streamline the daily drive, remains under construction.

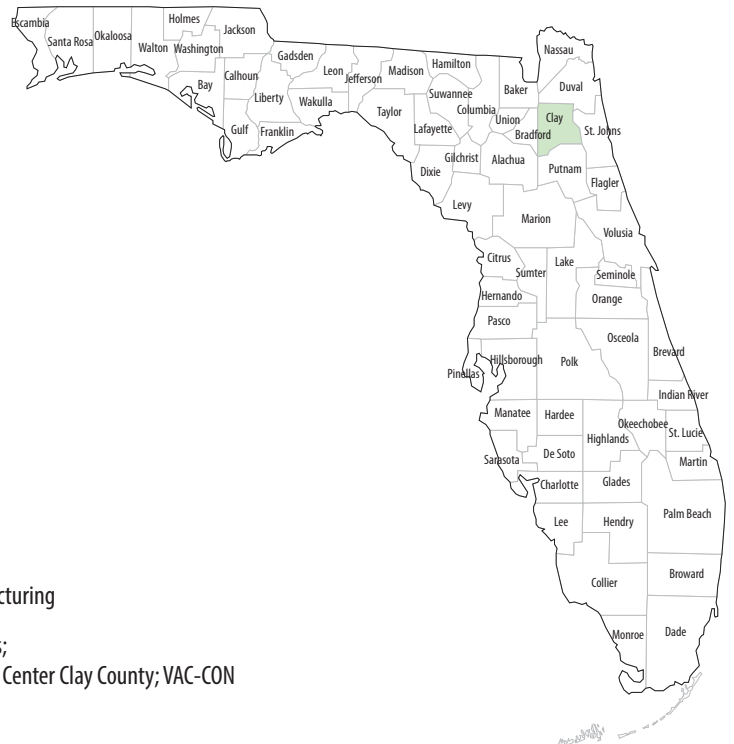


## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Lorin Mock (acting)
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Mike Cella District 2 – Wayne Bolla District 3 – Diane Hutchings District 4 – Gavin Rollins District 5 – Gayward Hendry
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Jimmy Weeks
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Addison David

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	106,276
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Business and professional services; health care; manufacturing
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Orange Park Medical Center; Parallon Business Solutions; VyStar Credit Union Service Center; St. Vincent's Medical Center Clay County; VAC-CON
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%





## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>The School District of Clay County</b> 27 elementary schools 6 junior high schools 7 high schools 3 charter schools 4 alternative schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>St. Johns River State College</b> Orange Park campus: 283 College Drive, Orange Park

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	St. Vincent's Medical Center Clay County, Middleburg – 106 beds Orange Park Medical Center, Orange Park – 317 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-295 – north to I-10 and I-95 north; east to south I-95, and I-10 US 17 – north to Jacksonville and Yulee; south to Palatka and DeLand SR 21 – north to US 17, then on to Jacksonville; south to Orange Springs SR 16 – west from Green Cove Springs to Starke
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Green Cove Springs Historic District; Clay County Historical Society Museum; Military Museum of North Florida; Camp Chowenwaw History Museum

**Notable events:** Strawberry Fest of Clay County, (March); Memorial Day RiverFest (May); Clay County Seafood and Barbecue Music Festival, (July); Clay County Fair, (September); Orange Park Fall Festival (October); Soul Food Festival, Green Cove Springs (October); Christmas on Walnut Street Festival, Green Cove Springs (December)

**Natural wonders:** Bayard Conservation Area

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing, boating and canoeing on the St. Johns River; hiking, biking, horseback riding and camping at various parks

## Like Nowhere Else

The fact that, in 1513, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon came ashore in what is today northeast Florida is a well-documented fact. Whether he came seeking a legendary “Fountain of Youth” is up for debate; more likely, he was looking for gold. Regardless, in the years since Ponce de Leon’s arrival, many places in Florida have claimed to be home of the mythical fountain. The best candidate for the title, however, might actually be Green Cove Springs. There is evidence that this area was inhabited more than 7,000 years ago and that natives spoke of a warm mineral spring, but there is no proof to suggest that it prolonged life or that Ponce de Leon ventured far enough inland to reach it. In later centuries, however, many people did. The spring – or “boil” as the locals called it – attracted droves of wealthy visitors in the 1800s who would arrive by steamboat to vacation at more than a dozen grand hotels and drink water from the spring, believing it to have medicinal properties. Green Cove Springs was officially established in 1854 as the town of White Sulfur Springs. It was renamed in 1866 and became the county seat in 1871. Today, the spring’s sulfur-scented water continues to flow, feeding a public swimming pool and, eventually, the St. Johns River.

# Collier County

## Key facts

Population:	378,488
Land size (square miles):	1,998
Population density:	189 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$85,421
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 76/53 July 93/73
County seat:	Naples
Largest cities/towns:	Golden Gate (pop. 29,841) Immokalee (pop. 25,686) Naples (pop. 21,948) Marco Island (pop. 17,561) Pelican Bay (pop. 5,876)

**Who lives here:** The well-heeled. At \$85,421, Collier County has the highest per capita income in Florida and the proportion of millionaires per capita in the U.S.

## Names to know

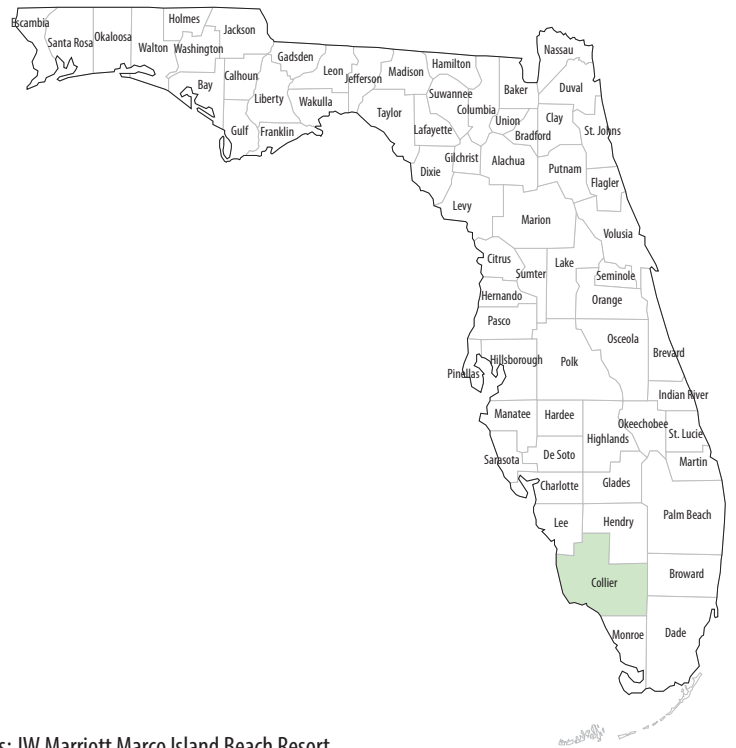
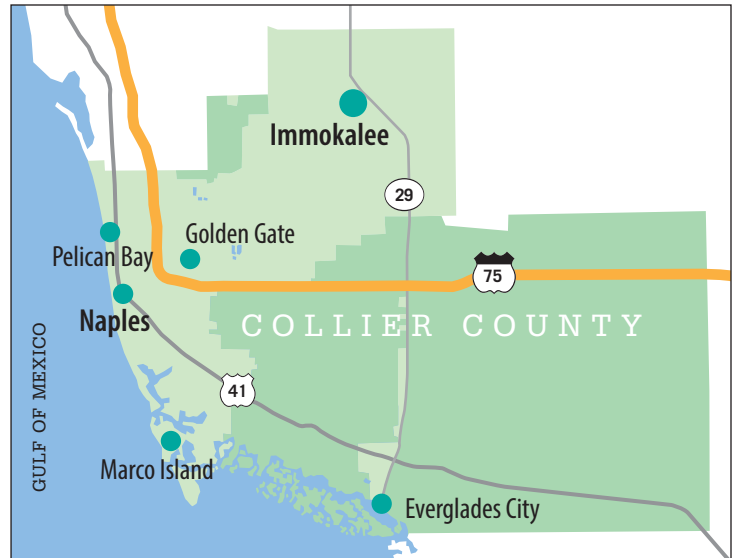
County manager:	Lee E. Ochs Jr.
County commissioners:	District 1 – Donna Fiala District 2 – Andy Solis District 3 – Burt L. Saunders District 4 – Penny Taylor District 5 – William L. McDaniel Jr.
Tax collector:	Larry H. Ray
School superintendent:	Kamela Patton

## Business

Labor force:	177,391
Primary industries:	Health care; hospitality/tourism; manufacturing
Notable private employers:	NCH Healthcare System; Arthrex; The Ritz Carlton-Naples; JW Marriott Marco Island Beach Resort
Sales tax rate:	7%

## Education

Public school system:	<b>Collier County Public Schools</b> 30 elementary schools 11 middle schools 9 high schools 8 alternative programs 7 charter schools
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- Public/private universities:** **Ave Maria University**  
Main campus: 5050 Ave Maria Blvd., Ave Maria
- Hodges University**  
Naples campus: 2647 Professional Circle, Naples
- Keiser University**  
Naples campus: 1336 Creekside Blvd., Suite 2, Naples
- State colleges:** **Florida SouthWestern State College**  
Collier campus: 7505 Grand Lely Drive, Naples

## Health Care

- Acute care hospitals:** NCH Baker Hospital, Naples – 391 beds  
NCH North Naples Hospital, Naples – 322 beds  
Physicians Regional Medical Center-Collier Boulevard, Naples – 100 beds  
Physicians Regional Medical Center-Pine Ridge, Naples – 101 beds

## Transportation

- Commercial airports:** Naples Municipal Airport
- Major highways:** I-75 – north to Tampa; east (Alligator Alley) to Fort Lauderdale, then south to Miami  
US 41 – north to Fort Myers and Tampa; southeast (Tamiami Trail) to Miami  
SR 29 – north to Immokalee and LaBelle

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Old Naples; Collier County Museum; The Baker Museum (featuring artworks by American Modernists and Modern Mexican Masters); Naples Nature Center; Naples Botanical Gardens; Naples Zoo; Immokalee Pioneer Museum at Roberts Ranch; Seminole Casino Hotel (Immokalee)

**Notable events:** Southwest Florida Nature Festival (January); Big Swamp Smoke-Off (January); Everglades City Seafood Festival (February); Collier County Fair (March); Marco Island Seafood and Music Festival (March); Summer Jazz on the Gulf, Naples Beach (June); Stone Crab Festival (October); Old Florida Festival (November); Swamp Heritage Festival, Big Cypress Swamp, Ochopee (December)

**Natural wonders:** Everglades National Park (the Gulf coast Visitor Center is located in Everglades City); Big Cypress Natural Preserve; Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge; two beaches – Barefoot Beach Preserve Park and Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park – cited more than once by Dr. Beach as “America’s Best.” Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (great hiking along the 2.25-mile boardwalk); three state parks: Collier-Seminole, Delnor-Wiggins Pass, Fakahatchee Strand Preserve

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing, camping, hunting, hiking; golf and tennis; swimming, shelling and water sports; North Collier Regional Park features a fitness complex, tournament soccer and softball fields and a state-of-the-art water park; airboating in the Everglades; canoeing and kayaking along the Wilderness Waterway

## Like Nowhere Else

To say that Collier County is a microcosm of Florida, both old and new, would not be an exaggeration. Collier ranks 16th in population among Florida’s 67 counties and at 1,998 square miles, is its largest in land size. A lot of wealthy people live here and it shows. Naples has the most golf holes per capita in the U.S. Its shopping districts feature names like Saks, Tiffany, Hermes and Cartier, and its high-rise waterfront condos offer luxury amenities and spectacular views. Alongside this new Florida is a good-sized share of the old, a glimpse of what south Florida must have looked like before all the people arrived. Almost 80% of Collier County is set aside as preserve lands, including Big Cypress National Preserve, the northernmost edge of Everglades National Park, two national wildlife refuges, one national research reserve, three state parks, one state forest and numerous county, city and private parks and nature preserves. Here, in the only place on earth where American alligators co-exist with American crocodiles, the elusive Florida panther may actually still roam free.



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Columbia County School District</b> 10 elementary schools 2 middle schools 2 high schools 1 alternative school
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Saint Leo University</b> Lake City Education Center: Florida Gateway College campus, 149 SE College Place (Building 101), Lake City
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida Gateway College</b> Main campus: 149 SE College Place, Lake City

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Lake City Medical Center, Lake City – 91 beds Shands Lake Shore Regional Medical Center, Lake City – 99 beds
<b>State/federal hospitals:</b>	Lake City VA Medical Center, Lake City – 152 beds

## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – east to Jacksonville; west to Pensacola and New Orleans I-75 – north to Valdosta, Georgia; south to Tampa (Note: I-10 and I-75 cross in Columbia County, just northwest of Lake City) US 90 – east to Jacksonville; west to Live Oak US 41 – north to Jasper and the Georgia state line; south to Williston and Tampa US 27 – northeast to Mayo; southeast to Spring Hill SR 47 – southwest to Trenton SR 100 – southeast to Starke
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Lake City-Columbia County Historical Museum; Ichetucknee Springs State Park; O’Leno State Park (largely built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s); River Rise Preserve State Park

**Notable events:** Annual Iche Nippy Dippy Dip Day (January); Annual Olustee Festival in Lake City, and Olustee Battle Reenactment, next door in Baker County (February); Gateway City Craft Beer and Wine Festival (February); Florida Gateway Pro-Rodeo (March); Smokin’ Pig BBQ Fest (September); Alligator Warrior Festival (October); Columbia County Fair (October/November); Dashing to the Snow 5K and Snow Day (December)

**Natural wonders:** Osceola National Forest (the Great Florida Birding Trail and Florida National Scenic Trail pass through the campgrounds here); Ichetucknee River (a popular tubing destination); Santa Fe River (disappears underground at O’Leno State Park and reemerges after three miles at River Rise Preserve State Park)

**Sports and recreation:** Camping, hiking, biking and horseback riding; canoeing and bank fishing along the Santa Fe River; River Rise Preserve State Park has 35 miles of trails and a primitive equestrian camp that includes a 20-stall horse barn; Ichetucknee Springs State Park is widely known for its excellent drift tubing opportunities and scuba diving in the Blue Hole (you MUST be cave-certified); Lake City’s 146-acre Southside Sports Complex features tournament-worthy baseball, softball and soccer fields

## Like Nowhere Else

On New Year’s Day all across the U.S., people don wet suits, swim trunks – even bikinis – to jump into a body of water. These events, called “polar bear plunges,” derive their name from the fact that they mostly occur in places like Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Boston and Chicago, where lakes ice up and water temperatures are less-than-ideal for taking a dip in January. Folks in Columbia County, Florida, on the other hand, take a more sensible approach to this time-honored New Year’s tradition. Each year, on the first Saturday in January, they gather at Ichetucknee Springs State Park near Fort White for a “nippy dip.” Annual Iche Nippy Dippy Dip Day consists of a “polar bear plunge, Florida-style” – a quick dip in one of Florida’s natural blue springs where the water is always 72 degrees, followed by hot chocolate and coffee, of course.

# DeSoto County

## Key facts

Population:	37,489
Land size (square miles):	637
Population density:	59 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$24,921
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 73/47 July 92/71
County seat:	Arcadia
Largest cities/towns:	Arcadia (pop. 8,025)
Who lives here:	Mostly farmers and ranchers. The economy here is largely dependent on agribusiness with citrus, phosphate and cattle the primary products.



## Names to know

County administrator:	Mandy J. Hines
County commissioners:	District 1 – Juril “Buddy” Mansfield District 2 – JC Deriso District 3 – Judy Schaefer District 4 – Elton Langford District 5 – Terry Hill
Tax collector:	Kathryn J. Hill
School superintendent:	Adrian H. Cline

## Business

Labor force:	13,955
Primary industries:	Agribusiness; logistics and distribution; health care
Notable private employers:	Mac-Bee Harvesting; Walmart Distribution Center; Sorrells Citrus; DeSoto Memorial Hospital
Sales tax rate:	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>The School District of DeSoto</b> 3 elementary schools 1 middle school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>South Florida State College</b> Main campus: 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park DeSoto campus: 2251 NE Turner Avenue, Arcadia

## Health Care

<b>Hospitals:</b>	DeSoto Memorial Hospital, Arcadia – 49 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 17 – from Arcadia, north to Zolfo Springs, Bartow and Winter Haven; south to Nocatee, Fort Ogden and Punta Gorda SR 31 – south from Arcadia through Charlotte County to Fort Myers SR 70 – northwest to Myakka City and I-75; east to Okeechobee and Fort Pierce SR 72 – west from Arcadia to I-75 and Sarasota
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Downtown Arcadia Historic District, including several structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but nothing before 1905 (a Thanksgiving Day fire that year leveled the town); Arcadia All-Florida Championship Rodeo, Florida's longest running and largest rodeo event

**Notable events:** DeSoto County Fair and Livestock Show, Arcadia (January/February); Rio de la Paz Festival and Art of the River, Arcadia (February); Arcadia Heritage Festival (February); Arcadia All-Florida Championship Rodeo (March); DeSoto County Watermelon Festival, Arcadia (May); DeSoto County Citrus Extravaganza, Arcadia (November); Christmas Card Lane, Arcadia (December)

**Natural wonders:** Peace River and Horse Creek; facilities at Brownville Park, on the Peace River, include a boat ramp, campsites and hiking trails

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing, rafting, canoeing, wildlife viewing and shark tooth hunting on the Peace River; antiquing – Arcadia boasts one of the largest groupings of antique shops in the state and hosts more than 100 dealers from 8 am to 3 pm on the 4th Saturday of every month for an outdoor Antique Fair; Walt Brewer Sports Complex in Arcadia, with playing fields for football, baseball and soccer, plus basketball, volleyball and tennis courts, a skate park and fitness center

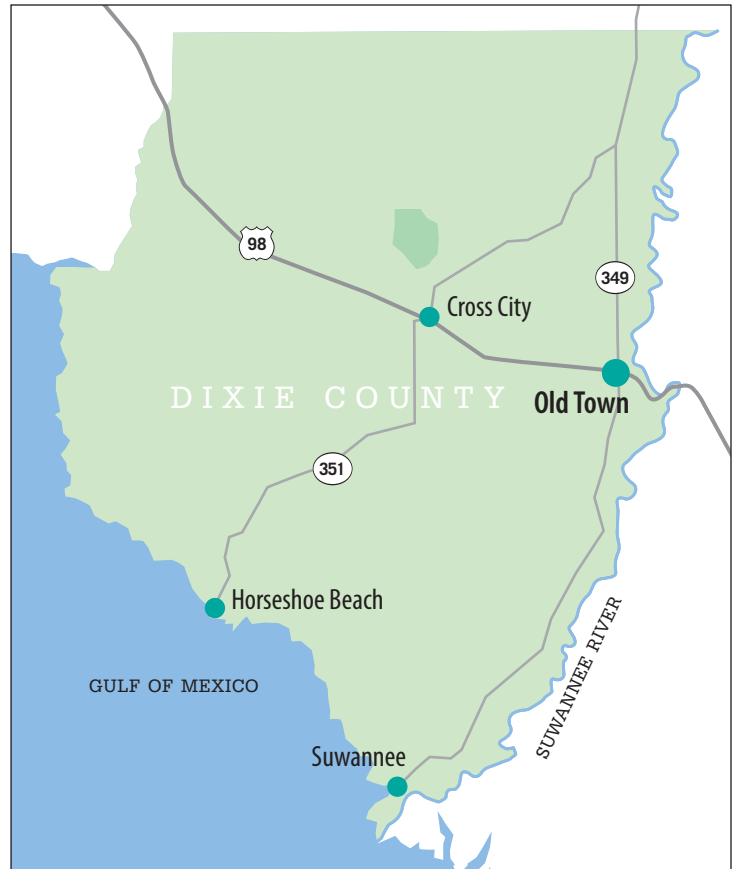
## Like Nowhere Else

To look at DeSoto County today, it's hard to imagine that this tranquil place was ever anything other than a quiet, unpretentious agricultural community. But there was a time when the world looked to DeSoto County for a particular kind of expertise. Shortly after America entered World War I in 1917, an Army survey crew came to southwest Florida looking for a suitable site to build airfields. It found one near Arcadia, and for the next five years, Carlstrom Field – as this place came to be called – was used for pilot training and weapons development. In 1919, an experimental unmanned aircraft called the "Kettering Bug," one of the earliest examples of a cruise missile, was successfully tested and launched at Carlstrom. Pursuit pilots continued to receive advanced training here as well, until the War Department determined that it would be more cost effective to centralize all pilot training at a single facility in San Antonio, Texas. Carlstrom Field closed in 1926, but reopened again in 1941 to train U.S. and RAF pilots for combat. A total of 23 British pilots were killed while training at Carlstrom during World War II and are buried at DeSoto County's Oak Ridge Cemetery, where they are remembered and honored each year on Memorial Day. Carlstrom Field closed for good in 1945 and the property was later sold to the state of Florida for conversion into a juvenile corrections facility and mental health hospital. Those facilities too are now gone, and the land on which they stood was purchased by Power Auto Corporation in 2014.

# Dixie County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	16,700
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	705
<b>Population density:</b>	24 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$27,394
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/40 July 91/72
<b>County seat:</b>	Cross City
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Old Town (pop. 10,104) Cross City (pop. 1,716) Suwannee (pop. 246) Horseshoe Bend (pop. 167)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Rugged individuals with deep Florida roots. According to local legend, the first white man – George Miller – arrived in what is now Dixie County from North Carolina in 1820; he befriended the natives and settled in to grow corn and peanuts and raise cattle and hogs, only to die of malaria 10 years later. He is buried at Old Town.



## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Tim Alexander
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Wade E. “Gene” Higginbotham District 2 – W. C. Mills District 3 – Mark Hatch District 4 – Jamie Storey District 5 – David Osteen
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Michelle F. Cannon
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Mike Thomas

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	5,773
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Agriculture/forestry; manufacturing; trade and transportation
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Suwannee Lumber; Knights Products; Cross City Veneer; Gulf Coast Supply and Manufacturing
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%





## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Dixie District Schools</b> 2 elementary schools 1 middle school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida Gateway College</b> Main campus: 149 SE College Place, Lake City Dixie Center: 64 NE 121st Street, Cross City

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Dixie County; nearest options include: Shands Live Oak Regional Medical Center, Live Oak – 25 Doctors' Memorial Hospital, Perry – 48 beds Regional General Hospital Williston, Williston – 40 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 27/US 98/ US 19 – northwest to Perry and Monticello; southeast to Fanning Springs and Chiefland SR 349 – north to Old Town and Branford; south to Suwannee CR 351 – from Horseshoe Point northeast to SR 349
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Nature Coast State Trail linking Cross City and Old Town in Dixie County; City of Hawkinsville Underwater Archaeological Preserve where the wreck of the steamboat City of Hawkinsville lies in the middle of the Suwannee River (the wreck can only be reached by boat; diving is permitted); Gornto Springs Park; Horseshoe Beach; Old Town

**Notable events:** Horseshoe Beach Spring Festival (April); North Florida Fair (November); Annual Christmas Concert, Dixie Music Center (December)

**Natural wonders:** Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge; Big Bend Wildlife Management Area

**Sports and recreation:** Hunting and fishing (freshwater and saltwater); canoeing and kayaking on the Suwannee River; hiking, biking and horseback riding along the Nature Coast State Trail; also popular: mud bogging, an off-road motorsport in which the goal is to drive a vehicle through a mud pit of set length

## Like Nowhere Else

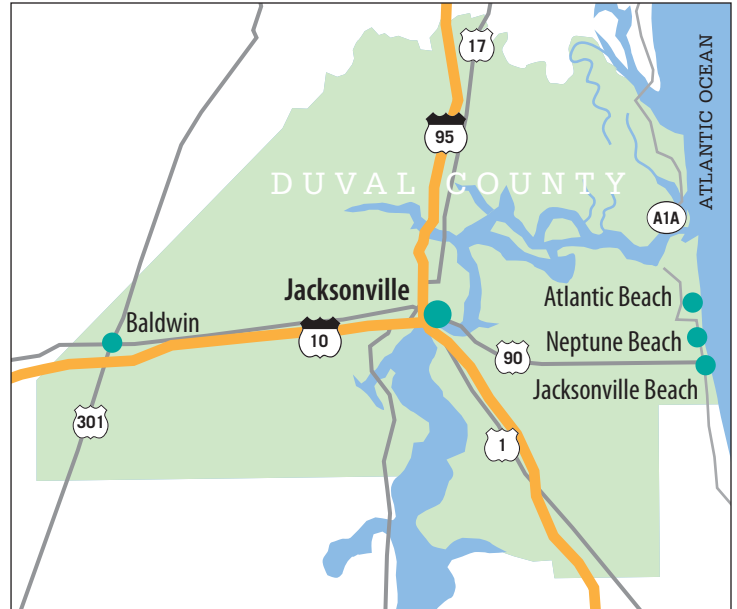
What's in a name? In the case of Cross City, it seems, the desire to maybe stand out from the crowd. Although the town that would become Dixie's county seat actually was positioned at a crossroads, W. H. Mathis, who decided on the name, wanted something a little less ordinary. So he called it "Cross City" because two public roads crossed at this point – one from Perry to old Archer, the other from Branford to Horseshoe. Kinda makes sense. Or not.

# Duval County

## Key facts

Population:	950,181
Land size (square miles):	762
Population density:	1,247 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$45,080
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/39 July 92/71
County seat:	Jacksonville
Largest cities/towns:	Jacksonville (pop. 892,062) Jacksonville Beach (pop. 23,518) Atlantic Beach (pop. 13,608) Neptune Beach (pop. 7,280) Baldwin (pop. 1,643)

**Who lives here:** Heavy hitters and enterprising millennials. With a median age of 36 and a booming technology sector, Jacksonville is home to three Fortune 500 company headquarters and more than 80 national and divisional headquarters. No wonder *Business Insider* has ranked Jacksonville among its “10 U.S. cities where everyone wants to live right now.”



## Names to know

**City of Jacksonville, Mayor:** Lenny Curry

### Jacksonville City Council District Members

- District 1 – Joyce Morgan
- District 2 – Al Ferraro
- District 3 – Aaron L. Bowman
- District 4 – Scott Wilson
- District 5 – Lori N. Boyer
- District 6 – Matt Schellenberg
- District 7 – Reggie Gaffney
- District 8 – Ju’Coby Pittman
- District 9 – Garrett L. Dennis
- District 10 – Terrance Freeman
- District 11 – Danny Becton
- District 12 – Randy White
- District 13 – Bill Guilliford
- District 14 – Jim Love

**At-Large Council Members**

- Group 1 – Ana Lopez Brosche
- Group 2 – John R. Crescimbeni
- Group 3 – Tommy Hazouri
- Group 4 – Greg Anderson
- Group 5 – Samuel Newby

**Tax collector:** Jim Overton

**School superintendent:** Diana L. Greene



## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	487,844
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Financial and professional services; logistics and distribution; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Baptist Health System; Bank of America Merrill Lynch; Florida Blue; Southeastern Grocers; Mayo Clinic; JP Morgan Chase; Citigroup; CSX; GATE Petroleum; Johnson & Johnson Vision Care; Deutsche Bank; Fidelity Investments; Crowley Marine
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Duval County Public Schools</b>                      102 elementary schools                      27 middle schools                      21 high schools                      2 combined-grade level schools (K-8)                      9 alternative schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Barry University, School of Professional and Career Education</b>                      Jacksonville-Town Center: 4401 Salisbury Road, Suite 300, Jacksonville</p> <p><b>Edward Waters College</b>                      Main campus: 1658 Kings Road, Jacksonville</p> <p><b>Jacksonville University</b>                      Main campus: 2800 University Blvd. North, Jacksonville</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b>                      Jacksonville: 6430 Southpoint Parkway, Jacksonville</p> <p><b>Nova Southeastern University</b>                      Jacksonville campus: 6675 Corporate Center Parkway, Suite 115, Jacksonville</p> <p><b>Saint Leo University</b>                      Jacksonville Education Center: 9775 Crosshill Blvd., Jacksonville                      Mayport Education Center: 126 SW Sumatra Ave., Suite A, Jacksonville</p> <p><b>University of North Florida</b>                      Main campus: 1 UNF Drive, Jacksonville</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>Florida State College at Jacksonville</b>                      Downtown Campus: 101 West State Street, Jacksonville                      Kent Campus: 3939 Roosevelt Blvd., Jacksonville                      North Campus: 4501 Capper Road, Jacksonville                      South Campus: 11901 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville                      Advanced Technology Center: 401 West State Street, Jacksonville                      Cecil Center: 5640 POW-MIA Memorial Highway, Jacksonville                      Deerwood Center: 9911 Old Baymeadows Road, Jacksonville                      Urban Resource Center: 601 West State Street, Jacksonville</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Baptist Medical Center, Jacksonville – 489 beds Baptist Medical Center South, Jacksonville – 269 beds Jacksonville Heart Hospital, Jacksonville – 120 beds Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville – 304 beds Memorial Hospital Jacksonville – 418 beds St. Vincent’s Medical Center Southside, Jacksonville – 309 beds St. Vincent’s Medical Center Southside, Jacksonville – 311 beds UF Health Jacksonville, Jacksonville – 603 beds UF Health North, Jacksonville – 92 beds Baptist Medical Center Beaches, Jacksonville Beach – 146 beds
<b>Children’s hospitals:</b>	Wolfson Children’s Hospital Jacksonville – 202 beds

## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Jacksonville International Airport
<b>Seaports:</b>	Port of Jacksonville (JAXPORT)
<b>Spaceport:</b>	Cecil Spaceport
<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak: Silver Service from Jacksonville North to New York and Washington DC through Savannah and Charleston; south to Orlando, Tampa, Okeechobee, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami
<b>Major highways:</b>	US 10 – west from Jacksonville to Lake City, Madison, Crestview, Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans I-95 – north to the Georgia state line and Savannah; south to Daytona Beach, Melbourne and Miami US 1 – northwest with US 23 to Callahan and Folkston, Georgia; southeast through Jacksonville to St. Augustine, Bunnell and Ormond Beach US 17 – north from Jacksonville to Yulee and the Georgia state line; south to Orange Park and Palatka US 90 – west from Jacksonville to Lake City, Live Oak and Madison; east through Jacksonville to Jacksonville Beach US 301 – northeast to Callahan and, with US 1, to Folkston, Georgia; southwest to Starke, Waldo and Ocala SR A1A – north through Jacksonville Beach and Atlantic Beach to Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach; south to Ponte Vedra and St. Augustine Beach

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Fort Caroline National Memorial (commemorating the short-lived presence of Huguenots in 16th-century Florida; no fort remains, it was sacked by Spanish troops under Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565); Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve (tells the story of the Native peoples who inhabited this region before the French and Spanish arrived); Kingsley Plantation (former cotton plantation, now part of the Timucuan Preserve); Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens; Museum of Science & History (MOSH); Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens; Museum of Southern History; Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Jacksonville; Tree Hill Nature Center (50 acres, three ecosystems and a butterfly house to explore); in Jacksonville Beach: Adventure Landing (go-karts, laser tag, miniature golf and Shipwreck Island Water Park) and Beaches Museum & History Park; six of the seven parks known collectively as Talbot Islands State Parks: Big Talbot Island, Little Talbot Island, Pumpkin Hill Creek Preserve, Fort George Island Cultural, Yellow Bluff Historic and George Crady Bridge Fishing Pier; the seventh park – Amelia Island State Park – is located in Nassau County

**Notable events:** Art & Antiques Show, to benefit Wolfson Children’s Hospital, Jacksonville (January); Chariots of Fur Beach Run & Festival, Jacksonville Beach (February); Jacksonville International Auto Show (February); World of Nations Celebration, highlighting the cuisine, customs and culture of more than 35 countries, Jacksonville (March); The GATE River Run, largest 15K run in the U.S., drawing 20,000+ participants to downtown Jacksonville (March); Mandarin Art Festival at the Mandarin Community Club, Jacksonville (April); Springing the Blues, blues music festival, Jacksonville Beach (April); Jacksonville Jazz Fest (May); Great Atlantic Country Music Festival, Jacksonville Beach (June); Greater Jacksonville Kingfish Tournament (July); Jacksonville Caribbean Festival (August); Jacksonville Pagan Pride Day (September); QuiltFest of Jacksonville (September); Beaches Oktoberfest, Jacksonville Beach (October); Jacksonville Sea & Sky Spectacular, sand, surf and a breathtaking aerial performance by the Blue Angels, Jacksonville (October); Greater Jacksonville Agricultural Fair (November); WinterFEST, Jacksonville Beach (November-January); Christmas on the River at The Jacksonville Landing (November-December)

**Natural wonders:** 50 miles of white sandy beaches; Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve; Thomas Creek Wildlife Management Area; Cary Wildlife Management Area (shared with Nassau County); St. Johns River (divides the city of Jacksonville); Trout River, a major tributary of the St. Johns, located entirely within Jacksonville; University of North Florida Wildlife Sanctuary

**Sports and recreation:** Plenty of pro sports to cheer: NFL Jacksonville Jaguars at TIAA Bank Field, AFL Jacksonville Sharks at Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena, minor league baseball action from the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp (formerly known as the Jacksonville Suns) at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville and the NASL Jacksonville Armada FC at Community First Park at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville; one of college sports’ biggest rivalries, the annual Florida-Georgia Football Classic at TIAA Bank Field; ample opportunities for hiking, biking, boating, kayaking, fishing, swimming, birding and wildlife viewing at the seven state parks collectively known as Talbot Islands State Parks (six are in Duval County; the seventh is in adjacent Nassau County); self-guiding nature trails at the University of North Florida Wildlife Sanctuary

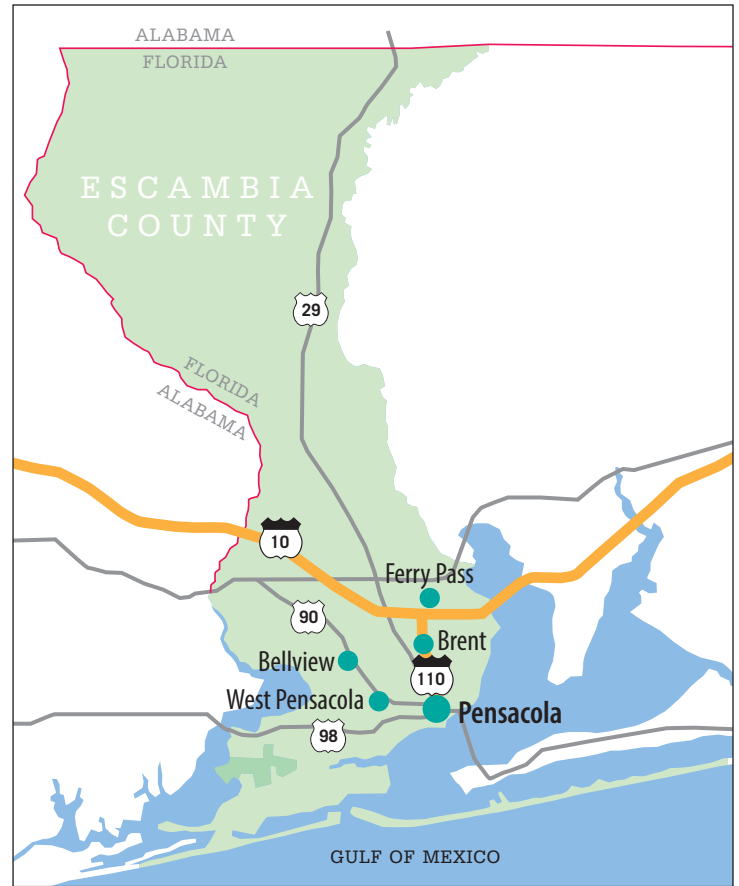
## Like Nowhere Else

If asked to name the largest city in the continental U.S., it’s a good bet that most people – especially those outside the state of Florida – would say New York, or maybe even Los Angeles. In either case, they’d be dead wrong. The answer is Jacksonville. Now keep in mind, we weren’t looking for the most populous city – that would be New York and while Jacksonville has the largest population of any city in Florida, it’s a distant No. 12 nationwide. Our query was “largest,” and with 747 square miles of land, Jacksonville wins that contest hands down. Only four other U.S. cities – all of which are located in Alaska – are larger than Jacksonville. But size isn’t the only thing that sets this city apart. Jacksonville also has a slightly peculiar form of government. Here, the city and county operate as one, making Jacksonville one of only eight metro areas in the U.S. that the Census Bureau refers to as “consolidated cities.” Among these are Louisville-Jefferson County, Kentucky, and Nashville-Davidson County, Tennessee. Jacksonville-Duval County is the only such arrangement in Florida. And while Jacksonville and Duval County operate as one, the cities of Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach and Atlantic Beach as well as the town of Baldwin, which are also located in Duval County, retain separate governments.

# Escambia County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	315,534	
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	656	
<b>Population density:</b>	481 per square mile	
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$41,809	
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central	
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 61/43 July 91/75	
<b>County seat:</b>	Pensacola	
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Pensacola	(pop. 52,689)
	Ferry Pass	(pop. 33,532)
	Bellview	(pop. 22,761)
	Brent	(pop. 21,655)
	West Pensacola	(pop. 20,314)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Many current and former military personnel. Naval Air Station Pensacola alone employs more than 16,000 active duty and 7,400 civilian personnel. The 33,000 veterans residing here make up 11% of Escambia's total population.	



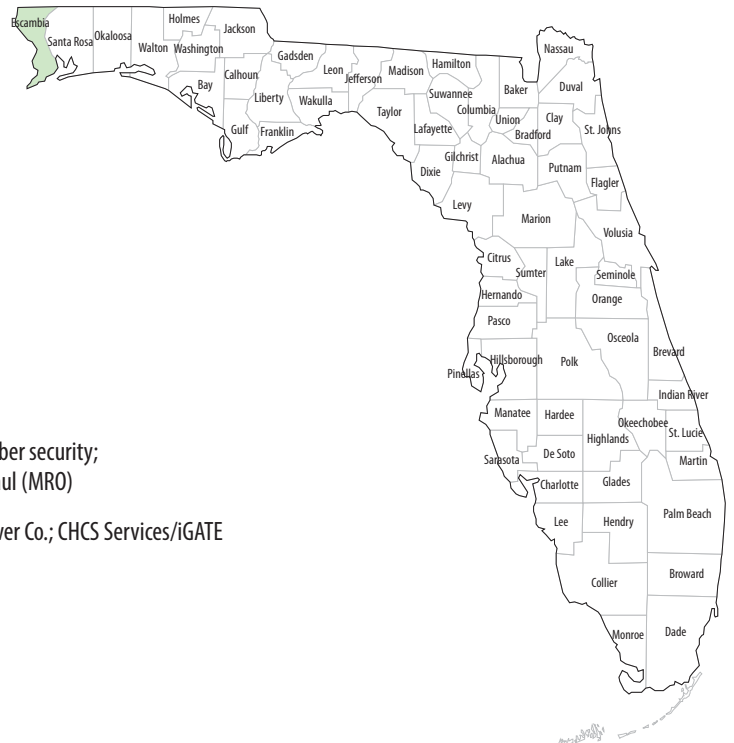
## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	open
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Jeff Bergosh District 2 – Doug Underhill District 3 – Lumon May District 4 – Robert Bender District 5 – Steven Barry

<b>Tax collector:</b>	Scott Lunsford
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Malcolm Thomas

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	145,298
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Financial/professional services; defense & homeland/cyber security; aviation manufacturing & maintenance, repair & overhaul (MRO)
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Navy Federal Credit Union; Baptist Health Care; Gulf Power Co.; CHCS Services/iGATE
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Escambia County School District</b> 32 elementary schools 10 middle schools 7 high schools 18 alternative schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>University of West Florida</b> Main Campus: 11000 University Parkway, Pensacola Historic Pensacola: 120 Church Street, Pensacola
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Pensacola State College</b> Main campus: 1000 College Blvd., Pensacola Downtown Center: 418 West Garden Street, Pensacola Warrington Campus: 5555 West Highway 98, Pensacola Century Center: 440 East Hecker Road, Century

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Baptist Hospital, Pensacola – 492 beds Sacred Heart Hospital of Pensacola, Pensacola – 566 beds West Florida Hospital, Pensacola – 487 beds
<b>Children's hospitals:</b>	The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Sacred Heart Pensacola – 126 beds

## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Pensacola International Airport
<b>Seaports:</b>	Port of Pensacola
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – east to Jacksonville; west to New Orleans I-110 – through downtown Pensacola, north to I-10 at Ferry Pass; south to US 98 at Gulf Breeze US 98 – east along the Gulf Coast to Panama City; west to the Alabama state line, then north to Mobile US 90 – east to Crestview and Marianna; west to the Alabama state line and on to Mobile US 29 – north from US 98 in Pensacola to Century, then over the Alabama state line where it joins US 31

## Things to See and Do

<b>Major attractions:</b>	Pensacola Historic District; National Aviation Museum
<b>Notable events:</b>	Fiesta of Five Flags, 10 days celebrating Pensacola's founding in 1559 and the five flags – Spanish, French, British, Confederate and American – that have flown over the city (June); Pensacola Beach Air Show (July); the Pensacola Seafood Festival (September)
<b>Natural wonders:</b>	Gulf Islands National Seashore, one of two national seashores in Florida, with opportunities for camping, hiking, swimming, snorkeling, beach-combing and birdwatching
<b>Sports and recreation:</b>	The Pensacola Blue Wahoos, an AA affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds MLB team, play at Blue Wahoo Stadium in downtown Pensacola from April through September.

## Like Nowhere Else

Aviation enthusiasts, if they're lucky, may get to see a live performance of the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron – better known as the Blue Angels – once in a lifetime. For Escambia residents, it's more like once a week. The legendary precision flying team is based at Naval Air Station Pensacola and between March and November, whenever the team is in town, the Angels practice over Pensacola Beach on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings at 11:30. No reservations required.

# Flagler County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	112,067
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	485
<b>Population density:</b>	231 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$43,705
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 67/46 July 91/73
<b>County seat:</b>	Bunnell
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Palm Coast (pop. 86,516) Flagler Beach (pop. 5,068) Bunnell (pop. 2,907) Beverly Beach (pop. 400) Marineland (pop. 17)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	A growing population. Marineland, the smallest town in Flagler County, has just 17 residents. At the other extreme, however, is Palm Coast, which didn't even become incorporated as a city until 1999. In 2017, Palm Coast posted a population of 86,516, up 15% since 2010 and well above Florida's recorded population growth of 11% over the same period. Interestingly, the nation's population grew by just 5% between 2010 and 2017.

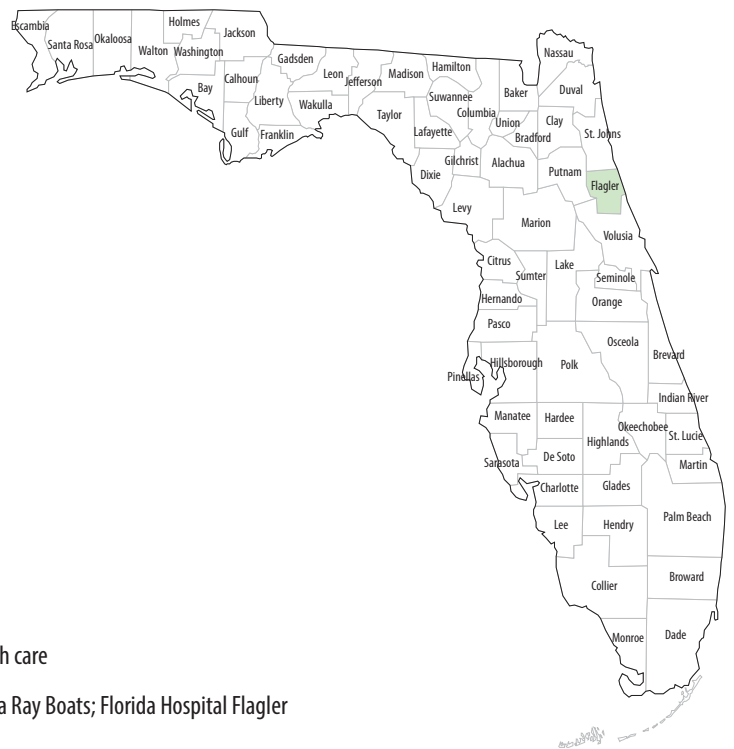


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Craig M. Coffey
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Charles Ericksen Jr. District 2 – Gregory Hansen District 3 – David Sullivan District 4 – Joseph Mullins District 5 – Donald O'Brien Jr.
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Suzanne Johnson
<b>School superintendent:</b>	James Tager

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	47,077
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Business and technology services; manufacturing; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Palm Coast Data; AmRad Engineering; Coastal Cloud; Sea Ray Boats; Florida Hospital Flagler
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Flagler County Public Schools</b> Flagler County Public Schools 5 elementary schools 2 middle schools 2 high schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Daytona State College</b> Flagler/Palm Coast Campus: 3000 Palm Coast Parkway SE, Palm Coast

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Change Florida Hospital Flagler to: AdventHealth Palm Coast – 99 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-95 – north to Jacksonville and Savannah, Georgia; south to Daytona Beach, Melbourne and Miami US 1 – north to St. Augustine, Jacksonville and the Georgia state line; south to Daytona Beach, Titusville and Melbourne SR A1A – north to St. Augustine Beach and Ponte Vedra; south through Palm Coast and Flagler Beach to Ormond Beach and New Smyrna Beach SR 11 – south from Bunnell to DeLand SR 100 – northwest to Palatka and Starke; east to Flagler Beach
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Major attractions: Historic district in downtown Bunnell; Washington Oaks Gardens State Park (formal gardens are the centerpiece here, but also a good place to fish and hike); Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area at Flagler Beach (named for Florida folk singer Gamble Rogers; a sea turtle nesting spot and an excellent vantage point from which to observe shore birds at low tide); Florida Cracker Ranch; Flagler Beach Historical Museum

**Notable events:** Flagler County Fair and Youth Show, Bunnell (April); Flagler Beach Turtle Fest, live music, environmental exhibits, giant tortoise races (April); Creekside Festival, Princess Place Preserve, celebrating the natural beauty of northeast Florida with bluegrass music, food, arts and crafts (November)

**Natural wonders:** Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (shared with St. Johns County); Princess Place Preserve; Pellicer Creek Aquatic Preserve; Matanzas River; Haw Creek Preserve State Park, offering a serene paddleway through an old Florida cypress swamp leading to Crescent Lake (the address of this park is Volusia County, but access is available only by boat, kayak or canoe from boat ramps in Flagler County)

**Sports and recreation:** Quiet beaches for swimming, sunning and shelling; hiking and biking through shady coastal forest of scrub oaks and saw palmetto; kayaking and canoeing; fishing from boats, the beach or pier.

## Like Nowhere Else

Flagler County is home to Flagler Beach, one of America's "Coolest Small Towns." And that's not just our opinion; it's the result of an annual contest sponsored by *Budget Travel Magazine* in which readers are asked to nominate a favorite small town (must have a population under 10,000 and "a certain something that no place else has"). The top 15 vote-getters are then placed in contention for the title "America's Coolest Small Town" nationwide and the voting begins all over again. Among the assets cited on behalf of Flagler Beach: remaining less developed than its neighboring beach communities, six miles of pristine sand favored by sea turtles and interrupted only by a fishing pier, a ukulele shop and a fish shack that serves Bloody Marys made with sake. Alas, Flagler Beach was not the winner; the coveted title went instead to Lititz, Pennsylvania, a 250-year-old Moravian community that boasts handcrafted ice cream, ales and furniture. Seriously? No sand or sea turtles and it snows there. Go figure.

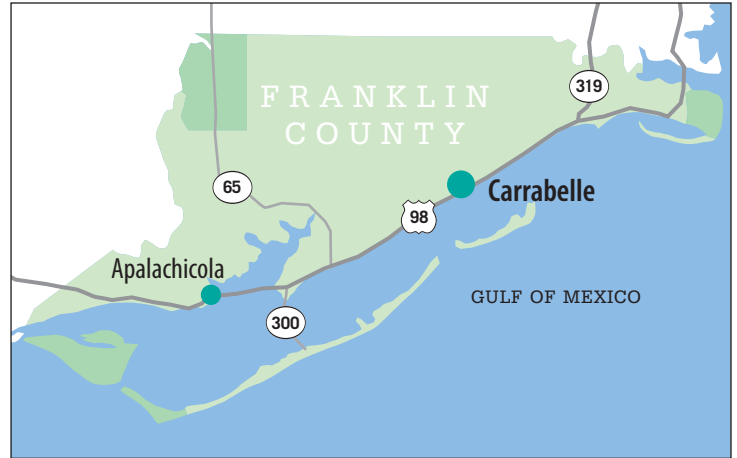


# Franklin County

## Key facts

Population:	11,736
Land size (square miles):	535
Population density:	22 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$36,151
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 62/43 July 90/74
County seat:	Apalachicola
Largest cities/towns:	Carrabelle (pop. 2,503) Apalachicola (pop. 2,296)

**Who lives here:** Close to 12,000 people who are serious about preserving and nurturing the best of old, natural Florida. And now, in the face of unprecedented declines in oyster yields and the potential loss of an industry that has sustained this county for better than 100 years, they are pulling together to reinvent their economy and seek new opportunities.



## Names to know

Director of Administrative Services	Alan Pierce
County coordinator:	Michael Morón
County commissioners:	District 1 – Ricky Jones District 2 – Bert B. Boldt II District 3 – Noah Lockley Jr. District 4 – Joseph “Smokey” Parrish District 5 – William Massey
Tax collector:	Rick Watson
School superintendent:	Traci Moses

## Business

Labor force:	4,840
Primary industries:	Commercial fishing; tourism/hospitality; health care
Notable private employers:	Leavins Seafood; Water Street Seafood; George E. Weems Memorial Hospital
Sales tax rate:	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Franklin County School District</b> 1 combined-grade level school (K-12) 1 charter school (K-8)
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Gulf Coast State College</b> Gulf/Franklin Campus: 3800 Garrison Street, Port St. Joe

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	George E. Weems Memorial Hospital, Apalachicola – 25 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 98 – west along the Gulf of Mexico coastline from Bald Point to Apalachicola, Port St. Joe, Panama City and Fort Walton Beach US 319 – northeast to Crawfordville and Tallahassee; southwest to Carrabelle, Eastpoint and Apalachicola SR 65 – north from Green Point on the Gulf of Mexico coastline to Liberty and Gadsden counties SR 300 – south from Eastpoint to St. George Island
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Apalachicola – Apalachicola Historic District (900 homes, commercial buildings and sites, including the Raney House, Chapman House and the Chestnut Street Cemetery), Apalachicola Maritime Museum, Chapman Botanical Garden, John Gorrie Museum State Park and Orman House Historic State Park; in Carrabelle – Camp Gordon Johnston Museum, Crooked River Lighthouse; World’s Smallest Police Station (it’s a phone booth), St. George Island State Park (Dr. Beach has rated the beach here among “America’s Best”); Cape St. George Lighthouse, Fort Gadsden Historic Site in Apalachicola National Forest

**Notable events:** Apalachicola Oyster Cook-Off (January); African-American History Festival (February); Dixie Does Nashville (March); Annual Apalachicola Antique & Classic Boat Show (April); Carrabelle Riverfront Festival (April); St. George Island Mullet Toss (June); Florida Seafood Festival (November); Holiday on the Harbor & Boat Parade of Lights in Carrabelle (December)

**Natural wonders:** Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve; Alligator Harbor Aquatic Preserve (one of the world’s largest feeding grounds for the Kemp’s ridley, the rarest and most endangered of all sea turtles); St. Vincent Island National Refuge; Cape San Blas; Cape St. George State Reserve; Apalachicola National Forest; Tate’s Hell State Forest, which includes a large expanse of wetlands that act as a natural filter for water entering Apalachicola River and Bay; the barrier islands of Cape St. George, Dog, St. George and St. Vincent

**Sports and recreation:** Boating and fishing; canoeing and kayaking (the Apalachicola Paddling Trail System is among the nation’s top 12 paddling destinations according to Paddler magazine and the American Canoe Association); hiking and biking along the Big Bend Scenic Byway (full trail is 220 miles and takes a minimum of two days to complete, but US 98 in Franklin County is an access point for a shorter jaunt); simply wandering (Apalachicola’s historic district is a good spot) or basking in the sunshine (Franklin County has more than 250 miles of white-sand beaches); two public golf courses

## Like Nowhere Else

More than 87% of Franklin County’s 535 square miles are preserved and managed by the state or federal government as open lands for hiking, biking, camping, bird watching and wildlife viewing. The rest is pretty much taken up by historic structures – houses, churches and old commercial buildings that tell the story of Apalachicola in good times and bad. Established in 1831, “Apalach,” as the locals like to call it, was at first a bustling cotton shipping town and, by the mid-1800s, third largest port on the Gulf of Mexico. Timber replaced cotton as the crop of choice here after the Civil War and, with the arrival of Greek immigrants, a thriving sponge trade also took hold. It was the oyster, however, that would put Franklin County on the map. Barrels of them were being shipped north as early as 1850, and by the turn of the 20th century, Apalachicola was exporting 50,000 cans of oysters per day. There were ebbs and flows in the market to be sure over the next 100 years, but oystering remained the predominant cash cow. Oysters from Apalachicola Bay were said to be the best and production figures reflected that; close to 10% of the total U.S. oyster supply – and 90% of Florida’s total harvest – originated here. Lately, however, a combination of decreased water flow and increased salinity off the coast of Apalachicola has seriously depleted oyster supply and there is worry it may never recover. But history shows that Franklin County people are proven innovators. It was one of them – a doctor named John Gorrie – who, in the process of inventing an ice-making machine to keep his yellow fever patients cool in 1851, developed the precursor of modern air conditioning, for which millions of Floridians still say thank you. And it was on Franklin County’s beaches that American GIs learned and practiced the amphibious skills they would need to ensure a D-Day victory on Normandy’s beaches in 1944. The people of Franklin County have already defeated Florida’s heat and Hitler’s army. No reason to believe, they can’t handle an oyster challenge.

# Gadsden County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	45,894
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	516
<b>Population density:</b>	89 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$33,435
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 64/40 July 91/71
<b>County seat:</b>	Quincy
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Quincy (pop. 7,542) Midway (pop. 3,326) Chattahoochee (pop. 3,104) Havana (pop. 1,671) Gretna (pop. 1,383)

**Who lives here:** A black majority population. At 25,701, blacks make up 56% of Gadsden's population, compared to 17% statewide. Of the remaining Gadsden County residents, 41.6% are white, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.7% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and 1.1% of two or more races. Gadsden is the only county in Florida with a black majority population.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Dee Jackson
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Eric Hinson District 2 – Anthony O. Viegbesie District 3 – Gene Morgan District 4 – Brenda A. Holt District 5 – Sherrie Taylor
<b>Tax collector:</b>	W. Dale Summerford
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Roger P. Milton

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	18,500
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Manufacturing; warehousing and distribution; agribusiness
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Supervalu Distribution Center; Safelite Autoglass; Capital Hydraulics; Armada Ammunition; Coastal Plywood Company; Gadsden Tomato Company
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Gadsden County School District</b> 4 elementary schools 2 middle schools 1 high school 3 combined-grade level schools (K-8, 4-12) 1 alternative school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Tallahassee Community College</b> Gadsden Center: 223 Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy Florida Public Safety Institute: 75 College Drive, Suite 203, Havana

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Capital Regional Medical Center, Gadsden Memorial Campus, Quincy – 4 beds
<b>State/federal hospitals</b>	Florida State Hospital, Chattahoochee – 949 beds

## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Bonifay, DeFuniak Springs and Pensacola; east to Tallahassee and Jacksonville US 90 – west to Marianna and Chipley; east to Tallahassee, Monticello and Live Oak US 27 – north to Georgia; southeast to Tallahassee, Perry, Cross City and Williston SR 12 – northeast to Havana and Leon County; southwest to Bristol SR 65 – north through Quincy to the Georgia state line; south through Liberty and Franklin counties to the Gulf of Mexico
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Quincy Historic District, 36 blocks of historic homes, churches and commercial buildings; Centenary United Methodist Church (the stained glass windows here include an original by Louis Comfort Tiffany); Gadsden Art Center; White Dog Plantation, a combination nature retreat and historic village (dogs are welcome); downtown Havana for its eclectic eateries and shopping venues; Lake Talquin State Park; Chattahoochee Landing archaeological site; Old Gretna School House; Creek Entertainment Gretna

**Notable events:** Havana Hills Spring Classic, marking the kickoff of the U.S. East Coast cycling season (February/March); Havana Bead Festival (April); Quincyfest (May); Old Fashioned Quincy Porchfest and Sketch Crawl (October); Havana Pumpkin Festival (October); Art in Gadsden Regional Exhibition of Fine Art, Gadsden Art Center (October-December); Havana Lawn Mower Parade and Winter Festival (December)

**Natural wonders:** Bear Creek Educational Forest; Joe Budd Wildlife Management Area; Lake Talquin (reservoir); Ochlockonee River

**Sports and recreation:** Camping; fishing and hunting; hiking, biking and horseback riding; kayaking and canoeing; parks, playgrounds and picnic areas throughout the county; golf; art appreciation; antiquing

## Like Nowhere Else

Over the years, Gadsden County has hitched its economic fortunes to an unusual assortment of products. First came tobacco and not just any old ordinary kind, but a variety known as “shade tobacco,” which was thinner, lighter and highly sought after for wrapping cigars. Only two regions in the U.S. were suitable for growing this tobacco variety and, as luck would have it, Gadsden was located in one of them. The tobacco trade would prove quite lucrative for Gadsden until the 1970s when profits were driven down drastically by a combination of rising production costs, improved wrappers and negative publicity about tobacco in general. Gadsden grew its last shade tobacco crop in 1977. Meanwhile, some workmen digging a well at the Owl Cigar Company just north of Quincy came upon “fuller’s earth,” an unusual type of clay known to be of superior purity and to have exceptional bleaching qualities. It is used today in the manufacture of pesticides and fertilizers and as an absorbent for oil, grease and animal waste (think kitty litter here). Whether any locals made fortunes from this find is unclear, but one might assume that, at the very least, millions of cats continue to hold Gadsden County in high esteem. Fortunes apparently were made here, however, off of a soft drink. Shortly after Coca-Cola appeared for the first time in Gadsden, prominent local banker M. W. “Pat” Monroe who enjoyed the occasional bottle himself was heard to remark that even if times were tough, “folks would always have a nickel for a Coke.” Thus he encouraged family and friends to buy stock in the beverage before it attained world-wide renown. They did and, according to local legend, many of them became millionaires. It was even rumored that, at one time, more Coca-Cola stock was held in Gadsden County, Florida, than throughout the U.S. Fact or fiction? You decide.

# Gilchrist County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	18,256
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	350
<b>Population density:</b>	52 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$32,759
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 69/43 July 91/72
<b>County seat:</b>	Trenton
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Trenton (pop. 2,093) Fanning Springs* (pop. 1,009) Bell (pop. 483)

\* Fanning Springs straddles the line between two Florida counties: Levy and Gilchrist

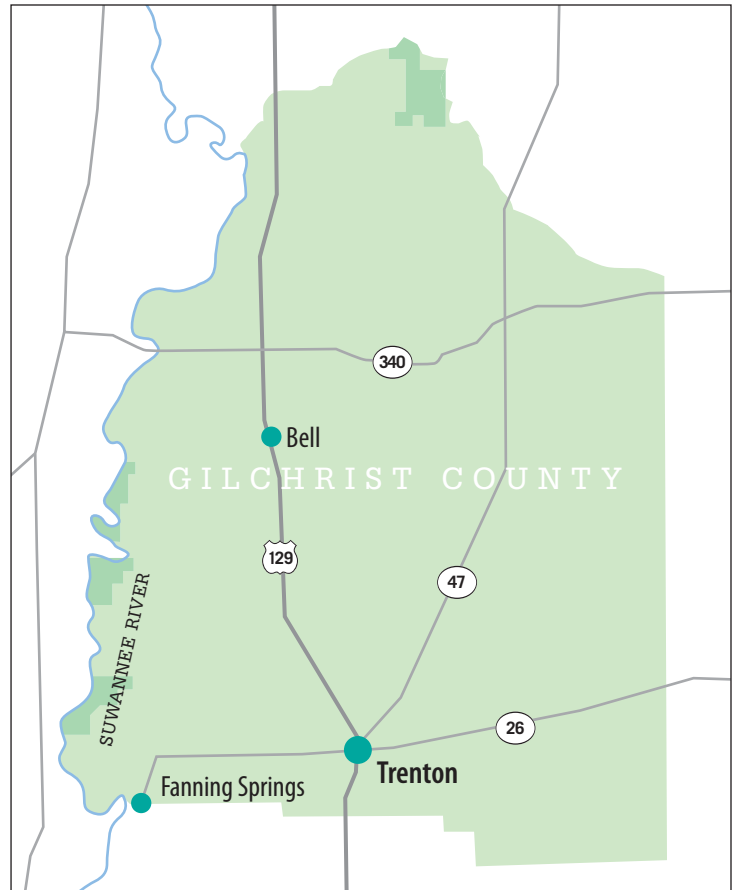
**Who lives here:** Many people for whom proximity to nature is apparently more important than nearness to their worksites. More than 60% of workers in Gilchrist County commute to jobs in Alachua or Levy County.

## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Bobby Crosby
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Sharon A. Langford District 2 – William Bill Martin District 3 – Todd Gray District 4 – Marion Poitevint District 5 – Kenrick Thomas
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Barbara Merritt
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Rob Rankin

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	6,869
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Agriculture; forestry; health care; eco-tourism
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Ayers Health and Rehabilitation Center; Alliance Dairies; North Florida Holsteins
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Gilchrist County School District</b> 2 elementary schools 2 high schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida Gateway College</b> Main campus: 149 SE College Place, Lake City Gilchrist Center: 2821 East Bell Avenue, Bell

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Gilchrist County; nearest options include: North Florida Regional Medical Center, Gainesville – 432 beds UF Health Shands Hospital, Gainesville – 1,041 beds Regional General Hospital Williston, Williston – 40 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 129 – north to US 27 and SR 247; south to Chiefland SR 26 – west to Fanning Springs and Wilcox; east to Newberry and Gainesville SR 47 – north to Lake City; south to Trenton SR 340 – west to Dixie County; east to High Springs and Alachua County
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic downtown Trenton, including the 1905 Trenton Depot and the Trenton Church of Christ built in 1920; Suwannee Valley Shoppes on Main Street where the quilt shop housed in a former Coca-Cola Bottling Plant (circa 1925) claims to have 7,000 bolts of fabric and sodas are served at a marble counter made by Robert M. Green, the very man credited with inventing the ice cream soda in 1874; Fanning Springs State Park (manatees sometimes visit during winter months); Fort Fanning Historic Park (site of a fort established in 1838 during the Second Seminole War; no actual fort here, just a reconstructed gate leading into a lovely riverside park); Nature Coast Trail, retracing the route of the Atlantic Coastline Railroad through unspoiled forests, rustic farmland and the towns of Cross City, Trenton, Fanning Springs and Chiefland (in Gilchrist County, start off in Trenton at the train depot and follow southwest to Fanning Springs)

**Notable events:** Trenton's Suwannee Valley Quilt Festival (March); Suwannee River Youth Fair (March); Fanning Springs Festival of Lights & Boat Parade (December); Bell Christmas Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** Gilchrist calls itself "Springs Capital of the World" – options include Fanning, Otter, Blue, Ginnie and Hart Springs; Wanee Conservation Area; Suwannee and Santa Fe rivers (Santa Fe forms the entire northern boundary of Gilchrist County); Cow Creek

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking, biking and horseback riding on the Suwannee River River Wilderness Trail or Nature Coast Trail; fishing for bass on the Suwannee River and for redbreast sunfish on the Santa Fe (watch for jumping sturgeon!); swimming, snorkeling and tubing at Fanning, Otter and Rock Bluff Springs; cave diving at Hart and Ginnie Springs; "spring hopping" by canoe along the Gilchrist County Blueway (50+ springs – many unnamed – line its banks); canoeing along the 26-mile Santa Fe River Canoe Trail or the less-intensive one-mile run leading from Otter Springs to the Suwannee River

## Like Nowhere Else

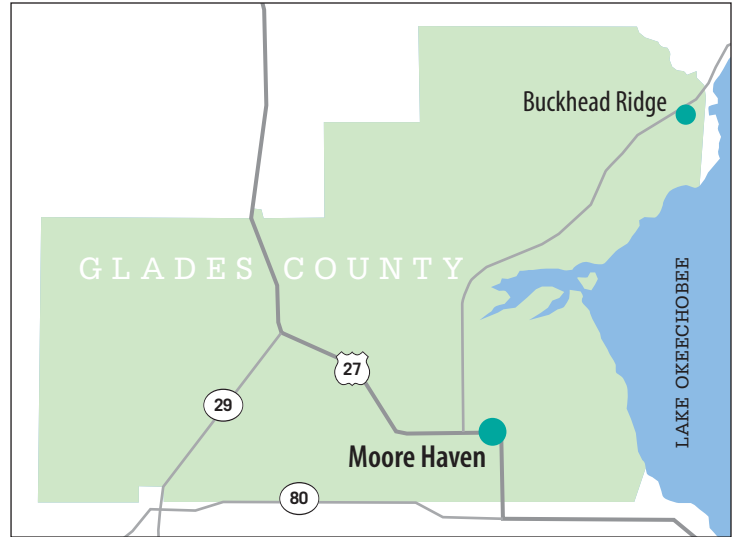
New counties in Florida were often carved from old ones and they were formed for many different reasons. Gilchrist was created as the result of a bluff posed by people who wouldn't take no for an answer. It seems that some "rabble-rousers" from the western part of Alachua County – what was then called "The West End" – wanted a road from the Suwannee River at Fanning Springs to Alachua's county seat, Gainesville. When the County Commission refused to build it, these West Enders drew up plans for an entirely new county and presented them to the Alachua County Commission for approval, but that didn't fly either. The County Commission still refused to build the road. So, to save face, the citizens took their appeal to the next level. They drew up a petition to create a new county and sent it to the Florida Legislature, which at the time was meeting in special session in Tallahassee. To almost everyone's surprise, a bill was put forward as a result and it passed. On December 4, 1925, Governor No. 24, John W. Martin, signed Gilchrist County – named for Governor No. 20, Albert Waller Gilchrist – into existence as county Number 67. It would be Florida's last... at least for now anyway.

# Glades County

## Key facts

Population:	13,724
Land size (square miles):	806
Population density:	17 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$22,246
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 74/52 July 91/73
County seat:	Moore Haven
Largest cities/towns:	Moore Haven (pop. 1,809) Buckhead Ridge (pop. 1,607)

**Who lives here:** People in the “thick” of Florida, yet set apart. To live in Glades County is to be just two hours from Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa and Orlando, and nearly equidistant between Fort Myers and West Palm Beach. As a result, residents here enjoy the best of two worlds – ready access to urban amenities and the laid-back charm of small-town life.



## Names to know

County manager:	Martin Murphy
County commissioners:	District 1 – Weston Pryor District 2 – Donna Storter Long District 3 – Donald Strenth District 4 – John Ahern District 5 – Tim Stanley
Tax collector:	Gail A. Jones
School superintendent:	Scott Bass

## Business

Labor force:	5,206
Primary industries:	Agribusiness; distribution and warehousing
Notable private employers:	Lykes Brothers; A. Duda & Sons
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Glades County School District</b> 1 elementary school 1 elementary-middle school 1 middle-high school 1 charter school (K-8)
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida SouthWestern State College</b> Hendry/Glades center: 1092 E. Cowboy Way, LaBelle

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Glades County; nearest options include: AdventHealth Lake Placid, Lake Placid – 33 beds Hendry Regional Medical Center, Clewiston – 25 beds Lehigh Regional Medical Center, Lehigh Acres – 88 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Intracoastal waterway</b>	The Okeechobee Waterway is a man-made waterway bisecting the Florida peninsula from Fort Myers on the west coast to Stuart on the east coast through Lake Okeechobee, and incorporating the Caloosahatchee River and St. Lucie Canal to facilitate the movement of goods and people between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean; Moore Haven is the approximate halfway point.
<b>Major highways:</b>	US 27 – north to Lake Placid, Sebring, Lake Wales and Winter Haven; south to Clewiston, South Bay, Weston and Miami SR 29 – southwest to LaBelle and SR 80 SR 80 – west to Fort Myers; east to US 27, Clewiston and South Bay

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Downtown Moore Haven, a National Historic District, which includes the Glades County Courthouse, circa 1926; Ortona Indian Mound Park containing remnants of several Calusa Indian mounds and canals once used for travel in the region; Ortona Cemetery where Seminole Indian Chief Billy Bowlegs III is buried; Ortona and Moore Haven Locks, both vital components of Florida’s Intracoastal Waterway, linking the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico between Stuart and Fort Myers; Gatorama, self-proclaimed “world’s largest alligator farm,” offering gator experiences since 1957 – i.e., learn how to catch a baby gator, have your picture taken on the back of an 8-foot gator – plus what is said to be North America’s largest captive breeding colony of American crocodiles; Brighton Seminole Casino

**Notable events:** Buckhead Ridge Catfish Festival (January); Art in the Park, Moore Haven (January); Ortona Cane Grinding Festival (February); Brighton Seminole Field Day and Rodeo (February); Sour Orange Festival in Lakeport, including the celebrated “Sour Orange Dessert Contest” with entries made from the wild oranges that give the festival its name (February); Chalo Nitka Festival, including the Glades County Youth Livestock Show and Frontier Days Rodeo, Moore Haven (March); Alligator Hatching Festival at Gatorama in Palmdale (August)

**Natural wonders:** Lake Okeechobee; Lake Hicpochee; Caloosahatchee River; Fisheating Creek; Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area; the “Lone Cypress Tree” in Moore Haven that has served for more than a century as a navigational aid for sailors on Lake Okeechobee

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking, biking and hunting; canoeing and kayaking along the Caloosahatchee River and Fisheating Creek; birding (the 40 miles of Fisheating Creek that flow through Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area are a designated site on the Great Florida Birding Trail); RV and tent camping at Fisheating Creek Resort and Sabal Palm RV Resort and Campground

## Like Nowhere Else

Glades County is home to Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation, one of six Florida reservations held in trust by the federal government for the Seminole tribe. This particular reservation has a land area of approximately 36,000 acres and a resident population of just under 600. The Seminole Tribe of Florida operates the Brighton Seminole Casino here, featuring more than 400 slot machines and high-stakes bingo. Once a year, in February, the reservation opens its doors to area school children for a Friday “Kids Day” where they learn firsthand how Seminoles once lived in chickees, cooked over open fires, made their own weapons and crafted baskets from sweet grass and clothing from tiny pieces of brightly-colored cloth sewn into intricate patterns. On Saturday and Sunday, the reservation hosts a field day for the general public to showcase Seminole and other Native American arts and crafts, dances and traditions, including wild animal exhibitions, alligator wrestling and a rodeo.



# Gulf County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	16,164
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	564
<b>Population density:</b>	29 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$32,544
<b>Time zone:</b>	Northern Gulf County: Central Southern Gulf County: Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 63/42 July 91/74
<b>County seat:</b>	Port St. Joe
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Port St. Joe (pop. 3,574) Wewahitchka (pop. 2,091)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Community-minded folks who love their little piece of paradise and don't mind sharing it with others. What Gulf County lacks in heavy industry and mega-employers, it more than makes up for in quality of life. Quaint shopping districts, a bustling bi-monthly farmers' market, miles of white sandy beaches and incredible sunsets are the hallmarks here.

## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Michael Hammond
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – David Rich District 2 – Ward McDaniel District 3 – Jimmy Rogers District 4 – Sandy Quinn District 5 – Phillip McCroan
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Shirley Jenkins
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Jim Norton

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	6,122
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Tourism/hospitality; business services; health care; retail
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Fairpoint Communications; Raffield Fisheries; Duren's Piggly Wiggly; Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf; Bluewater iNet Group
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Gulf District Schools</b> 2 elementary schools 2 high schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Gulf Coast State College</b> Gulf/Franklin Campus: 3800 Garrison Street, Port St. Joe

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf, Port St. Joe – 19 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Seaports:</b>	Port of Port St. Joe
<b>Major highways:</b>	US 98 – northwest to Panama City; southeast to Apalachicola SR 22 – west from Wewahitchka to Callaway and Panama City SR 71 – north from Port St. Joe and the Gulf of Mexico to Blountstown, I-10 and the Alabama state line

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Constitution Convention Museum State Park (tells the story of Florida's first constitution, drafted in the now-defunct town of St. Joseph in 1838); the lighthouse and keeper's quarters from Cape San Blas, relocated for their own protection to Port St. Joe in 2014; T. H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park, a 2,500-acre finger of land jutting out into the Gulf of Mexico; Historic Downtown Reid Avenue Shopping District in Port St. Joe; Old St. Joseph Cemetery (where victims of the yellow fever epidemic in 1841 that pretty much wiped out the town of St. Joseph are buried)

**Notable events:** Port St. Joe SaltAir Farmers' Market, 1st and 3rd Saturdays (April–November); Forgotten Coast en Plein Air: America's Great Paint-Out, 10 days of workshops, guest speakers and painting stations along the Gulf of Mexico in Gulf and Franklin counties (May); Annual Tupelo Honey Festival, Wewahitchka (May); Florida Scallop & Music Festival, Port St. Joe (September/October); "Blast on the Bay" Songwriters Festival, Port St. Joe (October); "New Year's Eve Celebrate Twice," a chance to welcome the new year with fireworks in Port St. Joe at midnight Eastern Standard Time, then hop a free trolley to Mexico Beach and do it all over again an hour later at midnight Central Standard Time (December 31–January 1)

**Natural wonders:** St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge (accessible only by boat); St. Joseph Peninsula, an important stopover point for a variety of bird species during their fall migration and home to one of America's best beaches (rated No. 1 by Dr. Beach in 2002) as well as one of the Panhandle's most productive sea turtle and shore bird nest beaches; St. Joseph Bay and its State Buffer Preserve; the Chipola and Apalachicola rivers; Dead Lakes State Recreation Area (so-called after a flood of salt water temporarily replaced fresh water and killed the cypress trees leaving only stumps behind); scenic highway US 98 along the Gulf of Mexico coastline

**Sports and recreation:** Saltwater and freshwater fishing; scalloping (in season only; all you need is a saltwater fishing license, snorkel, mask and dive flag); hunting for hogs, frogs and ducks; riding the beach on horseback (very popular, reservations recommended) or in a golf cart (permit required); kayaking and paddle boarding; golfing; hiking and biking on numerous trails throughout the county

## Like Nowhere Else

If you saw the 1997 film "Ulee's Gold" about a beekeeper and starring Peter Fonda in the title role, then you already know a little something about Gulf County's second largest town, Wewahitchka. Although it has a tongue-twister name and just one stoplight, Wewahitchka (the locals call it "Wewa") is a force to be reckoned with. Connoisseurs of fine honey know this place as the source of the world's best Tupelo Honey. Prized for its unique flavor, digestibility and absence of granularity, Tupelo Honey is produced from the tupelo gum trees that grow prodigiously along the Chipola and Apalachicola rivers of northwest Florida. Here, seasoned beekeepers like the third-generation L. L. Lanier family who inspired the movie "Ulee's Gold," have perfected a harvesting process designed to ensure that the honey they label "Tupelo" retains the light golden color and distinctive taste consumers have come to expect. And although Tupelo Honey is produced from tupelo gum trees grown in some other states, the variety that originates in Gulf County is truly like nowhere else and celebrated annually in May at a two-day festival in Wewahitchka.

# Hamilton County

## Key facts

Population:	14,310
Land size (square miles):	514
Population density:	28 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$27,216
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 64/38 July 92/70
County seat:	Jasper
Largest cities/towns:	Jasper (pop. 3,959) Jennings (pop. 872) White Springs (pop. 769)

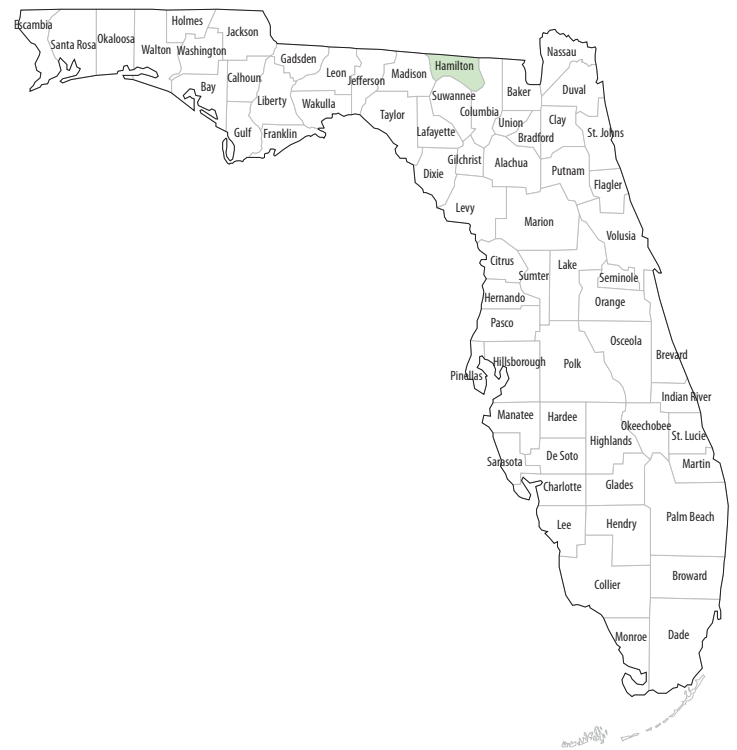
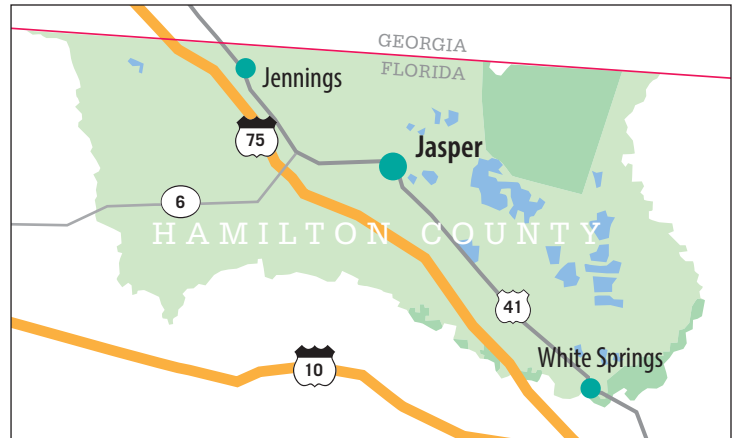
**Who lives here:** People who love history and like to share it. Hamilton County reveres its past and has, quite successfully, preserved a lot of it; the county boasts more than 90 sites and structures that are on the National Register of Historic Places. And at least once every month, these people find a reason to party. The county's annual calendar is chock full of festivals and events celebrating everything from azaleas and blackberries to American folk music.

## Names to know

County coordinator:	Louie Goodin
County commissioners:	District 1 – Beth Burnam District 2 – Josh Smith District 3 – Robert Brown District 4 – Randy Ogburn District 5 – William Mitchell
Tax collector:	Mary Sue Adams
School superintendent:	Rex Mitchell

## Business

Labor force:	4,296
Primary industries:	Logistics and distribution; manufacturing; agribusiness
Notable private employers:	PotashCorp-White Springs; Love's Travel Center & Country Store; Suwannee Valley Nursing Center; Swift Straw; Preferred Rental Company
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>School District of Hamilton County</b> 1 elementary school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>North Florida Community College</b> Main campus: 325 NW Turner Davis Drive, Madison

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Hamilton County; nearest options include: Shands Live Oak Regional Medical Center, Live Oak – 25 beds Madison County Memorial Hospital, Madison – 25 beds Lake City Medical Center, Lake City – 91 beds Shands Lake Shore Regional Medical Center, Lake City – 99 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – northwest to Valdosta, Georgia; southeast to Gainesville, then south to Tampa US 41 – north to Valdosta, Georgia; south to Lake City SR 6 – east to Columbia County and US 441
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Old Jail Museum and historic structures on Central Avenue in Jasper; White Springs Historic District; Big Shoals State Park (only class III rapids in Florida); Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park (the Stephen Foster Memorial Carillon Tower here has 97 tubular bells that play Stephen Foster's songs every day)

**Notable events:** Wild Azalea Festival (March); Hamilton County Championship Rodeo (April); Florida Folk Festival (May); Wild Blackberry Festival (June); Stephen Foster Old-Time Music Weekend (September); Suwannee River Quilt Show & Sale (October); Big Shoals Pumpkin Fest (October); Sweets N the Streets (December); Festival of Lights (December)

**Natural wonders:** Lake Octahatchee; Cypress Creek Wildlife Management Area; Holton Creek Wildlife Management Area; Big Shoals State Forest; Twin Rivers State Forest; Suwannee and Withlacoochee rivers; Alapatha "River of Sand," so-called for its tendency to disappear underground at certain times of the year

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing and hunting; biking, hiking, horseback riding; canoeing on the Suwannee; birding

## Like Nowhere Else

You might say that Hamilton County is a little obsessed with Stephen Foster. A popular weekend musical festival held here in September bears the name of this 19th-century songwriter who penned such popular tunes as "Oh! Susanna," "Camptown Races" and "My Old Kentucky Home," and at the state park that is likewise named for Foster, a carillon plays selections from his vast repertoire several times each day. The curious thing about all of this is that, as far as anyone knows, Foster himself never set foot in Florida, let alone Hamilton County. And that river he wrote about in "Old Folks at Home"? Well, Foster spelled it "Swanee," not "Suwannee" like the one that flows through Hamilton. Regardless, "Old Folks at Home" was selected as Florida's official state song in 1935 and, despite some controversy over the lyrics which harken back to pre-Civil War plantations and slavery – even an attempt to replace it with a more "politically correct" tune in 2007 – "Old Folks at Home," remains our state song. And Hamilton County continues to celebrate its composer.

# Hardee County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	27,245
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	638
<b>Population density:</b>	43 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$26,472
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 74/49 July 93/73
<b>County seat:</b>	Wauchula
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Wauchula (pop. 4,928) Bowling Green (pop. 2,885) Zolfo Springs (pop. 1,816)

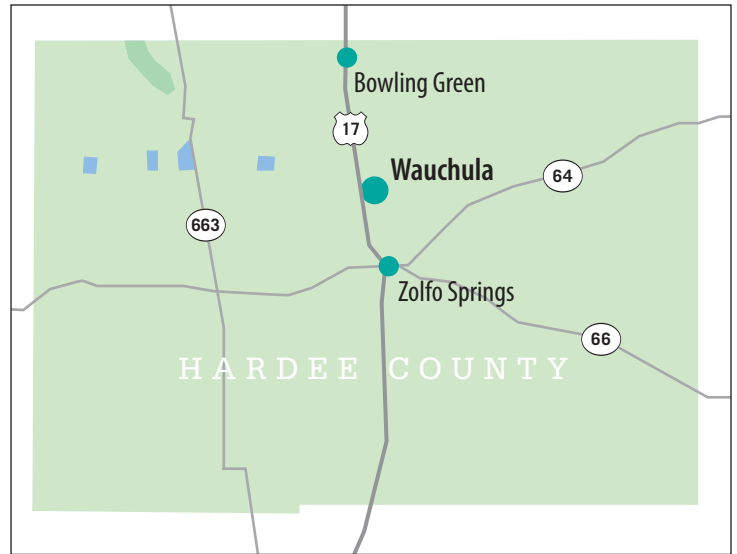
**Who lives here:** A growing concentration of Hispanics. At 43.7%, the number of Latinos residing in Hardee County is nearly twice the statewide average and second only in south central Florida to Hendry County.

## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Lex Albritton
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Colon Lambert District 2 – Norey Flores District 3 – Rick Knight District 4 – Russell Melendy District 5 – Mike Thompson
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Jacki Johnson
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Bob Shayman

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	8,789
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Mining; agribusiness; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Mosaic; Florida Institute for Neurological Rehabilitation; Peace River Electric Cooperative; AdventHealth Wauchula
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Hardee County School District</b> 5 elementary schools 1 junior high school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>South Florida State College</b> Main campus: 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park Hardee Campus: 2968 US 17 North, Bowling Green

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	AdventHealth Wauchula – 25 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 17 – north to Lake Wales, Winter Haven and Haines City; south to Arcadia and Punta Gorda SR 64 – west to Myakka Head, I-75 and Bradenton; northeast to US 27/98 and Avon Park SR 66 – southeast to Highlands County and DeSoto City CR 663 – north to Fort Green, Bradley and Pierce; south to Limestone and DeSoto County
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Pioneer Park, Zolfo Springs (includes the Cracker Trail Museum, Pioneer Village and Hardee County Wildlife Refuge); Solomon's Castle, near Ona; Center for Great Apes, Wauchula (providing permanent sanctuary for orangutans and chimpanzees rescued or retired from the entertainment industry, research or private ownership; pre-arranged tours only, no drop-ins); Paynes Creek Historic State Park, Bowling Green (site of Fort Chokonikla and the Kennedy-Darling Trading Post following the Second Seminole War; nothing remains of either one, but a museum at the visitor's center depicts the lives of Florida's Seminole Indians and pioneers during the 19th century)

**Notable events:** Hardee County Fair, Wauchula (February); Pioneer Park Days, antique engine, tractor and car show (March); Hardee County Cattleman's Association Ranch Rodeo, Wauchula (July); Wauchula Community Fall Festival (October); Living Christmas Tree, downtown Wauchula (December)

**Natural wonders:** Peace River, Paynes Creek, Horse Creek

**Sports and recreation:** Canoeing, kayaking and fishing at Paynes Creek Historic State Park; kayaking, canoeing and paddle boarding along the Peace River (call ahead to reserve your vessel); fossil hunting (mammoths are known to have lived in these parts 11,000 years ago and bones have been found, although shark's teeth are more common; the Peace River is a popular spot and for best results, bring a trowel, snorkel mask and sifting screen); hiking, biking, horseback riding and fishing at Hardee Lakes Park (facilities include four lakes, a handicap-accessible hiking trail, picnic areas and playground); three golf courses

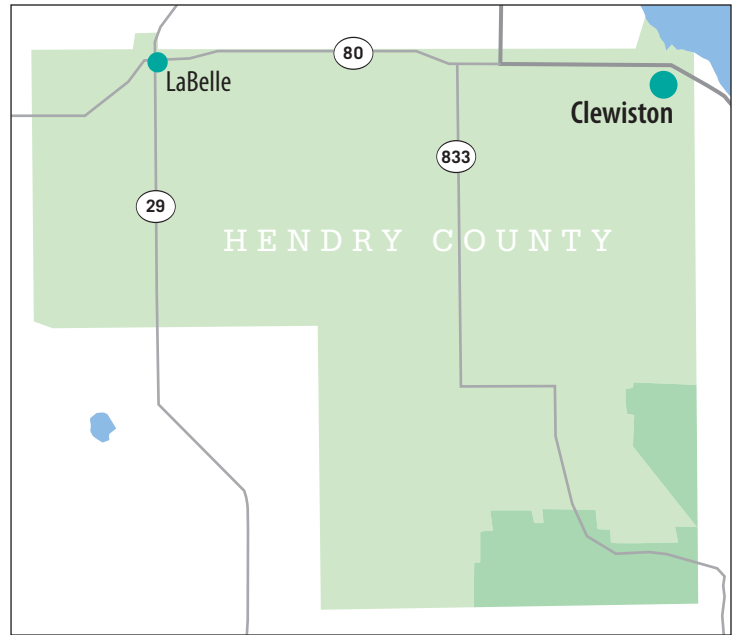
## Like Nowhere Else

We all know people who never seem to throw anything away. In Hardee County, that person was artist and collector Howard Solomon, who, over more than 40 years, cleverly turned his obsession with "stuff" into a bona fide tourist attraction. First, he built a house, but not just any house. With constant tinkering over many years, this one became a 12,000-sq.-ft castle – "Solomon's Castle" – fabricated from repurposed aluminum printing plates pressed to look like chiseled stone, and complete with multiple towers and turrets, a drawbridge, a dungeon and a moat. Solomon later added a lighthouse and built a 65-foot-long replica of a Spanish galleon (housing the "Boat in the Moat" restaurant today). The castle, which remained Solomon's home until his death in 2016, is packed full of art he created over the years from junkyard debris the rest of us would probably discard – oil drums, rusty brake shoes, old lawnmower parts, etc. Each piece has a clever title and a story, which the guides are eager to share. Solomon's Castle is off the beaten path in Ona, Florida, but worth the trip. Allow time to wander the grounds. FYI, the Castle closes for the months of August and September, and hours the rest of the year are somewhat limited. Best to phone ahead before making the trip.

# Hendry County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	41,556
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,153
<b>Population density:</b>	36 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$29,535
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 74/48 July 91/70
<b>County seat:</b>	LaBelle
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Clewiston (pop. 7,720) LaBelle (pop. 4,852)
<b>Who lives here</b>	The largest concentration of Latinos in south central Florida. 53.2% of Hendry residents are of Hispanic descent, compared to 25.6% statewide.

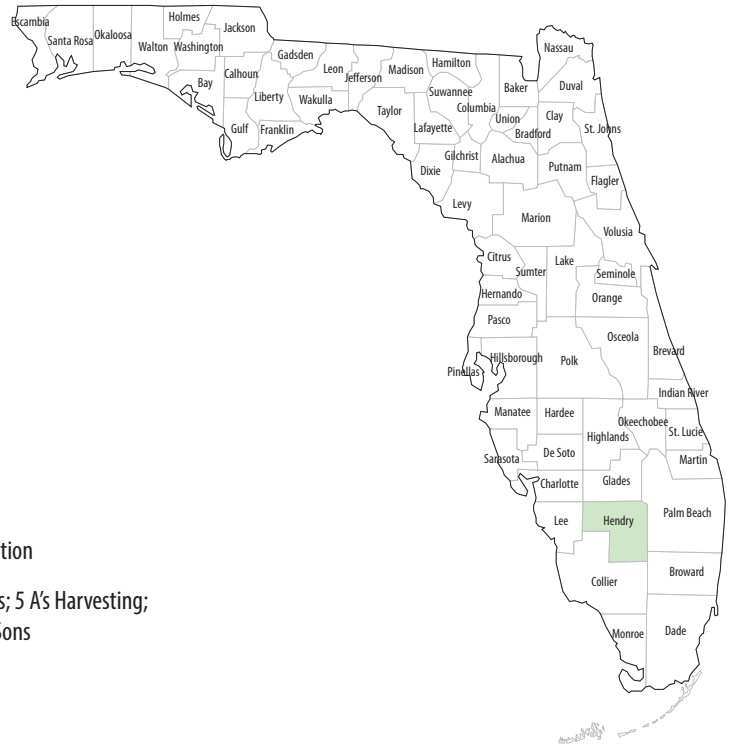


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Jennifer Davis
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Emma Byrd District 2 – Darrell Harris District 3 – Mitchell Wills District 4 – Michael Swindle District 5 – Karson Turner
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Patrick B. Langford
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Paul K. Puletti

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	15,599
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Agribusiness; food manufacturing; logistics and distribution
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	U.S. Sugar; Walmart Distribution Center; J&J Ag Products; 5 A's Harvesting; D & K Harvesting; Southern Gardens Groves; A. Duda & Sons
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Hendry County District Schools</b> 6 elementary schools 2 middle schools 2 high schools 2 alternative schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida SouthWestern State College</b> Hendry/Glades: 1092 E. Cowboy Way, LaBelle

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Hendry Regional Medical Center, Clewiston – 25 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	SR 29 – northeast to Hall City, US 27N to Palmdale and Lake Placid SR 80 – west to Fort Myers; east to US 27, then southeast to South Bay, Weston and Miami CR 833 – north to Devils Garden, US 27N and Moore Haven; southeast to Big Cypress and Miccosukee Indian Reservations
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Downtown LaBelle Historic District; Clewiston Museum; Historic Clewiston Inn; Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki (“a place to learn”) Museum at Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation in Clewiston, featuring more than 30,000 artifacts and archival items of the Seminole people

**Notable events:** “Everglades Boogie” Skydiving Festival, Clewiston (January); LaBelle Inland Arts Festival, featuring original creations by local artists and crafters (January); Hendry County Fair and Livestock Show (February); Swamp Cabbage Festival, LaBelle (last weekend of February); Clewiston Sugar Festival, sponsored in part by U.S. Sugar, one of Hendry’s primary employers, and celebrating the importance of sugarcane to the region with food, fun and big-name country music stars (March); Brown Sugar Festival, organized by Clewiston’s Harlem Academy Alumni Association and featuring gospel music, a talent show, parade and basketball tournament (May)

**Natural wonders:** Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest/Okaloacoochee Slough Wildlife Management Area; Caloosahatchee River

**Sports and recreation:** Hunting, hiking, biking, camping and birding (look for bald eagles and osprey); fishing for largemouth bass and speckled perch in Lake Okeechobee; Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (Clewiston is an access point); facilities for baseball, softball, racquetball, soccer, basketball and shuffleboard at Sugarland Park in Clewiston; golf

## Like Nowhere Else

In eateries up north, they call it “hearts of palm,” and charge \$10 or more for a salad containing just a slice or two; in Hendry County, they simply call it – “swamp cabbage” – and set aside an entire weekend in February each year just to celebrate it. Swamp cabbage is a vegetable taken from the tender heart of Florida’s official state tree, the sabal palm (also known as the cabbage palm); once that heart is taken, the tree dies, which could explain those pricey salads. Or not. Sabals grow all over the South and in almost any kind of soil so they appear to be in no danger of extinction. Nor are they protected in Florida by virtue of simply being official state trees. It is not illegal to cut one down, unless, of course, the one you choose to level is on someone else’s property which actually might be illegal. Hendry County apparently has plenty of sabals to spare and so, for more than 50 years, the good people here have set aside the last weekend of February for their annual “Swamp Cabbage Festival.” Activities include a car show, bike show, beauty pageant, fishing tournament, rodeo, kiddie rides, crafts and a “5K Swamp Stomp” along the Caloosahatchee River. The real star of the show is, of course, the humble swamp cabbage, served in some ways they’ve probably never even thought of at those fancy restaurants up north – not just raw in a salad, but boiled in a stew or fried up as a fritter and often served with a little gator meat on the side. So mark your calendar for the last weekend of February and make a beeline for LaBelle. Order up a plate of this delicacy, just remember to not call it “hearts of palm.”



# Hernando County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	190,865
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	473
<b>Population density:</b>	404 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$36,335
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/49 July 91/72
<b>County seat:</b>	Brooksville
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Spring Hill (pop. 104,722) Brooksville (pop. 8,147) Ridge Manor (pop. 4,114) Weeki Wachee (pop. 13)

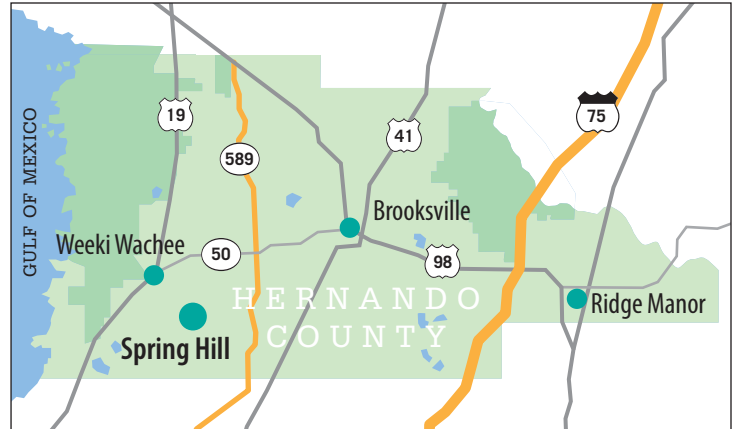
**Who lives here:** A solid population of people who hold to their traditions and like to stay put. Hernando's population has grown by 10% since 2010, and once settled, almost no one seems to move; 86% of residents here have lived in the same house for multiple years. Events and attractions have long histories too. The Brooksville Raid Re-enactment – the largest in Florida – celebrates its 40th consecutive year in 2020, and over at Weeki Wachee State Park, mermaids have been performing underwater shows since 1947.

## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Jeff Rogers (deputy administrator)
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – John Mitten District 2 – Wayne Dukes District 3 – John Allocco District 4 – Jeff Holcomb District 5 – Steve Champion
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Sally L. Daniel
<b>School superintendent:</b>	John Stratton

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	70,464
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Mining; manufacturing; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Walmart Distribution Center; Bayfront Health System; Oak Hill Hospital; CEMEX; Accuform Signs; Sparton Electronics; Florida Crushed Stone
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	6.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Hernando County School District</b> 10 elementary schools 4 middle schools 5 high schools 3 combined-grade level schools (K-8) 1 alternative school 3 charter schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Pasco-Hernando State College</b> North Campus: 11415 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Brooksville Spring Hill Campus: 450 Beverly Court, Spring Hill
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Saint Leo University</b> Pasco Hernando Education Office: 11415 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Pasco State College North Office, Brooksville

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Bayfront Health Brooksville, Brooksville – 120 beds Oak Hill Hospital, Brooksville – 280 beds Bayfront Health Spring Hill, Spring Hill – 124 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Florida’s Turnpike and Ocala; south through Pasco County to Tampa SR 589 (toll) – aka “Suncoast Parkway” – north through Hernando County to the Citrus County line; south through Pasco County to Tampa and I-275 US 19 – north to Homosassa Springs, Crystal River and Chiefland; south to New Port Richey, Clearwater and St. Petersburg US 41 – from Brooksville: north to Inverness, Williston and Newberry; south to Land O’Lakes, Tampa and Bradenton US 98 – northwest to Yankeetown, Chiefland and Fanning Springs; east to I-75 SR 50 – from Brooksville: west to Weeki Wachee and US 19; east to I-75, Minneola and Clermont
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic downtown Brooksville (tree-lined brick streets and many antebellum homes; pick up a self-guided tour map at the Visitor Center); Hernando Heritage Museum (May-Stringer House); Brooksville Historical Train Depot, circa 1885; City Art Gallery (inside Brooksville City Hall); Weeki Wachee Springs State Park (one of Florida’s most iconic attractions with daily underwater mermaid shows, a petting zoo, river cruise and water park); Nature Coast Botanical Gardens, Spring Hill; Chinsegut Conservation Center; for roadside kitsch, the dinosaur-shaped Harold’s Auto Center on US 19 in Spring Hill (it was a Sinclair gas station back in the ‘60s when that company’s logo was a dinosaur)

**Notable events:** Annual Brooksville Raid Re-enactment at Sand Hill Scout Reservation, largest Civil War re-enactment in Florida with 1,500+ re-enactors, 28 cannons and 60 horses commemorating a July 1864 Civil War battle in Hernando (January); Art in the Park: Art, Craft & Music Festival, Brooksville (January); Brooksville Native American Festival (February); Greek Festival, Brooksville (February); Celtic Family Jamboree at Sertoma Youth Ranch, Brooksville (February); Heritage Day Festival, Brooksville (February); Weeki Wachi Swamp Fest at Weeki Wachi Springs State Park (March); Will McLean Music Festival, paying homage to “Florida’s Father of Folk” at Sertoma Youth Ranch, Brooksville (March); Hernando County Fair and Youth Livestock Show, Brooksville (April); Annual Brooksville Cycling Classic (April); Florida Blueberry Festival, live music, fresh blueberries, plus blueberry wine and pie, Brooksville (April); Orange Blossom Jamboree at Sertoma Youth Ranch, Brooksville (May); Brooksville Founders’ Week, a week’s worth of special events and tours (October); “Taste of the Fields” evening of “country elegant” outdoor dining with the meal made from food grown in Hernando County soil, Brooksville (October); HarvestMoon Farms corn maze, Masaryktown (October); Christmas Cards on the Lawn, Hernando County Courthouse, Brooksville (December)

**Natural wonders:** Green Swamp; Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area; Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area; Withlacoochee State Forest; Weeki Wachee, Cypress Lake, Fickett Hammock and Annutteliga Hammock preserves; Withlacoochee and Weeki Wachee rivers; Weeki Wachee Springs; some of Florida’s least crowded and most scenic Gulf of Mexico coastline

**Sports and recreation:** Abundant hunting, fishing, canoeing, kayaking and camping opportunities; hiking, biking and skating on the paved Suncoast and Withlacoochee State trails; Croom Motorcycle Area at Withlacoochee State Forest; Gran Canyon mountain bike trail; 20 county parks offering a variety of facilities, including soccer, baseball and softball fields, basketball, volleyball and tennis courts, horseshoe pits and shuffleboard

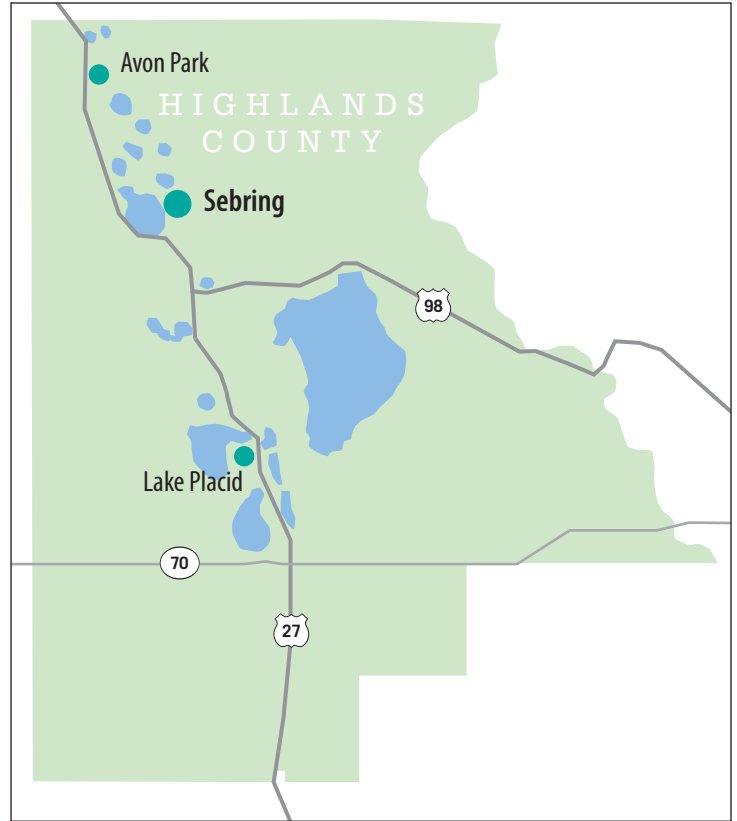
## Like Nowhere Else

Orange County, Florida, may have cornered the market on flashy theme parks, but unassuming Hernando, with its bevy of swimming mermaids (and a few mermen) also knows how to keep the visitors coming. Since its opening in 1947, Weeki Wachee Springs has entertained a steady stream of families who come to marvel at how long-haired beauties in bulky mermaid costumes manage to remain deep underwater in a real natural spring and put on a 30-minute show as an audience (also deep underwater) watches from behind glass panels. This is not 3D animation or smoke and mirrors; these mermaids are actually swimming underwater. The theater itself was the brainchild of Newton Perry, an ex-Navy frogman who knew a thing or two about navigating underwater for long periods of time. Here’s how it works: at regular intervals throughout the show, the Weeki Wachee mermaids swim to submerged air hoses at the sides of the theater to take deep breaths which they then hold while performing. The audience doesn’t notice this activity because the mermaids stagger their oxygen “fixes” so that there are always some mermaids swimming in the foreground to be distracted by. It’s a tricky business to be sure, and not an easy one; each performer has had to train for 6-8 months, first on land, then in the water without the tail and finally in full costume. Think about that the next time you head out for an afternoon of snorkeling! The mermaid shows are, of course, the star attraction at Weeki Wachee, but the park also has a Wilderness River Cruise, the Buccaneer Bay water park, a petting zoo and two bird shows. It’s a throwback to 1950s Florida in some ways, but worth the trip.

# Highlands County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	105,424
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,017
<b>Population density:</b>	104 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$34,734
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 73/48 July 91/72
<b>County seat:</b>	Sebring
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Sebring (pop. 10,696) Avon Park (pop. 10,408) Lake Placid (pop. 2,433)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Small-town aficionados who appreciate connectivity and affordability. Positioned almost dead center between Florida's east and west coasts, Highlands County offers its residents easy access to 86% of Florida's population within a two-hour radius, plus low labor costs and competitive real estate options.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Randy Vosburg
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – James Brooks District 2 – Don Elwell District 3 – Ron Handley District 4 – Arlene Tuck District 5 – R. Greg Harris
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Eric T. Zwayer
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Brenda Longshore

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	36,472
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Agribusiness; business services; manufacturing; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	AdventHealth; Highlands Regional Medical Center; Agero; Lykes Citrus Management; Genpak; Delray Plants; Turf Care Supply; Trend USA (E Stone); CitraPak
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>The School Board of Highlands County</b> 9 elementary schools 4 middle schools 3 high schools
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**State colleges:** **South Florida State College**  
Main campus: 600 W. College Drive, Avon Park  
Lake Placid Center: 500 East Interlake Blvd., Lake Placid

## Health Care

**Acute care hospitals:** AdventHealth Lake Placid – 33 beds  
AdventHealth Sebring, Sebring – 147 beds  
Highlands Regional Medical Center, Sebring – 126 beds

## Transportation

**Passenger rail:** Amtrak Silver Service, from Sebring  
North to: New York and Washington DC through Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston  
South to: West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami

**Major highways:** US 27 – north to Lake Wales, Winter Haven and Haines City; south to Palmdale, Moore Haven and South Bay  
US 98 – west to DeSoto City and US 27; southeast to Okeechobee, south along eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee, then east to Loxahatchee and West Palm Beach  
SR 70 – west to Arcadia, Myakka City and I-75

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Sebring Downtown Historic District; Alan Altwater Cultural Center, Sebring; Highlands Museum of the Arts (MoTA), Sebring; Children’s Museum of the Highlands, Sebring; the murals of Lake Placid, 46 colorful murals (some with sound) depicting the history and ecology of the town and surrounding area (visit the Chamber of Commerce first for a 10-minute orientation film); Toby’s American Clown Museum and School in Lake Placid where dozens of working clowns have received training (collection includes 700 pieces of clown memorabilia); South Florida State College Museum of Florida Art & Culture, Avon Park; Highlands Hammock State Park, one of Florida’s oldest state parks and one of the highest ranking for endemic biodiversity (featuring the Florida Civilian Conservation Corps Museum and ranger-guided tram tours to restricted areas for close-up views of birds, alligators, turtles, deer and, occasionally, black bear and the Florida panther); Lake June-in-Winter Scrub State Park, protecting one of Florida’s most endangered natural communities, sand scrub (few amenities, but an exceptional natural experience)

**Notable events:** “Pigfest” in Sebring, featuring a BBQ contest (First Responders compete in two categories, ribs and chicken), plus live music, classic cars and a 5K run (January); Sebring U.S. Sport Aviation Expo, the place to see, try, buy and sell Light Sport Aircraft (January); Lake Placid Art League’s Annual Art and Fine Craft Festival (January); Lake Placid Arts & Crafts Country Fair (February); Highlands County Fair, Sebring (February); Roaring Twenties Arts & Crafts Festival, Sebring (February); Sebring Seafood & Music Festival (February); 12 Hours of Sebring Auto Race (March); Avon Park Bluegrass Blueberry Festival (April); Sebring 500 auto race (July); Annual Caladium Festival, Lake Placid (July); Grape Stomp Festival, including a Lucy-Look-Alike Contest, at Henscratch Farms Vineyard & Winery, Lake Placid (August); Sebring Oktoberfest/Firemantics, the usual German food and beer, plus teams from fire departments throughout Florida face off in contests of skill re: extrication, putting out fires and advancing fire hoses (October) Crazy Pepper Chili Cook-Off, Sebring (November)

**Natural wonders:** Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge (shared with Polk County); Boney March River Run Bluff, Bluff Hammock and Hickory Hammock Recreational Areas; 29 freshwater lakes, including Lakes Placid, Jackson, Josephine and Istokpoga; Kissimmee River; Arbuckle Creek; Josephine Creek

**Sports and recreation:** More than two dozen lakes for fishing, boating, water skiing and sailing; catch-and-release fishing, hiking, biking, birding, wildlife viewing and ranger-guided tours at Highlands Hammock State Park; hiking, canoeing and kayaking at Lake June-in-Winter Scrub State Park (one of Florida’s least developed state parks, well-suited for those seeking a remote wilderness experience); golf at more than a dozen courses; softball, football and soccer fields at the Highlands County Multi-Sports Complex in Sebring

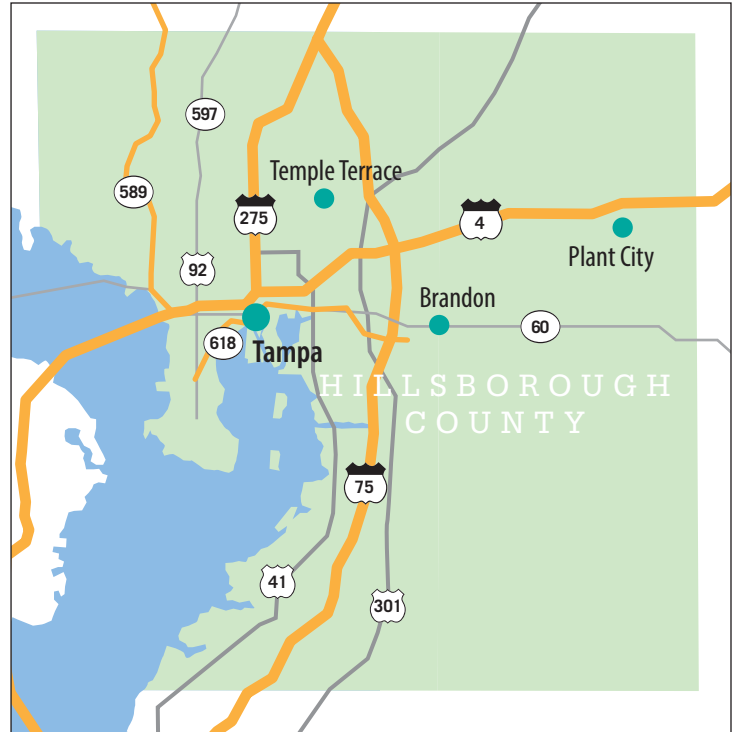
## Like Nowhere Else

In 2015, theculturetrip.com called Sebring, Florida “one of America’s 10 most picturesque towns.” And no wonder. With its one-of-a-kind circular downtown historic district, population of close to 10,700 and no heavy industry to speak of, Sebring is a charming and relatively quiet place to live, work and visit almost anytime...with the exception of one weekend in March when it becomes a madhouse. Sebring International Raceway, the oldest permanent road racing track in North America, is home to the Mobil 1 “Twelve Hours of Sebring” endurance auto race, which takes place annually on the third Saturday in March. As part of the prestigious Le Mans Series of auto races, it draws a crowd. On a single weekend, more than 50 sports cars, along with their drivers and teams from 20 countries, not to mention thousands of racing fans from around the world, descend on this otherwise peaceful place to watch a race, create a lot of noise and leave behind a few tons of trash. And no one minds too much at all because for the next 51 weeks, Sebring goes back to simply being “one of America’s 10 most picturesque towns.”

# Hillsborough County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	1,436,888
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,020
<b>Population density:</b>	1,409 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$47,086
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 70/52 July 90/75
<b>County seat:</b>	Tampa
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Tampa (pop. 385,430) Brandon (pop. 113,124) Plant City (pop. 38,714) Temple Terrace (pop. 26,489)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	A young and diverse workforce with potential to grow. Close to 23% of Hillsborough residents are age 18-34 and 29% are Hispanic. Over the next five years, Hillsborough's population is projected to grow significantly faster than the population statewide, with inbound migration accounting for most of the increase.

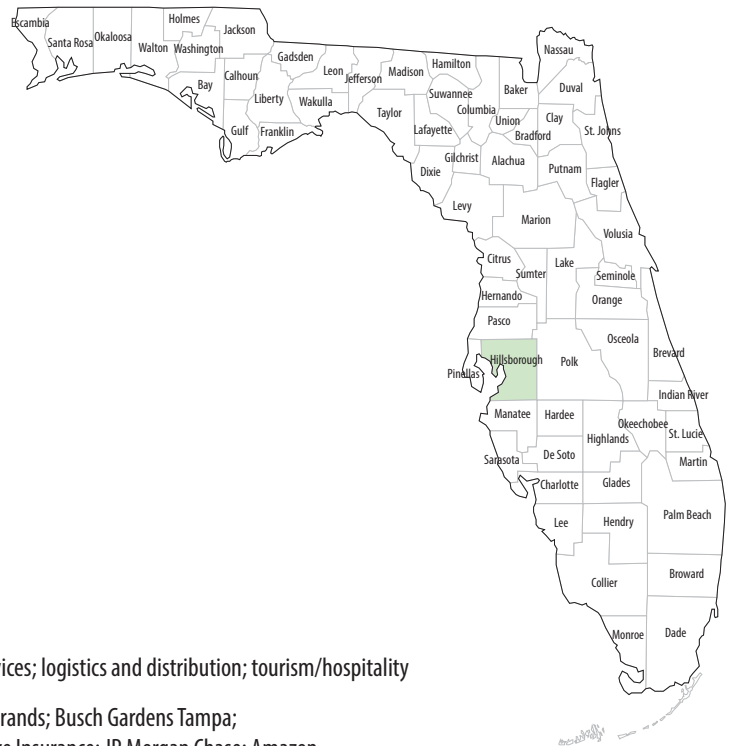


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Mike Merrill
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Sandra Murman District 2 – Ken Hagan District 3 – Lesley “Les” Miller District 4 – Stacy White District 5 – Mariella Smith District 6 – Pat Kemp District 7 – Kimberly Overman
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Doug Belden
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Jeff Eakins

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	735,690
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Life sciences/health care; professional and financial services; logistics and distribution; tourism/hospitality
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Tampa General Hospital; CitiGroup; Humana; Bloomin’ Brands; Busch Gardens Tampa; Moffitt Cancer Center; Well Care Health Plans; Progressive Insurance; JP Morgan Chase; Amazon
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	8.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Hillsborough County Public Schools</b> Hillsborough County Public School System 139 elementary schools 43 middle schools 31 high schools 6 combined-grade level schools (K-8) 6 alternative schools 10 exceptional centers 50 charter schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Barry University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences</b> Tampa: 5650 Breckenridge Park Drive, Suite 108, Tampa</p> <p><b>Everglades University</b> Tampa Off-Campus Instructional Site: 5010 W. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa</p> <p><b>Florida College</b> Main campus: 119 North Glen Arven Avenue, Temple Terrace</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b> Tampa: 5002 West Waters Avenue, Tampa</p> <p><b>Saint Leo University</b> MacDill Education Office: 8102 Condor Street, Albert B. Arrighi Education Center, Suite 116, MacDill AFB Tampa Education Center: 1102 E. Kennedy Blvd., Suite 238, Tampa</p> <p><b>Stetson University</b> Tampa Law Center: 1700 North Tampa Street, Tampa</p> <p><b>University of South Florida</b> Main campus: 4202 East Fowler Avenue, CGS 401, Tampa</p> <p><b>The University of Tampa</b> 40 W. Kennedy Blvd., Tampa</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>Hillsborough Community College</b> Dale Mabry (main) Campus: 4001 W. Tampa Bay Blvd., Tampa Brandon Campus: 10451 Nancy Watkins Drive, Tampa Plant City Campus: 1206 North Park Road, Plant City SouthShore Campus: 551 24th Street NE, Ruskin Ybor City Campus: 2112 North 15th Street, Tampa MacDill Center: 8102 Condor Street, Building 252, MacDill AFB, Tampa</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	<p>Brandon Regional Hospital, Brandon – 422 beds St. Joseph’s Hospital North, Lutz—108 beds South Florida Baptist Hospital, Plant City – 147 beds St. Joseph’s Hospital South, Riverview – 114 beds South Bay Hospital, Sun City Center – 138 beds AdventHealth Carrollwood, Tampa – 103 beds AdventHealth Tampa, Tampa – 536 beds Moffitt Cancer Center, Tampa – 206 beds Memorial Hospital of Tampa, Tampa – 183 beds St. Joseph’s Hospital, Tampa – 437 beds St. Joseph’s Women’s Hospital, Tampa – 157 beds</p>
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Tampa Community Hospital, Tampa – 201 beds  
Tampa General Hospital, Tampa – 1,010 beds

**Children’s hospitals:** St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital, Tampa – 186 beds

**State/federal hospitals:** James A. Haley Veterans’ Hospital, Tampa – 353 beds

## Transportation

**Commercial airports:** Tampa International Airport

**Seaports:** Port Tampa Bay

**Passenger rail:** Amtrak: Silver Service from Tampa  
North to New York/Washington DC through Orlando, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston; south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami

**Major highways:** I-4 – northeast to Lakeland, Orlando and Daytona Beach  
I-75 – north to Ocala, Gainesville, Lake City and Valdosta, Georgia; south to Sarasota, Fort Myers and Naples  
I-275 – from downtown Tampa: north to Temple Terrace and I-75N; west and south to St. Petersburg, Bradenton and I-75  
US 41 – north to Lutz, Land O’Lakes and Brooksville; south to Apollo Beach, Ruskin, Palmetto and Bradenton  
SR 60 – west to Clearwater; east to Brandon, Valrico, Bartow and Lake Wales  
US 92 – from downtown Tampa: south to Gandy Boulevard, then and south to St. Petersburg; east to US 301 and I-75  
US 301 – north to Thonotosassa, Zephyrhills, Dade City and Bushnell; south to Riverview, Parrish and Ellenton  
SR 589 (toll) – aka “Veterans Expressway” and “Suncoast Parkway” – from Tampa: north through Pasco and Hernando counties to the Citrus County line  
SR 597 – south to MacDill AFB; north to Carrollwood and Land O’Lakes  
SR 618 (toll) – aka “Lee Roy Selmon Expressway” – southwest to Gandy Boulevard and US 92; east to Brandon and I-75

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Tampa: The Riverwalk along the Hillsborough River (linking five museums, seven parks and numerous hotels and restaurants in downtown Tampa), The Florida Aquarium, Glazer Children’s Museum, Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa History Center, Henry B. Plant Museum (inside what was once the luxurious Tampa Bay Hotel, now the University of Tampa’s administration building), Tampa Theatre, a restored classic still showing movies; Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI), Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park (rated among the nation’s family-friendliest zoos), Ybor City (Tampa’s Cuban neighborhood and a popular night spot; Ybor City Museum State Park here recalls the history of Tampa’s cigar industry), Historic Hyde Park (one of Tampa’s oldest neighborhoods with many restored turn-of-the-20th-century bungalows lining shady streets – a great place to walk!) and next-door neighbor SoHo (short for South Howard, its main street; lots of bars and restaurants, especially busy after dark); Busch Gardens Tampa, Adventure Island Water Park, Big Cat Rescue (where rescued lions, tigers, leopards and other exotic cats are given new lives; guided tours only, reservations required), Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino; in Apollo Beach: TECO Manatee Viewing Center; in Lithia: Alafia River State Park (once a phosphate mine, now home to some of Florida’s most challenging off-road bicycling trails); in Plant City: Dinosaur World, Pioneer Heritage Museum; in Thonotosassa: Fort Foster State Historic Site and Hillsborough River State Park (Fort Foster, part of Hillsborough River State Park though located across the road, is a reconstructed fort from the Second Seminole War; the state park is one of Florida’s earliest, offering opportunities for fishing, canoeing and kayaking); in Wimauma: Little Manatee River State Park (the Oxbow Nature Trail here is considered one of the best wilderness trails in southwest Florida; other activities include canoeing, camping and horseback riding)

**Notable events:** Tampa Bay Black Heritage Festival, 10 days of music, cultural events and uplifting speakers, Tampa (January); Children’s Gasparilla Extravaganza, an alcohol-free event along Bayshore Boulevard in Tampa the week before Gasparilla Pirate Fest, Tampa (January); Gasparilla Pirate Fest, Tampa’s signature annual event (January); Florida State Fair, Tampa (February); Beer, Bourbon & BBQ Festival, Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park, Tampa (February); Bay Area Renaissance Festival, outdoor every-weekend celebration featuring live armored jousting, dancing, juggling, archery, human chess matches, artisans and minstrels, at MOSI, Tampa (February–April); Plant City Bike Fest, vintage cruisers and souped-up Harleys descend on quaint Plant City (February); Florida Strawberry Festival, when the self-proclaimed “Strawberry Capital of the World” honors its most prized fruit, selling it by the container or flat and serving it up in shortcake and milkshakes, Plant City (March); Repticon, all things slithery and cold-blooded for petting, handling, photographing, purchasing and just watching, Florida State Fairgrounds, Tampa (March); Gasparilla Music Festival, downtown Tampa (March); Busch Gardens Food & Wine Festival (March–April); Apollo Beach Manatee Festival of the Arts (March); Festa Italiana, Ybor City, Tampa (April); USF Botanical Gardens Summer Plant Festival, Tampa (June); SharkCon, education and interactive fun honoring the ocean presented by The Florida Aquarium at the Florida State Fairgrounds, Tampa (July); Tampa Bay Comic Con, Tampa Convention Center (July); Summer of Rum Fest, Ybor City, Tampa (August); WaZoo Beer Fest at Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park, Tampa (August); Tampa Theatre Winefest, annual fundraiser for the beloved vintage theater; Tampa (September); Howl-O-Scream Busch Gardens’ annual haunted freak show; Tampa (September–October); Oktoberfest, Curtis Hixon Park, Tampa (October); USF Botanical Gardens Plant Festival, Tampa (October); Greater Hillsborough County Fair, Brandon (October); Creatures of the Night (no horror, just fun for all ages) at Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park, Tampa (October); Guavaween Festival & March of the Pumpkin King Parade, Ybor City, Tampa (October); The Fancy Flea, shabby chic flea market for southern belles with upscale taste at the Strawberry Festival Fairgrounds, Plant City (November); Zoofari, more than 50 local restaurants participate in this popular zoo fundraiser at Zoo Tampa

at Lowry Park, Tampa (November); Conga Caliente, celebrating Hispanic culture and heritage, Al Lopez Park, Tampa (November); Brandon Seafood Festival (November); Ruskin Seafood Festival (November); Pioneer Heritage Day, Plant City (November); Ruskin Tomato & Heritage Festival; (November); Ybor City Heritage & Cigar Festival, Ybor City (December); Busch Gardens Christmas Town (Jingle Bells Express train rides, Santa and 1 million twinkling lights), Tampa (December); Snow on 7th Holiday Parade at Ybor City, Tampa (December); Santa Fest at Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park, downtown Tampa's prettiest park becomes a holiday playground, complete with an ice skating rink, Tampa (December); Christmas in the Wild, Zoo Tampa at Lowry Park, Tampa (December); Annual Victorian Christmas Stroll at Henry B. Plant Museum, University of Tampa (December)

**Natural wonders:** Lower Hillsborough Wildlife Management Area; Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge (shared with Pinellas County); more than 40 nature preserves, including Lake Frances, Bell Creek, Cockroach Bay, Lower Green Swamp, Cypress Creek, Fish Hawk and Lithia Springs; Hillsborough, Alafia, Little Manatee and Palm rivers; manatees in the wild – not what you'd expect in an urban area, but the discharge canal at TECO's Big Bend power plant in Apollo Beach is warm and manatees love to gather here in winter (November-March); facilities include a butterfly garden, rays touch tank and 50-foot-high observation tower – it's all free!

**Sports and recreation:** Spectator sports are huge here – NFL Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Raymond James Stadium (August-December) and at Amalie Arena, the NHL Tampa Bay Lightning (October-April); MLB spring training for the New York Yankees at George M. Steinbrenner Field; men's and women's collegiate competition from the University of South Florida Bulls, University of Tampa Spartans and Hillsborough Community College Hawks in a wide range of sports, including football (USF only), soccer, baseball, softball, volleyball, swimming, track and field, tennis and golf; horse racing at Tampa Bay Downs (only thoroughbred track on Florida's west coast); run/walk/bike/skate across Old Tampa Bay on the newly-completed 12-mile trail that runs alongside the Courtney Campbell Causeway between Tampa and Clearwater, on Bayshore Boulevard in south Tampa (said to be the longest continuous sidewalk in the world; even if that's not true, the view of Hillsborough Bay on one side and stately old homes on the other is spectacular) and the Upper Tampa Bay Trail in northwest Hillsborough County; playgrounds, athletic facilities and organized activities at many city and county parks; ocean-side water sports, sunning and shelling (although Tampa Bay's best beaches are on the Pinellas side, there's Ben T. Davis Beach, a narrow strip of sand along the Courtney Campbell Causeway within Tampa city limits, and beaches in south Hillsborough at Apollo Beach and Ruskin); birding, wildlife viewing and equestrian activities at numerous state parks

## Like Nowhere Else

For 364 days of each year, Tampa is a lot like any other mid-sized city in America with tall buildings and tidy streets. People go to work, kids go to school, business gets accomplished. But on that one remaining day of the year – which is typically the last Saturday in January – all hell breaks loose here as the grown men of Ye Mystic Krewe Gasparilla, normally clad in business suits and conservative neckties, don pirate gear, hoist the Jolly Roger and set off to invade the city of Tampa. Accompanied by a flotilla of small vessels, the “cutthroats” sail their very much larger one – the 165-foot-long José Gasparilla built especially for this occasion – into downtown Tampa to confront the mayor and demand the key to the city. When he or she turns it over – which, big surprise, is always the outcome – the victory celebration begins. And for the next 12 hours or so, nothing much moves along Bayshore Boulevard or in downtown Tampa except a whole lot of floats loaded with krewes of pirates flinging coins and beads to some 300,000 revelers lining the streets and eagerly jostling one another and their cocktails to retrieve the booty. This is Gasparilla Pirate Fest, like Mardi Gras on steroids and, since 1904, Tampa's annual signature event. It celebrates the legend of one José Gaspar, a Spanish nobleman-turned-pirate who is said to have plundered ships and taken hostages along Florida's Gulf coast at the turn of the 19th century. Never mind that no evidence has yet been found to support this story, it makes a fine legend on which to build a festival. Not to mention haul in a tidy sum. The economic impact of this one-day event on Tampa has been estimated at \$22 million. Is that before or after trash pickup? No one is talking.

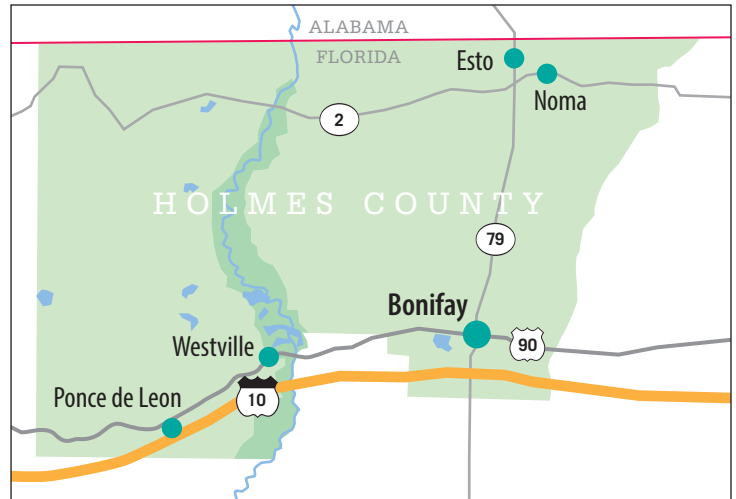


# Holmes County

## Key facts

Population:	19,477
Land size (square miles):	479
Population density:	41 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$29,294
Time zone:	Central
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 61/38 July 91/71
County seat:	Bonifay
Largest cities/towns:	Bonifay (pop. 2,722) Ponce de Leon (pop. 558) Esto (pop. 352) Westville (pop. 282) Noma (pop. 207)

**Who lives here:** A highly skilled workforce of more than 6,700, many of whom are employed in the county's fastest growing industry sector: precision metal parts manufacturing and fabrication



## Names to know

County coordinator:	open
County commissioners:	District 1 – Bobby Sasnett District 2 – Brandon Newsom District 3 – Phillip Music District 4 – Earl Stafford District 5 – Clint Erikson
Tax collector:	Harry B. Bell III
School superintendent:	Terry L. Mears

## Business

Labor force:	6,983
Primary industries:	Precision metal parts manufacturing and fabrication; logistics and transportation; health care; cattle ranching
Notable private employers:	Environmental Manufacturing and Supply; AUS Manufacturing; Manown Engineering; LKQ; Bonifay Nursing and Rehab Center
Sales tax rate:	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Holmes District School Board</b> 1 elementary school 2 high schools 3 combined-grade level schools (K-8, K-12) 1 alternative school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Chipola College</b> Main campus: 3094 Indian Circle, Marianna

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Doctors Memorial Hospital, Bonifay – 20 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to DeFuniak Springs, Pensacola and Mobile; east to Marianna and Tallahassee US 90 – west to DeFuniak Springs, Crestview and Milton; east to Cottondale, Marianna and Quincy SR 2 – west to Walton County and DeFuniak Springs; east to Jackson County and the Georgia state line SR 79 – north to Esto and the Alabama state line; south through Bonifay to Vernon and Ebro
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Ponce de Leon Springs State Park; 1920s-era Waits Mansion, Bonifay (rumored to be haunted); Keith Cabin, Pittman; Vortex Spring, Ponce de Leon; shops along Main Street in Bonifay for high-quality western wear

**Notable events:** Bonifay Down Home Street Festival (March); Annual Northwest Florida Championship Rodeo (October)

**Natural wonders:** Choctawhatchee River Wildlife Management Area; Ponce de Leon Springs, a convergence of two underground water flows producing 14 million gallons of water daily; Lake Victor

**Sports and recreation:** Seasonal hunting, primitive camping, bank and river fishing, paddling, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, springs diving (privately-owned Vortex Spring is said to be Florida's largest diving facility)

## Like Nowhere Else

On 362 consecutive days each year, Holmes County, Florida, is home to just under 20,000 people. On the remaining three – the first Thursday through Saturday in October – another 25,000 pay this place a visit. They come to Bonifay in droves each year to “get their cowboy on” at the annual Northwest Florida Championship Rodeo. It’s a Holmes County tradition that dates back to 1946, when the Bonifay Kiwanis Club decided to stage a rodeo fundraiser. That first event, held in December, was a low-budget affair; spectators sat on bales of hay and the sponsoring Kiwanians enlisted their wives to be ticket sellers and concessionaires. Today’s rodeo, still a Kiwanis-sponsored event, is considerably more sophisticated. It takes place annually on the first full weekend in October – when it almost never rains in Bonifay – and, because it is sanctioned by the PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association), draws some of the best rodeo contestants from across America bent on scoring a few more points before heading to Kissimmee for the RAM National Circuit Finals in April. In addition to three nights of non-stop rodeo action – bull-riding, cattle-roping, steer-wrestling, barrel-racing and more – the Northwest Florida Championship Rodeo includes two parades, a pancake breakfast and a reigning king and queen decked out in western wear.

# Indian River County

## Key facts

Population:	157,413
Land size (square miles):	503
Population density:	313 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$73,564
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 73/53 July 90/73
County seat:	Vero Beach
Largest cities/towns:	Sebastian (pop. 25,174) Vero Beach (pop. 16,919) Fellsmere (pop. 5,723) Indian River Shores (pop. 4,230) Orchid (pop. 447)

**Who lives here:** People who stay close to home. According to census figures, the majority of workers in Indian River County have jobs nearby. Less than 16% of the workforce here is employed outside their county of residence.

## Names to know

County administrator:	Jason E. Brown
County commissioners:	District 1 – Susan Adams District 2 – Joseph E. Flescher District 3 – Tim Zorc District 4 – Peter D. O'Bryan District 5 – Bob Solari
Tax collector:	Carole Jean Jordan
School superintendent:	Mark J. Rendell

## Business

Labor force:	65,104
Primary industries:	Manufacturing; health care; business services; logistics; tourism/hospitality
Notable private employers:	Indian River Medical Center; Piper Aircraft; Sebastian River Medical Center; Disney's Vero Beach Resort; CVS Warehouse/Distribution
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

**Public school system:** **School District of Indian River County**  
13 elementary schools  
4 middle schools  
3 high schools  
2 alternative schools  
5 charter schools

**State colleges:** **Indian River State College**  
Mueller Campus: 6155 College Lane, Vero Beach  
Classroom facility in Sebastian:  
1235 Main Street, Sebastian

## Health Care

**Acute care hospitals:** Sebastian River Medical Center, Sebastian – 154 beds  
Indian River Medical Center – 286 beds

## Transportation

**Major highways:** I-95 – north to Melbourne, Daytona Beach and Jacksonville; south to Port St. Lucie, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami  
US 1 – north to Melbourne, Titusville and Daytona Beach; south to Fort Pierce, Stuart and Jupiter  
US 60 – west to Yeehaw Junction, Lake Wales and Bartow; east to Vero Beach and US 1  
SR 512 – east to Sebastian; south to US 60  
SR A1A – north to Indian River Shores, Orchid, Melbourne Beach and Merritt Island; south to St. Lucie, Jensen Beach and Port Salerno

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic downtown Vero Beach, including the Old Indian River Courthouse and Vero Railroad Station, circa 1903; McKee Botanical Garden, Vero Beach (one of Florida's first public gardens); Vero Beach Museum of Art; Indian River Citrus Museum; Mel Fisher's Treasure Museum (includes gold and jewels from the "Fleet" wreck off Sebastian's coast discovered by this noted treasure seeker years before he found the famed "Atocha" in the Keys) Sebastian; St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park (providing a glimpse of the open grassy forests of longleaf pine once commonplace throughout Florida and habitat for 50+ protected plant and animal species); Sebastian Inlet State Park (preserving more than 900 acres of barrier island and hosting two museums: the McLarty Treasure Museum and the Sebastian Fishing Museum; the park is open 24 hours and often very busy; best times to visit: before 10 am and after 3 pm)

**Notable events:** Sebastian Riverfront Fine Arts and Music Festival (January); Fellsmere Frog Leg Festival, a frog jumping contest, carnival rides, live music, frog's leg and gator tail dinners and the Red Neck Olympics, with competitions like "pig's feet bobbin'" (January); Shrimpfest & Craft Brew Hullabaloo, Fellsmere (February); Pelican Island Wildlife Festival in Sebastian, celebrating the establishment of the nation's first National Wildlife Refuge by President Theodore Roosevelt (March); The

Firefighters' Indian River County Fair, Vero Beach (March); Hibiscus Festival, live music, fine arts and crafts, Vero Beach (April); Vero Beach Pirate Fest, commemorating the July 1715 wreck of a treasure-laden Spanish fleet off the coast of today's Indian River County (July); Autumn in the Park Crafts & Art Festival, Vero Beach (October); Indian River Birding Festival and Nature Art Show sponsored by the Pelican Island Preservation Society (October)

**Natural wonders:** 26 miles of Atlantic Ocean coastline; Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge (first-ever site in the U.S. to be designated a National Wildlife Refuge); Indian River Lagoon; Fort Drum Wildlife Management Area (more than 20,000 acres and "birthplace" of Florida's longest river, the St. Johns); Blue Cypress Conservation Area; Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge (shared with Brevard County); Blue Cypress Lake; Indian, St. Sebastian and St. John's rivers

**Sports and recreation:** Water sports and wildlife viewing top the list of favorite activities here; swimming, surfing, snorkeling and saltwater fishing along the Atlantic coast; boating and freshwater fishing in the Indian River Lagoon, St. Sebastian River and Blue Cypress Lake; a wide array of city parks, including several with ocean beaches and lifeguards on duty; treasure hunting off the coast near Sebastian (the remains of the Spanish fleet lost to a hurricane in 1715 are not yet fully recovered)

## Like Nowhere Else

They crop up along roadsides all over America – those signs that welcome visitors to whatever community they're about to enter and maybe have something to say about who lives here or what's to see and do. Sebastian, Florida, has just such a sign, and it proudly proclaims this town to be "Home of Pelican Island, Friendly People and Six Old Grouches." Say what? The first two claims can be readily substantiated. Pelican Island National Refuge is indeed located here and has been since President Theodore Roosevelt established it as the nation's first wildlife refuge in 1903, and the people must be friendly; they've been hosting tourists for better than 100 years and if they weren't friendly, word would have gotten around by now. But "Six Old Grouches"? What's up with that? A local newspaper columnist asked that very question a few years back, but could never seem to get a definitive answer. Some thought the "grouches" might be members of Sebastian's first City Council in 1924, but there was no documentation to support that theory. Perhaps they were members of Sebastian's 1954 City Council, the group that passed the resolution to put up the sign in the first place? No proof. Or maybe, someone else suggested, "grouches" referred to a 1989 painting by Carol Anne Mondshour of six pelicans sitting side-by-side on dock pilings; she had titled her work "Six Ole Grouches." Alas, no one could say for sure and so to this day, the mystery continues. But now here's a thought: Suppose those six old grouches were simply six guys who'd spent considerable time and money mounting an expedition to hunt for gold and jewels from those wrecked Spanish galleons in the waters off the coast of Sebastian only to come away empty handed. Nothing to show for all that effort and expense? You'd be grouchy too.

# Jackson County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	48,305
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	918
<b>Population density:</b>	53 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$32,726
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 61/38 July 91/71
<b>County seat:</b>	Marianna
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Marianna (pop. 7,360) Graceville (pop. 2,199) Malone (pop. 2,127) Sneads (pop. 1,796) Cottondale (pop. 906) Greenwood (pop. 663)

**Who lives here:** More than 48,000 permanent residents, none of whom really ever have to leave town to be on vacation. Google “Jackson County Tourist Development Council” to see why. This place has enough history, hiking trails, lakes, rivers, ponds, caves and springs to fill many a “stay-cation” itinerary for years to come.

## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Wilanne Daniels
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Willie E. Spires District 2 – Clint Pate District 3 – Chuck Lockey District 4 – Eric Hill District 5 – Jim Peacock
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Mary Carol Murdock
<b>School superintendent:</b>	H. Larry Moore
<b>Business</b>	
<b>Labor force:</b>	17,542
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Manufacturing; logistics and distribution; lumber and agriculture; eco-tourism
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Family Dollar Distribution Center; Mowrey Elevator Company; Enviva; Spanish Trail Lumber Company
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	Jackson County School Board 5 elementary schools 2 middle schools 4 high schools 2 combined-grade level schools (K-12) 1 alternative school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Chipola College</b> Main campus: 3094 Indian Circle, Marianna

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Jackson Hospital, Marianna – 100 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Bonifay, Milton and Pensacola; east to Tallahassee and Jacksonville US 90 – west to Defuniak Springs and Milton; east to Quincy and Tallahassee US 231 – north to the Alabama state line; south to Panama City SR 2 – west to Holmes and Walton counties; east to the Georgia state line SR 69 – north through Grand Ridge to Two Egg and Greenwood; south from I-10 to Blountstown SR 71 – north to the Alabama state line; south to Blountstown and Port St. Joe
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Many historic structures in Marianna, including antebellum and Victorian-era homes, the First National Bank Building, Jackson County Courthouse and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church and Cemetery grounds, where, in Alamo-like fashion, Confederate soldiers fought to the death as the church burned down around them (a Bible from that day survives); Bellamy Bridge and Spanish Heritage Trails; Battle of Marianna battleground site; Florida Caverns State Park (the only Florida state park with public cave tours); Three Rivers State Park; “Red Ground” at Neal’s Landing; Service Drug Store, Graceville; Great Oaks, believed to be the last true antebellum home built in the South, Greenville (not open to the public, but worth a look)

**Notable events:** Chipola Feather Fest, four days of guided field trips for bird-watchers in and around Marianna (April); Marianna Municipal Airport Fly-In (May); Annual Sunland Fall Festival (October); Annual Farm City Festival (November); Circle D Ranch Rodeo (November); Christmas parades in Cottondale, Graceville, Grand Ridge, Marianna and Sneads (early December)

**Natural wonders:** Three Rivers State Park, named for the two rivers – Chattahoochee and Flint – that merge here to form a third, the Apalachicola; Hinson Conservation and Recreation Area; Blue Springs Recreation Area; Lake Seminole (reservoir); Merritt’s Mill Pond; Spring Creek

**Sports and recreation:** Canoeing and kayaking on rivers, lakes and ponds; tubing at Spring Creek; hiking and biking along two designated National Recreation trails, Hinson Conservation and Recreation Area and Butler Tract; cave diving at Merritt’s Mill Pond; fishing at Lake Seminole, Ocheesee Pond and along the Chipola and Apalachicola Rivers; birdwatching (enthusiasts come from all over Florida just to see the horned lark); golf at two public courses; horseback riding around Compass Lake or at Florida Caverns State Park

## Like Nowhere Else

Jackson County is a good example of what some have called Florida’s “geographic anomaly” – that the further north you travel in this state, the more southern it seems. Indeed, the town of Marianna with its more than a half-dozen well-preserved antebellum homes and streets lined with live oaks that are draped in Spanish moss shares the “look” we’ve come to associate with America’s Deep South in Civil War times. Unfortunately, however, Marianna also shares some of the ugly history of racial tensions that would permeate the region in later years. One incident in particular – the torture and lynching of Claude Neal, a black man accused of rape and murder here in 1934 – would help to inspire the nation’s anti-lynching laws. Jackson is the only county in Florida that borders both Georgia and Alabama, and its eastern border with Gadsden County forms the demarcation line between the Eastern and Central Standard Time Zones in Florida. Jackson boasts more caves than any other county in the state and is the only one to have a walk-through cave tour. And, oh by the way, Daniel Boone explored northern Jackson County in 1765, and Andrew Jackson, Florida’s first military governor, had a hand in creating and naming the county in 1822.

# Jefferson County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	14,288
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	598
<b>Population density:</b>	24 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$38,186
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 62/38 July 91/70
<b>County seat:</b>	Monticello
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Monticello (pop. 2,318) Wacissa (pop. 386) Waukeenah (pop. 272) Lloyd (pop. 215)

**Who lives here:** Many state government employees. Positioned some 23 miles east of Florida's capital city, Monticello has become a favorite bedroom community for workers who don't seem to mind a daily commute to and from Tallahassee. Perhaps they find welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of state politics in the stately old homes and moss-draped trees that line the 27 blocks of Monticello's extensive downtown historic district.



## Names to know

<b>County coordinator:</b>	Parrish Barwick
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Stephen Fulford District 2 – Gene Hall District 3 – J. T. Surles District 4 – Betsy Barfield District 5 – Stephen Walker
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Lois Howell-Hunter
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Marianne Arbulu

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	5,582
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Transportation and logistics; manufacturing; agribusiness
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Simpson Nurseries; XPO Logistics; Broadleaf Contracting; Big Bend Timber Services; Brynwood Health and Rehabilitation Center
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Jefferson County School District</b> 1 elementary school 1 middle/high school 1 alternative school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>North Florida Community College</b> Main campus: 325 NW Turner Davis Drive, Madison

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Jefferson County; nearest options include: Madison County Memorial Hospital, Madison – 25 beds Doctors' Memoria Hospital, Perry – 48 beds Capital Regional Medical Center, Tallahassee – 266 beds Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare, Tallahassee – 772 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Tallahassee and Pensacola; east to Madison and Jacksonville US 19/27 – west and north to Tallahassee and Bainbridge, Georgia; southeast to Perry and Cross City SR 59 – south to SR 30/US 98; north to Thomasville, Georgia
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Monticello's downtown historic district (guided walking tours are available); Letchworth-Love Mounds Archaeological State Park, site of the tallest prehistoric, Native American ceremonial earthwork mound in Florida; the Monticello Opera House fully restored to its turn-of-the-century splendor and hosting a full complement of plays, films, lectures and musical events throughout the year

**Notable events:** Chili Challenge (February); Southern Music Rising (March); Monticello Bike Fest (April); Watermelon Festival (on tract to Mark its 70th year in 2020; don't miss the seed-spitting contest!); Christmas Tree Lighting in downtown Monticello (December)

**Natural wonders:** Miles and miles of virtually untouched forest and marshlands through which three rivers meander: Wacissa, Aucilla and St. Marks; St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, one of the northern hemisphere's final stops for millions of migratory Monarch butterflies on their way to South America each October; Lake Miccosukee; Aucilla Wildlife Management Area, 80,000 acres of meandering trails and crystal-clear springs

**Sports and recreation:** Canoeing along the Aucilla and Wacissa Rivers (both are part of the Florida Canoe Trails system); hiking and biking over rolling hills and along scenic roads throughout the county

## Like Nowhere Else

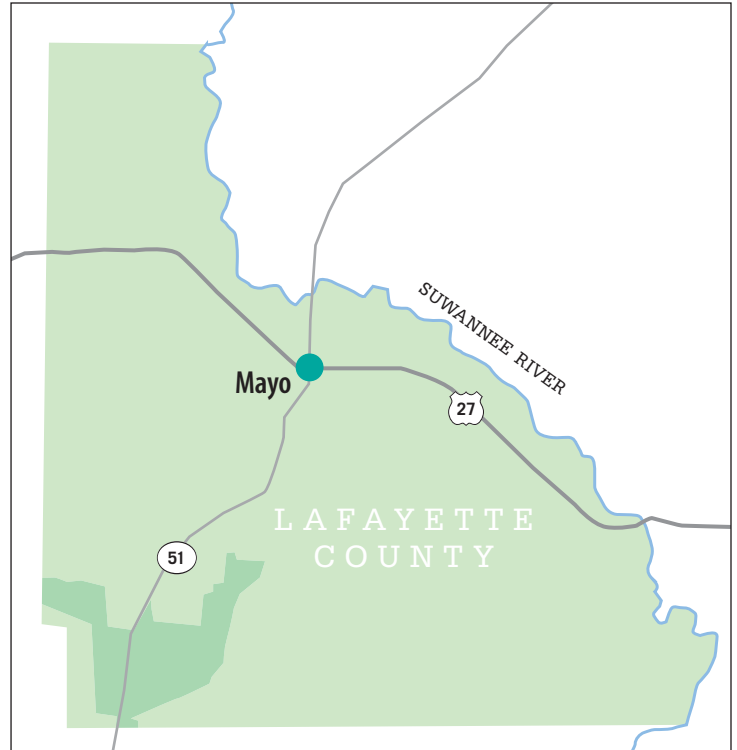
Jefferson calls itself "Florida's Keystone County," and with good reason. On a map, it appears similarly shaped and, like the keystone in a masonry arch, Jefferson is positioned at the arc – that exact point in Florida known as the "Big Bend" – where the panhandle meets the peninsula. It's as if Jefferson holds the two pieces together. Was it planned that way? Probably not, but it's interesting to consider, as is the fact that Jefferson is the only county in Florida that stretches from Georgia on the north to the Gulf of Mexico on the south. And did we mention that Jefferson is also one of the last remaining counties in Florida to have NO stoplights? Or that its county seat – the city of Monticello – currently holds the record for posting the highest temperature ever recorded in Florida – 109°F on June 29, 1931? Yes, this county truly is like nowhere else. So why not come see it for yourself?



# Lafayette County

## Key facts

Population:	8,732
Land size (square miles):	543
Population density:	16 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$23,795
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/40 July 92/71
County seat:	Mayo
Largest cities/towns:	Mayo (pop. 1,237)
Who lives here:	A largely employed workforce. Lafayette was one of four Florida counties to post an annual unemployment rate of just 3.2% in 2018. Florida's annual rate of unemployment for the same period was 3.9%.



## Names to know

County administrator:	Lisa Carwyle
County commissioners:	District 1 – Lance Lamb District 2 – Thomas Pridgeon Jr. District 3 – Lisa Walker District 4 – Anthony Adams District 5 – Earnest Jones
Tax collector:	Chuck Hewett
School superintendent:	Robert Edwards



## Business

Labor force:	2,847
Primary industries:	Agriculture/forestry; trucking and distribution; manufacturing
Notable private employers:	Putnals Premium Pine Straw; Florida Pine Straw Supply; Bass Assassin Fishing Lures; A Plus Trailers and Fabrication
Sales tax rate:	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Lafayette District Schools</b> 1 elementary school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>North Florida Community College</b> Main campus: 325 NW Turner Davis Drive, Madison

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Lafayette County; nearest options include: Shands Live Oak Regional Medical Center, Live Oak – 25 beds Doctors' Memorial Hospital, Perry – 48 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 27/SR 20 – west to Fennholloway; southeast to Branford and High Springs SR 51 – south to Tennille and Dixie County; north to Live Oak and I-10
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Lafayette Blue Springs State Park; Troy Springs State Park; Old Lafayette County Court House, now an inn (circa 1893-94); current Lafayette County Courthouse (circa 1908); Hal W. Adams Bridge, Florida's only suspension bridge, built in 1947; House of the Seven Gables in Mayo

**Notable events:** Mayo Pioneer Day Festival (October)

**Natural wonders:** Suwannee River Water Management Recreational Lands: Owens Spring, Adams, Walker and Little River tracts;

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking, biking, horseback riding and wildlife viewing; swimming, cave diving and primitive camping at Lafayette Blue Springs State Park; paddling along the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail; walking track and facilities for baseball, basketball and tennis available at Edward Perry Sports Complex in Mayo; baseball – Lafayette High School's team snagged its first-ever state championship in 2016

## Like Nowhere Else

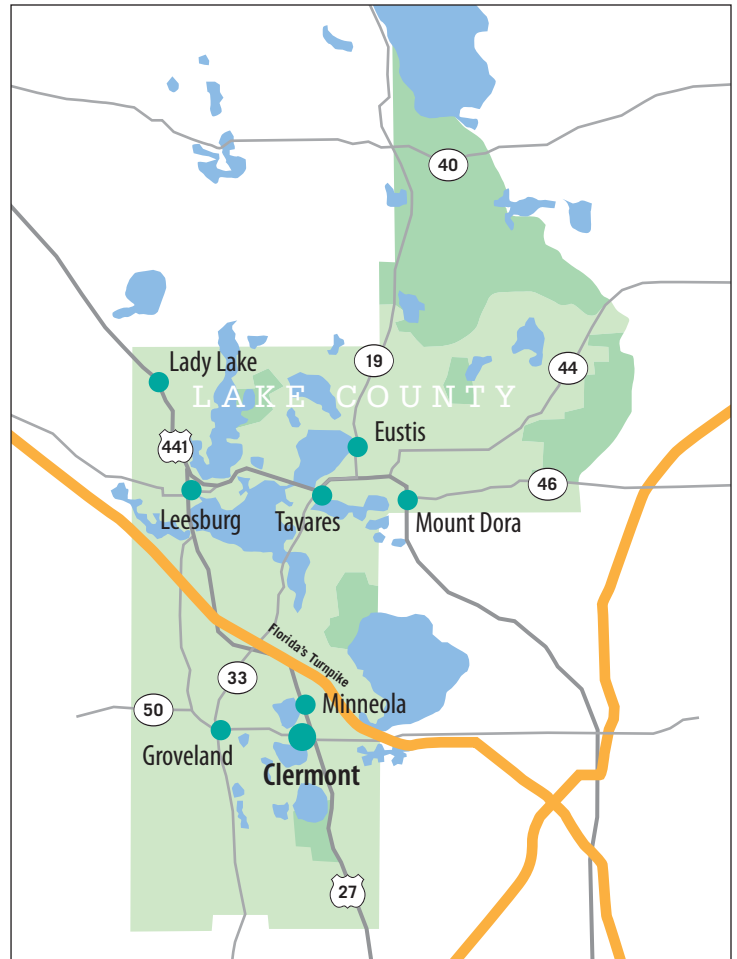
Out-of-towners tend to get noticed here, and not just because Lafayette is the second least populated county in Florida where most everyone knows most everyone else. Visitors are more likely to be singled out for something they say. Lafayette County, Florida, was named for the Marquis de Lafayette, the French general who helped influence the outcome of America's Revolutionary War by rendering assistance to Continental Army troops when they needed it most. In history classes, we learned to pronounce his name as the French do – "Lah-fay-ETTE" – putting emphasis on the last syllable. Forget that when you stop by Lafayette County, Florida. Here, they say "Lah-FAY-ette," emphasis on the middle syllable. To speak otherwise is to broadcast that you're from somewhere else and that will cause locals to nod their heads knowingly and chuckle. Not to worry, they'll still be kind.

# Lake County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	356,495
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	938
<b>Population density:</b>	380 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$40,750
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 68/45 July 91/71
<b>County seat:</b>	Tavares
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Clermont (pop. 35,211) Leesburg (pop. 22,689) Eustis (pop. 20,827) Tavares (pop. 16,865) Lady Lake (pop. 15,317) Mount Dora (pop. 13,916) Groveland (pop. 13,474) Minneola (pop. 11,529)

**Who lives here:** Busy, active middle-agers. With its abundance of natural beauty and small-town charm, Lake County stands in significant contrast to frenzied Orange County next door. Here, where the median age is 47.1 (compared to 35.1 across the county line), mega theme parks and multinational corporations have given way to real nature and home-grown small business. And the only traffic jam you're likely to encounter will be on your way into Mount Dora on a craft fair Saturday.

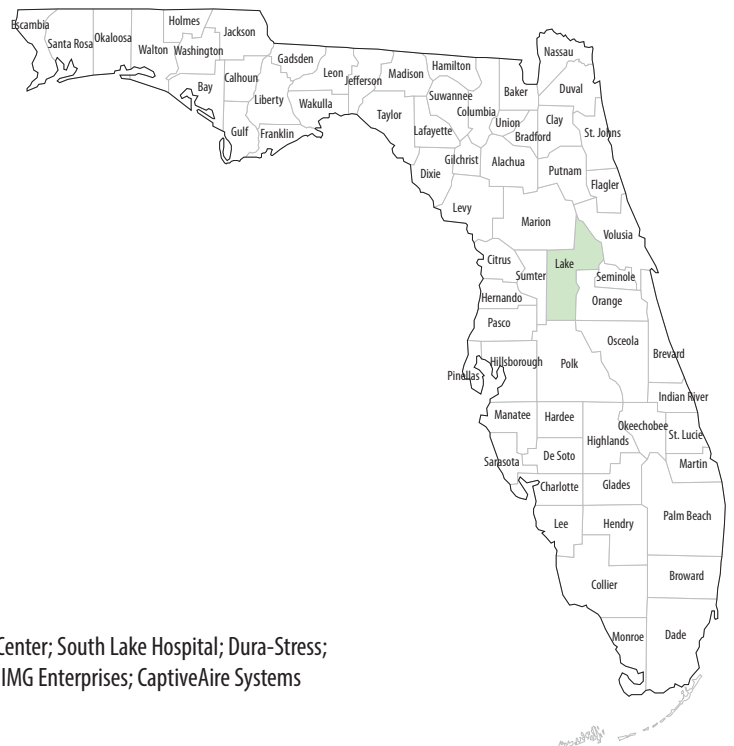


## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Jeff Cole
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Timothy I. Sullivan District 2 – Sean Parks District 3 – Wendy Breeden District 4 – Leslie Campione District 5 – Josh Blake
<b>Tax collector:</b>	David Jordan
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Diane Kornegay

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	155,273
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Health care; agribusiness; manufacturing
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Florida Hospital Waterman; Leesburg Regional Medical Center; South Lake Hospital; Dura-Stress; Hewitt Contracting; Southeast Modular Manufacturing; IMG Enterprises; CaptiveAire Systems
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Lake County Schools</b> 20 elementary schools 10 middle schools 9 high schools 1 combined-grade level school (K-12) 8 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Beacon College</b> Main campus: 105 East Main Street, Leesburg  <b>University of Central Florida</b> UCF Leesburg: 9501 US Highway 441, Leesburg UCF South Lake: 1250 North Hancock Road, Clermont
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Lake-Sumter State College</b> Leesburg Campus: 9501 US Highway 441, Leesburg South Lake Campus: 1250 North Hancock Road, Clermont

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	South Lake Hospital, Clermont – 170 beds Leesburg Regional Medical Center, Leesburg – 308 beds Chance Florida Hospital Waterman to: AdventHealth Waterman, Tavares – 269 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	Florida's Turnpike (toll) – northwest to Wildwood and I-75; southeast to Orlando, Yeehaw Junction and Fort Pierce US 27 – north to The Villages, Belleview and Ocala; south to Clermont, I-4, Haines City and Lake Wales US 441 – from Mount Dora: northwest to Tavares, Lady Lake and Belleview; southeast to Apopka and Orlando SR 19 – from Tavares: north to Eustis, Umatilla and the Ocala National Forest; south to Groveland SR 33 – south from Groveland to Polk City SR 40 – west to Lynne, Silver Springs and Ocala; east through Ocala National Forest to Barberville and Daytona Beach SR 44 – from Eustis: west to Grand Island, Lisbon and US 441; northeast to DeLand then east to I-4, I-95 and New Smyrna Beach SR 46 – east to Sanford, Geneva and I-95 near Titusville SR 50 – west to Minneola, Mascotte, Ridge Manor and I-75; east through Clermont to Winter Garden
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Mount Dora: downtown Mount Dora historic district for shopping (antiques, books, collectibles, clothing, jewelry, toys, etc.; stop by the Chamber of Commerce in the Historic Mount Dora Train Depot for a directory), Village Antique Mall, Renninger's Twin Markets (antiques and collectibles), Mount Dora History Museum, Mount Dora Museum of Speed (muscle cars and auto memorabilia – TripAdvisor's No. 1 Mount Dora attraction for three years running), Modernism Museum Mount Dora, Grantham Point Park on Lake Dora (site of Florida's only freshwater inland lighthouse); in Clermont: Florida Citrus Tower (226 feet tall, offering 360-degree views of the surrounding hills and lakes), Presidents Hall of Fame, Clermont Historic Village Museum, Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards; Eustis Historical Museum; Trout Lake Nature Center, Eustis; Orange Blossom Cannonball (historic train, offering trips between Tavares and Mount Dora); Lady Lake Historical Society Museum; four state parks: Lake Griffin (home to Florida's 8th largest lake and 2nd largest Live Oak tree believed to be around 400 years old); Lake Louisa (within the Green Swamp; largest lake in a chain of 13 and a designated "Outstanding

Florida Water Way); Rock Springs Run State Reserve (co-managed with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for hunting purposes; some trails closed during hunting season); Lower Wekiva River Preserve (equestrian camping facilities and excellent wildlife viewing; shared with Seminole County)

**Notable events:** Art in the Park, Lady Lake (January); Georgefest Celebration, held since 1902 and recognized as the second longest ongoing annual event in honor of America's first president, George Washington, Eustis (February); Mount Dora Arts Festival (February); Mount Dora Music Festival (February); Winefest at Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards, Clermont (February); Leesburg Mardi Gras, "12 hours of madness" (February); Spring Show, Mount Dora (March); Leesburg Art Festival (March), Wine and Seafood Fest at Lakeridge Winery and Vineyards, complementary tastings and tours included, Clermont (March); Pig on the Pond Community Festival, "8 acres of non-stop fun," Clermont (March); Annual Sail Boat Regatta, Mount Dora (April); Blues at the Winery, Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards in Clermont (April); Lake County Fair (April); Leesburg Bikefest, motorcycles and music event (April) Blues-n-Groove Weekend, Mount

Dora (May); Jazz on the Vineyard Green, Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards, Clermont (May); Mount Dora Paddle Fest, for canoes, kayaks, dragon boats and anything else propelled by paddles (June); Leesburg's 4th of July celebration, small-town and family-focused with face painting, snow cones, balloon artists, free ice cream and fireworks (July); Annual Harvest Grape Stomp, Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards, Clermont (August); Florida Wildlife Festival, fostering appreciation for Florida black bear and other native species, Umatilla (September); Mount Dora Craft Fair, 350 crafters/200,000 visitors (October); Lake County Folk Festival, Eustis (October); Wings and Wildflowers Festival, Leesburg (October); Mount Dora Bicycle Festival, 3 days, multiple routes, crushing hill climbs (October); Leesburg Craft Beer, Wine and Food Festival (November); Montverde Carnival & Music Festival (November); Mount Dora Plant & Garden Fair (November); Lady of the Lakes Renaissance Faire, Tavares (November); Scottish Highland Festival, Mount Dora (November); Hometown Christmas, Fruitland Park (December); Christmas Parade (on land), Lighted Boat Parade (on water), Mount Dora (December); Wine and Chocolate Festival, Lakeridge Winery & Vineyards, Clermont (December)

**Natural wonders:** Green Swamp (shared with Pasco, Polk, Sumter and Hernando counties); Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge (shared with Volusia County); Ocala National Forest (shared with Marion County); Seminole State Forest; Lower Wekiva River Preserve (shared with Seminole County); Lake Hiawatha and Ferndale Preserves; Rock Springs Run Reserve; Emerald Marsh Wildlife Management Area; Harris Chain of Lakes (part of the Ocklawaha River Basin and consisting of 7 lakes: Big and Little Harris, Dora, Carlton, Beauclair, Eustis and Griffin; an eighth lake – Lake Yale – is technically part of the chain, but not connected by a navigable river or canal); more than 1,000 lakes in all (some estimates put the number at around 1,400); Wekiva River; Hontoon Dead River (so called because it lacks current; a john boat left on the river overnight will remain in nearly the same position with less than five feet of drift); portions of Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge and Ocala National Forest

**Sports and recreation:** No lack of recreational activities here; hunting, fishing, boating and paddling are particularly popular (7 of the top 11 Florida lakes for number and size of bass are in Lake County); hiking, biking, birding and wildlife viewing throughout the county; for serious hikers, Alexander Springs Recreation Area near Umatilla includes a section of the Florida Trail; in busy Mount Dora, Gilbert, Donnelly and Grantham Point Parks provide a pleasant respite from the shopping frenzy

## Like Nowhere Else

The founders of Lake County, Florida, surely didn't have to think very long or hard about what to name this place. All they had to do was look around. At least 1,000 lakes are within these borders, so settling on the perfect name had to have been a no-brainer. With its winding roads, rolling green hills and fresh water in some form or another around practically every bend, Lake County doesn't look like most of Florida. But it sure is pretty. And the people here sure know how to have a good time; they've cornered the market on festivals and fairs. Lake County puts on a party for everything it seems – wine, chocolate, crafts (not once but many times and in multiple places throughout the year), beer, birds, boats, bicycles, black bears – even George Washington, who, as far as we know, had no Florida connections but for whom the people of Eustis have such high regard they've been celebrating him for 115 years! Should the people of Lake County ever decide to go looking for another name, here's a suggestion: Don't think any longer or harder than your predecessors, please. Just call this place Festival, Florida. It has a nice ring.

# Lee County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	745,610
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	785
<b>Population density:</b>	950 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$48,592
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 75/54 July 92/74
<b>County seat:</b>	Fort Myers
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Cape Coral (pop. 183,365) Fort Myers (pop. 79,943) Bonita Springs (pop. 56,088) Estero (pop. 33,048) Sanibel (pop. 7,363) Fort Myers Beach (pop. 7,077)

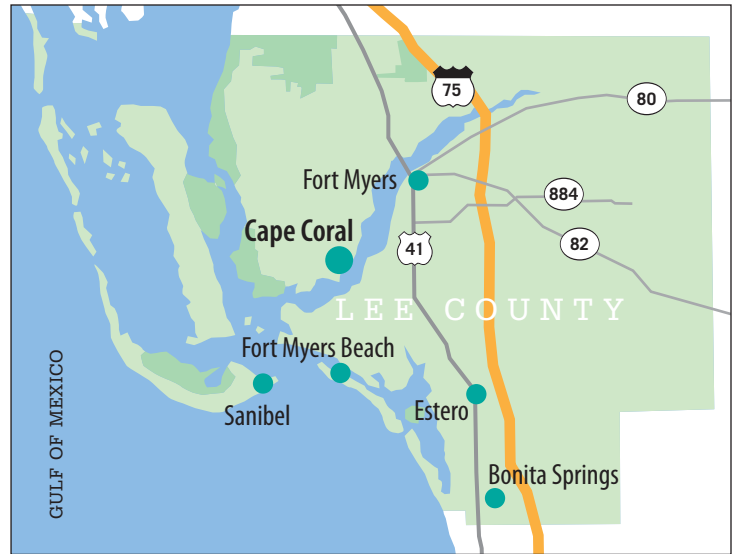
**Who lives here:** A growing labor pool. Population projections from the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research show an increase of 21% in Lee County's 25–54 age group between now and 2025 compared to 7.9% across the entire state.

## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Roger Desjarlais
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – John Manning District 2 – Cecil Pendergrass District 3 – Larry Kiker District 4 – Brian Hamman District 4 – Frank Mann
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Larry D. Hart
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Gregory K. Adkins

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	342,684
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Advanced manufacturing; logistics and distribution; business and professional services; information technology; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Hertz Global Holdings; Chico's FAS; Lee Memorial Health System; Alico; Gartner; Data2 Logistics; eMaint Enterprises; 21st Century Oncology
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	6.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>The School District of Lee County</b> 49 elementary schools 20 middle schools 14 high schools 11 alternative schools/special programs 23 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Barry University, School of Professional and Career Education</b> Fort Myers: Sunrise Building, 12381 South Cleveland Avenue, Suite 502, Fort Myers  <b>Florida Gulf Coast University</b> Main campus: 10501 FGCU Blvd., Fort Myers  <b>Hodges University</b> Fort Myers campus: 4501 Colonial Blvd., Fort Myers  <b>Keiser University</b> Fort Myers campus: 9100 Forum Corporate Parkway, Fort Myers  <b>Nova Southeastern University</b> Fort Myers Campus: 3650 Colonial Court, Fort Myers
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida SouthWestern State College</b> Lee County campus: 8099 College Parkway, Fort Myers Corporate Training Center: 27400 Riverview Center Blvd., Building #8, Suite 2, Bonita Springs

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Cape Coral Hospital, Cape Coral – 291 beds Gulf Coast Medical Center, Fort Myers – 356 beds HealthPark Medical Center, Fort Myers – 481 beds Lee Memorial Hospital, Fort Myers – 414 beds Lehigh Regional Medical Center, Lehigh Acres – 88 beds
<b>Children’s hospitals:</b>	Golisano Children’s Hospital of Southwest Florida – 134 beds

## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Southwest Florida International Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Punta Gorda, Sarasota, Bradenton and Tampa; south to Naples, then east (Alligator Alley) to Fort Lauderdale and Miami US 41 – north to Punta Gorda, North Port, Sarasota and Bradenton; south to Naples, then southeast (Tamiami Trail) to Miami SR 80 – east from Fort Myers to LaBelle and Clewiston at Lake Okeechobee SR 82 – southeast from Fort Myers to SR 29 and Immokalee SR 884 – east from Fort Myers to Lehigh Acres

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Fort Myers: Downtown Historic River District; Burroughs Home & Gardens; Edison & Ford Winter Estates (20 acres of historical buildings, gardens, Edison Botanic Research Lab and the Estates Museum), Imaginarium Science Center (60 interactive exhibits, touch tanks, outdoor freshwater lagoon), Calusa Nature Center and Planetarium, Southwest Florida Museum of History, Murder Mystery Dinner Train (Wed.-Sun. only); Everglades Wonder Gardens, Bonita Springs; Bailey Matthews Shell Museum, Sanibel; Historic Boca Grande Lighthouse and Museum at Gasparilla Island State Park, Boca Grande; Cayo Costa State Park (hiking, biking and fishing; accessible by private boat or ferry only); Estero Bay Preserve State Park (Florida’s first aquatic preserve, enjoy from land or by

water); Koreshan State Historic Site (former home to a utopian community of 200 who followed Cyrus Reed Teed and his faith, Koreshanity); Mound Key Archaeological State Park (cultural and ceremonial center of the Calusa Indians when Spanish explorers first arrived in Florida; accessible only by water); Lovers Key State Park (so named because it was once accessible only by boat and it was said that only lovers seeking solitude made the trip; a road was built in 1965, but the name stuck)

**Notable events:** Southwest Florida ClamJam Seafood & Music Festival, Cape Coral (January); Caloosahatchee Celtic Festival, Fort Myers (January); Edison Festival of Light, 9 days of events honoring the life and work of Fort Myers’ most famous winter

resident, Thomas Alva Edison, at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates in Fort Myers (February); Southwest Florida and Lee County Fair, North Fort Myers (February); Pine Island Art Show & Sale (February); Burrowing Owl Festival in Cape Coral, home to the largest known population of Florida burrowing owls (February); Bonita Blues Festival, Bonita Springs (March); Sanibel Shell Festival (March); Fort Myers Shrimp Festival (March); Fort Myers Beach Film Festival (April); Taste of the Beach, a chance to sample signature dishes from 20 restaurants, Fort Myers Beach (May); Watermelon Festival at Fleamasters Flea Market, speed eating and seed spitting, plus a cow-milking contest for kids, Fort Myers (June); MangoMania Tropical Fruit Fair, Cape Coral (July); Island Hopper Songwriter Fest, multiple venues in Captiva, downtown Fort Myers and Fort Myers Beach (September/October); Fort Myers Beach Pirate Fest (October); "Ding" Darling Days at J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island, celebrating migratory birds with narrated tram tours and nature presentations; Oktoberfest at the German American Club in Cape Coral (two weekends in October); Annual American Sand Sculpting Championship, Fort Myers Beach (November); Tapa Hop, pub crawl with trolley transportation to 6 restaurants for tapas, Fort Myers Beach (December); Holiday Nights at the Edison & Ford Winter Estates, annual display of lights that earned a spot on the American Bus Association's "Top 100 Events in North America for 2016," Fort Myers, (late November through January 1)

**Natural wonders:** J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and Pine Island National Wildlife Refuge; accessible by boat only; Matlacha Pass National Wildlife Refuge and Caloosahatchee National Wildlife Refuge; 50+ miles of white sand beaches (Barefoot Beach in Bonita Springs has been ranked 3rd best beach in the U.S. by Dr. Beach; Caloosahatchee, Imperial and Estero rivers; Six Mile Cypress Slough Preserve

**Sports and recreation:** MLB spring training February-March for the Minnesota Twins at Hammond Stadium and the Boston Red Sox at JetBlue Park; Minor League baseball throughout the summer from the Fort Myers Miracle at Hammond Stadium; collegiate action from the Florida Gulf Coast University Eagles in swimming, soccer and men's and women's basketball (FGCU was a surprise "Sweet 16" contender at the 2013 NCAA basketball tournament); 100 parks, beaches and wildlife refuges for hiking, biking and water sports; paddling and wildlife viewing along the Great Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail; shelling on Sanibel Island which claims to be the #1 U.S. shelling destination; ice skating (yes, you read that right) at the Fort Myers Skatium (lessons available) or, if you'd rather just watch, head to Germain Arena where the Florida Everblades play their East Coast Hockey League home games October-April; Lee County Manatee Park with paved trails, kayak rentals and, possibly, wild manatee viewing, November-March

## Like Nowhere Else

Lee is a county of population extremes. On the high end is the city of Cape Coral. In 1957, two real estate developers from Baltimore carved 400 miles of canals into Florida's southwest coastline to create it. Today, with a population of 183,365 Cape Coral is not only Lee County's largest city, with more than double the population of its geographically nearest rival Fort Myers; together, the two hold the No. 6 position among largest cities in Florida. And, to date, it's only about 50% built out; another 400,000 residents could easily fit here and probably will, given the appeal Cape Coral seems to hold for families and working professionals seeking affordable housing. At the other end of the Lee County population spectrum: Sanibel and Captiva Islands. At 7,363, Sanibel has a population roughly 4% the size of Cape Coral's, and Captiva has only a few hundred year-round residents. Together, these two islands that are connected by a 3-mile-long causeway do have enough families to support a school serving kindergarten through eighth grades. Cape Coral and Sanibel-Captiva are polar opposites in other ways too. Cape Coral was developed as a master-planned, pre-platted community, heavily hyped to northeasterners in the 1960s as a retirement haven and, more recently, as a prime spot for light industrial and commercial development. Sanibel and Captiva, on the other hand, have restricted commercial development to mostly high-end resort properties and independent retail establishments. A full 67% of Sanibel remains preserved land. The island's J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge draws about 800,000 visitors annually for kayaking and wildlife viewing and the beaches here are said to yield about 160 varieties of shells. Feel free to take anything that's dead, but do check inside your shells to be sure; taking live critters, or sand dollars, starfish or sea urchins could result in a hefty fine, possibly even jail time.



# Leon County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	292,502
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	667
<b>Population density:</b>	439 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$42,954
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 64/40 July 92/73
<b>County seat:</b>	Tallahassee (and state capital)
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Tallahassee (pop. 191,049) Woodville (pop. 2,770)

**Who lives here:** Florida's most highly educated population. 94% of Leon County residents over the age of 25 are high school graduates or higher; 46% have earned at least a bachelor's degree, compared to the U.S. average of 31%. The next closest Florida county is Alachua, where 41% countywide hold at least a bachelor's degree.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Vincent S. Long
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Bill Proctor District 2 – Jimbo Jackson District 3 – Rick Minor District 4 – Brian Desloge District 5 – Kristin Dozier At Large – Mary Ann Lindley At Large – Nick Maddox
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Doris Maloy
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Rocky Hanna

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	154,655
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Health care; business and financial services; manufacturing; retail trade
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare; Capital Regional Medical Center; ACS/Xerox; Capital City Bank Group; General Dynamics Land Systems; Danfoss Turbocor
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Leon County Schools</b> 24 elementary schools 8 middle schools 6 high schools 4 charter schools 6 special programs
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Florida A&amp;M University</b> Main campus: 1601 South Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Tallahassee  <b>Florida State University</b> Main campus: 600 West College Avenue, Tallahassee  <b>Keiser University</b> Tallahassee: 1700 Halstead Blvd., Building 2, Tallahassee  <b>Saint Leo University</b> Tallahassee Education Center: University Center Building, 444 Appleyard Drive, Suite 136, Tallahassee
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Tallahassee Community College</b> Main campus: 444 Appleyard Drive, Tallahassee Center for Innovation: 300 West Pensacola, Tallahassee Ghazvini Center for Healthcare Education: 1528 Surgeons Drive, Tallahassee

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Capital Regional Medical Center, Tallahassee – 266 beds Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare, Tallahassee – 772 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Tallahassee International Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans; east to Madison, Lake City and Jacksonville US 27 – north to Bainbridge, Georgia; southeast to Perry, Chiefland, Ocala and Miami US 90 – west to Quincy, DeFuniak Springs and Pensacola; east to Monticello, Lake City and Jacksonville US 319 – north to Thomasville, Georgia; south to Crawfordville and US 98 along the Gulf of Mexico coastline SR 20 – west to Bristol, Blountstown and Freeport SR 61 – north to the Georgia state line; south to Wakulla Springs SR 363 – south to St. Marks

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Florida State Capitol; Old State Capitol; Florida Governor's Mansion; Florida Supreme Court; The Museum of Florida History; Goodwood Museum and Gardens; Mission San Luis de Apalachee; Tallahassee Museum; Knott House Museum; Railroad Square Art Park; Tallahassee Automobile and Collectibles Museum; at Florida State University: Museum of Fine Arts; National High Magnetic Field Laboratory; five state parks within the boundaries of Leon County: Alfred B. Maclay Gardens (botanical garden and home open for tours; high blooming season is January 1-April 30), DeSoto Site (site of a 1539-40 winter encampment by Hernando de Soto and the mansion of former Governor John Martin), Lake Jackson Mounds (four earthen temple mounds, two open for viewing), Natural Bridge Battlefield (where Florida's second largest Civil War Battle was fought; reenactment every year in March); and St. Marks River (Florida's 161st state park with trails for hiking, horseback riding and off-road biking; river not conducive to canoeing or kayaking), plus a sixth state park – Lake Talquin – which Leon shares with neighboring Gadsden County;

**Notable events:** Annual Battle of Natural Bridge Reenactment (March); North Florida Vegfest (March); Springtime Tallahassee Festival (March/April); Tallahassee Museum Jazz & Blues Festival (April) Annual Florida African Dance Festival, Tallahassee Community College (June); Swamp Stomp Music Festival, Tallahassee Museum (July); Tallahassee Southern Extreme Ram Rodeo (August); Grape Harvest Festival (includes grape and wine sampling and a grape stomp, ala Lucy Ricardo) at FAMU Center for Viticulture (August); Monarch Butterfly Festival at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (October); Oktoberfest, annual fundraiser to benefit Elder Care Services (October); North Florida Fair, 10 days, 24 northwest Florida counties represented (November); The Winter Festival-A Celebration of Lights, Music and Art (December)

**Natural wonders:** St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge; Apalachicola National Forest; Elinor Klapp-Phipps Park; Talquin Wildlife Management Area; Ochlockonee River Wildlife Management Area; Silver Lake Recreation Area; Black Creek; numerous lakes including, Bradford, Ella, Hall, Lamonia, Jackson, Lafayette, Miccosukee and Munson; unlike much of Florida, most of Leon County has rolling hills, the highest of which is 280 feet

**Sports and recreation:** Plenty of collegiate teams and sports to cheer for – Florida State Seminoles, Florida A&M Rattlers and the Tallahassee Community College Eagles – check individual school websites for schedules and ticketing information; Division III Tallahassee Rugby Football Club competing in the Florida Rugby Union; golfing at five public courses; Big Bend Scenic Byway for hiking (public access point at Tallahassee International Airport); hiking, biking, fishing and swimming at Lafayette Heritage Trail Park; hiking and biking along the 20.5-mile Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail

## Like Nowhere Else

Leon County may share many similarities with other Florida counties, but it is completely different in one basic respect – the state capital is located here – and there's a perfectly logical reason why. Under Spanish and English rule, Florida was two territories – East Florida and West Florida – and each had its own capital city – St. Augustine and Pensacola. In 1820, as plans were being made for statehood, Florida's territorial legislators decided, that to be fair, they should convene alternately in each capital city. The first session of Florida's Legislative Council as a U.S. territory met on July 22, 1822, at Pensacola, and members from St. Augustine traveled 59 days by water to attend. For the second session in St. Augustine, the delegates from Pensacola traveled by land; it took them 28 days to cross the peninsula. Not surprisingly, neither side was particularly anxious to make this trek on a regular basis. And so they compromised, agreeing to meet at a site halfway in between, which turned out to be Tallahassee. A crude log building was constructed to serve as Florida's first capitol and in 1824, the third legislative session met there. It was replaced in 1845, just ahead of Florida's admission to the Union as the 27th state, by a Greek revival masonry structure that was subsequently replaced in 1977 by a 22-story capitol building designed by architect Edward Durrell Stone. The old capitol building, positioned directly in front of the new, was scheduled for demolition in 1978, but preservationists prevailed and today, the "Old Capitol," now restored to 1902 grandeur, houses a museum containing artifacts of Florida history and memorabilia related to gubernatorial campaigns. Meanwhile, the real business of the state takes place in the high-rise just behind. And while most state capitals garner barely a passing glance from residents of other states, Florida's has a bit of a reputation nationwide. For six weeks in November/December 2000, all eyes were focused on Tallahassee as the outcome of that year's presidential election hung in the balance. When it was finally decided by the U.S. Supreme Court on December 12, the entire nation knew the location of Florida's capital and, as a bonus, could readily define the term "hanging chad."

# Levy County

## Key facts

Population:	40,770
Land size (square miles):	1,118
Population density:	37 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$35,385
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 67/44 July 91/72
County seat:	Bronson
Largest cities/towns:	Williston (pop. 2,710) Chiefland (pop. 2,180) Inglis (pop. 1,320) Bronson (pop. 1,119) Fanning Springs* (pop. 1,009) Cedar Key (pop. 690) Yankeetown (pop. 495)



\* Fanning Springs straddles the line between two Florida counties: Levy and Gilchrist

**Who lives here:** Resilient folks who will do what it takes to thrive – cross county lines for good jobs in Gainesville and Ocala, acquire specialized skills to meet employer needs, reinvent themselves for an entirely new industry

## Names to know

County coordinator:	Wilbur Dean
County commissioners:	District 1 – John Meeks District 2 – Rock Meeks District 3 – Mike Joyner District 4 – Lilly Rooks District 5 – Matt Brooks
Tax collector:	Linda Fugate
School superintendent:	Jeffery R. Edison

## Business

Labor force:	16,926
Primary industries:	Transportation and trade; manufacturing; construction; professional and business services; commercial fishing
Notable private employers:	DAB Constructors; ANCORP; Theissen Training Systems; Seabring Marine Industries (Monterey Boats); Marshall Tree Farm
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Levy County School District</b> 4 elementary schools 3 middle-high schools 2 combined-grade level schools (K-8, K-12) 2 charter schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>College of Central Florida</b> Jack Wilkinson Levy Campus: 15390 NW Highway 19, Chiefland

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Regional General Hospital Williston, Williston – 40 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 19/US 98 – northwest to Perry and Tallahassee; south to Crystal River, New Port Richey and Clearwater US 27 – north to Newberry and High Springs; south to Marion County US 27 Alt – northwest from Williston to Chiefland, Cross City and Perry US 41 – north to Newberry; south to Dunnellon and Brooksville SR 24 – northeast to Gainesville; southwest to Cedar Key SR 345 – north from Rosewood to Chiefland
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** The shops, galleries and eateries along Dock Street in Cedar Key (stop at Tony's Seafood for a bowl of award-winning clam chowder); Two Tails Ranch in Williston for a personal encounter with elephants and some other exotic beasts, including tortoises, zebras and an emu (guided tours by appointment only); four state parks: Cedar Key Museum (Saint Clair Whitman House here depicts life in Cedar Key circa 1920); Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve; Manatee Springs State Park (look for manatees to visit in winter); Waccasassa Bay Preserve (accessible only by boat)

**Notable events:** Levy County Fair, Williston (March/April); Old Florida Celebration of the Arts, Cedar Key (April); Watermelon Festival, Chiefland (June); Williston Independence Day Celebration, featuring food, music, games, rides, parade and fireworks (early July but not necessarily on the 4th); Peanut and Harvest Festival, Williston (October); Cedar Key Seafood Festival, offering bluegrass and banjo music, arts and crafts, lots of seafood (surprise!) and shuttles over to Seahorse Key to visit a lighthouse that is almost never open to the public (October); Yankeetown Arts, Crafts & Seafood Festival (November); "Light Up Williston" Christmas Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge, 13 islands in the Gulf of Mexico off Levy County established in 1929 to protect the 200,000 birds that raise their young here; Manatee Springs, a first-magnitude spring producing an average of 100 million gallons of clear, cool water daily; Cedar Key Scrub Wildlife Management Area, providing habitat for roseate spoonbills, wood storks, scrub-jays, gopher frogs, indigo snakes and white-tailed deer; the Suwannee and Withlacoochee rivers (both originate elsewhere, but empty into the Gulf of Mexico in Levy County – the Suwannee at Levy's border with Dixie County and the Withlacoochee near Yankeetown); the Waccasassa River,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of which is accessible only by canoe or kayak, making it one of Florida's most undeveloped rivers; MacDonald Creek; Goethe State Forest and Wildlife Management Area; Withlacoochee Gulf Preserve; Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge (shared with Dixie County)

**Sports and recreation:** Saltwater and freshwater fishing; kayaking, paddle boarding and canoeing; hiking and biking along the Nature Coast Trail from Fanning Springs to Chiefland; snorkeling and swimming at Manatee Springs; diving at Devil's Den, Blue Grotto and Manatee Springs (be sure to bring certification); hunting for native or exotic wildlife at Ross Hammock Ranch near Inglis

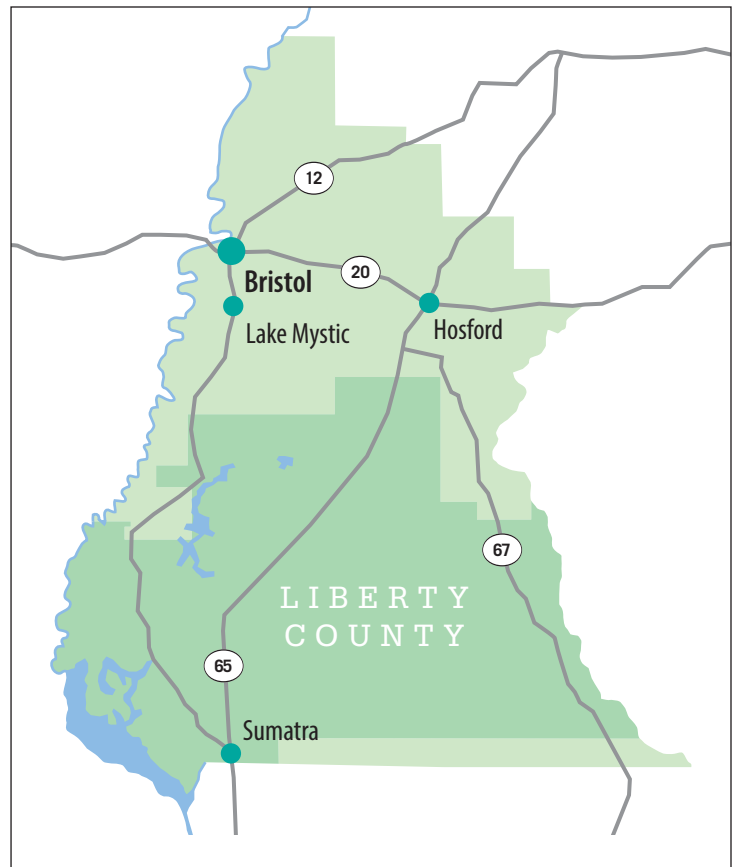
## Like Nowhere Else

1845 was a banner year for Levy County. Florida became the nation's 27th state on March 3, 1845, and exactly one week later, on March 10, Levy became its 27th county, named for David Levy, an influential landowner and Florida's first elected member of Congress. Now fast forward 16 years. David Levy, who has changed his last name to Yulee for reasons unknown, is now president of the Florida Railroad connecting Fernandina on the east coast of Florida to Cedar Key on the west. It is March 1, 1861, the first train has arrived in Cedar Key and a sense of optimism is in the air that, unfortunately, does not last. The Civil War broke out six weeks later and what should have been a boom became a bust. When hostilities ended, Cedar Key bounced back, repairing the rails torn up during the war and welcoming to town two manufacturers of pencils made from the surrounding red cedar trees that gave this town its name. But then came a double whammy – Henry Plant's railroad to Tampa which began service in 1886 drew cargo away from Cedar Key, and a devastating hurricane in 1896 wiped out the cedar trees, leveled the pencil factories and killed more than 100 people. Cedar Key would survive, but never regain its former prominence. Today, it's a lovely little town, a slice of old Florida and a tourist attraction for its quaint shops and charter fishing fleet. Cedar Key is reinventing its economy too, as a hotbed for aquaculture. In recent years, it has become one of the nation's top producers of farm-raised clams, with an estimated 150 million hauled from the Gulf of Mexico each year. And the chowder made from these clams at Tony's Seafood Restaurant has put Cedar Key on the map again by being named to the Knorr Great Chowder Cook-Off's hall of fame after earning top honors in the Newport, Rhode Island, competition for three consecutive years.

# Liberty County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	8,457
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	836
<b>Population density:</b>	10 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$28,314
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 63/41 July 91/71
<b>County seat:</b>	Bristol
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Bristol (pop. 970) Hosford (pop. 799) Lake Mystic (pop. 336) Sumatra (pop. 148)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Not very many people. At 836 square miles, Liberty is Florida's 23rd largest county, but with only 8,457 residents, also its smallest by population. So while most of Florida's most populous counties have around 1,500 persons per square mile, Liberty has just 10.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator/ Clerk of the court:</b>	Kathleen E. Brown
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Dewayne Branch District 2 – Dexter Barber District 3 – Jim Johnson District 4 – Doyle Brown District 5 – Scott Phillips
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Marie G. Goodman
<b>School superintendent:</b>	David H. Summers

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	2,643
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Lumber and forestry; manufacturing
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	C. W. Roberts Contracting; Georgia Pacific; Rex Lumber; Apalachee Pole
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	8%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Liberty County School District</b> 1 elementary and junior high school 1 combined-grade level school (K-8) 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Chipola College</b> Main campus: 3094 Indian Circle, Marianna

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Liberty County; nearest options include: Calhoun-Liberty Hospital, Blountstown – 25 beds Capital Regional Medical Center, Tallahassee – 266 beds Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	SR 20 – west to Blountstown, Crystal Lake and Freeport; east to Tallahassee SR 12 – from Bristol, northeast to I-10, Quincy and the Georgia state line; south to Apalachicola National Forest, Orange and Wilma SR 65 – north to Gretna (Gadsden County); south to Green Point (Franklin County) SR 67 – from Telogia, south to Carrabelle
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** The Gregory House, an antebellum mansion (circa 1849), restored and moved from its original site just across the Apalachicola River to Torreya State Park; Veterans Memorial Park with its main attraction, the narrow gauge Veterans Memorial Railroad, operating diesel and steam locomotives recovered from amusement parks elsewhere in Florida; rides offered the second Saturday of every month, March through October

**Notable events:** Veterans Memorial Railroad becomes a “Ghost Train” for Halloween (October) and the “Polar Bear Express” (late November through December)

**Natural wonders:** Apalachicola and Ochlockonee rivers; Apalachicola National Forest (occupies half of Liberty County); Torreya State Park (look for the park’s namesake, the Torreya tree, which is native only to the 20-mile surrounding area); Mud Swamp/New River Wilderness: two wilderness areas in one. Mud Swamp has no trails, no old roads and no people, but lots of biting insects (especially in summer), black bears and alligators; hiking can be perilous. The New River is more inviting with its combination of Atlantic white cedar, cypress and gum trees; primitive camping available.

**Sports and recreation:** Swimming and camping at Camel Lake Recreation Area within Apalachicola National Forest with three trails for hiking nearby: Florida National Scenic Trail, the Trail of Lakes and the Camel Lake Interpretive Trail; canoeing on the New River, but beware – the twisting waterway with numerous channels is too challenging for novices; fishing for redbreast sunfish (red-bellies) in the Ochlocknee River

## Like Nowhere Else

Liberty County is a modern-day slice of old Florida, sparsely populated and lush with vast areas of undeveloped forest, rivers and lakes. Some might think of it as paradise; one Baptist preacher believed it really was. After several years of intense study and nosing around the Apalachicola River valley in northern Florida, a former schoolteacher-turned-lawyer-turned-Baptist-minister named Elvy E. Callaway announced that he had found the true location of the Garden of Eden: Liberty County, Florida. Callaway claimed that not only had Adam and Eve once roamed the woods just outside what is present-day Bristol, but that Noah had built his Ark there too. As proof, he cited Genesis 2:10, which speaks of a river flowing from Eden, then separating into four heads. The Apalachicola splits into four streams so, reasoned Callaway, it must be the river referenced in Genesis. God’s instructions in Genesis 6 specify an Ark to be constructed of gopher wood, and Noah would have found that here too. Gopher wood is another name for the rare Torreya tree, which grows only within a very small, well-defined area in these woods. Callaway’s conclusions were never widely accepted, but they did make sense to some and, for a brief time in the 1950s and ‘60s, devotees flocked to Bristol to see the supposed Garden of Eden for themselves; directional signs were erected and there was talk of developing an actual tourist attraction here. It never happened and the signs are all gone now. But if you’d like to see this Garden of Eden, ask around and someone will point you in the general vicinity. Just watch out for snakes and be careful not to eat any fruit you pick.

# Madison County

## Key facts

Population:	18,529
Land size (square miles):	696
Population density:	27 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$31,504
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 64/38 July 91/71
County seat:	Madison
Largest cities/towns:	Madison (pop. 2,807) Greenville (pop. 798) Lee (pop. 352)

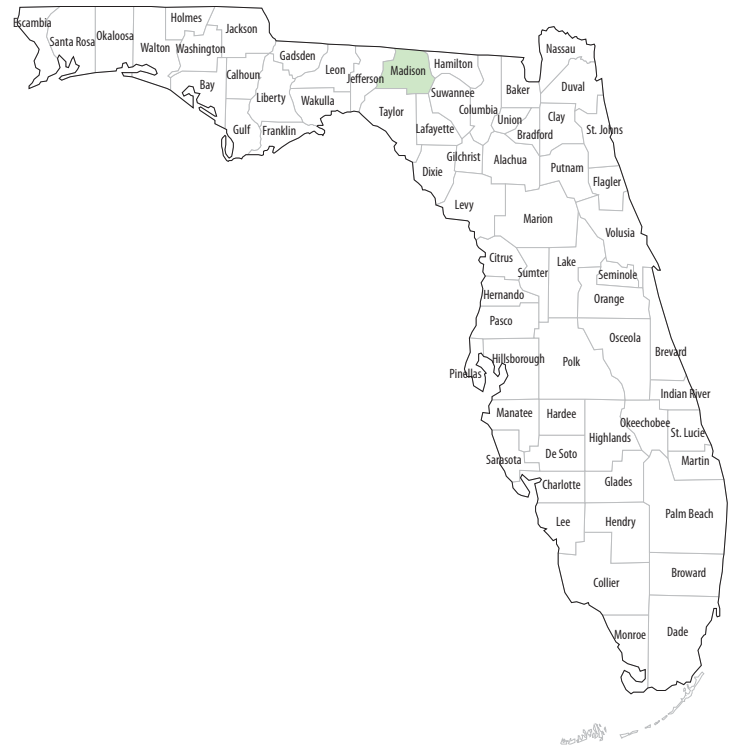
**Who lives here:** Friendly, down-home folks who thrive on small-town life. This particular Madison County isn't the one Robert James Waller wrote about in his novel *The Bridges of Madison County*, but it could be. Madison County, Florida is quintessential small-town America with a whole lot of Southern charm. People who come here for a visit often come back to live; it's just that appealing.

## Names to know

County coordinator:	Brian Kauffman
County commissioners:	District 1 – Alston Kelley District 2 – Donnie Waldrep District 3 – Ronnie Moore District 4 – Alfred Martin District 5 – Rick Davis
Tax collector:	Lisa Tuten
School superintendent:	Karen Pickles

## Business

Labor force:	7,348
Primary industries:	Timber and forestry; transportation and logistics; manufacturing; health care services
Notable private employers:	Nestle Waters North America; Johnson and Johnson (fuel delivery); Genesis Timber; Madison County Memorial Hospital
Sales tax rate:	7.5%





## Education

- Public school system:** **Madison County District School Board**  
 3 elementary schools  
 2 high schools  
 1 combined-grade level school (K-8)  
 1 alternative education center
- Public/private universities:** **Saint Leo University**  
 Madison Education Center: 126 SW Sumatra Ave., Suite A, Madison
- State colleges:** **North Florida Community College**  
 Main campus: 325 NW Turner Davis Drive, Madison

## Health Care

- Acute care hospitals:** Madison County Memorial Hospital, Madison – 25 beds

## Transportation

- Major highways:** I-10 – west to Tallahassee, Pensacola and New Orleans; east to Live Oak, Lake City and Jacksonville  
 US 90 – west to Monticello; southeast to Live Oak and Lake City  
 US 221 – north to Valdosta, Georgia; south to Perry  
 SR 53 – north to Georgia state line; south to Suwannee County

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Treasures of Madison County Museum; Four Freedoms Monument; Madison's oldest home, the Livingston House, circa 1836, and other impressive structures in the downtown historic district; (walking tours available); Madison Blue Spring State Park; Ladell Brothers Outdoor Environmental Center at North Florida Community College; childhood home of R&B legend Ray Charles in Greenville

**Notable events:** Down Home Days Festival (April); Annual Hickory Grove Founder's Day Celebration (October); Fancy Flea Vintage Home and Garden Market (November); Light Up Madison (December); Greenville Country Christmas (December)

**Natural wonders:** Cherry Lake; three rivers – Aucilla, Withlacoochee and Suwannee; a first magnitude spring (at Madison Blue Spring State Park); Twin Rivers State Forest

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing, canoeing, swimming, cave diving; horseback riding; birding at Ladell Brothers Outdoor Environmental Center, recently named a Great Florida Birding Trail site; hiking and biking along the 11.65-mile Four Freedoms Trail

## Like Nowhere Else

It's no accident – or any indication of laziness on the part of the founders, for that matter – that this county and its county seat share the same name; they just didn't take it from the same source. Madison County was named in honor of our nation's fourth President, James Madison, when it was chartered as Florida's largest county in 1827. The county seat, also dubbed "Madison," took its name from Madison C. Livingston who donated the first parcel of land to create the city in Madison County on May 2, 1838. Livingston Street, located on the north side of the city in what is today Madison's historic district bears his name to this day. Madison County, however, is no longer Florida's largest, having "surrendered" significant portions of land over the years to create the adjacent counties of Taylor, Lafayette and Dixie. Another famous son is Captain Colin P. Kelly Jr., first national hero of World War II. On December 10, 1941, Kelly's B-17 Flying Fortress successfully struck the Japanese cruiser Ashigara, but came under fire on its return to Clark Field in the Philippines. Captain Kelly held his plane in the air until all surviving members of his crew could parachute to safety; he, however, was unable to escape and perished. The Four Freedoms Monument in Madison's city park was commissioned by President Roosevelt and dedicated to Captain Kelly's memory.

# Manatee County

## Key facts

Population:	394,855
Land size (square miles):	743
Population density:	531 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$46,929
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/52 July 91/75
County seat:	Bradenton
Largest cities/towns:	Bradenton (pop. 56,508) Palmetto (pop. 13,661) Longboat Key* (pop. 7,292) Holmes Beach (pop. 4,261) Anna Maria (pop. 1,725)

\* Longboat Key straddles the line between two Florida counties: Manatee and Sarasota

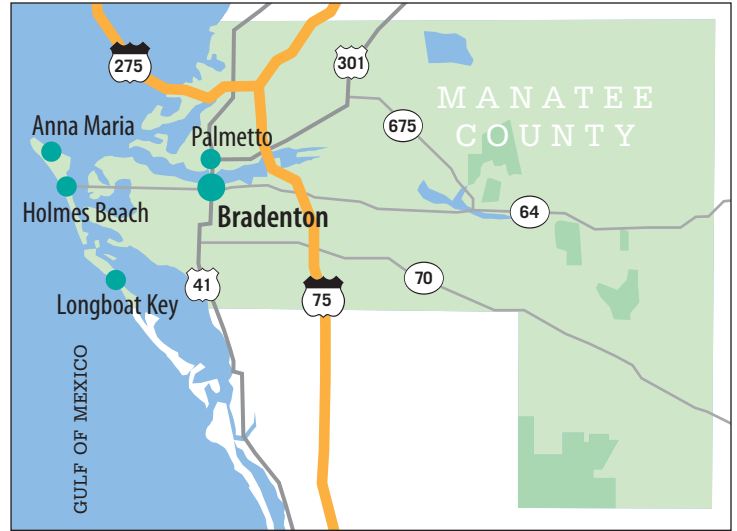
**Who lives here:** People who enjoy the best of all worlds. Manatee County residents are ideally positioned to partake of every advantage Gulf Coast Florida has to offer: big-city amenities just across the bay in Tampa and St. Pete; arts and culture down the road in Sarasota; sandy beaches and small-town camaraderie right here at home.

## Names to know

County administrator:	Cheri Coryea
County commissioners:	District 1 – Priscilla Trace District 2 – Reggie Bellamy District 3 – Stephen R. Jonsson District 4 – Misty Servia District 5 – Vanesca Baugh At Large – Carol Whitmore At Large – Betsy Benac
Tax collector:	Ken Burton Jr.
School superintendent:	Cynthia Saunders

## Business

Labor force:	177,777
Primary industries:	Manufacturing; logistics and distribution; health care; business services
Notable private employers:	Bealls; Manatee Memorial Hospital; Tropicana Products; Blake Medical Center; IMG Academy; Feld Entertainment; TriNet; SYSCO West Coast Florida; Pierce Manufacturing; Air Products
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>School District of Manatee County</b> 32 elementary schools 8 middle schools 7 high schools 1 combined-grade level school (K-8) 3 alternative schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee</b> Main campus: 8350 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota</b> Bradenton Campus: 5840 26th Street W., Bradenton

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Blake Medical Center, Bradenton – 383 beds Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, Bradenton – 120 beds Manatee Memorial Hospital, Bradenton – 295 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (shared with Sarasota County – the airport terminal is in Sarasota County, the runway in Manatee)
<b>Seaports:</b>	Port Manatee
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Tampa, Gainesville, Lake City and Valdosta, Georgia; south to Sarasota, Fort Myers and Naples I-275 – north across the Sunshine Skyway Bridge to St. Petersburg and Tampa US 41 – north to Palmetto, Ruskin and Tampa; south to Sarasota, North Port, Punta Gorda and Fort Myers SR 64 – west to Holmes Beach; east to Myakka Head, Zolfo Springs and Avon Park SR 70 – southeast to Arcadia, then east to Okeechobee and Fort Pierce CR 675 – north from SR 70 to Parris and US 301

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Bradenton: Riverwalk (on the waterfront downtown); Village of the Arts (galleries, shops and artists at work; guided “artwalks” on the first Friday night and Saturday afternoon of every month) Bishop Museum of Science and Nature (said to be the largest cultural history museum on Florida’s Gulf coast; includes the Bishop Planetarium and the Parker Manatee Rehabilitation Habitat), Family Heritage House Museum, Manatee Historical Village; Gamble Plantation Historic State Park in Ellenton (former sugar plantation and sole surviving antebellum house in south Florida, where Confederate Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin is believed to have hidden after the fall of the Confederacy until his safe passage to England could be secured); Hunsader Farms (farm market, petting zoo and U-pick fields); Madira Bikel Mound State Archaeological Site (Native American artifacts dating back 2,000 years

discovered here); Colonel Hermann’s Royal Lipizzan Ranch, Myakka City (training dates: December 15-April); Lake Manatee, Myakka River and Terra Ceia Preserve state parks; Skyway Fishing Pier State Park; DeSoto National Memorial, west of Bradenton along the Manatee River, commemorating the first major European exploration of what is now the southeastern U.S.

**Notable events:** Manatee County Fair, Palmetto (January); Gamble Plantation Arts & Crafts Festival, Ellenton (February); Cortez Commercial Fishing Festival, celebrating Florida’s commercial fishing industry (February); Art at the Ranch Festival, Lakewood Ranch (February); Mixon Fruit Farms’ Orange Blossom Festival, Bradenton (March); Gulf Coast Rhythm and Rib Fest, Palmetto (April); Anna Maria Island Springfest, juried festival of fine arts and crafts (April); Florida Heritage Festival & Riverfest, Bradenton (April); Food and Wine on Pine, culinary specialties along historic Pine Avenue on Anna Maria Island (May); Indiafest of Manasota, raising awareness and appreciation of Indian culture, dance, food and merchandise, Palmetto (August); Gulfcoast Rhythm & Ribs Festival (October); Terra Ceia Island Arts and Crafts Show (October); Rocky Bottom Bluegrass Festival, Linger Lodge, Bradenton (November); Mixon Fruit Farms’ Harvest Festival, Bradenton (November); Cortez Stone Crab Festival (November); Festival of the Skeletons, Village of the Arts in Bradenton (November); Anna Maria Island Winterfest of Fine Arts & Crafts (December); Bradenton Blues Festival at the Riverwalk (December)

**Natural wonders:** Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve; Robinson, Perico, Emerson Point, Rye and Duette Preserves; Manatee, Little Manatee and Myakka rivers; Lake Manatee State Recreation Area

**Sports and recreation:** MLB spring training February-March for the Pittsburgh Pirates at McKechnie Field in Bradenton; Minor League baseball action throughout the summer from the Bradenton Marauders at McKechnie Field; swimming, boating and canoeing at Lake Manatee; kayaking at Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve; fishing for snook, snapper, cobia, sea bass and more from a portion of what used to be the original Skyway Bridge at Skyway Fishing Pier State Park; world-class training programs in soccer, basketball, football, baseball, track and field, tennis and golf for young athletes at IMG Academy; Anna Maria Island and Longboat Key for seaside water sports, shelling and just hanging out

## Like Nowhere Else

It’s only fitting that a county called “Manatee” would have its own mascot – a real-live manatee – named Snooty who became famous for simply being alive so long. Born on July 21, 1948, at the old Miami Aquarium, “Baby Snoots” came to Bradenton for the DeSoto Celebration in March 1949 and just never left – until he died, on July 23, 2017. For 68 years, Snooty lived in his own 60,000-gallon tank at the South Florida Museum, consuming 70-80 pounds of raw veggies daily and simply delighting museum visitors young and old alike. Tragically, just a day after celebrating his 69th birthday at the annual “Snooty Birthday Bash and Wildlife Awareness Festival,” the “old man” died by drowning in a freak accident. He’s gone now, but most certainly not forgotten. During his lifetime, Snooty greeted some two million visitors in person and a lot of them have taken the time to share their memories of this gentle giant for an online memorial page the museum created. And although there will be no more birthday parties for Snooty, his legacy will continue at his former home – renamed the Bishop Museum of Science and Nature – through its public education programs at the Parker Manatee Rehabilitation Habitat, where sick and injured manatees are brought for rehabilitation and, if all goes well, return to the wild.

# Marion County

## Key facts

Population:	359,977
Land size (square miles):	1,585
Population density:	227 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$37,516
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/45 July 93/71
County seat:	Ocala
Largest cities/towns:	Ocala (pop. 59,110) Bellevue (pop. 4,963) Dunnellon (pop. 1,798) Reddick (pop. 538) McIntosh (pop. 477)

**Who lives here:** Opportunity seekers and growing businesses. Ocala is a hotbed for job growth according to Moody Analytics, which compiles a biennial list of the nation's top 10 cities expected to add a significant number of jobs over the next two years. In 2017, Ocala snagged the No. 8 position with a projected growth of 2.5% and became the only city in Florida to earn a spot on this list for five years in a row.



## Names to know

County administrator:	Mounir Bouyounes
County commissioners:	District 1 – David Moore District 2 – Kathy Bryant District 3 – Jeff Gold District 4 – Carl Zalak III District 5 – Michelle Stone
Tax collector:	George Albright
School superintendent:	Heidi Maier

## Business

Labor force:	135,745
Primary industries:	Logistics and distribution; health care; business services; manufacturing
Notable private employers:	AdventHealth Ocala; Ocala Health; AT&T; Sitel; E-ONE; Lockheed Martin; Cheney Brothers; FedEx Ground
Sales tax rate:	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Marion County Public Schools</b> 30 elementary schools 9 middle schools 7 high schools 1 combined-grade level school (K-8) 7 alternative schools/programs 4 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Barry University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences</b> Ocala/Gainesville: 1500 SW 1st Avenue, 2nd Floor, Ocala  <b>Saint Leo University</b> Ocala Education Center: 1930 SW 38th Avenue, Ocala  <b>University of Central Florida</b> UCF Ocala: 3001 SW College Road, Ocala
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>College of Central Florida</b> Appleton Museum of Art: 4333 E. Silver Springs Blvd., Ocala Ocala campus: 3001 SW College Road, Ocala Vintage Farm Campus, 4002 SE Third Avenue, Ocala

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	AdventHealth Ocala, Ocala – 425 beds Ocala Regional Medical Center, Ocala – 222 beds West Marion Community Hospital, Ocala – 138 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Ocala International Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Gainesville, Lake City and Valdosta, Georgia; south to Tampa, Sarasota and Fort Myers US 41 – north through Dunnellon to Williston and Newberry; south to Inverness and Brooksville US 27 – northwest to Williston and Chiefland; southeast to The Villages, Leesburg and Clermont US 301 – north to Hawthorne and Starke; south to Bushnell and Dade City US 441 – northwest to Micanopy, Alachua and High Springs; southeast to Wildwood, Leesburg and Tavares SR 40 – west through Dunnellon to Yankeetown; east through Silver Springs and the Ocala National Forest to Barberville and Daytona Beach SR 200 – north to Citra and Hawthorne; southwest to Hernando

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Ocala's downtown square and historic district; Appleton Museum of Art; Florida Carriage Museum at the Grand Oaks Resort; The Discovery Center in Tusawilla Park, offering exhibits and educational programs related to science and technology; Rainbow Springs State Park; Silver Springs State Park (the first glass-bottom boat tour was offered here in 1878, making this place Florida's oldest tourist attraction); Silver River Museum and Environmental Education Center at Silver Springs State Park; Don Garlits Museum of Drag Racing and International Drag Racing Hall of Fame

**Notable events:** Southeastern Youth Fair, Ocala (February); Southeastern Pro Rodeo, Ocala (March); Boomtown Days, an homage to Dunnellon's roots and the discovery of phosphate (April); Ocala Shrine Rodeo (August); Downtown Ocala Carnival (September); Ocala Arts Festival (October); 1890s Festival, McIntosh (October); Cowboy & Christmas Festival, Ocala (December)

**Natural wonders:** Ocala National Forest (about 1/3 of Marion County); Ross Prairie State Forest; Rainbow Springs; Silver Springs, the world's largest artesian spring system (by water flow); three lakes within Marion County – Orange Lake near the Alachua County border, Lake Kerr near the town of Salt Springs and the Putnam County border and Lake Weir, largest of the three near the Lake County border; a portion of Lake George, Florida's second largest lake; Withlacoochee River

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking, biking, paddling and equine trails at numerous locations throughout the county; swimming, snorkeling, canoeing, kayaking and tubing at Rainbow River State Park; horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking and glass bottom boat tours at Silver Springs State Park; two city-operated public 18-hole golf courses; facilities and activities for all ages at city and county parks

## Like Nowhere Else

If asked to name the county in America with the most horses, it's a good bet that the majority of people would first pull out a map of Kentucky and start looking for a name associated with Louisville or Lexington. And they'd be wrong. Marion County, Florida, leads all U.S. counties in total number of horses and ponies in residence. Which is why, in 1999, the U.S. Department of Agriculture gave its approval to Marion's use of the promotional label, "Horse Capital of the World." With close to 600 farms, breeding and training facilities spread across 700,000 acres and some 20,000 people employed in the Thoroughbred industry alone, the horse business is big business in Marion. People in the equine industry have long known about Ocala's influence, of course. But it took a singular event in 2015 to make the rest of the world stand up and take notice. American Pharoah, racing's first Triple Crown winner in 37 years, was broken in Marion County, where, coincidentally, the previous winner – Affirmed in 1978 – had also been broken. So look out Kentucky, there's a definite pattern here.

# Martin County

## Key facts

Population:	160,912
Land size (square miles):	543
Population density:	296 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$77,258
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 74/55 July 90/74
County seat:	Stuart
Largest cities/towns:	Stuart (pop. 16,543) Sewall's Point (pop. 2,193) Jupiter Island (pop. 908) Ocean Breeze (pop. 377)

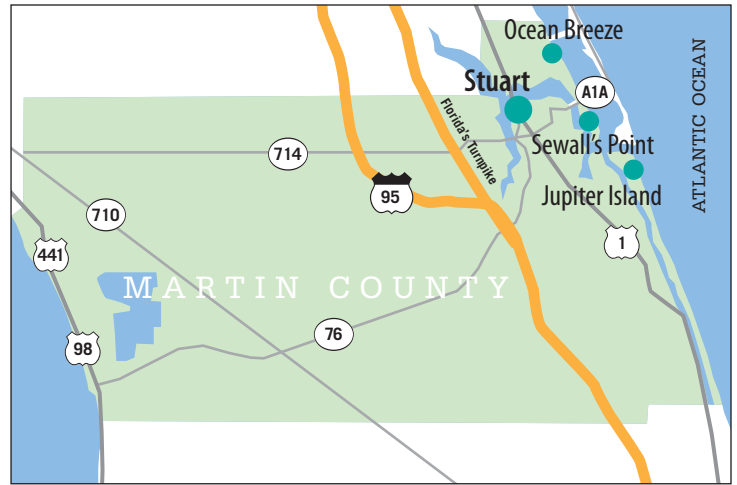
**Who lives here:** People and companies seeking streamlined access to both Florida coasts. As the eastern terminus of the Okeechobee Waterway, which stretches across the Florida peninsula between Stuart and Fort Myers, Martin is the state's only east coast county offering direct water access to both the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

## Names to know

County administrator:	Taryn Kryzda
County commissioners:	District 1 – Doug Smith District 2 – Stacey Hetherington District 3 – Harold Jenkins District 4 – Sarah Heard District 5 – Edward V. Ciampi
Tax collector:	Ruth Pietruszewski
School superintendent:	Laurie J. Gaylord

## Business

Labor force:	74,159
Primary industries:	Manufacturing; logistics and distribution; business services; health care
Notable private employers:	Martin Health Systems; Paradigm Precision; Triumph Aerostructures-Vought Aircraft Division; Liberator Medical Supply; Armellini Express Lines
Sales tax rate:	6.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Martin County School System</b> 12 elementary schools 5 middle schools 3 high schools 4 alternative/special schools 3 charter schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Indian River State College</b> Chastain Campus: 2400 SE Salerno Road, Stuart Indiantown Education Center, 15655 SW Osceola Street, Indiantown

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Martin Hospital South, Stuart – 100 beds Martin Medical Center, Stuart – 244 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Intracoastal waterway</b>	The Okeechobee Waterway is a man-made waterway bisecting the Florida peninsula from Stuart on the east coast to Fort Myers on the west coast through Lake Okeechobee and incorporating the Caloosahatchee River and St. Lucie Canal, to facilitate the movement of goods and people between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-95 – north to Fort Pierce, Melbourne, Daytona Beach and Jacksonville; south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami Florida's Turnpike – northwest to Fort Pierce, Yeehaw Junction and Orlando; south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami US 1 – from Stuart: north to Fort Pierce, St Lucie, Vero Beach and Sebastian; south to Tequesta, Jupiter, Juno Beach US 98 – north along the eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee from Port Mayaca to Okeechobee, then northwest to Highlands County; south (with US 441) along eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee through Pahokee, then east to Loxahatchee and West Palm Beach US 441 – north along the eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee through Okeechobee and Osceola counties; south (with US 98) along eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee through Pahokee, then east to Loxahatchee and West Palm Beach SR 76 – from Stuart: south west to Indiantown and Port Mayaca at Lake Okeechobee SR 710 – northwest through Indiantown to Cypress Quarters and US 441N; southeast to I-95 and West Palm Beach SR 714 – from Stuart: west to Florida's Turnpike, I-95 and SR 710 SR A1A – from Sewall's Point: north to Jensen Beach; south to Hobe Sound and Jupiter Island

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Stuart: Lyric Theatre (restored to 1920s glory), "Confusion Corner," where 8 streets come together at a single intersection, Stuart Heritage Museum, housed in the old Stuart Feed Store (admission is free), charter fishing (Stuart is known as the "Sailfish Capital of the World"); historic downtown Jensen Beach, once known as the "Pineapple Capital of the World" (stick around on Thursday nights for "Jammin' Jensen" – food, music and art along downtown streets); on Hutchinson Island: Children's Museum of the Treasure Coast, Florida Oceanographic Coastal Center (aquarium, touch tanks, nature trails and educational exhibits about marine life); Elliott Museum (honoring prolific inventor, civil rights champion and social activist Sterling Elliott with exhibits of his inventions, 80+ vintage cars and baseball memorabilia), House of Refuge Museum at Gilbert's Bar (artifacts of local history inside Martin County's oldest home, circa 1876) and FPL's Energy Encounter (adjacent to the Florida Power & Light St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant and featuring interactive exhibits related to nuclear power); four state parks: Jonathan

Dickinson (former site of a top-secret radar training school during WWII, now home to 13 natural habitat communities, ranger-guided tours of a 1930s pioneer homestead once owned by Trapper Nelson, aka "Wildman of the Loxahatchee," and the Elsa Kimbell Environmental Education and Research Center), Savannas Preserve (largest remaining remnant of Florida's east coast savannas, shared with St. Lucie County; guided walks and canoe trips by reservation), Seabranche Preserve (four miles of trails through four different natural habitats), St. Lucie Inlet Preserve (preserving one of the few undeveloped barrier islands remaining on Florida's east coast; accessible by boat only)

**Notable events:** Port Salerno Seafood Festival (January); Martin County Nautical Flea Market and Boat Sale, Stuart (January); Jensen Beach Fine Art & Craft Show (January); Downtown Stuart ArtsFest (February); Hobe Sound Festival of the Arts (February); Martin County Fair and Youth Livestock Show, Stuart (February); Treasure Coast Italian Fest, Stuart (March); Downtown Stuart Craft Fair (April); "Classics at the Beach," annual car show at Elliott Museum on Hutchinson Island (April); Stuart Sailfish Regatta,

hydroplanes and powerboats at speeds of up to 170mph (May); Southeast Bunfest, learn bunny basics at Florida's only festival devoted to rabbit and guinea pig owners, in Palm City (May); FPL Turtle Walks on the beach, originating at FPL's Energy Encounter on Hutchinson Island, reservations required (Friday and Saturday nights, June-July); Dancin' in the Streets, when the sun goes down, the lights come on and the dancers come out in downtown Stuart (August); Bahamian Festival, Port Salerno (September/October); Downtown Stuart Craft Festival (October); Stuart Seafood Festival (November)

**Natural wonders:** Stuart Beach and Jensen Sea Turtle Beach on the mainland, plus the beaches of Hutchinson Island, the southern 1/3 of which belongs to Martin County; Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge on Jupiter Island; Allapattah Flats Wildlife Management Area; DuPuis Management Area (shared with Palm Beach County); Indian River Lagoon; Savannas, Seabranche and St. Lucie Inlet preserves; Blowing Rocks Preserve; Loxahatchee, Indian and St. Lucie rivers; Lake Okeechobee

**Sports and recreation:** Beach tours on horseback at Frederick Douglass Memorial Park, Hutchinson Island; snorkeling at Bathtub Reef on Hutchinson Island; canoeing and kayaking (the kayak trail at St. Lucie Inlet Preserve is a particular favorite, but only at high tide; it is impassable at low tide); freshwater river fishing; offshore deep sea fishing (Stuart has been dubbed "Sailfish Capital of the World" for good reason); in the Allapattah Flats WMA, hiking, biking, horseback riding, hunting and wildlife viewing; ample opportunities for golf, tennis and shuffleboard throughout the county; county-owned Sailfish Splash Waterpark features a lazy river, two four-story water slides and a 7,300-sq.-ft water playground.

## Like Nowhere Else

Among the seven counties bordering the Atlantic Ocean in southeast Florida, Martin could easily be written off as the least impressive. It has no mega-tourist attractions and no corporate headquarters of any great size; the population of its largest city – Stuart – is nowhere close to even hitting the 20,000 mark. And yet, there is a good deal to like about this place – so much, in fact, that Martin County might well be described as Florida's best-kept coastal secret. A good deal of this county's appeal has to do with its natural attributes. Martin borders Lake Okeechobee to the west and its beaches on Hutchinson Island to the east are among the state's prettiest and least commercialized. Close to 26,000 acres here are protected as state parks; another 20,945 belong to the Allapattah Flats Wildlife Management Area and 1,091 to the Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge. If you want to see "real natural Florida" without driving to either the Everglades or the Panhandle, this is the place. At Blowing Rocks Preserve in Hobe Sound, for example, waves crashing against limestone can force geysers as high as 50 feet into the air, making this piece of Atlantic coastline look more like Hawaii than Florida. And while you're in the neighborhood, take time to stop at Jonathan Dickinson State Park for a quick trek to the top of Florida's only mountain. The observation tower atop "Mount Hobe" – the highest natural hill in Florida south of Lake Okeechobee – offers a sweeping view of the Atlantic Ocean and the inland flatwoods leading to the Loxahatchee River.

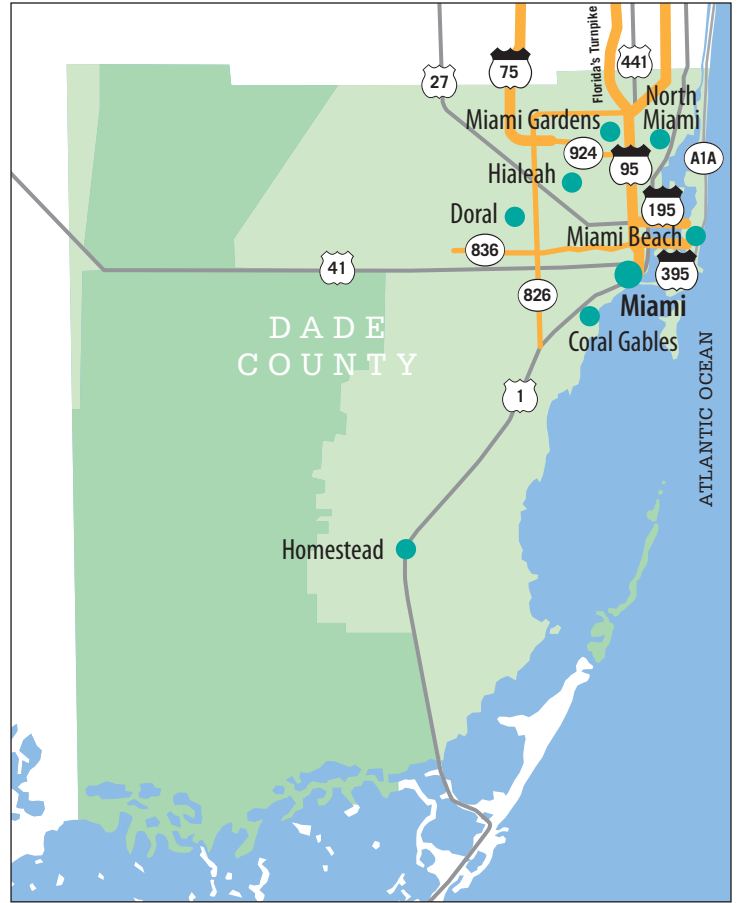


# Miami-Dade County

## Key facts

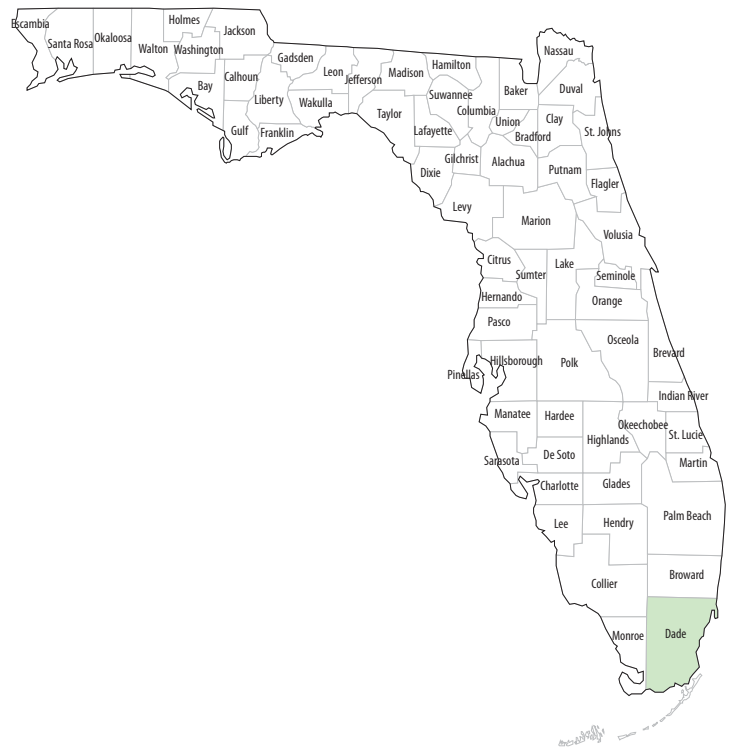
<b>Population:</b>	2,761,581
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,898
<b>Population density:</b>	1,455 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$47,667
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 76/60 July 91/77
<b>County seat:</b>	Miami
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Miami (pop. 463,347) Hialeah (pop. 239,673) Miami Gardens (pop. 113,750) Miami Beach (pop. 92,307) Homestead (pop. 69,907) North Miami (pop. 62,225) Doral (pop. 61,130) Coral Gables (pop. 51,095)

**Who lives here:** A growing and culturally diverse population. With more than 2.7 million residents, Miami-Dade is Florida's most populous county. Close to 60% of the residents here are foreign-born compared to 20% statewide, and among Florida's largest cities, Miami has the highest percentage of Hispanics (72%) compared to the lowest, Jacksonville, with 9.1%.



## Names to know

<b>County mayor:</b>	Carlos A. Gimenez
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Barbara J. Jordan District 2 – Jean M. Monestine District 3 – Audrey Edmonson District 4 – Sally A. Heyman District 5 – Eileen Higgins District 6 – Rebecca Sosa District 7 – Xavier L. Suarez District 8 – Daniella Levine Cava District 9 – Dennis C. Moss District 10 – Javier D. Souto District 11 – Joe A. Martinez District 12 – Jose “Pepe” Diaz District 13 – Esteban Bovo Jr
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Marcus Saiz de la Mora
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Alberto M. Carvalho



## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	1,383,302
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Health care; banking and finance; tourism/hospitality; aviation; logistics and distribution
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Baptist Health South Florida; University of Miami; American Airlines; Carnival Cruise Lines; Mount Sinai Medical Center; Royal Caribbean International/Celebrity Cruises; Bank of America Merrill Lynch; Wells Fargo; LATAM Airline/Lan Cargo; Federal Express; Ryder Integrated Logistics
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Miami-Dade Public Schools</b>            167 elementary schools            50 middle schools            53 K-8 centers            62 high schools            9 alternative schools            134 charter schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Barry University</b>            Main campus: 11300 NE 2nd Avenue, Miami Shores</p> <p><b>Barry University, Adrian Dominican School of Education</b>            Main campus: 11300 NE 2nd Ave., Miami Shores            Kendall: 8900 SW 107th Ave., Suite 205, Kendall</p> <p><b>Barry University, School of Professional and Career Education</b>            Main campus: 11415 NE 2nd Ave., Miami Shores            Kendall: Capital Plaza II, 8900 SW 107th Avenue, Suite 205, Kendall            South Miami-Dade: Clock Tower Shopping Center, 18958 South Dixie Highway, Cutler Bay</p> <p><b>Barry University, School of Podiatric Medicine</b>            Miami: 320 NW 115th Street, Miami</p> <p><b>Barry University, The Ellen Whiteside McDonnell School of Social Work</b>            Miami Shores: 11300 NE 2nd Avenue, Miami Shores            Kendall: Capital Plaza II, 8900 SW 107th Ave., Suite 205, Kendall            South Miami-Dade: Clock Tower Shopping Center, 18958 S. Dixie Highway, Cutler Bay</p> <p><b>Everglades University</b>            Miami Branch Campus: 11731 Mills Drive, Miami</p> <p><b>Florida International University</b>            Modesto A. Maidique (main) Campus: 11200 SW 8th Street, Miami            Biscayne Bay: 3000 NE 151st Street, North Miami            The Engineering Center: 10555 West Flagler Street, Miami            FIU Downtown on Brickell: 1101 Brickell Avenue, Miami            The Wolfsonian-FIU: 1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach            Miami Beach Urban Studios (FIU College of Architecture and The Arts): 420 Lincoln Road, Suite 440, Miami Beach</p> <p><b>Florida Memorial University</b>            Main campus: 15800 NW 42nd Avenue, Miami Gardens</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b>            Miami: 2101 NW 117th Avenue, Miami</p> <p><b>Nova Southeastern University</b>            Miami Campus: 8585 SW 124th Avenue, Miami            North Miami Beach Campus: 1750 NE 167th Street, North Miami Beach</p> <p><b>St. Thomas University</b>            Main campus: 16401 NW 37th Avenue, Miami Gardens</p>

**University of Miami**

Main campus: 1320 South Dixie Highway, Coral Gables  
 Miller School of Medicine: 1600 NW 10th Avenue, #1140, Miami  
 Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science: 4600 Rickenbacker Causeway, Miami

**State colleges:**

**Miami Dade College**

InterAmerican Campus: 627 SW 27th Avenue, Miami (Little Havana)  
 Kendall Campus: 11011 SW 104th Street, Miami  
 Medical Campus: 950 NW 20th Street, Miami  
 North Campus: 11380 NW 27th Avenue, Miami  
 West Campus: 3800 NW 115th Avenue, Doral  
 Wolfson Campus: 300 NE Second Avenue, Miami  
 Hialeah Campus: 1780 West 49th Street, Hialeah  
 Homestead Campus: 500 College Terrace, Homestead  
 Carrie P. Meek Entrepreneurial Education Center, 6300 NW Seventh Avenue, Miami

**Health Care**

**Acute care hospitals:**

Aventura Hospital and Medical Center, Aventura – 407 beds  
 Coral Gables Hospital, Coral Gables – 245 beds  
 Doctors Hospital, Coral Gables – 281 beds  
 Hialeah Hospital, Hialeah – 378 beds  
 Larkin Community Hospital Palm Springs Campus, Hialeah – 247 beds  
 Palmetto General Hospital, Hialeah – 368 beds  
 Homestead Hospital, Homestead – 142 beds  
 Baptist Hospital of Miami, Miami – 728 beds  
 Jackson Memorial Hospital, Miami – 1,254 beds  
 Jackson South Medical Center, Miami – 250 beds  
 Kendall Regional Medical Center, Miami – 417 beds  
 Mercy Hospital, Miami – 488 beds  
 North Shore Medical Center, Miami – 337 beds  
 South Miami Hospital, Miami – 436 beds  
 UHMC – UHealth Tower, Miami – 560 beds  
 UHMC – Bascom Palmer Institute, Miami – 100 beds  
 UHMC – Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, Miami – 40 beds  
 West Kendall Baptist Hospital, Miami – 133 beds  
 Westchester General Hospital, Miami – 125 beds  
 Mount Sinai Medical Center, Miami Beach – 672 beds  
 Jackson North Medical Center, North Miami Beach – 382 beds  
 Larkin Community Hospital, South Miami – 146 beds

**Children’s hospitals:**

Holtz Children’s Hospital at UM-Jackson Memorial Medical Center, Miami – 254 beds  
 Nicklaus Children’s Hospital, Miami – 309 beds

**State/federal hospitals:**

Miami VA Healthcare System, Miami – 372 beds

**Transportation**

**Commercial airports:**

Miami International Airport

**Seaports:**

PortMiami

**Passenger rail:**

Amtrak: Silver Service from Miami  
 North to New York and Washington DC through West Palm Beach, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston  
 Tri-Rail: the commuter rail line linking Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties  
 All Aboard Florida: the passenger rail service between Miami and Orlando that is currently under construction;  
 Miami is one of four stops along its path  
 Virgin Trains USA: High-speed rail service between Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach; service to Orlando is slated to begin in 2022

**Major highways:**

I-75 – north to Weston and I-595 toward Fort Lauderdale; west to Naples (Alligator Alley), then north to Fort Myers and Tampa  
 I-95 – north to Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Melbourne and Jacksonville  
 I-195 – east to mid-Miami Beach via the Julia Tuttle Causeway  
 I-395 – east to south Miami Beach via the MacArthur Causeway  
 Florida's Turnpike – north to Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and Fort Pierce; south to Florida City  
 US 1 – north through Miami to North Miami, Aventura and Fort Lauderdale; south to Coconut Grove, Kendall, Florida City and the Florida Keys  
 US 27 – northwest from Miami International Airport to Hialeah and Florida's Turnpike, then north through the Everglades toward Broward County  
 US 41 – west from Miami to Coral Gables and through the Everglades (Tamiami Trail) to Naples  
 US 441 – north from Miami to Opa-Locka, Hollywood and Margate  
 SR A1A – north from Miami Beach to Bal Harbour, Sunny Isles Beach and Hallandale Beach  
 SR 826 – west from SR A1A to Miami Lakes, then south to Hialeah, Miami Springs and Kendall  
 SR 836 – west from I-95 to Florida's Turnpike and the Everglades  
 SR 924 – west from I-95 to SR 826 and I-75 north

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Miami: Eighth Street (aka Calle Ocho, the main thoroughfare in Little Havana), Jungle Island (pose with a parrot!), Zoo Miami, Miami Seaquarium, Monkey Jungle, Miami Children's Museum, Patricia and Philip Frost Museum of Science, Pérez Art Museum Miami, Charles Deering Estate; in Miami Beach: The Holocaust Memorial, art deco architecture along Ocean Drive, Lincoln Road and Bal Harbour shopping districts; in Coral Gables: Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, the Venetian Pool, Lowe Art Museum, Miami Biltmore Hotel; in Coconut Grove: Vizcaya Museum & Gardens, The Barnacle Historic State Park; on Key Biscayne: Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park (historic lighthouse and one of "America's Best Beaches" according to Dr. Beach); in North Miami Beach: Oleta River State Park; in Homestead: Coral Castle; Historic Downtown Homestead; Homestead-Miami Speedway, NASCAR racetrack; two national parks: Everglades and Key Biscayne; Miccosukee Indian Village

**Notable events:** International Chocolate Festival, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Coral Gables (January); Beaux Arts Festival, Coral Gables (January); Art Deco Weekend, Miami Beach (January); Homestead Championship Rodeo (January); Eco Fair, Historic Downtown Homestead (February); Coconut Grove Arts Festival (February); Everglades Bluegrass Festival, North Miami Beach (February); Miami International Boat Show, Miami Marine Stadium Park & Basin, Miami (February); Miami River Seafood and Music Festival, Miami (March); Carnival Miami, culminating in Calle Ocho, Miami's Little Havana neighborhood (March); Bacardi Miami Sailing Week, teams of sailors from around the world compete for the Bacardi Cup, Coconut Grove (March); Miami-Dade County Youth Fair and Exposition, Miami (March/April); Miami Beach Gay Pride (April); Redlands Blues & Barbecue Festival, Homestead (April); Miami International Jazz Fest, multiple venues (May); Redland Summer Fruit Festival, Homestead (June); International Mango Fest, Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Coral Gables (July); IFÉ-ILÉ Afro-Cuban Dance & Music Festival, Miami (August); International Ballet Festival of Miami, best works of more than 20 artists from around the world at multiple venues throughout Miami-Dade (September); Miami Broward Carnival, two counties combine to throw an amazing party celebrating Caribbean culture, Miami (October); South Beach Seafood Festival, Miami Beach (October); Caribe Arts Fest, Miami (October); Miami Book Fair International (November); South Miami Art Festival (November); NASCAR's Ford Championship Weekend, Homestead (November); Miami Art Week and Art Basel, multiple locations in Miami Beach and Miami; (December); Miccosukee Indian Arts Festival at Miccosukee Indian Village, Miami (December)

**Natural wonders:** Biscayne National Park; Everglades National Park; Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area; Aerojet Wildlife Management Area; Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve; R. Hardy Matheson County, Owaissa Bauer Hammock, Castellow Hammock and Miami-Dade County Line Scrub preserves; Rangel's Shorebird Sanctuary; Oleta, Miami and North rivers; 20.8 miles of sandy beaches

**Sports and recreation:** Name your spectator sport, Miami-Dade probably has it – MLB, Miami Marlins at Marlins Park; NBA, Miami Heat at AmericanAirlines Arena; NFL, Miami Dolphins at Hard Rock Stadium; tennis, Miami Open, The Tennis Center at Crandon Park; college sports, University of Miami Hurricanes, Florida International University Panthers, Florida Memorial University Lions, Miami Dade College Sharks, St. Thomas University Bobcats; NASCAR racing at Homestead-Miami Speedway – on Ford Championship Weekend in November, all three of NASCAR's premier racing series crowns (Sprint Cup, Nationwide and Camping World Trucks) are decided here; swimming, diving, snorkeling, canoeing, kayaking, hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, birding and wildlife viewing at various sites throughout the county

## Like Nowhere Else

Miami-Dade County comprises small doses of pretty much everything Florida has to offer all across the peninsula, from big-city amenities and small-town charm to ethnic culture and wilderness experiences. In fact, Miami might well be the only city in America where you can purchase alligator shoes in the morning, then go looking for the actual animal in the wild that same afternoon – and never cross a county line. In a single day, a Miamian could easily stop by Little Havana for a "café con leche" and a Cuban cigar to get the day started, move on to shopping for designer togs, visiting a national park, feeding a flamingo, sipping a cocktail on the beach at sunset and tucking into a five-course gourmet dinner, only to cap the day off by attending a pro basketball game or ballet that night. Miami seems to have it all, but, in truth, lacks one thing – a very long history. While much smaller Florida cities like Pensacola and St. Augustine trace their roots to the 1500s, Miami remained a largely uninhabited swamp for many, many years. It was not until local landowner Julia Tuttle convinced Henry Flagler to extend his Florida East Coast Railway further down the Atlantic coast in 1896 that Miami was officially incorporated as a city: population just over 300. But oh my, how it has grown by leaps and bounds ever since. Miami-Dade is today Florida's largest county by population; more than half of its residents are foreign-born and 77% of them speak a language other than English at home. And like most every fast-growing urban area in the U.S., Miami is crowded and often difficult to negotiate by car at rush hour. But this city also has one distinct and quite refreshing feature: Greater Miami is the only metropolitan area in the U.S. whose borders encompass two national parks: Everglades and Biscayne. Think about that the next time traffic slows to a crawl in front of you on I-95.

# Monroe County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	75,027
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	983
<b>Population density:</b>	76 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$81,211
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 74/64 July 89/80
<b>County seat:</b>	Key West
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Key West (pop. 25,208) Marathon (pop. 8,877) Islamorada (pop. 6,544) Key Colony Beach (pop. 832) Layton (pop. 193)

**Who lives here:** People who work as hard as they play. Life in the Florida Keys may look like one endless vacation, but the truth is that pretty much everyone here has at least one job; many have two or three, most of which are aligned with the county's primary industry, tourism/hospitality. Not surprisingly, Monroe County has the second highest per capita income among all 67 Florida counties and the lowest unemployment rate – just 2.6% in 2018.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Roman Gastesi
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Danny Kolhage District 2 – Michelle Coldiron District 3 – Heather Carruthers District 4 – David Rice District 5 – Sylvia Murphy
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Danise D. Henriquez
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Mark T. Porter

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	45,307
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Tourism/hospitality; retail trade; transportation and trade
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Historic Tours of America; Little Palm Island Resort & Spa; Hawk's Cay Resort; Casa Marina Waldorf Astoria; Lower Keys Medical Center
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Monroe County School District</b> 3 elementary schools 3 high schools 6 combined-grade level schools (K-8) 4 charter schools 3 alternative education centers
<b>Public/private universities</b>	<b>Saint Leo University</b> Key West Education Center: Naval Air Station, A-718 Essex Circle, Key West
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida Keys Community College</b> Main campus: 5901 College Road, Key West Middle Keys Center: 900 Sombrero Beach Road, Marathon Upper Keys Center: 89901 US Highway 1, Tavernier

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Lower Keys Medical Center, Key West – 118 beds Fishermen’s Community Hospital, Marathon – 25 beds Mariners Hospital, Tavernier – 25 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Florida Keys Marathon International Airport Key West International Airport
<b>Seaports:</b>	Port of Key West
<b>Major highways:</b>	US 1/SR5 – southwest from the Florida mainland to mile marker 0 in Key West; northeast from Key West to Florida City, Cutler Bay, Kendall and Miami CR 905 (Card Sound Road) – an alternate (toll) route north, then west from Key Largo to Florida City

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Key West: Duval Street and Old Town for shopping/browsing by day, bar-hopping/live music by night with Sloppy Joe’s, The Bull and Whistle, Hog’s Breath, Margaritaville and Schooners Wharf among classic hangouts; Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum (look for the six-toed cats); Audubon House and Tropical Gardens; Little White House Museum; Mel Fisher Maritime Museum; Key West Aquarium (“your favorite seafoods – alive!”); San Carlos Institute; City Cemetery (victims of the 1898 USS Maine explosion in Havana Harbor are buried here; also look for a grave with the famous epitaph, “I Told You I Was Sick”); Southernmost Point marker; for an overview of area attractions and a quick history lesson, take a Conch Train tour before venturing out on foot

**Elsewhere in the Keys:** Fort Jefferson at Dry Tortugas National Park; Turtle Hospital, Marathon, where injured sea turtles are rehabilitated and returned to the sea (90-minute tours offered several times daily; reservations highly recommended); Dolphin Research Center, Grassy Key (opportunities for hands-on contact with marine mammals available for additional cost); John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park for snorkeling, diving and glass bottom boat tours; other state parks: Bahia Honda, Curry Hammock, Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock; Fort Zachary Taylor; Indian Key Historic Site; Lignumvitae Key, Long Key, San Pedro Underwater Archaeological Preserve; Windley Key

**Notable events:** Quantum Key West Sailing Regatta, Key West (January); Uncorked: The Key Largo and Islamorada Food & Wine Festival (January); Marathon Seafood Festival (March); Florida Keys Island Fest, Islamorada (March/April); Conch Republic Independence Celebration (April); Key West Songwriters Festival (May); Key Lime Festival, Key West (July); Underwater Music Festival, Looe Key Reef (July); Hemingway Days, Key West, with a “Running of the Bulls” (they’re on wheels), a 3-day marlin tournament and the famous “Hemingway Look-Alike Contest” at Sloppy Joe’s (July); “Anything that Floats” Regatta Race, Key Largo (August); Key West Lobsterfest (August); Key West WomanFest (September); Fantasy Fest (two weeks of adult-themed, costumed reveling just preceding Halloween and culminating in a massive Saturday night parade/party on the streets of Key West (October); Annual Key West World Championship Racers, the Indy 500 of powerboat racing (November); Key West New Year’s Eve, choices for ringing in the new year: Pirate Wench Drop, Conch Shell Drop or Drag Queen in a Giant Red High-Heel Shoe Drop at midnight (December)

**Natural wonders:** Incredible sunsets – celebrated nightly at Mallory Square in downtown Key West; same view, much quieter at Fort Zachary Taylor State Park (admission charge, but ticket is good all day; swim and snorkel in the morning, then return for sunset); Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (encompasses the western hemisphere’s only coral reef, a natural aquarium that must be seen to be believed); Dry Tortugas National Park; Everglades National Park (shared with Miami-Dade and Collier counties); Big Cypress National Preserve (shared with Collier County); Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge; National Key Deer Refuge; Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge; Key West National Wildlife Refuge; Lignumvitae Key; San Pedro Underwater Archaeological Preserve

**Sports and recreation:** Swimming and snorkeling just offshore at Bahia Honda State Park on Big Pine Key (rated No. 1 by Dr. Beach) and Fort Zachary Taylor State Park in Key West; offshore excursions for deep-sea fishing and snorkeling/scuba diving at the reef; key deer sighting on No Name and Big Pine Keys (about the size of a large dog, key deer are a subspecies of white-tailed deer believed to have migrated from the mainland centuries ago and become trapped here as sea levels rose); kayaking, windsurfing and parasailing at Bahia Honda and Smathers Beach in Key West; day-long excursion to Dry Tortugas National Park, 70 miles west of Key West and accessible only by boat or seaplane (overnight primitive camping permitted, limited to 10 campers per day; you must carry everything, including a tent, in and out)

## Like Nowhere Else

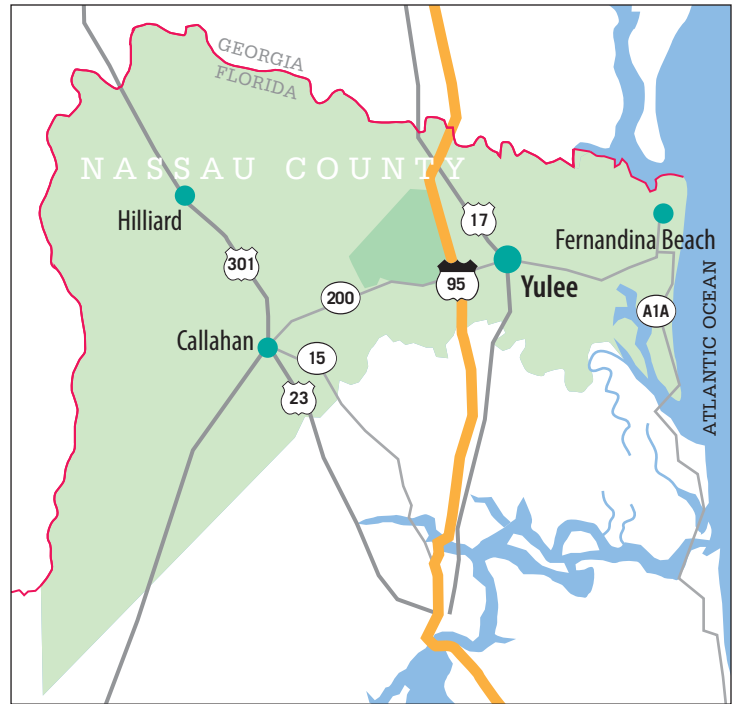
Key West, Florida, the southernmost city in the continental U.S., where sunsets are celebrated daily, six-toed cats are revered and the temperature has never dipped below 41°F, might easily be the quirkiest town in America. Separated from the Florida mainland by 125 miles of mostly two-lane highway and 42 bridges, Key West is an entity unto itself, and the residents of this city – indeed, of this entire island chain – consider themselves to be just a little outside the Florida mainstream. So it is not surprising that on April 23, 1982, they made their separation “official” by seceding from the union and forming an independent nation – the Conch Republic. Their reason? Economics, pure and simple. A few days earlier, the U.S. Border Patrol had begun stopping every car coming out of the Florida Keys in search of illegal aliens and the resulting 17-mile backup had put a damper on the Keys’ most lucrative industry — tourism. The locals were having none of that, thank you very much, and so a group of citizens headed by then-Key West Mayor Dennis Wardlow declared “war.” Their weapon of choice was a loaf of stale Cuban bread, which they broke over the head of a man dressed in a U.S. Navy uniform; a minute later, they surrendered to the Admiral in charge of the real U.S. Navy base at Key West and demanded foreign aid. It was all in fun and to make a point, of course, but to this day, some die-hard secessionists still fly the flag of the Conch Republic on their houses and shops and commemorate the event each April with a Conch Republic Festival, where flags are available for purchase, along with t-shirts bearing the brief nation’s motto “We seceded where others failed!” and official Conch Republic passports.

# Nassau County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	85,832
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	649
<b>Population density:</b>	132 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$52,801
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit)
	January 63/44
	July 91/75
<b>County seat:</b>	Fernandina Beach
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Fernandina Beach (pop. 12,244)
	Yulee (pop. 12,292)
	Hilliard (pop. 3,166)
	Callahan (pop. 1,342)

**Who lives here:** A steady stream of over-achievers. Nassau County public schools are consistently ranked among Florida's best for academic performance. In 2017-18, Nassau was among just 25% of districts statewide to receive an overall "A" grade; it was Nassau's 7th such designation in nine years. And equally impressive: a graduation rate of just under 93% for the same period.

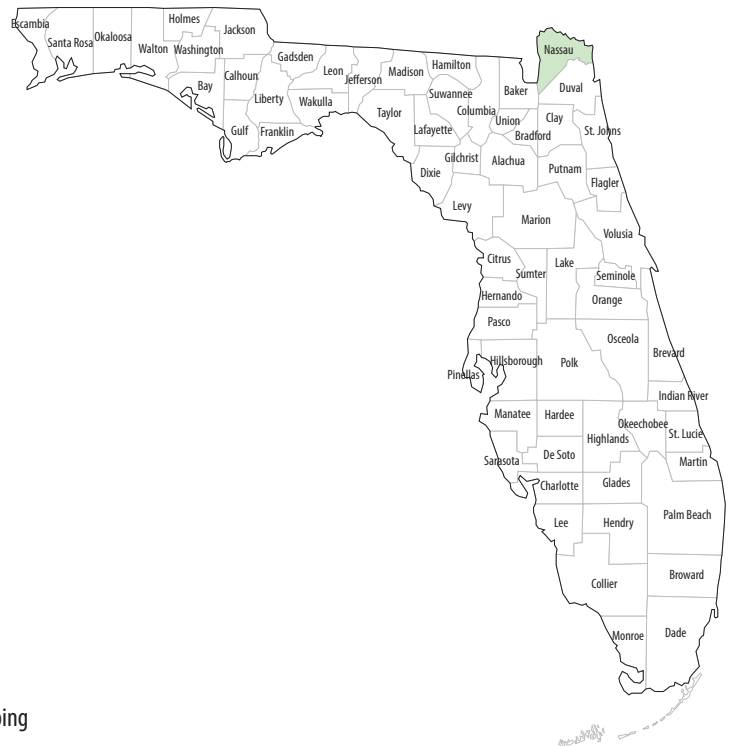


## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Michael Mullin
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Daniel B. Leeper District 2 – Aaron C. Bell District 3 – Pat Edwards District 4 – Thomas R. Ford District 5 – Justin M. Taylor
<b>Tax collector:</b>	John M. Drew
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Kathy Burns

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	39,910
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Manufacturing; health care; tourism/hospitality; shrimping
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Rayonier Advanced Materials; WestRock; River Valley Paper Company; Baptist Medical Center Nassau; Omni Amelia Island Plantation; The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%





## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Nassau County School District</b> 7 elementary schools 3 middle schools 3 high schools 1 primary school (K-2) 1 intermediate school (3-5) 1 combined-grade level school (6-12)
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida State College at Jacksonville</b> Nassau Center: 76346 William Burgess, Blvd., Yulee

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Baptist Medical Center Nassau, Fernandina Beach – 62 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Seaports:</b>	Port of Fernandina
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-95 – north to Savannah, Richmond, Philadelphia and New York; south to Jacksonville, Daytona Beach, Melbourne and Miami US 301 – north to the Georgia state line; south to Starke and Ocala US 1/US 23 – north to Folkston and Waycross, Georgia; south to Jacksonville US 17 – north to the Georgia state line and Brunswick, Georgia; south to Green Cove Springs, Palatka and DeLand SR 200 – west through Callahan to Baldwin; east to I-95 SR A1A – east to Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach SR 15 – south from Callahan to Jacksonville

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic downtown Fernandina Beach (400+ historic homes, churches and commercial buildings, including the 1903 Palace Saloon, still serving and rumored to be the oldest bar in Florida); Amelia Island Museum of History, Florida's only "spoken-history" museum (housed in the old Nassau County jailhouse); West Nassau Museum of History housed in the historic Callahan Train Depot and celebrating the role of the railroad in west Nassau's growth (the same east-west railroad that put Cedar Key on the map); Fort Clinch State Park (three miles of ocean shoreline, hiking and biking trails and, at the fort itself, costumed reenactors portray daily military life from 1864); Amelia Island State Park

**Notable events:** Amelia Island/Fernandina Restaurant Week, an annual opportunity to sample the fare at award-winning restaurants for significantly reduced prices (January); Concours d'Elegance classic car show, four days of exhibits, sales and events devoted to luxury auto brands, including Bentley, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati and more, Amelia Island (mid-March); Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival, Fernandina Beach (April); Annual Great Southern Tailgate Classic, a combination BBQ and tailgating bonanza in which teams are judged not just on their food but also beverage choices, décor and team spirit, Fernandina Beach (August); Northeast Florida Fair,

Callahan (October); Petanque American Open – this is the largest petanque (pronounced "pay-tonk") tourney in the U.S. with a total prize purse of \$10,000; opposing teams try to throw steel balls as close as possible to a small wooden target – yikes! (November); Holiday Cookie Tour of Inns in Fernandina Beach, with six stops, each featuring a signature cookie and a take-home recipe card (December); Fernandina Beach New Year's Eve Celebration – New York drops a crystal ball at midnight and Key West a drag queen in an oversized shoe, but in Fernandina, it's an LED-lit shrimp to honor the city's long-time connection with the shrimping trade

**Natural wonders:** White Oak Conservation; Four Creeks State Forest and Wildlife Management Area; Ralph E. Simmons Wildlife Management Area; Amelia Island (touristy Fernandina Beach occupies the northern end, but on the southern tip, a state park protects more than 200 acres of unspoiled wilderness); St. Mary's River

**Sports and recreation:** Plenty of water-based activities, including diving, snorkeling, deep-sea fishing, dolphin watching and parasailing; biking and hiking at Fort Clinch State Park; horseback riding and guided tours on the beach at Amelia Island State Park (reservations a must); beachcombing for fossilized sharks' teeth and seashells along Amelia's 13-mile shoreline; birding (Ralph E. Simmons State Forest is part of the Great Florida Birding Trail); golf, golf and more golf – 117 holes in all, many set right along the Atlantic Ocean

## Like Nowhere Else

To look at the tiny shops lining Centre Street in Fernandina Beach and the carefully-groomed resorts nearby is to believe that Amelia Island has always been a playground for the well-heeled. Not so. Shrimping was once this city's primary industry and it is still celebrated here today. Old-timers have been heard to say that Amelia Island invented the shrimp. Not quite, but a fisherman named Billy Corkum down from Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1913 did invent a better way to catch them. Corkum's invention – the "Otter Trawl" net which is still in use today – streamlined the process of catching shrimp and helped put Amelia Island on the map. And while Fernandina's shrimp fleet is largely gone now, the shrimp themselves are not forgotten. Each year in April, the folks here pull out all the stops for the "Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival," a combination three-day feeding frenzy of fresh-from-the-boat shrimp served in a multitude of ways and commemoration of the eight flags that have flown over Fernandina in the five centuries since its founding – French, Spanish, British, Patriot Republic of Florida, Green Cross of Florida, Mexican, Confederate and U.S. (that's three more than Pensacola claims, by the way). On Saturdays in August, a company called Amelia River Cruises offers two-hour "Shrimping Eco Tours" in which participants get to try their hands at actual shrimping by deploying and retrieving an Otter Trawl; any shrimp they catch are released back into the wild. And on December 31, to mark the end of the old year, Fernandina drops – you guessed it – a lighted shrimp.

# Okaloosa County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	207,269	
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	930	
<b>Population density:</b>	223 per square mile	
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$49,402	
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central	
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 62/37 July 92/70	
<b>County seat:</b>	Crestview	
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Crestview	(pop. 23,856)
	Fort Walton Beach	(pop. 21,895)
	Niceville	(pop. 15,249)
	Destin	(pop. 13,765)
	Valparaiso	(pop. 4,946)
	Mary Esther	(pop. 4,291)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	A significant military population: 14,100 personnel at Eglin Air Force Base, just southwest of Valparaiso; 9,700 personnel at Hurlburt Field, just west of Eglin near Mary Esther; as many as 40,000 military veterans throughout the county.	

## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	John Hofstad
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Graham Fountain District 2 – Carolyn Ketchel District 3 – Nathan Boyles District 4 – Trey Goodwin District 5 – Kelly Windes
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Ben Anderson
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Marcus Chambers

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	96,269
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Aviation/defense; manufacturing; tourism/hospitality
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	The Boeing Company; Lockheed Martin; InDyne; L-3 Crestview Aerospace; DRS Technologies; Fort Walton Machining; American Elite Molding; G.S. Gelato; The Henderson (hotel and resort)
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	6.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Okaloosa County School District</b> 19 elementary schools 8 middle schools 6 high schools 7 combined-grade level schools (K-8, K-12, 3-8) 4 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>University of West Florida</b> UWF Emerald Coast: 1170 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Fort Walton Beach
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Northwest Florida State College</b> Main campus: 100 College Blvd., Niceville Fort Walton Beach Campus: 1170 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Fort Walton Beach Robert L. Sikes Education Center: 805 East Highway 90, Crestview Hurlburt Field Center: Education Services Building #90220, 221 Lukasik Avenue, Hurlburt Field

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	North Okaloosa Medical Center, Crestview – 110 beds Fort Walton Beach Medical Center, Fort Walton Beach – 237 beds Twin Cities Hospital, Niceville – 65 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Destin-Fort Walton Beach Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans; east to Tallahassee and Jacksonville US 98 – west to Pensacola; east to Panama City US 90 – west to Milton and Pensacola; east to DeFuniak Springs and Cottondale SR 85 – north to Laurel Hill and the Alabama State line; south to Destin SR 20 – east to Freeport, Blountstown and Tallahassee

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** City of Fort Walton Beach Heritage Park and Cultural Center; Gulfarium Marine Adventure Park; Air Force Armament Museum; Emerald Coast Wildlife Refuge Zoological Park; Henderson Beach State Park; Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park; Fort Walton Mound archaeological site; Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida

**Notable events:** Destin Mardi Gras celebration (February); Musical Echoes Flute and Art Festival, Fort Walton Beach (April); Billy Bowlegs Pirate Festival, Fort Walton Beach (June); Destin Fishing Rodeo (September); Destin Seafood Festival (September/October); Northwest Florida Tri-County (Okaloosa/Walton/Santa Rosa) Fair (September/October); Boggy Bayou Mullet Festival, Niceville (October – trivia alert: Niceville was called Boggy until an enterprising postmaster changed the name in 1910); Festival of the Arts, Destin (October); Holiday on the Harbor Boat Parade, Destin (December)

**Natural wonders:** 6,000 feet of scenic Gulf shoreline at Henderson Beach State Park; Blackwater River State Forest; Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Recreation Area; Gulf Islands National Seashore; Choctawhatchee National Forest

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking, biking, boating and camping at Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park; deep-sea fishing, parasailing, waterskiing, windsurfing, paddle boarding, boating, diving, snorkeling shelling or simply basking in the sun along the Gulf coast; 1,080 holes available for golf enthusiasts

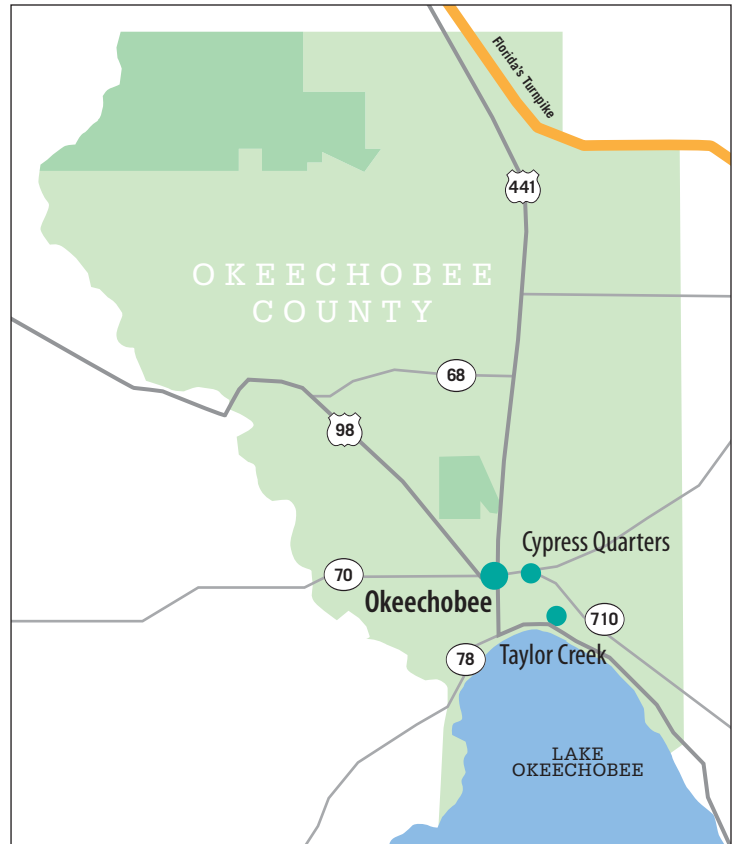
## Like Nowhere Else

A drive along US 98 which hugs the Gulf of Mexico shoreline and its barrier islands from Panama City across Okaloosa County and on to Pensacola is proof for why this section of Florida calls itself “the Emerald Coast.” All that bright white sand against the blue-green Gulf is downright breathtaking. So it’s no wonder that the once sleepy fishing villages of Destin and Fort Walton Beach have morphed into big-time tourist destinations. But just how many tourists come here annually remains a mystery since, unlike theme parks with turnstiles, cities don’t count every person coming in and going out. In Destin, where permanent residents number just under 14,000, city officials estimate that on any given day during peak tourist season, visitors easily swell their population by 25,000+. Even inland Crestview, formerly known as “Florida’s icebox” for its chilly winter temperatures that are among the coldest in Florida, is growing. At 235 feet above sea level, Crestview is one of the highest points in Florida and today boasts a new moniker – “Hub City” – for its position at the convergence of I-10, US 90, State Road 85 and a CSX rail line.

# Okeechobee County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	41,537
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	769
<b>Population density:</b>	54 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$32,707
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 74/52 July 91/72
<b>County seat:</b>	Okeechobee
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Okeechobee (pop. 5,725) Taylor Creek (pop. 3,982) Cypress Quarters (pop. 1,381)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Farmers and cattle ranchers. Okeechobee's primary industry is agribusiness and with 175,000 head of cattle in 2018, this county ranked No. 1 in Florida for cattle production.

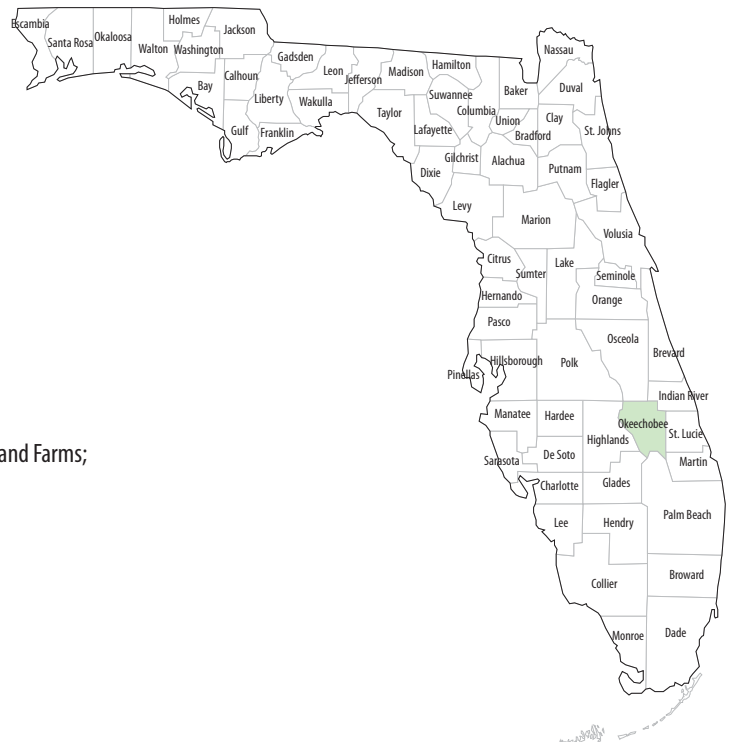


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Robbie Chartier
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – David E. Hazellief District 2 – Bryant H. Culpepper District 3 – Bradley G. Goodbread District 4 – Terry W. Burroughs District 5 – Kelly Owens
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Celeste Watford
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Ken Kenworthy

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	17,697
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Agribusiness; logistics and distribution; manufacturing
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Walpole; Entegra Roof Tile; Raulerson Hospital; Eagle Island Farms; Lykes Brothers; Larson Dairy
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Okeechobee County School District</b> 5 elementary schools 2 middle schools 1 high school (+ 1 freshman campus) 1 alternative school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Indian River State College</b> Dixon Hendry Campus: NW 9th Avenue, Okeechobee

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Raulerson Hospital, Okeechobee – 100 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak Silver Service, from Okeechobee North to: New York and Washington DC through Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston South to: West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami
<b>Major highways:</b>	Florida's Turnpike – northwest to Kissimmee and Orlando; southeast to Fort Pierce and Jupiter US 98 – northwest to DeSoto City, then north with US 27 to Avon Park, Lake Wales and Winter Haven US 441 – north to Yeehaw Junction and Orlando; south with US 98 along the eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee SR 70 – west to Arcadia and Sarasota; northeast to Fort Pierce SR 78 – south along the western shore of Lake Okeechobee to Moore Haven SR 710 – southeast to Indiantown and West Palm Beach CR 68 – east to Fort Pierce

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Lake Okeechobee, obviously since it's the largest freshwater lake in Florida and, at 730 square miles, the second largest contained entirely within the continental U.S. (Two things to note about Lake O: It is just nine feet deep and is actually located in five Florida counties – Glades, Okeechobee, Martin, Palm Beach and Hendry – that all come together at a single point in the center of the lake.); downtown Okeechobee, where historic, 1920s-era buildings include the Freedman-Raulerson House, Okeechobee County Courthouse and First United Methodist Church; Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, a vast grassland once used to train B-17 bomber crews during World War II (today, ranger-led buggy tours are offered November-March); Okeechobee Battlefield State Park, site of a significant Second Seminole War battle fought on Christmas Day 1837

**Notable events:** Main Street Speckled Perch Festival, Okeechobee (March); Okeechobee Music & Arts Festival at Sunshine Grove (March); Okeechobee County Fair (March); "Day of the Cowboy," which includes a cattle drive through downtown Okeechobee (4th Saturday in July); Okeechobee County Cattleman's Ranch Rodeo (July); Okeechobee Cowtown Rodeo (dates vary)

**Natural wonders:** Lake Okeechobee; Kissimmee Prairie Preserve, 54,000 acres of protected wildlife habitat and the largest remaining stretch of Florida dry prairie; Kissimmee River; Lettuce Creek

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking and biking around Lake Okeechobee on the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (part of the Florida National Scenic Trail); hiking, biking and horseback riding on more than 100 miles of dirt roads inside Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park (stick around until after dark, the park's remoteness makes it an ideal spot for stargazing; overnight camping permitted); swimming, boating and freshwater fishing for speckled perch and other indigenous species at Lake Okeechobee

## Like Nowhere Else

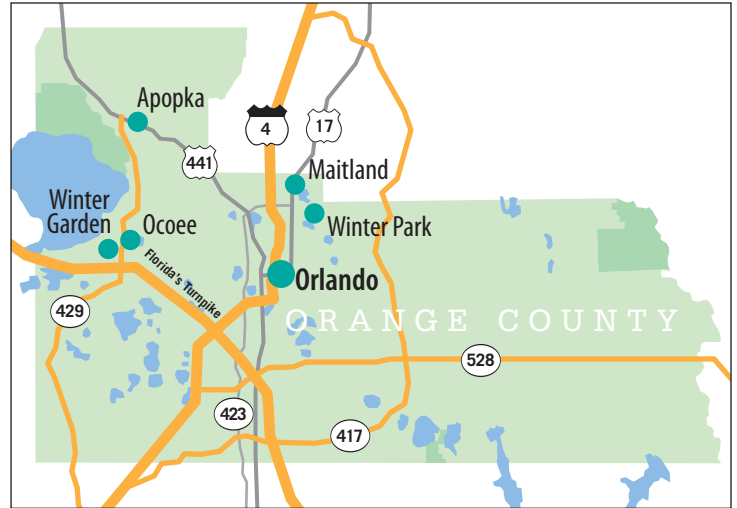
Okeechobee County has the dubious distinction of sharing its name with one of the worst hurricanes ever. The September 1928 Okeechobee hurricane took more than 2,500 lives in Florida, making it the second deadliest tropical cyclone in the history of the U.S., behind only the 1900 Galveston hurricane that claimed at least 6,000 lives. The Okeechobee storm actually made landfall in Palm Beach County, but reserved its greatest devastation for the area around Lake Okeechobee. The storm roared ashore in southern Palm Beach County at about 6 p.m. on Sunday, September 16, 1928, sweeping trees and buildings aside but killing no one at first. Then it headed toward Okeechobee, where the towns laid low and the population consisted mostly of poor, black farm workers who had nowhere to go. The then-four-foot-high earthen levee surrounding Lake Okeechobee proved no match for water pushed 20 feet high by 145 mph winds. Thousands drowned while taking shelter in their attics, running for higher ground or simply clinging to debris and one another. By the time it was over, the official death count stood at 1,836. In 2003, the National Hurricane Center revised that figure upward to 2,500, but with an asterisk; the toll was likely higher but the exact number, they said, will never be known. Most of the victims were migrants from the Caribbean, buried in mass graves or swept into the Everglades whose names remain unknown and whose families simply never heard from them again. A bronze memorial dedicated to the victims has since been erected in Belle Glade and the earthen levee replaced with the 30-foot-high Herbert Hoover Dike to prevent a recurrence; it has yet to be exposed to a storm of this magnitude.

# Orange County

## Key facts

Population:	1,380,975	
Land size (square miles):	903	
Population density:	1,529 per square mile	
Per capita income:	\$42,932	
Time zone:	Eastern	
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit)	
	January	72/50
	July	92/73
County seat:	Orlando	
Largest cities/towns:	Orlando	(pop. 280,257)
	Apopka	(pop. 51,564)
	Ocoee	(pop. 46,402)
	Winter Garden	(pop. 43,536)
	Winter Park	(pop. 30,879)
	Maitland	(pop. 17,554)

**Who lives here:** A growing number of people and jobs. The Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford MSA earned the No. 4 position on *Forbes'* list of America's 25 fastest-growing cities 2018 based on actual growth of population, employment, wages and economic output in 2017 as well as projected growth for 2018.



## Names to know

County mayor:	Jerry L. Demings
County commissioners:	District 1 – Betsy VanderLey District 2 - Christine Moore District 3 - Mayra Uribe District 4 - Maribel Gomez Cordero District 5 – Emily Bonilla District 6 – Victoria P. Siplin
Tax collector:	Scott Randolph
School superintendent:	Barbara M. Jenkins

## Business

Labor force:	750,160
Primary industries:	Tourism/hospitality; health care; aerospace/defense; business and professional services
Notable private employers:	Walt Disney World Resort; Universal Orlando; AdventHealth; Orlando Health; Lockheed Martin; SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment; Westgate Resorts; Darden Restaurants; Siemens; Rosen Hotels & Resorts; Wyndham Destinations
Sales tax rate:	6.5%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Orange County Public Schools</b>        82 elementary schools        25 middle schools        3 combined-grade level schools (K-8)        16 high schools        14 alternative schools        29 charter schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>AdventHealth University</b>        Main campus: 671 Winyah Drive, Orlando</p> <p><b>Barry University, School of Professional and Career Education</b>        South Orlando: 6441 East Colonial Drive, Building C, Room 302, Orlando</p> <p><b>Barry University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences</b>        Orlando: 1415 Sligh Blvd., Orlando</p> <p><b>Barry University, Dwayne O. Andreas School of Law</b>        Orlando: 6441 East Colonial Drive, Orlando</p> <p><b>Everglades University</b>        Orlando Branch Campus: 850 Trafalgar Court, Suite 100, Maitland</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b>        Orlando: 5600 Lake Underhill Road, Orlando</p> <p><b>Nova Southeastern University</b>        Orlando Campus: 4850 Millenia Blvd., Orlando</p> <p><b>Rollins College</b>        Main campus: 1000 Holt Avenue, Winter Park</p> <p><b>University of Central Florida</b>        Main campus: 4000 Central Florida Blvd., Orlando        UCF Downtown campus: 500 W. Livingston Street, Orlando        UCF Health Sciences campus: 6850 Lake Nona Blvd., Orlando        UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management: 9907 Universal Blvd., Orlando        UCF Valencia East: 701 N. Econlockhatchee Trail, Building 1, Suite 265, Orlando        UCF Valencia West: 1800 S. Kirkman Road, Building 1, Room 104, Orlando</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>Valencia College</b>        Downtown Campus: 500 W. Livingston Street, Orlando        East Campus: 701 N. Econlockhatchee Trail, Orlando        Lake Nona Campus: 12350 Narcoossee Road, Orlando        West Campus: 1800 South Kirkman Road, Orlando        Winter Park Campus: 850 Morse Blvd., Winter Park        School of Public Safety, 8600 Valencia College Lane, Orlando        Fire Rescue Training Facility: 2966 W. Oak Ridge Road, Orlando</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	<p>AdventHealth Apopka, Apopka – 120 beds        Health Central Hospital, Ocoee – 211 beds        Dr. P. Phillips Hospital, Orlando – 237 beds        AdventHealth East Orlando, Orlando – 295 beds        AdventHealth Orlando, Orlando – 1,366 beds        Orlando Regional Medical Center, Orlando – 866 beds        Winnie Palmer Hospital for Women &amp; Babies, Orlando – 348 beds        AdventHealth Winter Park, Winter Park – 320 beds</p>
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<b>Children's hospitals:</b>	Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, Orlando – 158 beds AdventHealth for Children, Orlando – 181 beds Nemours Children's Hospital, Orlando – 100 beds
<b>State/federal hospitals:</b>	Orlando VA Medical Center, Orlando – 134 beds

## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Orlando International Airport
<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak: Silver Service from Orlando and Winter Park North to New York and Washington DC through DeLand, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston; south to Okeechobee, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami  SunRail commuter train system: north from Orlando to Winter Park and Maitland in Orange County, through Seminole County and ending at DeBary in Volusia County; south from Orlando to Kissimmee and Poinciana in Osceola County  Virgin Trains USA: High-speed rail service from Orlando to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami currently under construction; service slated to begin in 2022.
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-4 – northeast to Altamonte Springs, Sanford, I-95 and Daytona Beach; southwest to Lakeland, I-75 and Tampa Florida's Turnpike (toll) – northwest to Wildwood and I-75; southeast to Yeehaw Junction, Fort Pierce, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami US 17/US 92 – northeast to Maitland, Lake Mary and Sanford; southwest with US 441 to Sky Lake and Kissimmee US 441 – aka "Orange Blossom Trail" – northwest to Apopka, Mt. Dora, Lady Lake and Ocala; south with US 17/US 92 to Kissimmee SR 417 (toll) – aka "Central Florida Greenway" – from I-4S near Walt Disney World, east and north to Union Park, Oviedo, Lake Mary and I-4N SR 423 – aka "John Young Parkway" – north to Eatonville; south to Kissimmee SR 429 (toll) – aka "Western Expressway" – north to Ocoee and Apopka; south to Walt Disney World and I-4S SR 528 (toll) – aka "Beachline Expressway" – west to I-4N near SeaWorld, east to I-95, Cocoa and Cape Canaveral

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Orange County is theme park central. Entire books have been written on what to see and do here, so we'll just hit the highlights. The big three parks to see are: Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, includes Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park, Disney's Hollywood Studios, Disney Springs (formerly known as Downtown Disney), Epcot, ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex and Magic Kingdom Park; Universal Orlando Resort, includes Universal CityWalk, Universal's Islands of Adventure, Universal's Volcano Bay and Universal Studios Florida; and SeaWorld Parks Orlando, includes Aquatica (water park), Discovery Cove Orlando (close-up animal encounters) and SeaWorld Orlando. Other attractions in and around Orlando include: Gatorland, Holy Land Experience, Orlando Science Center, The Mennello Museum of American Art, Orlando Museum of Art and the "Crayola Experience" at Florida Mall where thousands of crayons and 26 hands-on attractions beckon adults and kids alike to color outside the lines; also worth exploring: International Drive and, in particular, Madame Tussauds Orlando Wax Attraction, SEA LIFE Orlando Aquarium and the 400-foot-tall Orlando Eye, offering an unobstructed view of nearby theme parks, the Orlando skyline and, if the day is clear, Cape Canaveral 55 miles away; Orange County attractions to see outside of Orlando: in Apopka, Kelly Park and Rock Springs Run, Wekiwa Springs State Park; in Maitland: Maitland Historical Museum, Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida, Maitland Art Center, Waterhouse Residence and Carpentry Shop Museums; in Winter Park: The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art (contains a comprehensive collection of works by Louis Comfort Tiffany, including stained-glass windows, leaded-glass lamps, jewelry and numerous blown-glass pieces) and Mead Botanical Garden; and in Christmas, the Fort Christmas Historical Park, featuring a

full-size replica of the original Second Seminole War fort and restored houses depicting central Florida pioneer life from the 1870s-1930s; in Eatonville: Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Art

**Notable events:** Color in Motion 5K, start out wearing white, finish with splashes of vibrant pink, green, yellow, blue, orange, Orlando (January); Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts & Humanities, in Eatonville, the author's hometown (January); Pine Castle Pioneer Days, honoring the gone-but-not-forgotten town of Pine Castle located between Orlando and Kissimmee (February); Orlando Wetlands Festival at Fort Christmas Historical Park (February); Maitland Spring Festival of the Arts (February/March); Winter Park Sidewalk Art Festival (March); Central Florida Fair, Orlando (March); Apopka Fair (March); The Apopka Fair (March); Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival at Walt Disney World Resort, Lake Buena Vista (March-May); Florida Music Festival & Conference, Orlando (April); Apopka Art & Foliage Festival (April); Spring Fiesta in the Park at Lake Enola, downtown Orlando (April); Winter Garden Wine and Craft Beer Festival (April); Central Florida Earth Day, Lake Enola Park, Orlando (April); One Magical Weekend, LGBT festival at Walt Disney World Resort, Lake Buena Vista (June); Polka Dot Flea, vintage street market, Orlando (June); Ho'i kee Hawaii Hula Competition, Festival, Orlando (July); Florida Kids & Family Expo, Orange County Convention Center, Orlando (August); Festival Calle Orange Downtown Orlando, Latin food and music (October); Central Florida Veg Fest, food and fun for committed vegetarians and wannabes, Orlando (October); Ag Fest and Cattle Battle, Fort Christmas Historical Park (October); Fall Fiesta in the Park at Lake Enola, downtown Orlando (November); Festivals of Speed luxury car show, Orlando (November); Cracker Christmas at Fort Christmas Historical Park (December)



**Natural wonders:** Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area; Tibet-Butler Nature Preserve; Hal Scott Regional Preserve and Park; Split Oak Forest (largely undeveloped); more than 50 lakes and ponds of various sizes; St. Johns, Econlockhatchee and Little Econlockhatchee rivers; Rock Springs and Wekiwa Springs

**Sports and recreation:** NBA action by the Orlando Magic at Amway Center in downtown Orlando; MSL Orlando City Soccer Club and the Orlando Pride National Women's Soccer League team at the Orlando City Stadium; United States Tennis Association (USTA) National Campus at Lake Nona in Orlando with more than 100 courts for tournaments and training at all levels, some open to the public; ample opportunities for hiking, biking, boating, kayaking, fishing, horseback riding, birding and wildlife viewing at parks, lakes and rivers across Orange County; tubing and swimming at Rock Springs and Wekiwa Springs

## Like Nowhere Else

In 1963, Orlando was only a moderately interesting town in a moderately uninteresting landscape of citrus groves and cattle ranches, the kind of place you might simply drive past on the way to somewhere else. In 2017, it would become the first U.S. destination to welcome 70 million visitors in a single year. What changed? Walt Disney came to town. Frustrated by the fact that his first theme park in Anaheim, California, was rapidly becoming walled in by overdevelopment, Disney began prospecting for a site on which to build a second park that would both accommodate a Disneyland-sized development and allow plenty of room to grow. He found what he was looking for in the wide open spaces of central Florida. Unofficially, Disney World began to take shape in 1963 as representatives of Walt himself – without ever speaking the name Disney – began purchasing 27,400 acres of property, piece by piece. Officially, Walt Disney World Resort opened in 1971 in Lake Buena Vista with just one park – the Magic Kingdom – two hotels, a campground and a monorail. Today, in keeping with Walt Disney's dream, it is a mega-complex of four theme parks, two water parks and more than 35+ hotels. And it is the centerpiece of a tourist destination that now includes two other mega-theme parks — Universal Orlando Resort and SeaWorld Orlando — and continues to break attendance records. In 2017, 72 million tourists visited Orlando — more than double the number that had visited this central Florida city only two decades before. Disney's Magic Kingdom remains the most visited theme park in America, logging 20.5 million visitors in 2017, compared to Universal Studios Orlando, which drew 10.2 million over the same period.

# Osceola County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	367,990
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,327
<b>Population density:</b>	277 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$33,017
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/47 July 91/73
<b>County seat:</b>	Kissimmee
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Kissimmee (pop. 71,104) Poinciana (pop. 66,465) St. Cloud (pop. 51,282) Buenaventura Lakes (pop. 33,598) Celebration (pop. 8,536) Yeehaw Junction (pop. 316)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	An eclectic and growing population. Osceola is a county on the move. Since 2000, the population here has more than doubled. And it's a younger-than-average crowd, too. The median age in Osceola is just 36.3, compared to the statewide average of 42.

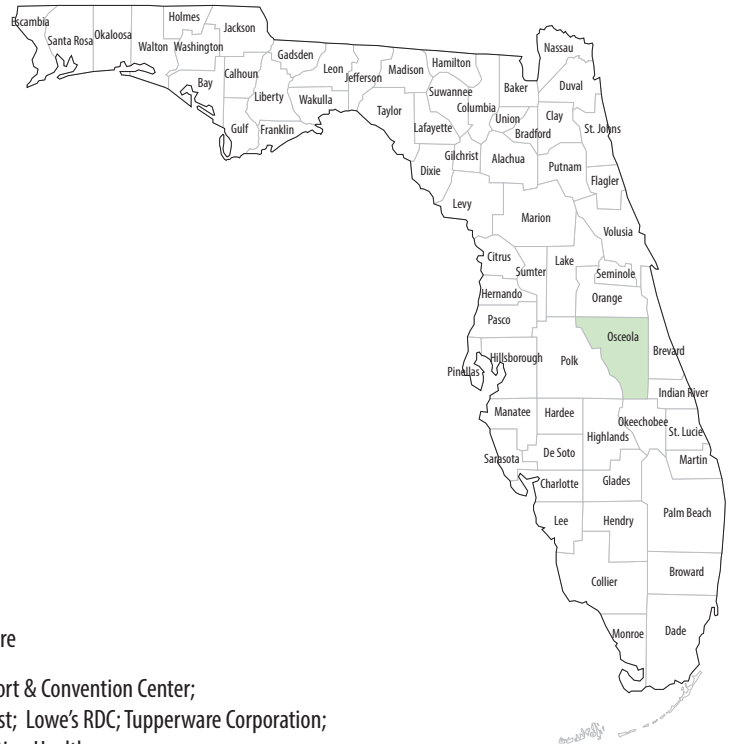


## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Don Fisher
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Peggy Choudhry District 2 – Viviana Janer District 3 – Brandon Arrington District 4 – Cheryl Grieb District 5 – Fred Hawkins Jr.
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Bruce Vickers
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Debra Pace

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	177,919
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Tourism/hospitality; logistics and distribution; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Walt Disney World Corporate Offices; Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center; Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate; McLane Suneast; Lowe's RDC; Tupperware Corporation; Osceola Regional Medical Center; AdventHealth Celebration Health
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>School District of Osceola County</b> 24 elementary schools 9 middle schools 10 high schools 4 combined-grade level schools (K-8, 6-12) 2 alternative schools 24 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Stetson University</b> Center at Celebration: 800 Celebration Avenue, Celebration  <b>University of Central Florida</b> UCF Valencia Osceola: 1800 Denn John Lane, Building 4, Kissimmee
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Valencia College</b> Osceola Campus: 1800 Denn John Lane, Kissimmee Advanced Manufacturing Training Center, 1099 Shady Lane, Kissimmee Poinciana Campus: 3255 Pleasant Hill Road, Kissimmee

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	AdventHealth Celebration, Celebration – 237 beds AdventHealth Kissimmee, Kissimmee – 102 beds Osceola Regional Medical Center, Kissimmee – 404 beds Poinciana Medical Center, Kissimmee – 76 beds St. Cloud Regional Medical Center, St. Cloud – 84 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak: Silver Service from Kissimmee North to New York and Washington DC through Orlando, DeLand, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston; south to Lakeland, Okeechobee, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami  SunRail commuter train system: north from Poinciana and Kissimmee in Osceola County through Orange and Seminole counties ending at DeBary in Volusia County.
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-4 – northeast through Orlando to Longwood, DeBary, Daytona Beach and I-95; southwest to Lakeland, I-75 and Tampa Florida's Turnpike (toll) – north through Orlando to Ocoee, Winter Garden and Wildwood; southeast through Kissimmee to Yeehaw Junction, Fort Pierce and West Palm Beach SR 417 (toll) – aka "Central Florida Greenway" – north around Orlando International Airport, through eastern Orange County to Sanford and I-4N; southwest to Celebration and I-4S US 17/US 92 – aka "Orange Blossom Trail" from Kissimmee: north through Orlando to Maitland, Sanford, DeBary and DeLand; south to Lakeland US 192 – from Kissimmee: west to Walt Disney World Resort and US 27; east to St. Cloud, I-95, Melbourne and Indialantic US 441 – east with US 192 to Kissimmee, then north through Orlando toward Apopka and Mt. Dora SR 60 – from Yeehaw Junction: west to Lake Wales, Bartow and Brandon; east to I-95 and Vero Beach SR 423 – aka "John Young Parkway" – from Kissimmee: north through Orlando to I-4N and US 17/US 92 near Winter Park

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic downtown Kissimmee (many structures date from the late 1800s; note the Osceola County Courthouse in particular – it’s the oldest continually operating courthouse in Florida); Osceola Welcome Center and History Museum; Pioneer Village at Shingle Creek (permanent collection of authentic structures from Osceola’s past; includes a “cracker” house, general store and blacksmith’s shop); Monument of States in Lakefront Park (a symbol of patriotism that took two years to assemble after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor using rocks sent in from all 48 states); Museum of Military History; historic downtown St. Cloud (this city was founded in the early 1900s as a colony for elderly Civil War soldiers; many historic structures and antique shops for browsing); Reptile World Serpentarium (snakes, lizards, alligators, turtles and more; demonstrations include a venom extraction show); Gatorland (110-acre “Old Florida” theme park with a new twist – the “Screamin’ Gator Zipline”); Town of Celebration (master-planned community conceptualized and built by Walt Disney Company; patterned after small-town New England with homes reminiscent of the 1940s and ’50s); Wild Florida Airboats and Gator Park in Kenansville (airboat and ranch buggy tours to view Florida’s native species, plus a wildlife park featuring lemurs, sloths and other animals from South America, Africa and Australia)

**Notable events:** Silver Spurs Rodeo, Osceola Heritage Park, Kissimmee (February); Sunshine Regional Chili Cook-Off and Beer Festival, Kissimmee (February); Art & Wine Stroll, Celebration (February); Osceola County Fair & Kissimmee Valley Livestock Show, Kissimmee (February); Regional Qualifying Ranch Rodeo, Kenansville (February); Runaway Country Music Fest, Kissimmee (March); Kowtown Festival, featuring the Kissimmee Valley Rib Rodeo, Kissimmee (March); Battle of Narcoosee Mill Civil War Reenactment, St. Cloud (March); Great American Pie Festival, Celebration (April); Smokin Blues Bikes & BBQ, St. Cloud (April); RAM National Circuit Finals Rodeo at Silver Spurs Arena, Kissimmee (April); Silver Spurs Rodeo, Osceola Heritage Park, Kissimmee (June); Sci-Fi Fourth of July, Celebration (July); Florida Ranch Rodeo Finals and Cowboy Heritage Festival (September/October); Oktoberfest, Celebration (October); Art & Wine Stroll, Celebration (October); Fall Frenzy Festival, St. Cloud (October); “Now Snowing,” simulated snow seeming to drift from the sky, Celebration (November-December); St. Cloud Holiday Festival, December; Christmas at Gaylord Palms, stunning ice sculptures, stage shows, larger-than-life decorations, two million twinkling lights, snow tubing and more, Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center, Kissimmee (November-December)

**Natural wonders:** Kissimmee Chain of Lakes Area, spanning 21,000 acres in Osceola and Polk counties; Herky Huffman/Bull Creek Wildlife and Three Lakes Wildlife Management Areas; Disney Wilderness Preserve; Camp Lonesome, Cherokee Point, Lake Lizzie, Lake Runnymede, Scotty’s Cove and Twin Oaks conservation areas; Peghorn Nature Park; Shingle Creek Regional Park; Lakes Tohopekaliga, Cypress, Alligator, Jackson and Marian; Kissimmee River; Shingle Creek (northernmost headwaters of the Florida Everglades)

**Sports and recreation:** Plenty of outdoor activities to enjoy – hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, boating and paddling; primitive camping on Makinson Island at Lake Tohopekaliga (accessible by boat only); a wide range of county parks, offering everything from groomed trails and tidy playgrounds to wildlife viewing and wilderness experiences

## Like Nowhere Else

Looking at the neatly manicured lawns and squeaky-clean streets of Celebration on the western edge of Osceola County, it’s hard to imagine that this was once cattle country. Or that significant parts of Osceola and its nearest neighbor, Polk, still are. With a combined 183,000 head of cattle, these two counties accounted for 24% of Florida’s total cattle population in 2018, making this the most prolific cattle producing region in Florida. Which helps to explain why the Florida Cattlemen’s Association is headquartered in Kissimmee and why the Silver Spurs Rodeo is such a big deal here. The Silver Spurs Rodeo is the largest rodeo east of the Mississippi and is annually ranked among the top 50 events sanctioned by the PCRA (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association). Silver Spurs got its start in Kissimmee and it comes to town twice a year now – in February and June. It’s one of the events that professional rodeo riders compete in on their way to qualifying for the biggest contest of all – the RAM National Circuit Finals Rodeo. In 2015, the RNCFR moved from Oklahoma City to Kissimmee, where it will remain for the foreseeable future. So be prepared for a whole lot of whoopin’ and hollerin’ over at Silver Spurs Arena in late March each year as cowboys and cowgirls from across the U.S. and Mexico compete for \$1 million in cash and prizes. All eyes will be trained on Kissimmee and, in rodeo circles, it just doesn’t get much better than that.

# Palm Beach County

## Key facts

Population:	1,485,941
Land size (square miles):	1,970
Population density:	754 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$74,980
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 75/57 July 90/76
County seat:	West Palm Beach
Largest cities/towns:	West Palm Beach (pop. 110,222) Boca Raton (pop. 98,150) Boynton Beach (pop. 77,702) Delray Beach (pop. 68,749) Jupiter (pop. 64,976) Wellington (pop. 64,848) Palm Beach Gardens (pop. 55,036)

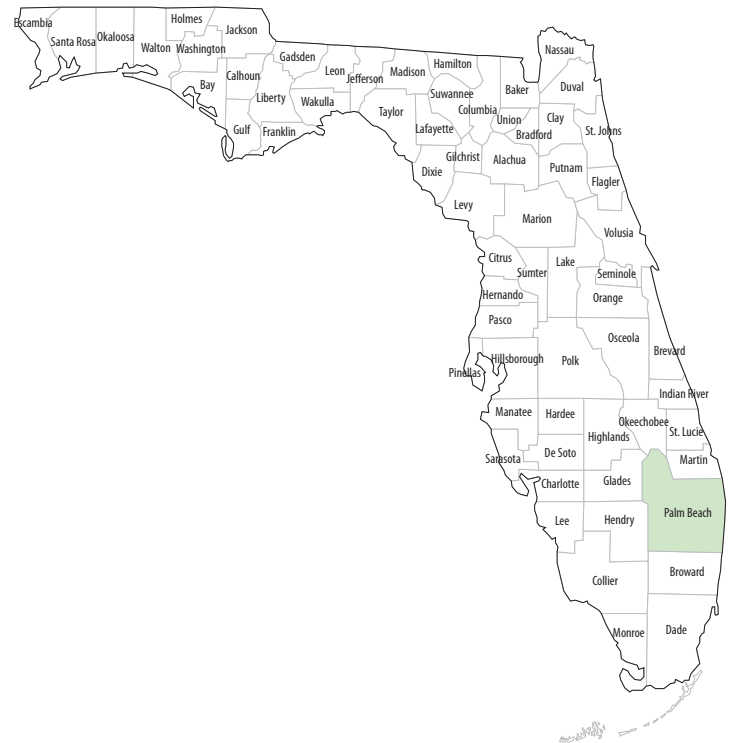
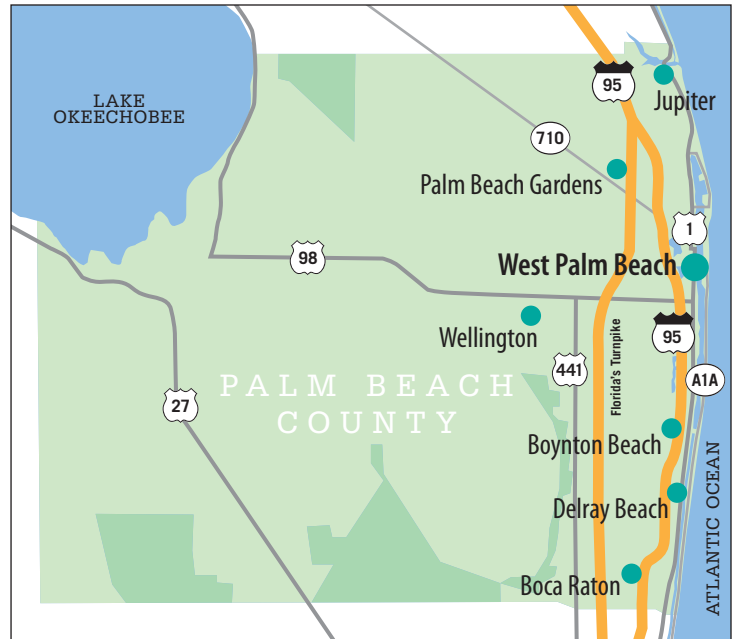
**Who lives here:** A few celebrities but otherwise, mostly just ordinary, hardworking folks. If the very words “Palm Beach” suggest a lifestyle enjoyed only by the rich and famous at posh ocean-front estates, think again. Palm Beach County is not the richest county in Florida nor does it boast the most millionaires. Average annual earnings typically hover around \$44,000.

## Names to know

County administrator:	Verdenia C. Baker
County commissioners:	District 1 – Hal A. Valeche District 2 – Gregg K. Weiss District 3 – Dave Kerner District 4 – Robert S. Weinroth District 5 – Mary Lou Berger District 6 – Melissa McKinlay District 7 – Mack Bernard
Tax collector:	Anne M. Gannon
School superintendent:	Donald E. Fennoy II

## Business

Labor force:	731,004
Primary industries:	Agribusiness; manufacturing; logistics and distribution
Notable private employers:	Florida Crystals; Sikorsky Aircraft; Pratt & Whitney; Tyco Integrated Security; TBC; Cheney Brothers; ADT Security Services; IBM
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

- Public school system:** **The School District of Palm Beach County**  
 111 elementary schools  
 44 middle schools  
 27 high schools  
 7 alternative schools
- Public/private universities:** **Barry University, School of Professional and Career Education**  
 Palm Beach: Gardens Professional Center, 9123 North Military Trail, Suite 206, Palm Beach Gardens
- Barry University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences**  
 Palm Beach: 9123 North Military Trail, Suite 103, Palm Beach Gardens
- Barry University, The Ellen Whiteside McDonnell School of Social Work**  
 Palm Beach: 9123 North Military Trail, Suite 206, Palm Beach Gardens
- Barry University, Adrian Dominican School of Education**  
 Palm Beach Gardens: Gardens Professional Center, 9123 N. Military Trail, Suite 206, Palm Beach Gardens
- Keiser University**  
 Flagship Residential Campus: 2600 North Military Trail, West Palm Beach  
 College of Chiropractic Medicine: 2085 Vista Parkway, West Palm Beach  
 College of Golf: 2600 N. Military Trail, West Palm Beach
- Lynn University**  
 Main campus: 3601 North Military Trail, Boca Raton
- Nova Southeastern University**  
 Palm Beach Campus: 11501 North Military Trail, Palm Beach Gardens
- Palm Beach Atlantic University**  
 Main campus: 901 S. Flagler Drive, West Palm Beach
- State colleges:** **Palm Beach State College**  
 Lake Worth (main) Campus: 4200 Congress Avenue, Lake Worth  
 Belle Glade Campus: 1977 College Drive, Belle Glade  
 Boca Raton Campus: 801 Palm Beach State College Drive, Boca Raton  
 Palm Beach Gardens Campus: 3160 PGA Blvd., Palm Beach Gardens  
 West Palm Beach Campus: 812 Fern Street, West Palm Beach  
 Dennis P. Gallon Campus at Loxahatchee Groves, 15845 Southern Blvd., Loxahatchee

## Health Care

- Acute care hospitals:** JFK Medical Center, Atlantis – 486 beds  
 Lakeside Medical Center, Belle Glade – 70 beds  
 Boca Raton Regional Hospital, Boca Raton – 400 beds  
 West Boca Medical Center, Boca Raton – 195 beds  
 Bethesda Hospital East, Boynton Beach – 401 beds  
 Bethesda Hospital West, Boynton Beach – 80 beds  
 Delray Medical Center, Delray Beach – 380 beds  
 Jupiter Medical Center, Jupiter – 207 beds  
 Palms West Hospital, Loxahatchee – 204 beds  
 Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center, Palm Beach Gardens – 199 beds  
 Good Samaritan Medical Center, West Palm Beach – 333 beds  
 JFK Medical Center-North Campus, West Palm Beach – 245 beds  
 St. Mary's Medical Center, West Palm Beach – 460 beds  
 Wellington Regional Medical Center, Wellington – 233 beds
- Children's hospitals:** Palm Beach Children's Hospital at St. Mary's Medical Center, West Palm Beach – 142 beds

**State/federal hospitals:** West Palm Beach VA Medical Center, West Palm Beach – 270 beds

## Transportation

**Commercial airports:** Palm Beach International Airport

**Seaports:** Port of Palm Beach

**Passenger rail:** Amtrak: Silver Service from West Palm Beach and Delray Beach North to New York and Washington DC through Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston; south to Fort Lauderdale and Miami  
Tri-Rail: the commuter rail line linking Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties  
Virgin Trains USA: High-speed rail service between West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami; service to Orlando is slated to begin in 2022.

**Major highways:** I-95 – north to Fort Pierce, Melbourne, Daytona Beach and Jacksonville; south to Fort Lauderdale and Miami  
Florida’s Turnpike – northwest to Fort Pierce and Orlando; south to Fort Lauderdale and Miami  
US 1 – from West Palm Beach: north to Jupiter, Stuart, Fort Pierce and Vero Beach; south to Delray Beach, Boca Raton, Fort Lauderdale and Miami  
US 441/US 98 – west to Loxahatchee and Belle Glade, around the eastern shore of Lake Okeechobee, then north to Yeehaw Junction and Holopaw (US 441) or northwest to Avon Park and Lake Wales (US 98)  
SR 710 – northwest from West Palm Beach to Okeechobee  
SR A1A – from Delray Beach: north to Boynton Beach and Palm Beach; south to Deerfield Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami Beach

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Palm Beach: luxury shopping along Worth Avenue, Flagler Museum (aka Whitehall, Henry Flagler’s 55-room Gilded Age estate); in North Palm Beach: John D. MacArthur Beach State Park; in West Palm Beach: Mounts Botanical Garden, Norton Museum of Art, Palm Beach Zoo and Conservation Society, Richard and Pat Johnson Palm Beach County History Museum, South Florida Science Center and Aquarium; in Boca Raton: Boca Raton Historical Society and Museum, Boca Raton Museum of Art, Gumbo Limbo Nature Center (sick and injured sea turtles are rehabilitated here); in Delray Beach: Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens, Spady Cultural Heritage Museum; in Boynton Beach: Schoolhouse Children’s Museum and Learning Center; in Riviera Beach: Rapids Water Park; in Loxahatchee: Lion Country Safari; in Belle Glade: memorial to victims of the 1928 Okeechobee hurricane

**Notable events:** South Florida Fair, West Palm Beach (January); Boca Raton Fine Art Show (January); South Florida Garlic Festival, Lake Worth (February); Palm Beach Marine Flea Market and Seafood Festival (February); Artigras Fine Arts Festival, Jupiter (February); Lake Worth Street Painting Festival, 600 artists use chalk as their brush, pavement as their canvas to turn downtown streets into an art gallery (February); Jupiter Seafood Festival (March); Festival of the Arts, Boca Raton (March);

Black Gold Jubilee, Belle Glade (April); SunFest, West Palm Beach (May); Hang 20 Surf Dog Classic, live bands and dogs on surfboards, Jupiter Beach (August); Boca Brazilian Beat, Boca Raton (September); Boynton Haunted Pirate Fest and Mermaid Splash (October); Oktoberfest at the American German Club of the Palm Beaches, Lake Worth (October); Juno Beach Craft Festival on the Ocean (November); Feast of Little Italy, Jupiter; Palm Beach Holiday Boat parade (December); Boynton Beach and Delray Beach Holiday Boat Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** 47 miles of Atlantic Ocean coastline; Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge (147,392 acres, the most northern remnant of the historic Everglades wetland ecosystem and encompassing the Rotenberger, Holey Land and Everglades wildlife management areas); J. W. Corbett Wildlife Management Area; DuPuis Management Area (shared with Martin County); Loxahatchee Slough Natural Area; Lake Okeechobee, second largest freshwater lake contained entirely within the continental U.S.; Loxahatchee River

**Sports and recreation:** MLB spring training February–March for the Miami Marlins and St. Louis Cardinals at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter and for the Washington Nationals and Houston Astros at The Ballpark of The Palm Beaches in West Palm Beach; Minor League baseball action throughout the summer from the Jupiter Hammerheads and Palm Beach Cardinals at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter; PGA national headquarters in Palm Beach Gardens; The Honda Classic PGA event in Palm Beach Gardens and the Allianz Championship in Boca Raton, both in February; more than 1,000 private and public tennis courts and the Delray Beach Open international tennis championships at Delray Beach Stadium & Tennis Center in February; National Croquet Center in West Palm Beach; Winter Equestrian Festival at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center in Wellington, January–April; Palm Beach International Polo Season at International Polo Club Palm Beach in Wellington, January–April; swimming, snorkeling and scuba diving at John D. MacArthur Beach State Park; hiking and biking along Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail; air-boat rides and wildlife viewing in the Everglades; Palm Beach County’s Parks and Recreation Department operates 79 parks, many featuring athletic facilities, campsites, hiking trails and beaches

## Like Nowhere Else

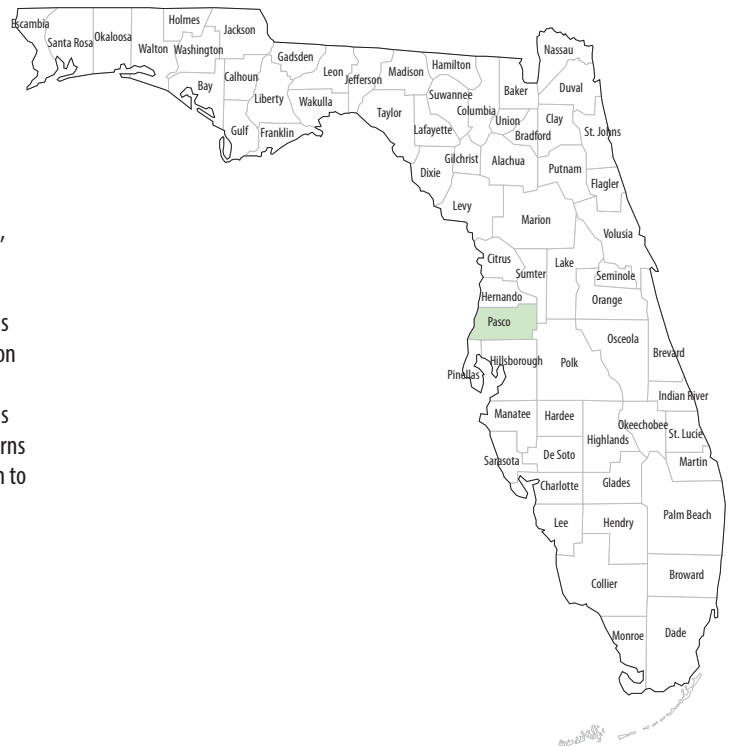
In a state where shoes with closed toes pass for formal wear, the very idea of a polo match seems incongruous. Isn’t polo a game that British royals play and the landed gentry watch? Well yes, but so do many other people around the world and a lot of them, it seems, are coming to Palm Beach County for that very purpose. The International Polo Club Palm Beach, which is located in Wellington, is considered one of the world’s premier polo destinations, hosting the largest field of high-goal teams and the most prestigious polo tournaments in the U. S. Each winter season, which runs from January through April, polo enthusiasts from around the world descend on Wellington to mingle with celebrities, including the occasional royal, sip champagne and cheer on their favorites. The competition starts on January 1 and ends 17 weeks later with the United States Polo Association’s U.S. Open Polo Championship final in late April; in between, there’s a fully-packed social calendar of brunches, balls and charitable and corporate events to which only sponsors, participants and well-heeled spectators are invited. The polo matches themselves, however, are open to the public with a wide range of ticket options, including box, grandstand and stadium seating as well as the ever-popular field-side champagne brunch. So why not skip a day at the beach and give polo a try? Just remember, this is no beer-and-hot-dogs crowd, so best leave the flip-flops at home.

# Pasco County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	539,630
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	747
<b>Population density:</b>	722 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$39,481
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 72/48 July 92/72
<b>County seat:</b>	Dade City
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	New Port Richey (pop. 16,256) Zephyrhills (pop. 15,247) Dade City (pop. 7,134) Port Richey (pop. 2,831) St. Leo (pop. 1,491) San Antonio (pop. 1,409)

**Who lives here:** A steadily growing population. Between 2000 and 2010, Pasco County's population grew by a whopping 35%, nearly double the rate for the entire state of Florida. Growth has tapered off considerably since, but it remains steady. Projections indicate an average annual population growth in Pasco of 2-3% over the next few years. One further characteristic to note: 46% of Pasco's workforce is currently employed outside the county, and traffic patterns suggest that most of these commuters are headed south to jobs in either Hillsborough or Pinellas counties.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Dan Biles
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Ron Oakley District 2 – Mike Moore District 3 – Kathryn Starkey District 4 – Mike Wills District 5 – Jack Mariano
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Mike Fasano
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Kurt Browning

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	231,983
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Health care; manufacturing; business services
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	HCA Healthcare; AdventHealth; Pall Aeropower; Cal-Main Foods; Seaway Plastics Engineering; St. Leo University; Saddlebrook Resort; Southeast Personnel Leasing
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Pasco County Schools</b> 51 elementary schools 18 middle schools 18 high schools 13 charter schools 3 environmental education centers
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Keiser University</b> New Port Richey: 6014 US Highway 19 North, Suite 250, New Port Richey  <b>Saint Leo University</b> Main campus: 33701 State Road 52, Saint Leo
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Pasco-Hernando State College</b> East Campus: 3672 Blanton Road, Dade City West Campus: 10230 Ridge Road, New Port Richey Porter Campus at Wiregrass Ranch: 2727 Mansfield Road, Wesley Chapel

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	AdventHealth Dade City, Dade City – 120 beds Regional Medical Center Bayonet Point, Hudson – 290 beds Morton Plant North Bay Hospital, New Port Richey – 150 beds Medical Center of Trinity, Trinity – 288 beds AdventHealth Wesley Chapel, Wesley Chapel – 145 beds AdventHealth Zephyrhills, Zephyrhills – 149 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Ocala, Gainesville and Lake City; south to Tampa, Sarasota and Fort Myers SR 589 (toll) – aka “Suncoast Parkway” – north through Hernando County to the Citrus County line; south to Tampa and I-275 US 301 – north to Bushnell, Belleview and Ocala; south to Thonotosassa, Riverview and Sun City Center US 19 – north to Weeki Wachee and Crystal River; south to Clearwater and St. Petersburg US 41 – from Land O’Lakes: north to Brooksville, Inverness and Williston; south to Lutz, Tampa, Gibsonton and Apollo Beach SR 54 – west from Zephyrhills to Wesley Chapel, I-75 and Odessa
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Church Street Historic District, downtown Dade City; Pioneer Florida Museum and Village; Joy-Lan Drive-In Theatre (still showing first-run movies!); Giraffe Ranch (safari tours and close-up encounters with giraffes, camels and other exotic species); Treehoppers Aerial Adventure Park (8 different zip-line courses, no reservations required); 1882 Baker House in Holiday (oldest standing building in Pasco County); Zephyrhills Depot

Museum; World War II Barracks Museum (memorabilia from WWII fighter pilots who lived and trained in Zephyrhills); Crystal Springs Preserve; Anclote Key Preserve State Park (three miles offshore, accessible only by private boat or ferry, no provisions so bring your own water and supplies); Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park (along the Gulf of Mexico, but due to mangroves lining the shoreline, there is no beach or swimming area)

**Notable events:** Annual Kumquat Festival, Dade City (January); Pigz in ZHills BBQ & Blues Fest, Zephyrhills (January); Suncoast Arts Festival, Wesley Chapel (January); Pasco County Fair, Dade City (February); Annual Farm Festival & Quilt Show at Florida Pioneer Museum and Village, Dade City (February); Dade City Antique Faire & Market (March); Chasco Fiesta, 9 days of activities to benefit 30 non-profit organizations, including a street carnival, flea market, boat parade and Native American arts and crafts show, New Port Richey (March/April); Cotee River Seafest, New Port Richey (April); KIAFEST Main Street Blast, New Port Richey (June/July); Festival of Flight, Wesley Chapel (September); San Antonio Rattlesnake Festival, featuring rides, exhibits, croc encounters and educational snake lectures (October); Main Street Holidays, downtown New Port Richey (December)

**Natural wonders:** 24 miles of Gulf coast shoreline; Green Swamp (shared with Polk, Lake, Sumter and Hernando counties); Crystal Springs Preserve; J.B. Starkey Wilderness Park; Robert Crown Wilderness Area; Aripeka Sandhills, Boy Scout, Pasco Palms and Upper Pithlachascotee River Preserves; King, Thomas, Padgett and East lakes; Withlacoochee, Pithlachascotee, Hillsborough and Anclote rivers

**Sports and recreation:** fishing, boating, paddling on the county’s many lakes and rivers; swimming, snorkeling, paddle-boarding and beachcombing along the Gulf coast; hiking, biking and birding; hot-air balloon rides in Land O’Lakes and skydiving in Zephyrhills; golf at more than two dozen courses

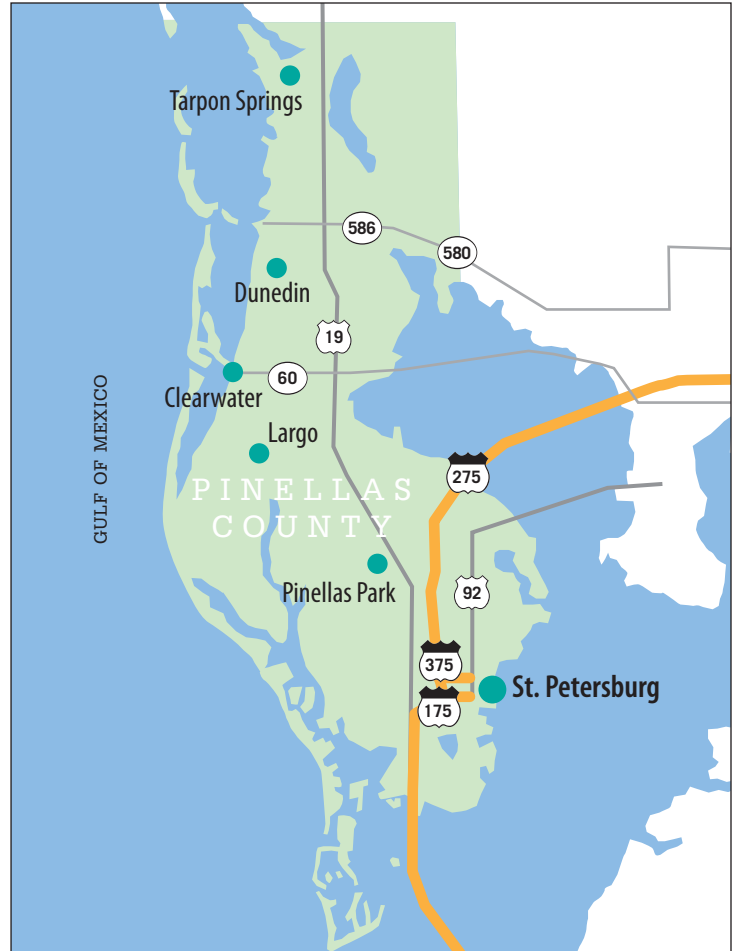
## Like Nowhere Else

Pasco is Florida’s 12th most populous county, yet it still boasts plenty of wide open spaces. Of this county’s total 747 square miles, more than 100 have been set aside as managed recreational facilities, including 37 parks, four artificial reefs, more than two dozen golf courses and three state-designated canoe trails. And although all the urban amenities of busy Hillsborough and Pinellas counties are within a 30-minute drive of most anyplace in Pasco, this county remains somewhat secluded and out of the mainstream. Which could explain why so many people who are looking for a not-so-run-of-the-mill vacation experience have found their way here. Pasco County is home to one of the nation’s largest enclaves of nudist and clothing-optional resorts. Now don’t get the wrong idea here. This is not about cheap thrills or sleazy strip clubs. These are legitimate resorts. Some are low-key and inexpensive, others are quite luxurious and equipped with multiple pools, spas, fine wines and upscale dining. Yet all share one thing in common: they cater to a clientele that prefers to kick back in the Florida sun by leaving their clothes behind. There are age restrictions, of course, but otherwise, all kinds of people flock here – singles, couples, empty-nesters, retirees, confirmed “naturists” and others simply wanting to give this lifestyle a try. Just one suggestion – bring along some sunscreen.

# Pinellas County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	975,280
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	274
<b>Population density:</b>	3,559 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$52,512
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 72/50 July 91/74
<b>County seat:</b>	Clearwater
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	St. Petersburg (pop. 263,255) Clearwater (pop. 115,513) Largo (pop. 84,754) Pinellas Park (pop. 52,854) Dunedin (pop. 36,545) Tarpon Springs (pop. 25,331)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Many people, very close together. With just under 1 million people crammed onto a peninsula measuring 274 square miles, Pinellas is Florida's most densely populated county. At 3,559 persons per square mile, Pinellas registers more than twice the density of its nearest rival – Broward County – with just 1,613 per square mile.

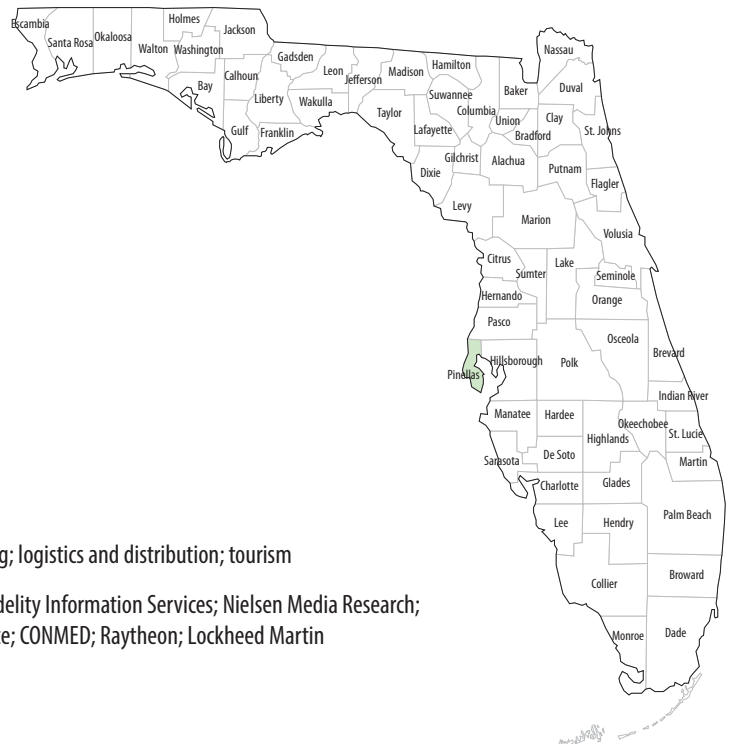


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Barry A. Burton
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Janet C. Long District 2 – Pat Gerard District 3 – Charlie Justice District 4 – Dave Eggers District 5 – Karen Williams Seel District 6 – Kathleen Peters District 7 – Kenneth T. Welch
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Charles W. Thomas
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Michael A. Grego

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	492,704
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Business and financial services; advanced manufacturing; logistics and distribution; tourism
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Raymond James Financial; Home Shopping Network; Fidelity Information Services; Nielsen Media Research; Jabil Circuit; Tech Data Corporation; Honeywell Aerospace; CONMED; Raytheon; Lockheed Martin
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Pinellas County Schools</b>            76 elementary schools            32 middle schools            2 combined-grade level schools (K-8)            16 high schools            6 alternative schools            4 exceptional schools            18 charter schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Barry University, Adrian Dominican School of Education</b>            Seminole: University Partnership Center at St. Petersburg College, 9200 113th Street N., Seminole</p> <p><b>Barry University, School of Podiatric Medicine</b>            Pinellas Park: 7200 66th Street N., Pinellas Park</p> <p><b>Eckerd College</b>            Main campus: 4200 54th Avenue South, St. Petersburg</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b>            Clearwater: 16120 US Highway 19 North, Clearwater</p> <p><b>Nova Southeastern University</b>            Tampa Bay Regional Campus: 3400 Gulf-to-Bay Blvd., Clearwater</p> <p><b>Stetson University</b>            Gulfport Campus: 1401 61st Street South, Gulfport</p> <p><b>University of South Florida St. Petersburg</b>            St. Petersburg: 140 7th Avenue South, St. Petersburg</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>St. Petersburg College</b>            Clearwater Campus: 2465 Drew Street, Clearwater            Downtown Center: 244 Second Avenue North, St. Petersburg            Douglas L. Jamerson Jr. Midtown Center: 1300 22nd St. South, St. Petersburg            Cecil B. Keene Sr. Student Achievement Center: 1048 22nd St. South, St. Petersburg            St. Petersburg/Gibbs Campus: 6605 Fifth Avenue North, St. Petersburg            Seminole Campus: 9200 113th Street North, Seminole            Tarpon Springs Campus: 600 Klosterman Road, Tarpon Springs            Allstate Center (public safety/emergency management training): 3200 34th Street South, St. Petersburg            EpiCenter: 13805 58th Street North, Clearwater            Health Education Center: 7200 66th Street North, Pinellas Park            Veterinary Technology Center: 12376 Ulmerton Road, Largo            BayPines STEM Center: 4723 Bay Pines Terrace, St. Petersburg</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	<p>Morton Plant Hospital – 613 beds            Mease Dunedin Hospital, Dunedin – 120 beds            Largo Medical Center, Largo – 256 beds            Largo Medical Center-Indian Rocks, Largo – 169 beds            Mease Countryside Hospital, Safety Harbor – 311 beds            Bayfront Health St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg – 480 beds            Northside Hospital, St. Petersburg – 288 beds            Palms of Pasadena Hospital, St. Petersburg – 307 beds            St. Anthony’s Hospital, St. Petersburg – 393 beds            St. Petersburg General Hospital, St. Petersburg – 215 beds            AdventHealth Tarpon Springs, Tarpons Springs – 168 beds</p>
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**Children's Hospitals:** Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital, St. Petersburg – 259 beds

**State/federal hospitals:** Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, Bay Pines – 397 beds

## Transportation

**Commercial airports:** St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport

**Seaports:** Port of St. Petersburg

**Major highways:** I-275 – through St. Petersburg, connecting Pinellas to Manatee County to the south over the Sunshine Skyway Bridge and to Tampa to the northeast over the Howard Frankland Bridge; east-west I-175 and I-375 provide access into and out of downtown St. Petersburg  
 US 19 – north from the Sunshine Skyway Bridge through St. Petersburg to Clearwater, New Port Richey and Crystal River  
 US 92 – south to St. Petersburg; east over the Gandy Bridge to south Tampa  
 SR 60 – west to Clearwater; east over the Courtney Campbell Causeway to Tampa, Brandon and Bartow  
 SR 580 – east from Dunedin to Oldsmar  
 SR 586 (Hillsborough Avenue) – west from Oldsmar to Dunedin; east to Tampa

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In St. Petersburg: Great Explorations Children's Museum, Sunken Gardens, The Dali Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Imagine Museum, The James Museum of Western & Wildlife Art; Florida Holocaust Museum, Chihuly collection at the Morean Arts Center, St. Petersburg Museum of History, Pinellas Pioneer Settlement, Central Avenue Arts District; in Clearwater: Clearwater Marine Aquarium (home of Winter, the dolphin who swims with a prosthetic tail, and her dolphin friend Hope whose stories were told in the feature-length films *Dolphin Tale* and *Dolphin Tale 2*), Sea Life Safari narrated boat tour (originating from Clearwater Marine Aquarium), daily sunset celebrations at Pier 60, Moccasin Lake Environmental Education Center; in Largo: Florida Botanical Gardens, Heritage Village (30 restored structures recalling life in early Pinellas County); in Pinellas Park: Tampa Bay Automobile Museum; in Dunedin: National Armed Services and Law Enforcement Memorial Museum; in Tarpon Springs: Sponge Docks, Tarpon Springs Aquarium; two state parks: Honeymoon Island, accessible by bridge from Dunedin, and Caladesi Island State Park, accessible by boat or ferry only; ferry leaves from Honeymoon Island State Park

**Notable events:** Greek Epiphany Celebration, Tarpon Springs (January 6); Martin Luther King Day National Parade, largest in the Southeast with marching bands, flamboyant dance teams and colorful floats (January); Dunedin Mardi Gras Parade & Festival (February); Raptor Fest, celebrating birds of prey at Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, St. Petersburg (February); Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg; Gulfport SPRINGFEST Garden Art and Faerie Festival (March); Pinellas Pepper Fest, Pinellas Park (April); Tampa Bay Blues Festival, St. Petersburg (April); Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival (stunning sand sculptures by master artists), Clearwater Beach (April); St. Pete Pride, Florida's largest LGBTQ event (June); Gulfport Geckkofest (September); I Like it Hot! Festival, hundreds of spicy gourmet and novelty foods for tasting, Largo (September); John's Pass Annual Seafood Festival, Madeira Beach (October); Clearwater Jazz Holiday (October); Tampa Bay Times Festival of Reading, USF St. Petersburg (October/November); Tarpon Springs Sponge Docks Seafood Festival (November); RibFest, St. Petersburg (November); Pinellas Pioneer Settlement Christmas Jamboree, St. Petersburg (December); Holiday Hoopla, Gulfport (December)

**Natural wonders:** 35 miles of incredibly beautiful beaches, one of which – Clearwater Beach – has topped TripAdvisor's annual Travelers' Choice™ list of the best 25 U.S. beaches multiple years and has appeared on its top 25 best world beaches list more than once; five county preserves: Boyd Hill, Brooker Creek, Mobley Bayou, Shell Key, Weed on Island; two state parks that are islands in the Gulf of Mexico, Caladesi and Honeymoon; Lake Tarpon; Lake Seminole

**Sports and recreation:** Tampa Bay Rays MLB action at Tropicana Field and Tampa Bay Rowdies NASL Soccer at Al Lang Stadium, both in St. Petersburg; MLB spring training February–March for the Philadelphia Phillies at Bright House Field in Clearwater and for the Toronto Blue Jays at Florida Auto Exchange Stadium in Dunedin; Minor League baseball action throughout the summer from the Clearwater Threshers at Bright House Field and the Dunedin Blue Jays at Florida Auto Exchange Stadium; Firestone Grand Prix takes over downtown St. Petersburg for a thrilling open-wheel series race in March; Valspar PGA Championship at Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor in March; run/walk/bike/skate across Old Tampa Bay on the newly-completed 12-mile trail that runs alongside the Courtney Campbell Causeway or on the 38.2-mile Pinellas Trail stretching the length of the peninsula from Tarpon Springs in the north to St. Petersburg in the south

## Like Nowhere Else

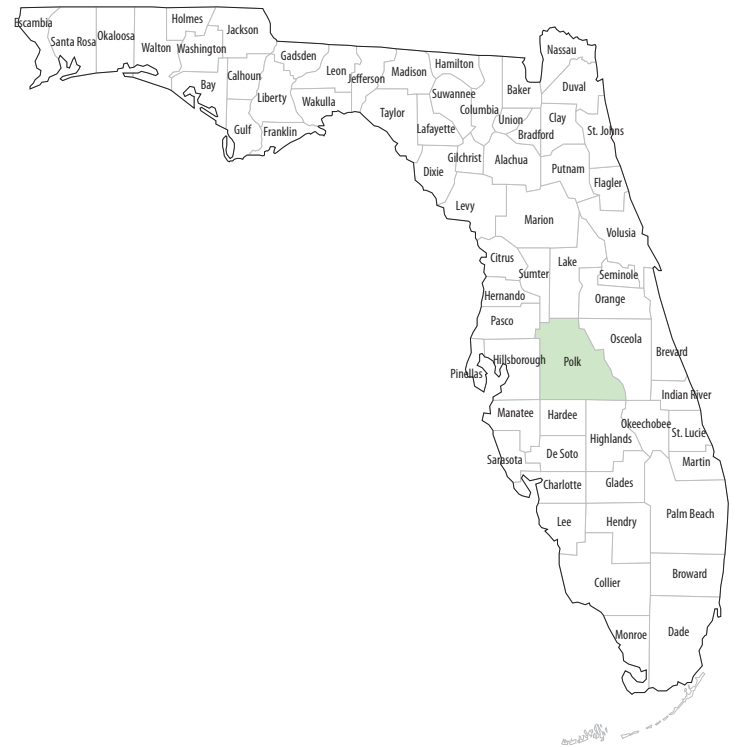
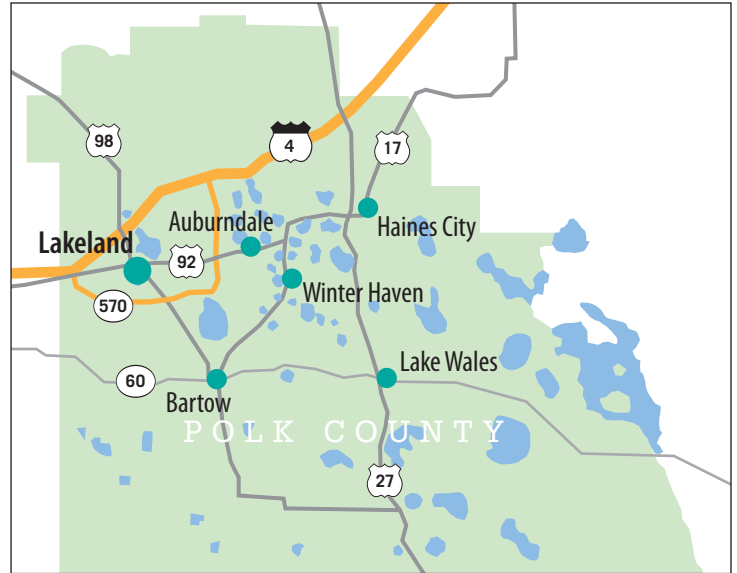
The Sunshine Skyway Bridge, which spans Tampa Bay 190 feet above the water on I-275 between St. Petersburg and Bradenton, is not only a marvel of engineering, it ranks No. 3 on the Travel Channel's list of the "World's Top 10 Bridges." Constructed at a cost of \$244 million, this structure is a continuous pre-stressed concrete cable-stayed bridge, instantly recognizable for its unique yellow support cables that spread from two center pillars. The piers of the main span and the approaches for one-quarter mile are surrounded by large concrete barriers called "dolphins" that were put in place to protect the piers from collisions with ships, a wise decision considering the fate of the previous Sunshine Skyway Bridge. Constructed in 1954, it collapsed after being struck by an outbound freighter on May 9, 1980, sending a Greyhound bus, six cars and one pickup truck into Tampa Bay and killing 35 people. Today's Skyway Bridge features a main span that is 50% wider than the old one and offers unobstructed views of the water during the entire 4.1-mile trip made by an estimated 52,000 vehicles each day.

# Polk County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	708,009
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,798
<b>Population density:</b>	394 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$36,850
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 73/51 July 92/74
<b>County seat:</b>	Bartow
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Lakeland (pop. 108,054) Winter Haven (pop. 41,280) Haines City (pop. 24,304) Bartow (pop. 19,597) Lake Wales (pop. 16,066) Auburndale (pop. 15,973)

**Who lives here:** Bright minds on their way to becoming the innovators of tomorrow. Polk County is home to the state's newest university – Florida Polytechnic – where students pursue studies in nanotechnology, cloud virtualization, motion intelligence and other topics we'd hardly heard of 10 years ago. Florida Poly received regional accreditation in 2016; its inaugural class of bachelor's degree candidates graduated in 2018.



## Names to know

<b>County manager:</b>	Jim Freeman
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – George Lindsey III District 2 – Rick Wilson District 3 – Bill Braswell District 4 – Martha Santiago District 5 – John Hall
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Joe G. Tedder
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Jacqueline M. Byrd

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	298,759
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Logistics and distribution; agribusiness; business services; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Publix Super Markets; Lakeland Regional Health; GEICO; Mosaic; LEGOLAND;
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<p><b>Polk County Public Schools</b> 91 elementary schools 42 middle schools 34 high schools 30 charter schools</p>
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<p><b>Florida Southern College</b> Main campus: 111 Lake Hollingsworth Drive, Lakeland</p> <p><b>Florida Polytechnic University</b> Main campus: 4700 Research Way, Lakeland</p> <p><b>Keiser University</b> Lakeland: 2400 Interstate Drive, Lakeland</p> <p><b>Saint Leo University</b> Lakeland Education Center: 315 Granada Street, Lakeland</p> <p><b>Southeastern University</b> Main campus: 1000 Longfellow Blvd., Lakeland</p> <p><b>Warner University</b> Main campus: 13895 US Highway 27, Lake Wales</p> <p><b>Webber International University</b> Main campus: 1201 North Scenic Highway, Babson Park</p>
<b>State colleges:</b>	<p><b>Polk State College</b> Lakeland Campus: 3425 Winter Lake Road, Lakeland Winter Haven Campus: 999 Avenue "H" NE, Winter Haven Center for Public Safety: 1251 Jim Keene Blvd., Winter Haven Clear Springs Advanced Technology Center: 301 Technology Drive, Bartow Airside Center East: 2949 Airside Center Drive, Lakeland Airside Center West: 3515 Aviation Drive, Lakeland JD Alexander Center: 152 East Central Avenue, Lake Wales</p>

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	<p>Bartow Regional Medical Center, Bartow – 72 beds Heart of Florida Regional Medical Center, Davenport – 193 beds Lakeland Regional Medical Center, Lakeland – 864 beds Lake Wales Medical Center, Lake Wales – 160 beds Winter Haven Hospital, Winter Haven – 458 beds Winter Haven Women’s Hospital – 61 beds</p>
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## Transportation

<b>Passenger rail:</b>	<p>Amtrak: Silver Service from Lakeland and Winter Haven north to New York and Washington DC through Orlando, Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston; south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami</p>
<b>Major highways:</b>	<p>I-4 – west to Plant City and Tampa; northeast to Orlando and Daytona Beach SR 570 (toll) – aka “Polk Parkway” – with endpoints at I-4, intersects major routes in southern Lakeland, providing access to Winter Haven and LEGOLAND at SR 540 and Auburndale at US 92 US 17 – northeast from Winter Haven to Haines City and Davenport toward Kissimmee and Orlando; southwest with US 98 to Bowling Green and Arcadia US 27 – north through Lake Wales to Clermont, Leesburg and Ocala; south to Avon Park, Palmdale and Moore Haven US 92 – west to Plant City, Tampa and St. Petersburg; east through Auburndale to Lake Alfred US 98 – northwest to Brooksville and US 19 in Citrus County; south through Bartow and Fort Meade to Bowling Green and Arcadia SR 60 – west to Brandon, Tampa and Clearwater; east to Yeehaw Junction and Vero Beach</p>

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Lakeland: Aerospace Discovery at The Florida Air Museum (at Lakeland Linder Regional Airport), Explorations V Children’s Museum, Safari Wilderness Ranch, Polk Museum of Art, Hollis Garden, Lake Mirror, Lake Morton Bird Sanctuary and the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed buildings at Florida Southern College; in Lake Wales: Bok Tower Gardens and Pinewood Estate, Lake Wales Depot Museum and Cultural Center and Spook Hill, where cars appear to roll uphill; in Winter Haven: LEGOLAND Florida (10 themed zones constructed from 58 million LEGO bricks) and a downtown district featuring 28 buildings designed by renowned architect Gene Leedy; Polk County Historical Museum in Bartow; three state parks: Lake Kissimmee (the 1876-era cow camp features living history demonstrations of Florida’s cracker cowboy past), Colt Creek (12 miles of trails and three lakes for fishing), Allen David Broussard Catfish Creek Preserve (8,000 acres of scrub, sandhill and flatwoods land; go prepared for rugged conditions)

**Notable events:** Polk County Youth Fair, Bartow (January); Lakeland Craft Festival (March); Spring Obsession Garden and Art Festival, Lakeland (March); Central Park SUN ‘n FUN International Fly-In Expo, Lakeland (April); “Thunder on the Ridge” in Haines City, Polk’s largest fireworks display including a Guinness World Record number of sparklers lit at once (July 4); Earthdance Florida, Lakeland (September); Annual Food Truck Wars featuring 40 trucks and all types of food, Winter Haven (September); Lake Wales Pioneer Days, celebrating 40 years in 2017 with crafters, re-enactors and antique cars (October); Lakeland Zombiefest, billed as the closest thing to a zombie apocalypse (October); Biennial Quilts & Tea Festival, Davenport (November); Art Crawl, Polk Museum of Art in Lakeland (December); When Pigs Fly South BBQ Challenge, Lakeland (December); Glitter Glisten and Snow with chestnuts, hot chocolate and real snow, Haines City (December); Christmas Bricktacular, a 30-foot Christmas tree made from 270,000 tiny plastic bricks, at LEGOLAND in Winter Haven

**Natural wonders:** Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve, including a 36-mile protected stretch of the Withlacoochee River; Lake Wales Ridge National Wildlife Refuge (shared with Highlands County); Chain of Lakes, 24 lakes in Winter Haven originally connected by man-made canals for the purpose of transporting citrus fruit to the railroad and today considered a prime place for bass fishing

**Sports and recreation:** At the newly renovated Publix Field at Joker Marchant Stadium in Lakeland: Detroit Tigers MLB spring training February-March and Minor League baseball action from the Lakeland Flying Tigers throughout the summer; hiking, biking and horseback riding at all three of the area’s state parks; hiking and biking between Lake Alfred and Winter Haven along the 3.2-mile Chain of Lakes Trail; excellent fishing at Colt Creek and Chain of Lakes; boating, canoeing and kayaking all over the place (Polk County is said to have more than 500 lakes)

## Like Nowhere Else

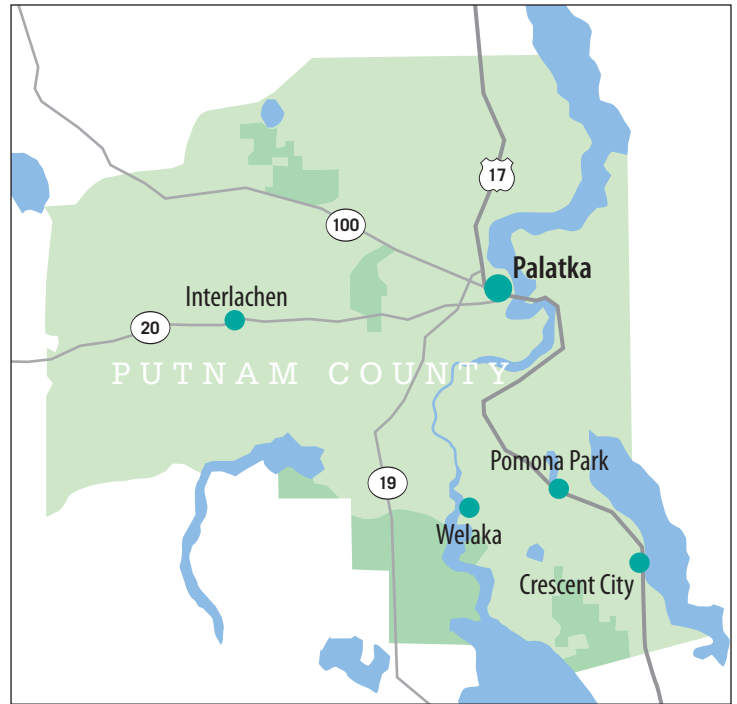
World-renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright is believed to have felt that most college campuses were architectural failures, and he expressed the desire to design an entire campus from scratch. Ludd M. Spivey, president of Florida Southern College from 1925 to 1957, seems to have taken him up on it. Envisioning a “college of tomorrow” as part of his plan to build enrollment at FSC which had been hit particularly hard by the Great Depression, Spivey visited Wright at his Wisconsin home in 1936 with a proposal: design a new campus for Florida Southern College. Then 69 years old and at the peak of his career, Wright had already completed the Johnson Wax building and Fallingwater; he didn’t need the work. But the two shook hands that day and Wright began to design immediately. Two years later, ground was broken in Lakeland for the first building, the Annie Pfeiffer Chapel; it was completed in 1941. Over two decades, Wright would complete nine additional buildings at Florida Southern, and as many as 10 more, including theatres, music buildings and studios, were said to be on the drawing board but never constructed. The 10 buildings that were completed, however, today remain the largest concentration of Wright-designed structures anywhere in the world. Whether they increased enrollment as Spivey originally intended is unknown – World War II came along in the midst of the construction – but these buildings continue to serve students and generate visitors to the FSC campus from around the world.

# Putnam County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	74,163
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	728
<b>Population density:</b>	102 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$31,594
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 68/44 July 92/73
<b>County seat:</b>	Palatka
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Palatka (pop. 10,389) Crescent City (pop. 1,544) Interlachen (pop. 1,386) Pomona Park (pop. 899) Welaka (pop. 702)

**Who lives here:** People for whom nature's bounty is an ever-present reason to celebrate. Putnam County boasts a full calendar of festivals throughout the year and many of them are dedicated to "fruits" of the earth or sea. The granddaddy of them all – the Azalea Festival which heralds the flowering of some 100,000 bushes planted here in 1933 – marked its 70th anniversary in 2016.

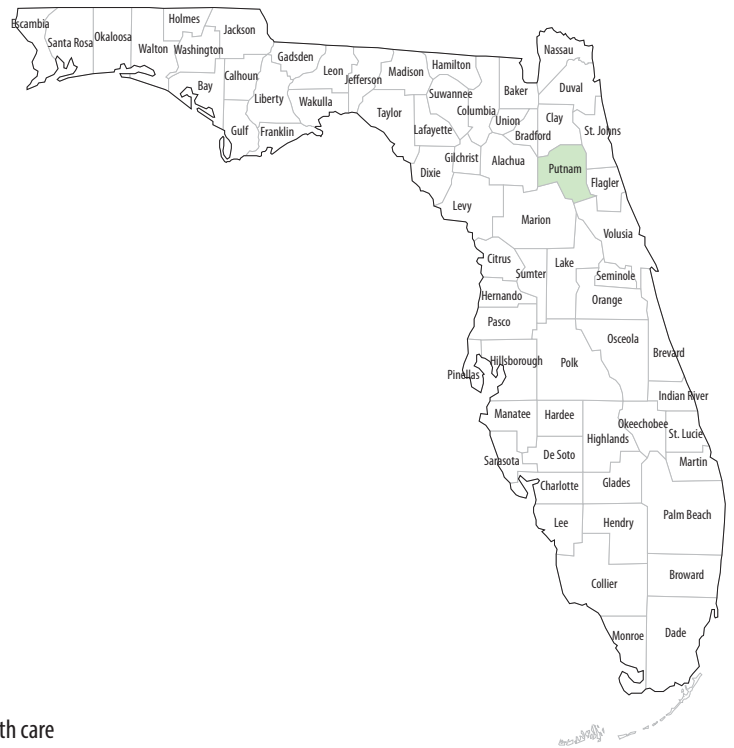


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Terry Suggs
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Bill Pickens District 2 – Jeff Rawls District 3 – Terry Turner District 4 – Larry Harvey District 5 – Buddy Goddard
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Linda Myers
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Rick Surrency

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	27,097
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Manufacturing; business and professional services; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Georgia-Pacific; Putnam Community Medical Center; Continental Building Products; Seminole Electric Cooperative
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%





## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Putnam County School District</b> 10 elementary schools 5 middle schools 4 high schools 1 junior/senior high school 3 charter schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>St. Johns River State College</b> Palatka campus: 5001 St. Johns Avenue, Palatka

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Putnam Community Medical Center, Palatka – 99 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak: Silver Service from Palatka North to: New York, Washington DC, Charleston, Savannah, Jacksonville South to: Orlando, Tampa; West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami
<b>Major highways:</b>	US 17 – north to Green Cove Springs, Orange Park and Jacksonville SR 20 – west to US 301 and Gainesville; east to SR 207 and St. Augustine SR 100 – northwest from Palatka to Starke SR 19 – south from Palatka to Ocala National Forest, Eustis and Tavares

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In downtown Palatka, the Bronson-Mulholland House (tours by appointment), Putnam Historical Society and Museum, Palatka Train Depot (circa 1908) – still an active Amtrak station and home to the David Browning Railroad Museum – Angel’s Diner, Florida’s oldest and still operating at the corner of South Second and Reid streets, and a collection of 24 “city murals” depicting scenes from Palatka’s history by mostly local artists on the walls of civic buildings and local businesses; Water Works Environmental Education Center; St. Johns River Center; two state parks: Ravine Gardens, built by the Works Progress Administration in 1933, and Dunns Creek, a steamboat stop during the 1920s that is today 6,200 protected acres of sandhills, longleaf pines and wiregrass; Welaka National Fish Hatchery and Aquarium, where the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service raises fish for stocking programs throughout the Southeast (visitors welcome; reserve ahead for guided tours)

**Notable events:** Giant Shiitake Mushroom Festival, Interlachen (January); Welaka SpringFest (February); Palatka Bluegrass Festival (February); Azalea Festival/Azalea Days, Ravine Gardens State Park and downtown Palatka (March); Putnam County Fair (March); Crescent City Catfish Fest (April); Bostwick Blueberry Festival (April); Blue Crab Festival, Palatka (Memorial Day weekend); Fall Palatka Bluegrass Festival (November)

**Natural wonders:** Ocala National Forest; Welaka State Forest; Etoniah Creek State Forest; St. Johns and Ocklawaha rivers; many lakes, including the second largest in Florida (Lake George), plus Lake Broward, Lake Stella, Crescent Lake and the Rodman Reservoir; the nearly 100,000 azalea bushes that burst into bloom annually throughout the hilly terrain at Ravine Gardens State Park (peak flowering season is late January to April); Carravalle Ranch Wildlife Management Area

**Sports and recreation:** Putnam County is widely known as “Bass Capital of the World,” and Rodman Reservoir was named one of Florida’s 10 best fishing

lakes for largemouth bass by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission; many opportunities for hiking and biking, including a trail that follows the footsteps of famed botanist William Bartram who explored this part of Florida in the late 1700s, and a portion of the yet-to-be-completed Lake Butler to St. Augustine Rails-to-Trails project (Palatka is the center point); horseback riding along the scenic St. Johns River; birdwatching at Ravine Gardens State Park

## Like Nowhere Else

In this age of interstate highways and self-driving automobiles, the very idea of a two-car ferry transporting vehicles across a stretch of water barely a mile wide seems not only old-fashioned, but downright peculiar. Yet such a thing exists in Putnam County. It’s called the Fort Gates Ferry and it has been operating at the same narrow spot in the St. Johns River near Drayton Island for nearly 200 years. What is today Florida’s oldest continually operated ferry began as a means to facilitate the river crossings of U.S. Army troops during the third Seminole War; these days, it’s more of a timesaver – capable of transporting two cars, up to 20 motorcycles or 38 bicycles across the river in about 10 minutes and cutting the distance between Salt Springs and Crescent City by about 35 miles. On the downside, getting to the ferry requires traveling on roads that have been declared “unimproved” (a euphemism for dirt and gravel), but since they traverse a particularly remote section of Ocala National Forest along the way, the drive could be worthwhile, especially if you happen to spot a black bear or two. The one-way fare for a car to cross the river is \$10, for a motorcycle, just \$5. Pull up slowly to the landing and, if the ferry’s not there, blink your headlights to signal that you want to be picked up; it will come across to get you. Ordinarily, the Fort Gates Ferry operates from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily except on Tuesday, but due to damages sustained during Hurricane Irma, it is temporarily out of service; be sure to phone ahead before making the trip.

# St. Johns County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	254,261
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	601
<b>Population density:</b>	423 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$66,684
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/46 July 89/73
<b>County seat:</b>	St. Augustine
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	St. Augustine (pop. 14,243) St. Augustine Beach (pop. 6,998) Hastings (pop. 643)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	Consistently healthy people. For eight years in a row, St. Johns has been ranked Florida's healthiest county, according to a report compiled by the University of Wisconsin and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that is based on factors such as quality of life, health behaviors, educational level, employment and physical environment. Coincidentally, St. Johns posted the second lowest unemployment rate among all Florida counties (2.9%) in 2018.



## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Michael D. Wanchick
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – James K. Johns District 2 – Jeb Smith District 3 – Paul M. Waldron District 4 – Jeremiah Ray Blocker District 5 – Henry Dean
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Dennis W. Hollingsworth
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Tim Forson

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	127,595
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Tourism/hospitality; manufacturing; health care
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Flagler Hospital; Northrop Grumman; Carlisle Interconnect Technologies; PGA Tour; Ponte Vedra Inn & Club; Ring Power
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	6.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>St. Johns County School District</b> 18 elementary schools 6 combined-grade level schools (K-8) 7 middle schools 7 high schools 3 charter schools 2 alternative schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Flagler College</b> Main campus: 74 King Street, St. Augustine
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>St. Johns River State College</b> St. Augustine campus: 2990 College Drive, St. Augustine

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Flagler Hospital, St. Augustine – 335 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Northeast Florida Regional Airport
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-95 – north to Jacksonville, Fernandina Beach and Savannah; south to Daytona Beach, Melbourne and Miami US 1 – north to Jacksonville and Folkston, Georgia; south to Ormond Beach, New Smyrna Beach and Cocoa SR A1A – north to Ponte Vedra and Jacksonville Beach; south to Palm Coast and Flagler Beach SR 16 – east-west between I-95 and St. Augustine SR 207 – northeast to US 1 and St. Augustine Beach; southwest through Elkton and Hastings to East Palatka

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Too numerous to list, but highlights include: Castillo de San Marcos National Monument (oldest masonry fort in the continental U.S.); Oldest House; Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse; Colonial Quarter; Flagler College (former Ponce de Leon Hotel built by Henry Flagler; guided tours available); Lightner Museum (a fascinating collection of collections housed inside the former Alcazar Hotel); Memorial Presbyterian Church (built by Henry Flagler to honor his daughter; she is buried here as are Flagler himself, first wife Mary and granddaughter); Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park; Fort Matanzas National Monument; St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum; St. Augustine Alligator Farm (opened in 1893 and one of Florida's oldest, continuously running attractions); World Golf Hall of Fame and Museum at World Golf Village. Also three state parks: Anastasia State Park, where the coquina rock used to construct nearby Castillo de San Marcos was mined; Faver-Dykes State Park, popular site for birding, fishing, hiking and canoeing; and Fort Mose Historic State Park, featuring an interactive museum recounting the story of the first legally sanctioned free African settlement in what would become the United States.

**Notable events:** Old Town Art Shows, St. Augustine (January & March); St. Augustine Lions Seafood Festival, every imaginable seafood treat for eating, plus live music for dancing to work it off (March); St. Augustine Annual Rhythm & Ribs Festival (March/April); Drake's Raid, a 2-day reenactment of Sir Francis Drake's 1586 invasion of St. Augustine with the highlight being the battle between British and Spanish forces in the historic district (June); Talk Like a Pirate Weekend, includes a family-friendly treasure hunt, poker run and miniature golf tourney (September); St. Augustine Greek Festival (October); Corn Maze at Sykes and Cooper Farms in Elkton, a 9-acre maze to explore and farm-themed family fun (every weekend in October); Great Chowder Debate, in which 30 area restaurants compete for the title "Best Chowder" in several categories; tastes are a \$1 each (November); Nights of Lights, millions of twinkling white lights creating a magical display across St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and the Beaches; this event has been named one of the 10 best holiday lighting displays in the world by National Geographic (begins in mid-November and runs through January 31)

**Natural wonders:** Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (shared with Flagler County); Matanzas Wildlife Management Area/ Matanzas State Forest; Deep Creek State Forest; Moses Creek Conservation Area; St. Johns River (one of only a handful of rivers worldwide that flows from south to north); Matanzas River; Pellicer Creek; several Atlantic Ocean beaches, including Vilano (fishing pier, boardwalk, shops and restaurants), St. Augustine (splash park for kids and volleyball courts) and Crescent City (least crowded, excellent beachcombing); the beach at Anastasia State Park is a favorite with locals and tourists alike for canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing and just hanging out.

**Sports and recreation:** Amateur and professional golf; Ponte Vedra hosts The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass every May and is home to the World Golf Hall of Fame; biking, hiking, horseback riding; all types of watersports, including canoeing, kayaking, windsurfing, snorkeling, diving; county parks offer facilities and competitive league play for adults and kids in many sports, including basketball, volleyball, flag football, softball and soccer

## Like Nowhere Else

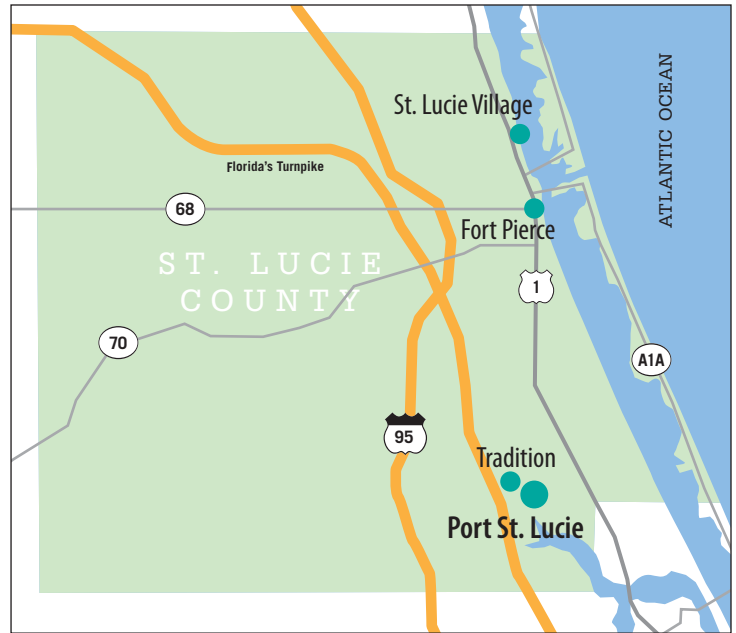
Technically speaking, St. Augustine is not the oldest city in the U.S.; prior to its founding in 1565, Native Americans had already established several so-called "cities" in what would later become Illinois, Arizona and New Mexico. The title St. Augustine can rightfully claim, however, is "oldest permanent European settlement in North America," having been founded 42 years before the English colonized Jamestown and 55 years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. And here's another widely held misconception about this place and period of history in Florida just begging to be corrected: although Juan Ponce de León is believed to have been the first European to set foot in Florida, he did not found St. Augustine; he may, in fact, have never been here at all. It was instead his fellow countryman Pedro Menéndez de Avilés who, in 1565, established a fort at the site of what is today the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park in St. Augustine and who later secured Spain's hold on the entire Florida peninsula by running the French out of Fort Caroline, near present-day Jacksonville. But these are just corrected details, none of which in any way diminish St. Augustine's charm or its importance to Florida history. St. Augustine is like no other place – one huge archaeological and historical goldmine that every Floridian should want to explore.

# St. Lucie County

## Key facts

Population:	321,128
Land size (square miles):	572
Population density:	561 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$38,701
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 72/52 July 90/74
County seat:	Fort Pierce
Largest cities/towns:	Port St. Lucie (pop. 189,344) Fort Pierce (pop. 45,581) Tradition (pop. 7,897) St. Lucie Village (pop. 639)

**Who lives here:** A heavily concentrated urban population. At just over 189,000, Port St. Lucie's population is close to 60% of the total recorded for St. Lucie County. The next largest city – Fort Pierce – represents only 14% of the county total with a population of 45,581.

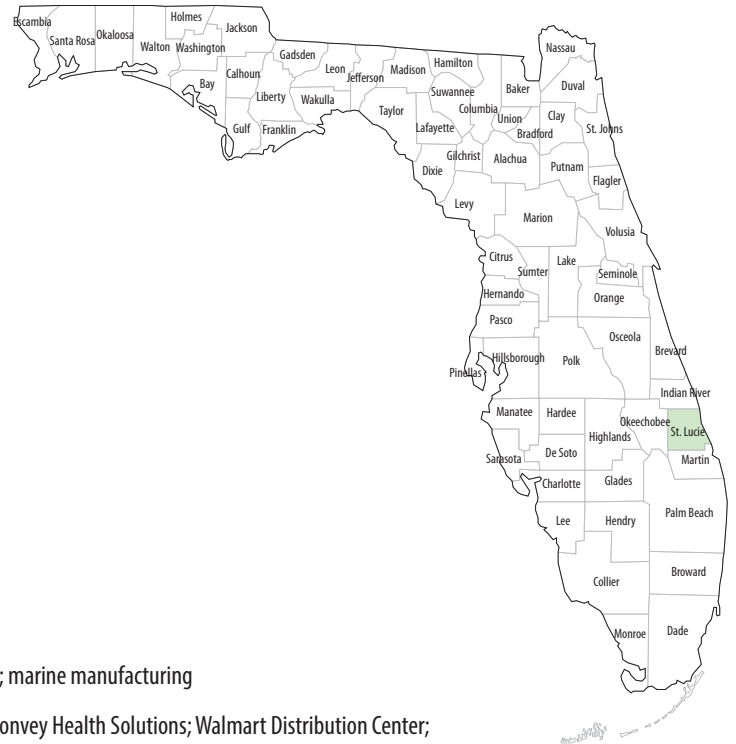


## Names to know

County administrator:	Howard Tipton
County commissioners:	District 1 – Chris Dzadovsky District 2 – Sean Mitchell District 3 – Linda Bartz District 4 – Frannie Hutchinson District 5 – Cathy Townsend
Tax collector:	Chris Craft
School superintendent:	E. Wayne Gent

## Business

Labor force:	142,635
Primary industries:	Health care; business services; logistics and distribution; marine manufacturing
Notable private employers:	Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute; Convey Health Solutions; Walmart Distribution Center; Teleperformance; iVox Solutions; Pursuit Boats; Maverick Boat Company
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>St. Lucie Public Schools</b> 17 elementary schools 4 middle schools 5 high schools 10 combined-grade level schools (K-8, 6-12) 2 alternative schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Florida Atlantic University</b> FAU Harbor Branch: 5600 US 1 North, Fort Pierce  <b>Keiser University</b> Port St. Lucie: 9400 Discovery Way, Port St. Lucie
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Indian River State College</b> Main campus: 3209 Virginia Avenue, Fort Pierce Treasure Coast Public Safety Training Complex: 4600 Kirby Loop Road, Fort Pierce Pruitt Campus: 500 NW California Blvd., Port St. Lucie

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Lawnwood Regional Medical Center & Heart Institute, Fort Pierce – 370 beds St. Lucie Medical Center, Port St. Lucie – 229 beds Tradition Medical Center, Port St. Lucie – 177 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Seaports:</b>	Port of Fort Pierce
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-95 – north to Vero Beach, Melbourne, Daytona Beach and Jacksonville; south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami Florida's Turnpike – from Fort Pierce: northwest to Yeehaw Junction and Orlando; south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami US 1 – from Martin County line: north to Fort Pierce, St. Lucie, Sebastian and Cocoa; south to Stuart, Jupiter and West Palm Beach SR 68 – west from Fort Pierce to US 441 SR 70 – southwest from Fort Pierce to Okeechobee and US 441 SR A1A – north to Indian River Shores and Melbourne Beach; south to Jensen Beach and Port Salerno

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Fort Pierce: A.E. Backus Museum and Collection (more than 60 Backus works on display as well as paintings by the famed “Highwaymen” whom he mentored), Heathcote Botanical Gardens (home to the nation’s largest public tropical bonsai collection, a replica Florida Cracker House and butterfly garden), St. Lucie County Regional History Center (providing a chronological walk-through history of St. Lucie County), the National Navy UDT-SEAL Museum (world’s only museum dedicated exclusively to these elite warriors; Fort Pierce is birthplace of the Navy Frogman), St. Lucie County Aquarium, Manatee Observation and Education Center (indoor displays about manatees; outdoor observation tower overlooking Moore’s Creek and the Indian River Lagoon for possible sightings of manatees in the wild), Harbor Branch Ocean Discovery Visitor’s Center at Florida Atlantic University’s Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute (interactive exhibits and aquaria depicting research efforts of the Institute); in Port St. Lucie: Port St. Lucie Botanical Gardens (10 garden rooms, featuring bamboo, bromeliads, cactus and succulents, native plants, orchids

and more); Oxbow Eco-Center, located on a 225-acre preserve on the North Fork of the St. Lucie River; PGA Gallery at PGA Village Golf Club; three state parks: Avalon (top-secret training site for Navy Frogmen during WWII; features more than a mile of rare undeveloped beachfront), Fort Pierce Inlet State Park (breathtakingly beautiful half-mile white-sand beach), Savannas Preserve (largest remaining remnant of Florida’s east coast savannas, shared with Martin County; guided walks and canoe trips by reservation)

**Notable events:** Taste of Little Italy, Port St. Lucie (January); Treasure Coast Pirate Festival, Fort Pierce (February); St. Lucie County Fair, Fort Pierce (February/March); St. Patrick’s Day Festival, Port St. Lucie (March); Taste of the Sea and Sandy Shoes Seafood Festival, Fort Pierce (March); Fort Pierce Oyster Festival (April); Treasure Coast Seafood Festival, Port St. Lucie (April); FPL Turtle Walks on the beach, originating at FPL’s Energy Encounter on Hutchinson Island, reservations required (Friday and Saturday nights, June-July); Fall Fun Fest, Port St. Lucie (October); Festival of Lights, Port St. Lucie (December); Sights & Sounds on Second Street Festival and Parade, Fort Pierce (December)

**Natural wonders:** 21 miles of pristine beaches, nearly half of which are nature preserves; Indian River Lagoon (connect with 90-minute guided boat tours at the Fort Pierce City Marina); North Fork St. Lucie River Aquatic Preserve; more than a dozen county-operated preserves, including Bluefield, DJ Wilcox, Kings Island, Pinelands, Spruce Bluff and Ten Mile Creek; St. Lucie River, Moore's Creek

**Sports and recreation:** MLB Spring Training February-March for the New York Mets at Digital Domain Park in Port St. Lucie; Minor League baseball action throughout the summer from the St. Lucie Mets at Tradition Field; swimming and snorkeling at Avalon State Park (watch for underwater obstacles left behind by amphibious warfare exercises here during WW II); swimming, snorkeling, surfing and diving at Fort Pierce Inlet State Park; 54 holes of championship golf, instruction and accommodations at PGA Village in Port St. Lucie; 40 unique county-operated parks and recreation facilities offering a variety of opportunities for individual and group exercise, lessons and team play

## Like Nowhere Else

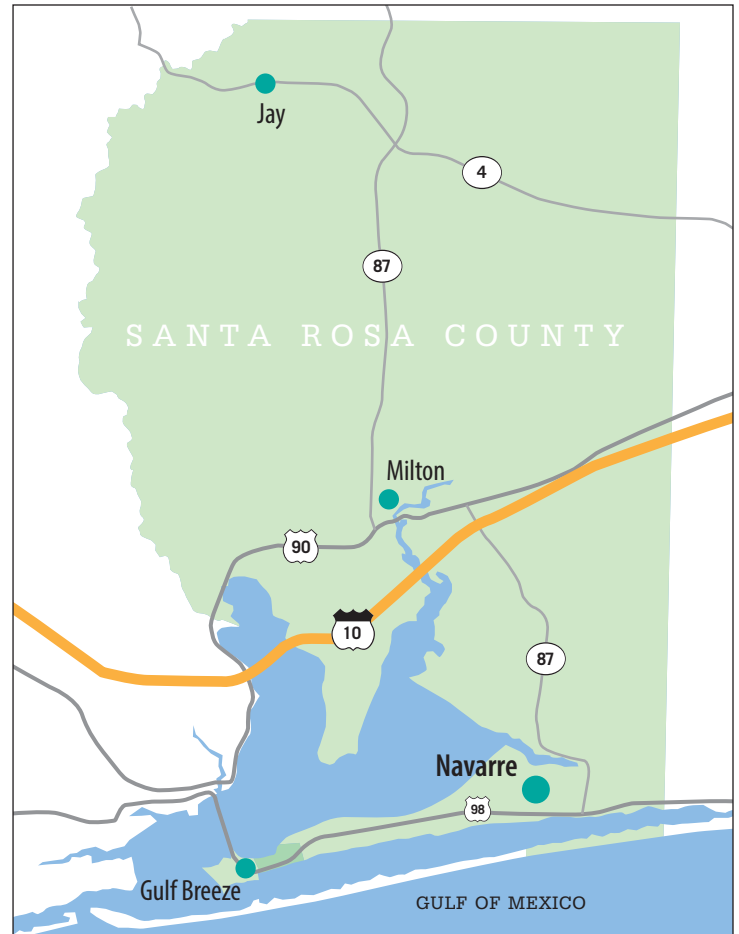
Every year between March 1 and October 31 on beaches all along the east coast of Florida, female sea turtles come ashore to lay their eggs in the sand. In St. Lucie County, they get special treatment from an unlikely source. The state's largest utility – Florida Power & Light – operates a nuclear power plant on Hutchinson Island and here, where a sizable portion of the beach remains undeveloped and largely inaccessible to the general public, these prospective parents have found an ideal hatching site. Sea turtle moms do not stick around for the “blessed event”; after they have dragged themselves ashore, dug a nest and laid their eggs (which can number more than 100, by the way), the females return to sea, leaving the eggs to incubate on their own. A female sea turtle never visits her nest again, but turtle biologists from FPL do, and on Friday and Saturday nights in June and July, they share what they know with a limited number of interested people. FPL's summer “turtle walks” originate at The Energy Encounter, an educational facility located adjacent to the St. Lucie Nuclear Power Plant on Hutchinson Island between Fort Pierce and Stuart. These events begin with an orientation and educational program at 9 p.m. and typically end by midnight, but may last longer – at least until the turtle has finished laying her eggs. Once the educational segment of the evening is complete, participants simply wait in the auditorium while specially trained “scouts” go looking for a nesting loggerhead. When one is found, participants are transported by truck to the nearest access gate to keep actual walking to a minimum. Sounds like fun, right? Well, here's the catch – walks are limited, by permit, to just 50 participants and you must reserve ahead by calling a special number that is not even activated until May 1. And did we mention, that even if you secure a spot, there's no guarantee, you'll actually see a nesting turtle?

# Santa Rosa County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	179,349
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,011
<b>Population density:</b>	177 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$42,932
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 61/38 July 92/71
<b>County seat:</b>	Milton
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	Navarre (pop. 34,085) Milton (pop. 9,986) Gulf Breeze (pop. 6,528) Jay (pop. 603)

**Who lives here:** Many active duty military and their families. In addition to “hosting” its own military facility (Naval Air Station Whiting Field), Santa Rosa County is positioned between Eglin AFB and Hurlburt Field to the east in Okaloosa County and Naval Air Station Pensacola to the west. The fact that unincorporated Navarre is largely a bedroom community for military personnel stationed along Florida’s Gulf coast explains why its population is almost three-and-a-half times that of Santa Rosa’s next largest city and county seat, Milton.

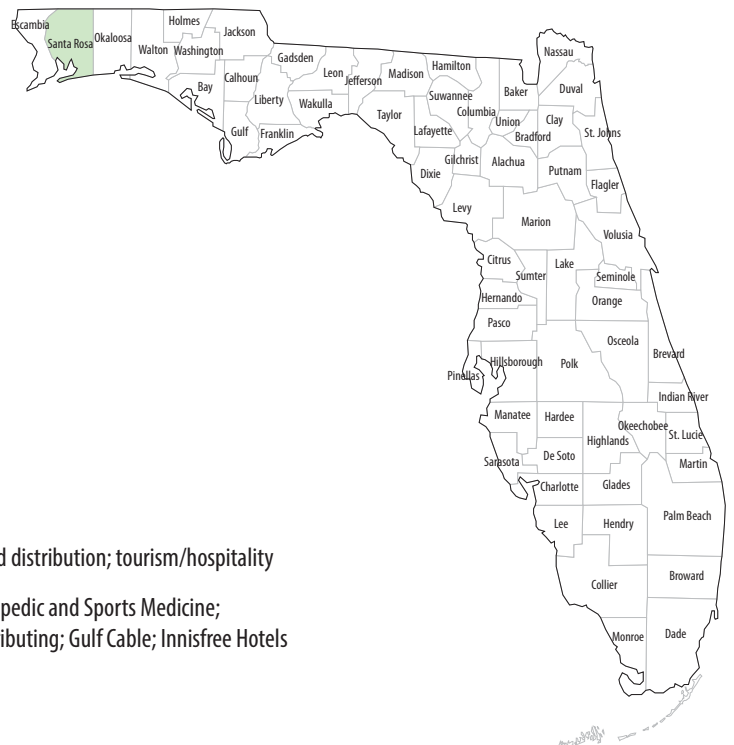


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Dan Schebler
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Sam Parker District 2 – Robert A. “Bob” Cole District 3 – W. D. “Don” Salter District 4 – Dave Piech District 5 – Lane Lynchard
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Stan Colie Nichols
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Tim Wyrosdick

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	80,654
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Health care; business and financial services; logistics and distribution; tourism/hospitality
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Baptist Healthcare Systems; Andrews Institute for Orthopedic and Sports Medicine; AppRiver; Navy Federal Credit Union; Goldring Gulf Distributing; Gulf Cable; Innisfree Hotels
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Santa Rosa Public Schools</b> 14 elementary schools 2 primary schools (K-2) 2 intermediate schools (3-5) 8 middle schools 9 high schools 2 specialty programs
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Pensacola State College</b> Milton Campus: 5988 Highway 90, Milton South Santa Rosa Center: 5075 Gulf Breeze Parkway, Gulf Breeze

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Gulf Breeze Hospital, Gulf Breeze – 77 beds Jay Hospital, Jay – 49 beds Santa Rosa Medical Center, Milton – 129 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans; east to Tallahassee and Jacksonville US 90 – west to Pensacola and the Alabama state line; east to DeFuniak Springs, Marianna and Tallahassee US 98 – west along the barrier islands from Navarre to Gulf Breeze and Pensacola SR 87 – north to I-10, US 90 and the Alabama state line; south to Navarre and US 98 SR 4 – east to Milligan and Crestview; northwest to Century and the Alabama state line
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic Milton, including St. Mary’s Episcopal Church (circa 1888), the West Florida Railroad Museum housed in the former L&N Train Depot, The Imogene Theater (circa 1912) and Milton Museum of Local History; Arcadia Mill Archaeological Site; Gulf Breeze Zoo; Blackwater River State Park; Yellow River Marsh Preserve State Park

**Notable events:** Milton Mardi Gras Parade (February); Riverwalk Art Festival (March); Annual Forestry Conclave and Lumberjack Festival, Pensacola State College-Milton Campus (March); Santa Rosa County Fair (April); Blueberry Bash (June); Americana Under the Stars (July); Juana Good Time Regatta (September); Jay Peanut Festival (October); Navarre Beach Festival of the Arts (October); “Christmas on the River” Lighted Boat Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** Blackwater River; Choctawhatchee National Forest; Yellow River Marsh Aquatic Preserve (one of Florida’s last remaining tracts of wet prairie); Blackwater State Forest; Escambia River Wildlife Management Area; Gulf Islands National Seashore

**Sports and recreation:** Hiking, biking and horseback riding along the Blackwater Heritage State Trail; canoeing and kayaking at Blackwater River and Coldwater Creek; stock car racing February-November at Southern Raceway in Milton; OHV riding at the Clear Creek trails in Blackwater State Forest

## Like Nowhere Else

The names of towns and cities are chosen for a variety of reasons, sometimes logical, sometimes not. In the case of Santa Rosa’s county seat, it’s a little of both. Milton was settled in the early 1800s as a small village centered on the lumber industry that was just beginning to take hold here. The vegetation surrounding the cabins of the townsfolk in those days was apparently thick enough to actually be considered treacherous and so at first they called their little settlement “Scratch Ankle.” After a man by the name of Benjamin Jernigan built a water-powered sawmill at nearby Locklin Lake around 1830, the name was changed to “Jernigan’s Landing.” Subsequently, for reasons that were possibly logical but not recorded, it became “Lumberton,” then “Black Water,” then “Hard Scrabble.” Meanwhile, the sawmill continued to operate and the lumber industry grew, so that by 1839, people had taken to calling this place simply “Milltown,” which, if said a little too quickly, came out “Milton.” And that name actually did stick. No pun intended.



# Sarasota County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	426,718
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	556
<b>Population density:</b>	767 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$61,463
<b>Time zone:</b>	Eastern
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/52 July 90/75
<b>County seat:</b>	Sarasota
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	North Port (pop. 66,300) Sarasota (pop. 56,994) Venice (pop. 23,020) Longboat Key* (pop. 7,292)
	*Longboat Key straddles the line between two Florida counties: Manatee and Sarasota

**Who lives here:** An interesting demographic mix. Sarasota County has a total population of more than 426,000 full-time residents, including business owners, working families and young-at-heart retirees; the civilian labor force, consisting of persons over the age of 18, makes up 53.3% of the county's total population. And according to U.S. News & World Report, this is a great place to live. In a ranking of the nation's 125 largest metropolitan areas, Sarasota beat out every other city in Florida to snag the No. 18 spot.

## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Jonathan R. Lewis
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – Michael A. Moran District 2 – Christian Ziegler District 3 – Nancy C. Detert District 4 – Alan Maio District 5 – Charles D. Hines
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Barbara Ford-Coates
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Todd Bowden

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	188,040
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Manufacturing; business services; logistics and distribution
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	PGT Industries; Sun Hydraulics; Tervis; Shared Services Center–Sarasota; FCCI Insurance Group; Expert Global Solutions; United Natural Foods; Gold Coast Eagle Distributing
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Sarasota County Schools</b> 23 elementary schools 7 middle schools 5 high schools 7 alternative/special schools 11 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Everglades University</b> Sarasota Branch Campus: 6001 Lake Osprey Drive, #110, Sarasota  <b>Keiser University</b> Sarasota: 6151 Lake Osprey Drive, Sarasota  <b>Ringling College of Art and Design</b> Main campus: 2700 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota  <b>New College of Florida</b> Main campus: 5800 Bay Shore Road, Sarasota  <b>University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee</b> Main campus: 8350 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota</b> Lakewood Ranch Campus: 7131 Professional Parkway East, Sarasota Venice Campus: 8000 S. Tamiami Trail, Venice

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Englewood Community Hospital, Englewood – 100 beds Doctors Hospital of Sarasota, Sarasota – 155 beds Sarasota Memorial Health Care System, Sarasota – 743 beds Venice Regional Bayfront Health, Venice – 312 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport (shared with Manatee County – the airport terminal is in Sarasota County, the runway in Manatee)
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-75 – north to Bradenton, Tampa, Gainesville and Valdosta, Georgia; south to Fort Myers and Naples, then east to Fort Lauderdale (Alligator Alley) US 41 – north to Bradenton, Tampa, Brooksville, Inverness and Ocala; south to Punta Gorda, Fort Myers and Naples, then east to Miami (Tamiami Trail) US 301 – north to Bradenton and Palmetto, then northeast to Sun City Center and Riverview SR 72 – southeast to Arcadia SR 780 – east to Old Myakka and SR 70 SR 789 – north on Longboat Key to Bradenton Beach and Anna Maria

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** The Ringling (three attractions, two tickets required – The John & Mable Ringling Museum of Art and The Circus Museum, including the 44,000-piece miniature Howard Brothers Circus Model, on one ticket; Ca' d'Zan, the 56-room mansion that served as the Ringlings' winter residence on another); Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium (a working marine research facility that includes an aquarium with two touch tanks and a 135,000-gallon shark habitat); Marie Selby Botanical Gardens; Sarasota Classic Car Museum; Sarasota Jungle Gardens (feed a flamingo!); Crowley Museum & Nature Center (191 acres of old Florida habitats along the Myakka River, with hiking trails and a boardwalk through swamp and marsh); St. Armands Circle, specialty shops and restaurants in a seaside setting; Myakka River State Park, one of Florida's oldest and largest state parks; Oscar Scherer State Park, one of the best places in southwest Florida to view the illusive and imperiled Florida scrub-jay; Warm Mineral Springs (a constant 87°F and Florida's only naturally formed warm water mineral springs) located south of Sarasota in North Port

**Notable events:** Suncoast Blues Festival, Sarasota (January); Downtown Sarasota Festival of the Arts (February); Sarasota Highland Games and Celtic Festival Southwest Florida Heritage Festival at Crowley Museum and Nature Center (February); Sarasota County Fair (March); Sarasota Jazz Festival (March); Venice Book Fair and Writers Festival (March); Sarasota Film Festival (March/April); Shark's Tooth Festival, Venice (April); Siesta Fiesta, arts & crafts festival, Siesta Key (April); Harvey Milk Festival, Sarasota (May); St. Armands Circle Craft Festival, Sarasota; Christmas in July, Venice (July); Englewood Pioneer Days (August/September); Ringling International Arts Festival, Sarasota (October); Sarasota Pumpkin Festival (October); Siesta Key Crystal Classic Sand Sculpting Festival (November); Chalk Festival, Venice (November); Sarasota Medieval Fair (November); Snow Fest Sarasota (December)

**Natural wonders:** 40 miles of white sand beaches and six barrier islands; Warm Mineral Springs in North Port (Florida's only warm water springs); Myakka River, a designated Florida Wild and Scenic River; Myakka Lake

**Sports and recreation:** MLB spring training February-March for the Baltimore Orioles at Ed Smith Stadium in Sarasota and for the Atlanta Braves at their newly opened CoolTrack Park in North Port. Minor League baseball action throughout the summer from the Sarasota Reds at Ed Smith Stadium; Nathan Benderson Park, home to the 2017 World Rowing Championships and, in 2018, the DI, DII and DIII NCAA Rowing Championships and the World Rowing Masters Regatta; a long legacy of golfing excellence (Sarasota was home to Florida's first golf course built in 1905, today more than 1,000 holes available at public, semi-private and private courses); a full complement of water sports, including paddle-boarding, parasailing, swimming, snorkeling and diving at beaches up and down the Gulf coast; canoeing and kayaking on the scenic Myakka River; hiking and biking at two state parks and along the Myakka River; beachcombing at Venice Beach (prime hunting ground for shark's teeth)

## Like Nowhere Else

As America was taking shape in the 19th and early 20th centuries, many cities came to be associated with a "favorite son," a resident who built a business there or somehow otherwise put them on the map. For Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, it was Carnegie, for Wilmington, Delaware, DuPont, for Dearborn, Michigan, Henry Ford. In Sarasota, Florida, the name to remember is Ringling and, more specifically, John and Mable Ringling, whose mutual love of one another, Italy, art and Sarasota, helped shape the future along this segment of Florida's Gulf coast. John Ringling was one of the five brothers who owned and operated the circus widely known as "the Greatest Show on Earth." In 1911, he and his wife Mabel purchased 20 acres of waterfront property in Sarasota and the following year, began spending winters in what was then just a small beachside community. Over time, they purchased additional real estate – eventually owning 25% of Sarasota's total area – and built a winter residence here. They called their 56-room mansion on Sarasota Bay "Ca' d'Zan" ("House of John" in Venetian dialect) and Mable, who supervised every aspect of the building, had it styled after the palazzi she had so admired in Venice, Italy. By the time construction was completed in 1926, the two had made several trips abroad and they never came home empty-handed. The books and works of art they carried back became furnishings for Ca' d'Zan, and when they ran out of room there, John built a 21-gallery museum modeled on the famous Uffizi Gallery in Florence to hold the overflow, which included paintings by Velazquez, Poussin, van Dyke and Rubens. He opened the museum to the public in 1931, two years after Mable's death; five years later, upon his own death, John Ringling bequeathed his Sarasota home and museum to the people of Florida. Today, The Ringling complex, which includes Ca' d'Zan, The John and Mable Museum of Art and The Circus Museum, is a major Florida tourist attraction, welcoming more than 400,000 visitors annually from around the world.

# Seminole County

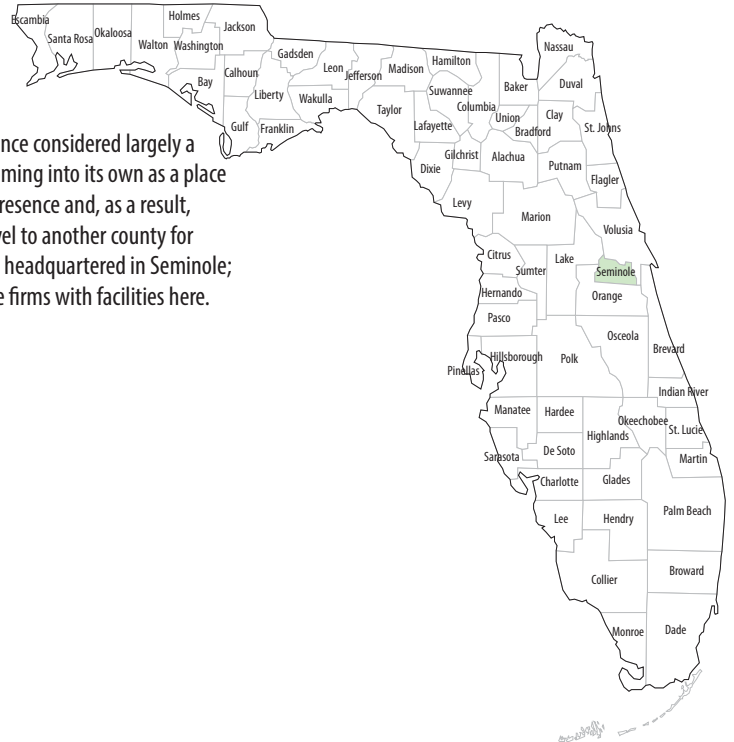
## Key facts

Population:	467,832
Land size (square miles):	309
Population density:	1,514 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$46,972
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/49 July 93/74
County seat:	Sanford
Largest cities/towns:	Sanford (pop. 59,317) Altamonte Springs (pop. 44,277) Oviedo (pop. 40,785) Winter Springs (pop. 36,635) Casselberry (pop. 28,395) Lake Mary (pop. 16,474) Longwood (pop. 15,061)



## Who lives here:

More homegrown workers than commuters. Although once considered largely a bedroom community for Orlando, Seminole County is coming into its own as a place where large companies want to establish a significant presence and, as a result, fewer than half of the workers who live in Seminole travel to another county for their job. The American Automobile Association (AAA) is headquartered in Seminole; Deloitte, Verizon, AT&T and Chase are among other large firms with facilities here.



## Names to know

County manager:	Nicole Guillet
County commissioners:	District 1 – Bob Dallari District 2 – Jay Zembower District 3 – Lee Constantine District 4 – Amy Lockhart District 5 – Brenda Carey
Tax collector:	Joel M. Greenburg
School superintendent:	Walt Griffin

## Business

Labor force:	254,438
Primary industries:	Business and professional services; manufacturing; health care
Notable private employers:	AT&T Mobility; Central Florida Regional Hospital; Chase Card Services; Convergys; Deloitte Consulting; Verizon Corporate Resources Group; Veritas Technologies; American Automobile Association; Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems America
Sales tax rate:	7%

## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Seminole County Public Schools</b> 37 elementary schools 12 middle schools 9 high schools 6 alternative schools 4 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>University of Central Florida</b> UCF Altamonte Springs: 850 South State Road 434, Suite A426, Altamonte Springs UCF Sanford/Lake Mary: 100 Weldon Blvd., UCF Partnership Center, Sanford
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Seminole State College of Florida</b> Sanford/Lake Mary (main) Campus: 100 Weldon Blvd., Sanford Altamonte Springs Campus: 850 South SR 434, Altamonte Springs Robert and Jane Lee Campus at Oviedo: 2505 Lockwood Blvd., Oviedo The Geneva Center (public safety training complex): 2450 Gun Range Road, Geneva The Center for Economic Development at Heathrow: 1055 AAA Drive, Heathrow

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	AdventHealth Altamonte, Altamonte Springs – 393 beds South Seminole Hospital, Longwood – 206 beds Oviedo Medical Center, Oviedo – 64 beds Central Florida Regional Hospital, Sanford – 221 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Orlando Sanford International Airport
<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak Auto Train, daily service from Sanford to Lorton, Virginia (about 25 miles south of Washington DC); 855-mile journey takes approximately 17-1/2 hours SunRail commuter train system: north from Sanford in Osceola County to DeBary in Volusia County; south from Sanford with Seminole County stops at Lake Mary, Longwood and Altamonte; through Orange County to Kissimmee and Poinciana in Osceola County
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-4 – northeast to DeBary, Daytona Beach and I-95; southwest to Orlando, Lakeland, I-75 and Tampa SR 417 (toll) – aka “Central Florida Greenway” – north across Lake Jessup to Sanford and I-4N; from Oviedo: south through eastern Orange County, past Orlando International Airport to connect with I-4S at Lake Buena Vista US 17/US 92 – north to Lake Monroe and DeBary; south through Casselberry to Maitland, Winter Park, Orlando and Kissimmee SR 46 – from Sanford: west to Mt. Dora and US 441; east to Orlando Sanford International Airport, then southeast to I-95 near Titusville SR 419 – north from Oviedo to Winter Springs and US 17/US 92 SR 426 – southwest from Volusia County to Winter Park SR 434 – west through Winter Springs to Longwood and Altamonte Springs SR 436 – west to Apopka

## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Sanford: historic downtown district with many buildings dating to the 1880s (catch the farmer’s market every Saturday or the “Alive After Five” street party every 2nd Thursday), RiverWalk paved trail along the Lake Monroe waterfront, Central Florida Zoo and Botanical Gardens, Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford Museum (depicting city history), Historic Sanford Memorial Stadium (where Jackie Robinson once played and a former spring training facility for the New York Giants); in Longwood: downtown historic district (190 acres and 37 structures), Bradlee-McIntyre House/Museum, circa 1885 (open for afternoon tours on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays and Sundays), Big Tree Park (home of “Lady Liberty,” an 89-foot-tall, 2,000-year-old giant cypress and the 20-25-foot-tall remains of “The Senator,” a 3,500-year-old bald cypress that stood here until it was destroyed by fire 2012); in Altamonte Springs: Cranes Roost Park in Uptown Altamonte (the fountain here is choreographed to classical, swing and contemporary music); in Oviedo: the mysterious “Oviedo Light” (a ghost light some claim has been known to chase cars – you be the judge!); Lower Wekiva River Preserve State Park (central Florida nature in its purest form along four miles of the Wekiva River, which is one of just two rivers in Florida to be designated a National Wild and Scenic River by the National Park Service); Seminole County Environmental Studies Center in Winter Springs

**Notable events:** Central Florida Scottish Highland Games, Winter Springs (January); Sanford Mardi Gras (February); Uptown Art Expo, painters, sculptors, potters, crafters, chalk artists and more at Cranes Roost Park at Uptown Altamonte Springs (March); Pints N’ Paws Craft Brew Festival, Sanford (March); St. Johns River Festival of the Arts, 125 fine artists and craftspeople in Historic Downtown Sanford (May); Central Florida’s BBQ Blowout, 80 professional and backyard teams grill and smoke for cash, trophies and a chance to compete in the World Food Championships in Las Vegas, Oviedo (May); Hurricane Street Party, Sanford (June); “Red, Hot & Boom,” said to be central Florida’s largest Independence Day celebration, Altamonte Springs (July); Puerto Rican Festival, Sanford (July); Hispanic Festival at Lake Monroe, Sanford (September); St. Juan’s Pirate Festival, Sanford (September); Oktoberfest at the German American Society of Central Florida in Castleberry (October); “The Rising,” annual 5K run and twilight cemetery tour, Oviedo (October); All Souls Community Harvest Festival, Sanford (November); Art, Craft & Wine Festival sponsored by the Seminole County South Rotary Club at Cranes Roost Park at Uptown Altamonte Springs (November); Longwood Arts & Crafts Festival at Bradlee-McIntyre Museum (November); St. Lucia Festival at the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford (December); Illuminated Boat Parade, Sanford (December)

**Natural wonders:** Little Big Econlockhatchee Wildlife Management Area and State Forest; Lower Wekiva River Preserve (shared with Lake County); Spring Hammock Preserve; Lake Jesup Wilderness Area; St. Johns, Wekiva, Little Wekiva, Econlockhatchee and Little Econlockhatchee rivers, plus more than a dozen creeks; numerous lakes including Monroe (shared with Volusia County), Jesup, Harney, Howell, Little Howell, Bear Gully and Red Bug

**Sports and recreation:** Ample opportunities to enjoy all that this county’s protected lands, lakes and rivers have to offer in the way of hiking, biking, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, primitive and cabin camping, canoeing and kayaking; Cranes Roost Park in Uptown Altamonte Springs and the paved RiverWalk along Lake Monroe in downtown Sanford are especially ideal places to walk or run at sunrise

## Like Nowhere Else

Looking to fly into or out of central Florida? Orlando International is not your only option. Depending on destination and/or schedule, Orlando Sanford International Airport might be a better choice. This facility, which began as a tiny aviation field for corporate jets and pilot training, is today central Florida’s second largest airport and ranks among the 100 busiest in the U.S. From here, five airlines offer regularly scheduled, chartered and seasonal service to more than 70 U.S. destinations as well as to Puerto Rico, the Netherlands and nine destinations in the United Kingdom. And word is getting out. In 2018, Sanford International handled 3.2 million passengers, an increase of 6% over the previous year. The airport’s primary carrier, Allegiant Air, accounts for close to 90% of passenger traffic.

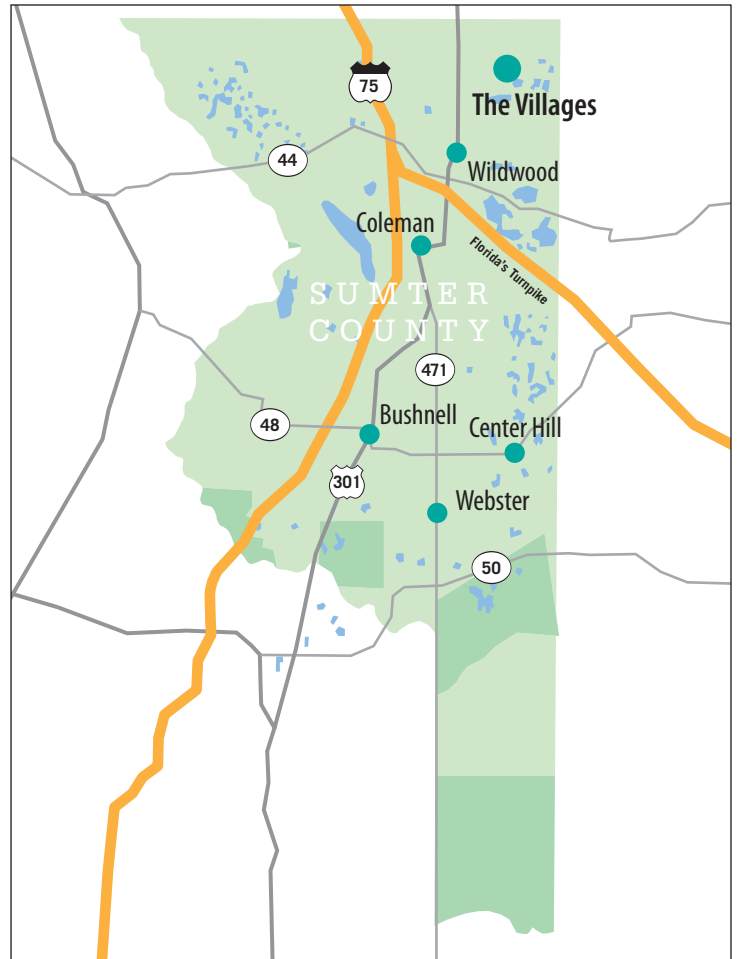
# Sumter County

## Key facts

Population:	128,754
Land size (square miles):	547
Population density:	235 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$42,659
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 71/47 July 92/71
County seat:	Bushnell
Largest cities/towns:	The Villages* (est. pop. 125,165) Wildwood (pop. 6,831) Bushnell (pop. 3,107) Center Hill (pop. 1,371) Webster (pop. 862) Coleman (pop. 852)

\*The Villages encompasses three Florida counties, mainly Sumter, but also parts of Lake and Marion; exact population unavailable, estimate based on last known population + annual growth rate of 4.3

**Who lives here:** A preponderance of people who are outside the labor force. Labor force numbers across Florida typically equal approximately half the total population in every county. Except Sumter. Here, the labor force accounts for just 24% of total population. Why? The continued influx of over-55 residents at The Villages who have relocated here, not to work but to simply enjoy retirement, skews the numbers.

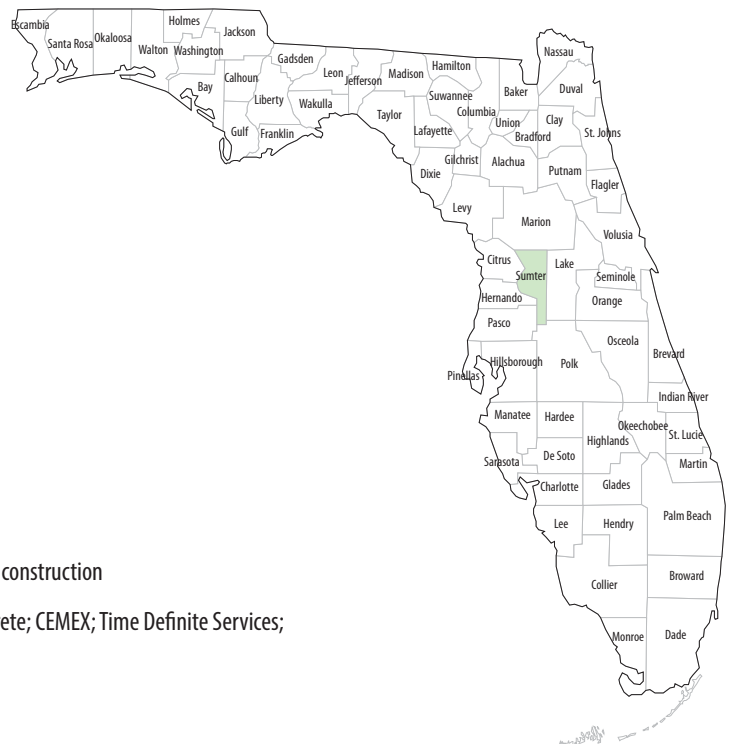


## Names to know

County administrator:	Bradley Arnold
County commissioners:	District 1 – Al Butler District 2 – Doug Gilpin District 3 – Don Burgess District 4 – Garry Breeden District 5 – Steve Printz
Tax collector:	Randy Mask
School superintendent:	Richard A. Shirley

## Business

Labor force:	31,241
Primary industries:	Agribusiness; manufacturing; logistics and distribution; construction
Notable private employers:	Brite Leaf Citrus Nursery; Agromillora Florida; T&D Concrete; CEMEX; Time Definite Services; Robbins Manufacturing; SECO Energy; The Villages
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Sumter County School District</b> 4 elementary schools 1 middle school 1 middle-high school 1 high school 1 charter school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Lake-Sumter State College</b> Sumter Campus: 1405 County Road 526A, Sumterville

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	The Villages Regional Hospital, The Villages – 307 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	Florida's Turnpike – southeast from its origin at Wildwood to Orlando and Fort Pierce, then south to West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami I-75 – north to Ocala, Gainesville and Lake City; south to Tampa, Sarasota and Fort Myers US 301 – north through Wildwood to Ocala, Starke and I-10 in Duval County; south through Bushnell to Dade City, Thonotosassa and Brandon SR 44 – west to Inverness, Lecanto and Crystal River; east to Leesburg, Eustis and DeLand SR 48 – west to Floral City; east to Howey-in-the-Hills SR 50 – west to Brooksville and Weeki Wachee; east to Minneola and Clermont SR 471 – north to US 301 at Sumterville; south to Polk County
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Bushnell: Dade Battlefield Historic State Park (site of a Second Seminole War battle in December 1835 in which 105 of 108 troops were massacred), Florida National Veterans Cemetery, Fort Armstrong Historical Monument, Florida International Teaching Zoo (tours by reservation only); in Wildwood: antiquing in downtown Wildwood; historic Baker House (guided tours), Royal Park (site of one of Florida's oldest African-American communities, founded in 1865 by former slaves from the nearby Old Green Plantation)

**Notable events:** Dade Massacre Reenactment, Bushnell (January); Spanish Springs Arts & Crafts Festival, The Villages (January); Mardi Gras Festival, The Villages (February); Sumter County Fair, Bushnell (March); The Villages Golf Festival (March); Brownwood Paddock Square Arts & Crafts Festival, The Villages (April); La Plaza Grande Arts & Crafts Festival, The Villages (May); Bunnell Fall Festival, commemorating the city's founding with a parade, craft fair, greased pig contest and fireworks (October); Christmas on the Frontier, Bushnell (December)

**Natural wonders:** Withlacoochee State Forest; Green Swamp (shared with Pascoe, Polk, Lake and Hernando counties); Croom Wildlife Management Area (shared with Hernando County); Half Moon Wildlife Management Area; Lake Panasoffkee Wildlife Management Area and Richloam Wildlife Management Area; many lakes, including Deaton, Panasoffkee, Okahumpka and Miona; Withlacoochee, Little Withlacoochee and Outlet rivers; numerous creeks for paddling

**Sports and recreation:** With so many wildlife management areas within its boundaries, Sumter is prime territory for hunting and fishing, kayaking and canoeing, hiking, off-road biking, horseback riding and wildlife viewing; county parks offer numerous amenities including boat ramps, horseshoe pits, hiking trails

and picnic pavilions; a portion of the Van Fleet State Trail, which traverses the Green Swamp and is considered Florida's most remoted trail, begins (or ends, depending on your direction) in Sumter County at Mabel Trail Head near Webster

## Like Nowhere Else

In an era when many rural counties across the U.S. are losing population, Sumter is gaining – in a most dramatic fashion and primarily because of a master-planned, age-restricted community called The Villages, which on an annual basis consistently earns the title “fastest-growing Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in America.” To really appreciate this fact, it's important to know up front that The Villages MSA consists of Sumter County alone; the Lake and Marion county portions of this community are counted in other MSAs. So, this place called The Villages, which is not even considered by the U.S. Census Bureau to be an official city or town, just a CDP – census-designated place – in the middle of Florida that is home to neither an Interstate exit nor an ocean view, is growing faster than all 380 other MSAs nationwide? Yes, and here's why. This community was a mobile home park in the 1970s, but when sales began to lag a decade later, H. Gary Morse, son of the original property owner, was brought on board to cast a broader vision. Morse had studied retirement communities elsewhere and determined that the key to their success was a combination of well-maintained amenities for residents and diverse commercial development nearby. So he set out to both emulate and improve upon that model; to a specific segment of the population, Morse offered what they seemed to want, and it has paid off handsomely. This community today boasts 42 golf courses (648 total golf holes), 70+ swimming pools, three town squares, 1,800 clubs and activities and a full complement of retail stores and dining options. And the people continue to come. Since 1980, Sumter County's population has experienced a better than 500% gain, growing from 24,272 to 128,754. It shows no signs of stopping.



# Suwannee County

## Key facts

Population:	44,191
Land size (square miles):	689
Population density:	64 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$31,296
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 67/43 July 93/72
County seat:	Live Oak
Largest cities/towns:	McAlpin-Wellborn (pop. 9,780) Dowling Park (pop. 8,693) Live Oak (pop. 6,896) Branford (pop. 728)
Who lives here:	Lovers of live music, it seems. Live Oak and its Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park & Campground host a musical festival of one kind or another almost every month. A particular favorite – the Wane Music Festival held each April – abruptly called it quits in 2019 after a 13-year run allegedly because of timing issues. (The concert typically falls on Easter/Passover.) No alternate date has been set, but die-hard fans remain hopeful.

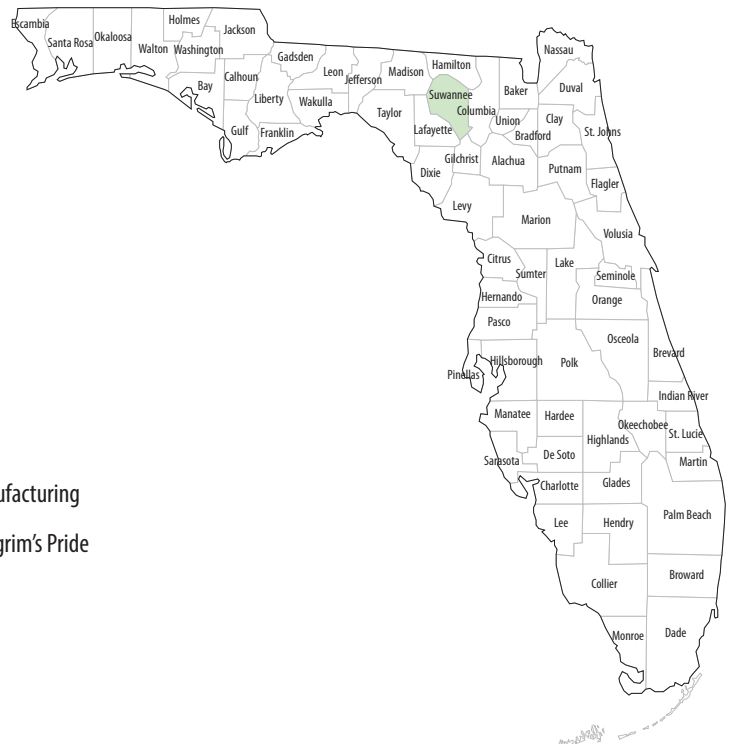


## Names to know

County administrator:	Randy Harris
County commissioners:	District 1 – Don Hale District 2 – Clyde Fleming District 3 – Ricky Gamble District 4 – Len Stapleton District 5 – Ronald Richardson
Tax collector:	Sharon W. Jordan
School superintendent:	Ted L. Roush

## Business

Labor force:	18,286
Primary industries:	Timber; transportation and logistics; agribusiness; manufacturing
Notable private employers:	Klausner Lumber One; Suwannee Lumber Company; Pilgrim's Pride
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Suwannee County School District</b> 3 elementary schools 2 middle schools 2 high schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>North Florida Community College</b> Main campus: 325 NW Turner Davis Drive, Madison

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Shands Live Oak Regional Medical Center, Live Oak – 25 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Pensacola and New Orleans; east to Jacksonville US 90 – northwest to Madison; east to Lake City US 129 – south to Branford and SR 349 SR 51 – north to I-10; south to Mayo
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Troy Spring State Park where the remains of the Civil War-era Steamboat Madison still rest; Bob's River Place in Branford, a swimming hole in the Suwannee River decked out with rope swings, balance beams, waterwheels, floating docks, hammock launchers and more; Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park, site of numerous music festivals throughout the year; the 170-mile Suwannee River Wilderness Trail; Suwannee River State Park; Wes Skiles Peacock Springs State Park

**Notable events:** Suwannee River Jam Fest (April); Annual Suwannee River Paddling Festival (April); Wellborn Blueberry Festival (June); Blackwater Music Festival (September); Old Tyme Farm Days (November); Christmas on the Square (December)

**Natural wonders:** 33,000 feet of surveyed underwater passages at Peacock Springs (experienced divers only); glimpses of old Florida along streets lined with the ancient live oaks for which the county seat was named

**Sports and recreation:** Fishing, hunting, spring diving, boating, canoeing, horseback riding, off-road motor sports; golf

## Like Nowhere Else

When it comes to aquatic sports, not all water wonders in Florida are coastal; there are, in fact, many to be found inland and in that regard, Suwannee County seems to have hit the jackpot. Considered by many to be the freshwater spring diving capital of America, Suwannee County has one of the longest underwater cave systems in the continental United States, not to mention a true swimming hole – a 70-foot deep, first magnitude spring (discharging 64.6 million gallons per day). And as if that's not enough, this region offers an actual rare opportunity for whitewater rafting in Florida; just next door in Hamilton County, Big Shoals State Park boasts the only class III (intermediate) rapids in the Sunshine State.

# Taylor County

## Key facts

Population:	21,623
Land size (square miles):	1,043
Population density:	21 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$31,790
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 67/41 July 92/71
County seat:	Perry
Largest cities/towns:	Perry (pop. 6,937) Steinhatchee (pop. 920) Salem (pop. 149)
Who lives here:	Non-commuters. Unlike workers in some largely rural Florida counties who must commute long distances to their jobs, Taylor workers are employed close to home. Fewer than 14% work outside their county of residence and mean travel time to work is just 24 minutes.



## Names to know

County administrator:	LaWanda Pemberton
County commissioners:	District 1 – Malcolm Page District 2 – Jim Moody District 3 – Sean Murphy District 4 – Pam Feagle District 5 – Thomas Demps
Tax collector:	Mark Wiggins
School superintendent:	Danny Glover Jr.

## Business

Labor force:	8,735
Primary industries:	Forestry and timber processing; manufacturing; logistics and distribution
Notable private employers:	Georgia-Pacific Foley Cellulose; Chemring Ordnance; West Fraser; United Welding Service; RDS Manufacturing
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Taylor Community School District</b> 2 elementary schools 1 middle school 1 high school 1 primary school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>North Florida Community College</b> Main campus: 325 NW Turner Davis Drive, Madison

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Doctors' Memorial Hospital, Perry – 48 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 98/US 27/US 19 – northwest to Monticello and the Georgia state line; southeast to Cross City and Fanning Springs US 98/SR 30 – west to Newport and Wakulla County US 221 – north to Greenville and the Georgia state line US 27/SR 20 – east to Mayo SR 51 – north to Mayo; south to Steinhatchee
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** In Perry, many historic structures, such as the Old Taylor County Jail and the Old Perry Post Office; Taylor County Historical Society Museum; glimpses of old Florida in Steinhatchee draw artists from far and wide; Econfina River State Park, where Confederate deserters once camped and assisted Union blockade ships during the Civil War; Forest Capital Museum State Park celebrating the heritage of Florida's forest industry (includes an authentic 19th-century Cracker homestead)

**Notable events:** Fiddler Crab Festival (February); Florida State Bluegrass Festival (April); Pickin' in the Pines Bluegrass Festival (September) Florida Forest Festival (October); Southern Pines Blues and BBQ Festival (December)

**Natural wonders:** 60 miles of gulf coastline, four rivers, numerous streams, creeks and springs; Big Bend Wildlife Management Area; Hagen's Cove south of Keaton Beach is one of the Gulf Coast's premier shorebird locations

**Sports and recreation:** Snorkeling for scallops in the Gulf shallows just off shore (season runs from July to mid-September); flats fishing in the Econfina River; canoeing along several challenging river trails (not recommended for beginners; some rapids drop by as much as 10 feet); for sea kayakers, the Saltwater Paddling Trail weaving along the Gulf shore between the St. Marks and Suwannee rivers; the 19-mile Aucilla River Canoe Trail system (moderately difficult; one rapids drops nearly 10 feet); hunting, fishing, biking, hiking and bird watching in the Big Bend Wildlife Management Area

## Like Nowhere Else

Every county in Florida has something to celebrate. In Taylor, it's the forest. So while other Florida communities organize all of their weekend festivals around arts and crafts, music, motorcycles, pretty flowers and seafood, the people of Perry gather to celebrate trees. And given that forestry has been a key component of Taylor County's economy ever since the railroads came to town some 100 years ago, this makes perfect sense. Toward the end of the 19th century, investors were attracted to this county's expansive stands of virgin pine and cypress, both of which could be used as building materials and, in the case of the pines, to make turpentine. The timber industry in Taylor County was thus launched, but it took until 1903, when the first rail line arrived in Perry, for forestry to really take off. The next 40 years would bring alternating booms and busts, but Taylor's lumber industry emerged after World War II on solid ground. So solid, in fact, that the local Chamber of Commerce and timber industry leaders promoted Taylor County as the "Pine Tree Capital of the South," and established an annual forest festival in 1957. Trees have been celebrated here every October since with a festival that includes a parade, chainsaw, cross cut and loader competitions, lumberjack shows and what is billed as "the world's largest free fish fry."

# Union County

## Key facts

Population:	14,940
Land size (square miles):	244
Population density:	61 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$19,749
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 65/40 July 91/70
County seat:	Lake Butler
Largest cities/towns:	Lake Butler (pop. 1,813) Worthington Springs (pop. 390) Raiford (pop. 242)

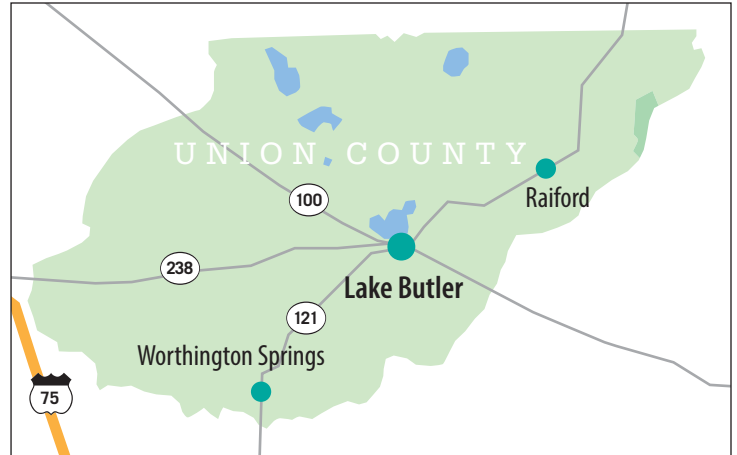
**Who lives here:** One-third as many women over the age of 18 as men, a demographic easily explained by the male prison population residing at the nearby Union Correctional Facility. The presence of this correctional facility and two others – the Reception and Medical Center in Lake Butler and Florida State Prison just across the Bradford County line – also skews employment figures; a significant share of working residents in Union County either work in Florida Department of Corrections facilities themselves or are related to someone who does.

## Names to know

Clerk of the court:	Kellie Hendricks Connell
County administrator:	None
County commissioners:	District 1 – Karen Cossey District 2 – Channing Dobbs District 3 – James “Jimmy” Tallman District 4 – Lacey Cannon District 5 – Willie Croft
Tax collector:	Lisa B. Johnson
School superintendent:	Carlton Faulk

## Business

Labor force:	4,670
Primary industries:	Timber; transportation and trucking; manufacturing; health care
Notable private employers:	Lake Butler Hospital; Pritchett Trucking; Harlis R Ellington Construction
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Union County School District</b> 1 elementary school 1 middle school 1 high school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Florida Gateway College</b> Main campus: 149 SE College Place, Lake City

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Lake Butler Hospital, Lake Butler – 25 beds
<b>State/federal hospitals:</b>	Reception and Medical Center (RMC), Lake Butler – 120 beds Union Correctional Institution Hospital, Raiford – 59 beds

## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	SR 121 – northeast to I-10 and McClenny; south to Gainesville SR 100 – northwest to Lake City; southeast to Starke and Palatka; SR 238 – west to I-75; northeast to I-10
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## Things to See and Do

<b>Major attractions:</b>	Union County Historical Museum
<b>Notable events:</b>	RMC Fall Festival (October); Lake Butler Christmas Parade (December)
<b>Natural wonders:</b>	Several lakes, including Butler, Bessie, Blanche, Chase and Louise; Union is one of three counties that make up an area of Florida known as “The Northern Lakes Region” (Bradford and western Clay are the other two); Mill Creek Preserve in nearby Alachua County
<b>Sports and recreation:</b>	Hiking and biking along the 47-mile-long Palatka-Lake Butler State Trail built on top of an abandoned rail road bed; splash park for kids at Lakeside Park in Lake Butler

## Like Nowhere Else

Union is both Florida’s smallest county by land size and one of its youngest. Founded in 1921, Union County was carved from the original New River County, which had been created in 1858 and subsequently renamed Bradford County in 1861 to honor Confederate Army Capt. Richard Bradford, Florida’s first casualty in the Civil War. Union County took its name to honor the concept of “unity,” which turned out to be somewhat ironic considering that the two counties would have a long history of less-than-cordial relations. At one time, the high school football teams weren’t even allowed to play one another because of the inevitable violence that would ensue regardless of outcome.



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Volusia County Schools</b> 46 elementary schools 13 middle schools 10 high schools 9 alternative schools/programs 8 charter schools
<b>Public/private universities:</b>	<b>Bethune-Cookman University</b> Main campus: 640 Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Blvd., Daytona Beach  <b>Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University</b> Daytona Beach campus: 600 South Clyde Morris Blvd., Daytona Beach  <b>Keiser University</b> Daytona Beach: 1800 Business Park Blvd., Daytona Beach  <b>Stetson University</b> Main campus: 421 North Woodland Blvd., DeLand  <b>University of Central Florida</b> UCF Daytona Beach: 1200 West International Speedway Blvd., Daytona Beach
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Daytona State College</b> Daytona Beach Campus: 1200 West International Speedway Blvd., Daytona Beach Advanced Technology College: 1770 Technology Blvd., Daytona Beach DeLand Campus: 1155 County Road 4139, DeLand Deltona Campus: 2351 Providence Blvd., Deltona New Smyrna Beach-Edgewater Campus: 940 10th Street, New Smyrna Beach

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	AdventHealth Daytona Beach, Daytona Beach – 327 beds Halifax Health Medical Center, Daytona Beach – 563 beds AdventHealth DeLand, DeLand – 164 beds AdventHealth New Smyrna Beach, New Smyrna Beach – 112 beds AdventHealth Fish Memorial, Orange City – 179 beds AdventHealth Oceanside, Ormond Beach – 80 beds Halifax Health Medical Center of Port Orange, Port Orange – 80 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Commercial airports:</b>	Daytona Beach International Airport
<b>Passenger rail:</b>	Amtrak: Silver Service, from DeLand North to: New York and Washington DC through Jacksonville, Savannah and Charleston South to: Orlando, Tampa; West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami  SunRail commuter train system: north from Orlando to Winter Park and Maitland, through Seminole County and ending at DeBary in Volusia County; south from DeBary through Seminole and Orange counties to Kissimmee and Poinciana in Osceola County
<b>Major highways:</b>	I-95 – north to St. Augustine, Jacksonville and Savannah; south to Melbourne, Fort Pierce and Miami I-4 – west from Daytona Beach to Orlando and Tampa US 1 – north to Bunnell, St. Augustine and Jacksonville; south to Titusville, Melbourne and Vero Beach US 17 – north to Crescent City, Palatka and Green Cove Springs US 17/US 92 – south through DeLand and DeBary to Seminole County SR A1A – north to Flagler Beach and Palm Coast; south to Edgewater and Canaveral National Seashore SR 40 – west to Ocala; east through Barberville to Ormond Beach SR 44 – west from New Smyrna Beach to I-4, then southwest to Eustis SR 11 – north from US 17 near DeLand to US 1 at Bunnell



## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Daytona International Speedway; Bethune-Cookman College Historic District; Halifax Historical Society Museum; Museum of Arts and Sciences (MOAS); Southeast Museum of Photography; Jackie Robinson Ballpark (originally known as Daytona City Island Ballpark, this is where Jackie Robinson played in the first integrated MLB spring training game in 1946); Ponce de León Inlet Lighthouse & Museum (Florida's tallest lighthouse, 203 steps); Downtown DeLand Historic District; Barberville Pioneer Settlement; Cracker Creek, Port Orange; seven state parks: Blue Spring (largest spring in the St. Johns River and a designated manatee refuge, extremely popular and often filled to capacity – go early), Bulow Creek, Bulow Plantation Ruins, DeLeon Springs, Hontoon Island (accessible only by ferry or boat), North Peninsula and Tomoka

**Notable events:** IMAGES: A Festival of the Arts, New Smyrna Beach (January); DeLand Craft Beer Festival, 100 breweries, 350 different beers (February); Enterprise Chili Cook-Off (February); Halifax Oyster Festival, Daytona Beach (March); DeLand Outdoor Art and Festival (March); Halifax Oyster Festival, Daytona Beach (April); Fishstock, combined fishing tournament, festival and boat show in New Smyrna Beach (May); Country 500 Great American Music Festival at Daytona International Speedway (Memorial Day Weekend); New Smyrna Beach Kite Festival featuring demos, competition and kite-flying lessons (June); New Smyrna Beach Shrimp & Seafood Festival (August); New Smyrna Beach Jazz Fest (September); Daytona Beach Blues Festival at Jackie Robinson Ballpark (October); Art Among the Trees Fine Art, Crafts & Music Festival, DeLeon Springs (October); Mainstreet Ormond Beach Riverfest Seafood Festival (November); Flamingo Follies in New Smyrna Beach, 2nd oldest continual art festival in Florida (November); Volusia County Fair & Youth Show, DeLand (November); Daytona Turkey Run at Daytona International Speedway, 6,000 vintage/classic/muscle/race cars for show and for sale (Thanksgiving weekend); New Smyrna Beach Rock & Roll Festival (December)

**Natural wonders:** Volusia County comprises approximately 240,000 acres of conservation lands, 172 linear miles of waterways and 35 miles of beaches, including: Lake George State Forest, Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, Tiger Bay State Forest, Lake George (Florida's second largest lake), Lake Monroe, Lake Woodruff, Mosquito Lagoon, the St. Johns, Halifax and Tomoka Rivers; some very old trees – a 400-year-old Fairfield Oak at Bulow Creek State Park and "Old Methuselah," a 500-year-old bald cypress at DeLeon Springs State Park; several hundred manatees warming themselves each winter in the 73°F water at Blue Spring State Park

**Sports and recreation:** Sports and recreation: Auto racing at Daytona International Speedway – NASCAR Sprint Cup Series (Daytona 500 and Coke Zero 500) and the "24 Hours of Daytona" endurance race in January; annual gatherings for motorcycle enthusiasts in Daytona Beach – Spring Bike Week (March) and Fall Biketoberfest (October); numerous golf courses throughout the county and the headquarters of the LPGA in Daytona Beach; the Daytona Tortugas (formerly known as the Daytona Cubs), an affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds, play minor league baseball at Jackie Robinson Ballpark; kayaking, canoeing, hiking, biking, birding and wildlife viewing at seven state parks and many other nature sites; swimming, snorkeling, surfing and shelling along the Atlantic coast; driving on the beach – a Volusia County tradition dating back to the 1890s when auto pioneer Ransom E. Olds practiced racing on the hard sand here – is allowed in designated areas only for a fee of \$20 per day

## Like Nowhere Else

More than 10 million tourists come to Volusia County each year, but only about 15,000 of them find their way to one of its most unusual attractions – a town called Cassadaga. Founded in 1875 by New York spiritualist George Colby as a winter retreat for his followers, Cassadaga has come to be known as "the psychic capital of Florida." The town has only 100 full-time residents, and at least half of them claim to be mediums or spiritual healers. They practice the principles of Spiritualism, a movement that first became popular in the mid-1800s and whose followers have included Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini. Spiritualism is based on the belief that every individual forms his or her own relationship with God and that because the personality survives death, communication with the dead is possible through mediumship. Everyone, they say, has the ability to become a psychic, but only after years of intensive training aimed at fine-tuning their "sixth sense." The mediums who live in Cassadaga are not casual fortune-tellers or palm readers; they conduct serious readings, healing ceremonies and séances. Likewise, the people who come here as tourists are generally not people who just "happened" on this place. Cassadaga is tucked away in a remote corner of Volusia just north of Deltona; you have to be looking for it to find it, but once you get here, you can settle in for awhile. There is a bookstore, a welcome center and a hotel – guests may opt to stay in one of its supposedly haunted rooms, if desired, and book appointments with mediums who occupy the upper floors.

# Wakulla County

## Key facts

Population:	32,461
Land size (square miles):	606
Population density:	54 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$35,179
Time zone:	Eastern
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 64/40 July 92/73
County seat:	Crawfordville
Largest cities/towns:	Crawfordville (pop. 4,999) Sopchoppy (pop. 473) St. Marks (pop. 312)

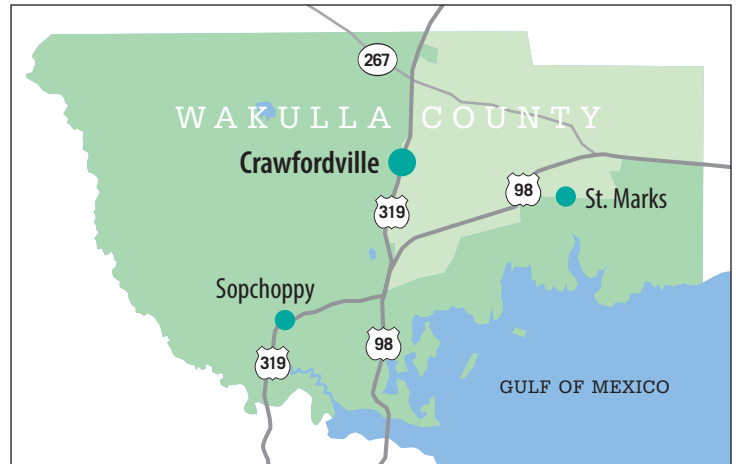
**Who lives here:** Hunting and fishing enthusiasts, nature lovers and people who'd rather take a walk in the woods than stand in line at a theme park. With a population of just under 5,000, Crawfordville is the only unincorporated county seat among Florida's 67 counties

## Names to know

County administrator:	David Edwards
County commissioners:	District 1 – Ralph Thomas District 2 – Randy Merritt District 3 – Mike Stewart District 4 – Quince Messersmith District 5 – Chuck Hess
Tax collector:	Cheryl Olah
School superintendent:	Robert Pearce

## Business

Labor force:	14,767
Primary industries:	Manufacturing; transportation and warehousing; business support services
Notable private employers:	CSG Systems International; St. Marks Powder; Eden Springs Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
Sales tax rate:	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Wakulla County Schools</b> 4 elementary schools 2 middle schools 1 high school 1 alternative school
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Tallahassee Community College</b> Wakulla Center: 2932 Crawfordville Highway, Crawfordville Wakulla Environmental Institute, 170 Preservation Way, Crawfordville

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	None in Wakulla County; nearest options include: Capital Regional Medical Center, Tallahassee – 266 beds Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare, Tallahassee – 772 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	US 319 – southwest to Sopchoppy; north to Tallahassee through Crawfordville SR 267/SR 20 – west and north to Bristol; southwest to Newport SR 363 – from Wakulla: to St. Marks; north to Tallahassee
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Historic Old County Courthouse and Old County Jail in downtown Crawfordville; Gulf Specimen Aquarium, featuring “weird and wonderful treasures of the wild north Florida coast”; Historic Sopchoppy Train Depot; Sopchoppy Opry (performances on the last Saturday of every month except December); the 1930s-era Wakulla Springs Lodge at Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park; St. Marks Lighthouse, second oldest in Florida; Pelican Place; Fort San Marcos de Apalache Historic State Park; Bald Point and Ochlockonee River State Parks

**Notable events:** Annual Arbor Day Celebration (January); St. Marks Wildlife Heritage and Outdoor Festival (February); Wakulla Wildlife Festival (April); Low Country Boil (April); Sopchoppy Worm Gruntin’ Festival (April); Rock the Dock Fishing Tournament (April); Panacea Blue Crab Festival (May); St. Marks Stone Crab Festival (October); Monarch Butterfly Festival (October); Hearts Gone Wild Music Festival (November); Christmas in the Park/Panacea/Sopchoppy (December)

**Natural wonders:** Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park, one of the largest and deepest freshwater springs in the world and a good spot for manatee viewing in winter; St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, home to the “Cathedral of Palm,” one of only two remaining virgin palm hammocks in Florida; Apalachicola National Forest; Bradwell Bay Wilderness Area

**Sports and recreation:** Sailing and windsurfing at Shell Point; fishing, swimming, snorkeling, kayaking and boating in four rivers and the Gulf of Mexico; hiking, biking and roller skating along the Tallahassee-to-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail or the GF&A Trail (short for the former Georgia, Florida & Alabama Railroad line along which it’s built, but locals affectionately call it the “Gopher, Frog & Alligator Trail”)

## Like Nowhere Else

Worm grunting – or worm charming, as it is sometimes called – is a method of “harvesting” earthworms from the ground in order to use them as live bait for fishing. Typically, this involves vibrating the soil, either by stamping the feet (as birds do), making a peculiar kind of music (grunting) or pounding a wooden stake into the ground and then rubbing the top of it with a flat piece of metal. Regardless of method, the point is to generate vibrations that will cause the worms to surface so they can be easily caught. As a profession, worm grunting is largely on the decline; in Wakulla County, Florida, however, it’s alive, well and cause for an annual community-wide celebration. Every year in April, the town of Sopchoppy stages its “Worm Gruntin’ Festival” complete with not only “good vibrations” but also music, arts and crafts, a fancy dress ball and the selection of a king and queen. Earthworms take notice and beware!

# Walton County

## Key facts

<b>Population:</b>	71,375
<b>Land size (square miles):</b>	1,038
<b>Population density:</b>	69 per square mile
<b>Per capita income:</b>	\$54,483
<b>Time zone:</b>	Central
<b>Climate:</b>	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 61/37 July 91/70
<b>County seat:</b>	DeFuniak Springs
<b>Largest cities/towns:</b>	DeFuniak Springs (pop. 6,442) Freeport (pop. 2,360) Paxton (pop. 797)
<b>Who lives here:</b>	A total of 71,375 full-time, permanent residents. And come summer, which is peak tourist time in Walton County, a whole lot more. With its growing popularity as a tourist destination, South Walton is experiencing seasonal population booms and reaping significant financial benefits as a result. From fall 2015 to summer 2017, for example, tourism here rose by more than 10%, creating an economic impact of \$3.7 billion and generating more than 65% of the area's tax revenue.

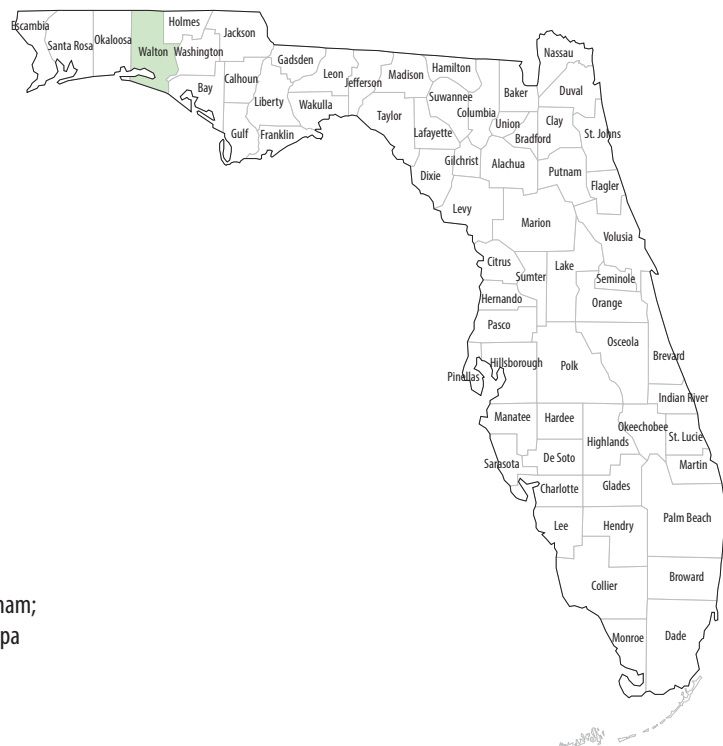


## Names to know

<b>County administrator:</b>	Larry Jones
<b>County commissioners:</b>	District 1 – William “Bill” Chapman District 2 – Danny Glidewell District 3 – Melanie Nipper District 4 – Trey Nick District 5 – Tony Anderson
<b>Tax collector:</b>	Rhonda Skipper
<b>School superintendent:</b>	Russell Hughes

## Business

<b>Labor force:</b>	30,644
<b>Primary industries:</b>	Tourism/hospitality; transportation and logistics; health care services
<b>Notable private employers:</b>	Sacred Heart Hospital on the Emerald Coast; Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort; ResortQuest by Wyndham; FedEx Ground; Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort and Spa
<b>Sales tax rate:</b>	7%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Walton County School District</b> 6 elementary schools 3 middle schools 3 high schools 1 combined-grade level school (K-12) 1 alternative school 2 charter schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Northwest Florida State College</b> Chautauqua Center: 908 US Highway 90 West, DeFuniak Springs South Walton Center: 109 Greenway Trail, Santa Rosa Beach

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Healthmark Regional Medical Center, DeFuniak Springs – 50 beds Sacred Heart Hospital on the Emerald Coast – 76 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans; east to Bonifay, Tallahassee and Jacksonville US 331 – north to Paxton and the Alabama state line through DeFuniak Springs; south to Santa Rosa Beach US 90 – west to Crestview; east to Bonifay and Marianna US 98/SR 30/30A – west to Pensacola; east to Panama City along the Gulf coast; provides access to Walton's 16 beachside communities SR 20 – east to Eglin AFB; west to Blountstown and Tallahassee SR 83 – north from DeFuniak Springs to the Alabama state line
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** Four state parks are within Walton's boundaries – Deer Lake, Eden Gardens, Grayton Beach and Topsail Hill Preserve, plus two close by on either side in adjacent counties – Henderson Beach in Okaloosa and Camp Helen in Bay; historic Wesley House (restored plantation house) at Eden Gardens State Park, offering guided tours; Walton-DeFuniak Public Library, said to be the state's oldest public library continuously operating in its original building (check out its collection of arms and armor); Chautauqua Assembly building in DeFuniak Springs

**Notable events:** Florida Chautauqua Assembly, DeFuniak Springs (January); 30A Songwriters Festival, 125 artists in 13 venues along Highway 30A in south Walton (January); Sandestin Gumbo Festival (February); Sandestin Wine Festival, (April); Digital Graffiti Festival, Alys Beach (May); Emerald Coast Blue Marlin Classic at Sandestin (June); Americana Under the Stars (September); Walton County Fair (October); Christmas Reflections, DeFuniak Springs (December)

**Natural wonders:** 15 named coastal dune lakes along Highway 30-A, including a rare freshwater specimen at Deer Lake State Park; Choctowhatchee National Forest; Point Washington State Forest; Nokuse Plantation – at 54,000 acres, the largest privately owned nature preserve in the southeastern U.S.; the beach at Grayton Beach State Park, rated No. 6 on Dr. Beach's "Top 10 Beaches 2016"; Lake DeFuniak, one of two perfectly round lakes in the world (the other is in Cambodia);

**Sports and recreation:** Swimming, snorkeling, kayaking, boating and fishing along the Gulf coast; hiking and biking all across the county on 200 miles of trails; swimming by day/ice skating by night beside the beach at Sandestin's "Baytown on Ice" event in December

## Like Nowhere Else

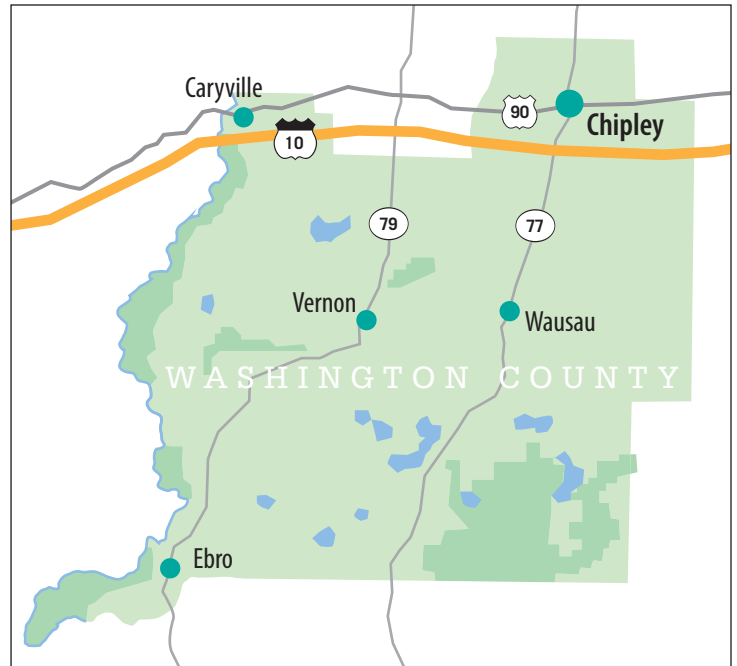
Walton is a county of contrasts. North Walton, once famous for its turpentine production, is still heavily wooded and sparsely populated; today, its chief claim to fame is Britton Hill – Florida's highest natural point at 345 feet and, coincidentally, the lowest highest point in any U.S. state. South Walton, on the other hand, is at sea level, boasting 26 miles of Gulf coastline and a string of 16 separate beach communities, including that icon of "New Urbanism," Seaside. And between the two, at almost dead center position, is Walton's county seat, DeFuniak Springs. Founded in the 1880s by railroad executives and named for Frederick R. DeFuniak, a vice-president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, it was purposed as a resort to accommodate winter assemblies for the then-popular Chautauqua movement. The L&N Railroad is long gone from DeFuniak Springs, but Chautauqua still carries on here every January.

# Washington County

## Key facts

Population:	24,880
Land size (square miles):	583
Population density:	43 per square mile
Per capita income:	\$29,303
Time zone:	Central
Climate:	Average high/low temperatures (Fahrenheit) January 61/38 July 91/71
County seat:	Chipley
Largest cities/towns:	Chipley (pop. 3,526) Vernon (pop. 678) Wausau (pop. 379) Caryville (pop. 278) Ebro (pop. 268)

**Who lives here:** People who prefer nature over man-made attractions and who find joy in celebrating simple things like watermelon and possums. Rather than urban amenities or heavy industry, it is quality of life that matters most here. Aside from the county seat, Washington's largest communities have fewer than 700 residents each, and the locals seem to like it that way.



## Names to know

County administrator:	Jeff Massey
County commissioners:	District 1 – Alan T. Bush District 2 – Charles Kent District 3 – Tray Hawkins District 4 – Todd Abbott District 5 – Steve Joyner
Tax collector:	Ken Naker
School superintendent:	Joseph Taylor

## Business

Labor force:	9,920
Primary industries:	Timber and forestry; manufacturing; construction
Notable private employers:	WestPoint Home; ABC Fence Systems; Munroe Forest & Wildlife Management; Panhandle Forestry Services; Trawick Construction
Sales tax rate:	7.5%



## Education

<b>Public school system:</b>	<b>Washington County School District</b> 2 elementary schools 2 middle schools 2 high schools 2 alternative/special schools
<b>State colleges:</b>	<b>Chipola College</b> Main campus: 3094 Indian Circle, Marianna

## Health Care

<b>Acute care hospitals:</b>	Northwest Florida Community Hospital, Chipley – 59 beds
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## Transportation

<b>Major highways:</b>	I-10 – west to Pensacola and Mobile; east to Tallahassee and Jacksonville US 90 – west to DeFuniak Springs, Crestview and Pensacola; east to Cottondale, Marianna and Tallahassee SR 79 – south to Bay County and US 98; northeast to I-10, Bonifay and the Alabama state line through Vernon SR 77 – south to Lynn Haven and Panama City; north through Wausau and Chipley to Graceville and the Alabama state line
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## Things to See and Do

**Major attractions:** South Third Street Historic District in Chipley; Washington County Courthouse; Vernon Historical Society Museum; Falling Waters State Park; Seacrest Wolf Preserve (tours by appointment only).

**Notable events:** Annual Panhandle Watermelon Festival, Chipley (May); Wausau Possum Festival, (August); Chipley Christmas Fest and Parade (December)

**Natural wonders:** A 73-foot waterfall, Florida's tallest, at Falling Waters State Park; Choctawhatchee River and Econfina Creek; Pine Log State Forest (Florida's first state forest, dating to 1936)

**Sports and recreation:** Canoeing, tubing and rafting; hiking, birding, swimming and camping at Falling Waters State Park; numerous county parks providing opportunities for fishing, hiking, swimming, snorkeling, water-skiing, hunting and birding; golf at two public courses.

## Like Nowhere Else

Historical markers and monuments are typically placed along roadsides to recognize significant structures, events or people. Along State Road 77 in Washington County, just across the street from Wausau's post office, there's a monument to – wait for it – the possum. Unveiled in August 1982, the Possum Monument pays tribute to those amazingly resilient and yet largely unsung hero marsupials of backyards and roadsides all across Florida and beyond. Why? Because, according to the actual words on the monument "Their presence here has provided a source of nutritious and flavorful food in normal times and has been important aid to human survival in times of distress and critical need." The inscription goes on to note that the 1982 session of the Florida Legislature further recognized the possum by "proclaiming the first Saturday in August as Possum Day in the Great State of Florida." And so it is to this day, at least in Wausau anyway, where a Possum Festival takes place on the first Saturday in August each year, complete with hog callin', rooster crowin' and cow lowin' contests; live music; an old-fashioned square dance; the crowning of a king and queen; and, lest we forget the true reason for celebrating possums – they're just plain good eatin' in a pinch – plenty of baked possum and sweet potatoes to enjoy. A day to celebrate the possum, by law, in Florida. Who knew?