

## The top 10 events for Florida's 500th birthday



FloridasHistoricCoast.com  
Three soldiers in St. Augustine.

By ROBERTA SANDLER

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Special Contributor

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In 1513, explorer Ponce de Leon landed on the shores of Florida and claimed the new land in the name of Spain.

This year, Florida is celebrating five centuries of Spanish-influenced culture, architecture and history that visitors can explore through statewide events.

Here are 10 top events commemorating Florida's quincentenary.

**March 16:** Opening of the Colonial Quarter in St. Augustine. This living-history museum reveals what life was like in 16th- and 17th-century fortified, Spanish-occupied St. Augustine. There are interactive activities, historical interpreters, shows, demonstrations and drills.

**Contact:** 904-342-2857; colonialquarter.com

**Through May 11:** Picasso Art & Arena. This exhibition of ceramics and graphic works at St. Augustine's Visitor Center showcases 39 art pieces from the Fundación Picasso, Museo Casa Natal of Málaga, Spain, and pays tribute to Florida's Spanish cultural and artistic traditions. Interactive guided tours in English and Spanish are available.

**Contact:** 904-825-1053; picassoartandarena.com

**March 23-24:** Ponce de Leon Festival. The Royal Order of Ponce de Leon Conquistadors of Charlotte County commemorates Ponce de Leon's landings at Charlotte Harbor in 1513 and 1521, including the Festival of Flowers parade, a costumed re-enactment of Ponce de Leon's landing, live music, children's entertainment and encampments, all taking place in Punta Gorda.

**Contact:** 941-743-1900; poncedeleonfestival.com

**April 2:** Juan Ponce de Leon V Centennial Celebration. A re-enactment of Ponce de Leon's landing in northeast Florida takes place at the Ponce de Leon Landing Historical Site in Melbourne Beach. Events include an Air Force flyover, 21-gun salute, tall ship exhibition, parade and unveiling of a Ponce de Leon statue.

**Contact:** 321-300-4882; utbunitedthirdbridge.com/pdleon-schedule.php

**April 3:** Commemorative re-enactment of the landing of Juan Ponce de Leon. Costumed actors re-create the explorer's landing in Florida on April 3, 1513. The event takes place at St. Augustine's bay front.

Also on April 3: A Ponce de Leon Commemorative Mass will be conducted at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine. A replica of the baptismal font in which Ponce de Leon was baptized will be installed in the basilica. King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia of Spain have been invited to attend.

**Contact:** staugustine-450.com

**Through April 28:** Borders of Paradise: The New World in the Eyes of the Explorers. The Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach features an exhibition showing how 17th- to 19th-century explorers viewed Florida. Early Spanish explorers' maps, etchings, engravings and lithographs are on exhibit.

**Contact:** 386-255-0285; moas.org

**May 8:** Gálvez Day Celebration. Pensacola pays homage to Gen. Bernardo de Gálvez, who defeated the British at the Siege of Pensacola in 1781, thus regaining East and West Florida. (Galveston is named for Gen. Gálvez.) A laying of wreaths on Pensacola Bay will take place at Fort George, where the British flag was lowered on May 10, 1781. The only existing replica of the flag will be on display at T.T. Wentworth Jr. Florida State Museum in Pensacola.

**Contact:** 850-434-1234 or 1-800-874-1234; visitpensacola.com

**May 11:** 17th-Century Muster. Visitors to Mission San Luis, an Apalachee-Spanish living-history museum in Tallahassee, will learn how Spanish soldiers and missionaries and Apalachee Indians lived and worked

together in the 1600s. Costumed interpreters, re-enactors and cannon and musket firings depict what life was like in this small community.

**Contact:** 850-245-6406; [missionsanluis.org](http://missionsanluis.org)

**Oct. 7-13:** International Spanish Food and Wine Festival. Spanish culture is spotlighted in St. Augustine as Spanish wine distributors and local and regional restaurants celebrate the Old City's food, wine and dance heritage. The event is hosted with the U.S.-Spain Chamber of Commerce.

**Contact:** 904-825-1000; [staugustine-450.com](http://staugustine-450.com)

**Ongoing:** Forever Changed: La Florida, 1513-1821. This expansive exhibit at Tallahassee's Museum of Florida History unravels Florida's history and heritage, including Spain's exploration in Florida, Ponce de Leon's first contact with native cultures and the mission system in Spanish Florida.

**Contact:** 850-245-6400; [museumoffloridahistory.com](http://museumoffloridahistory.com)

*Roberta Sandler is a Lake Worth, Fla., freelance writer.*

*Note: Online article was posted in Dallas Morning News' travel section on March 1. Print version appeared in travel section Dallas Morning News on Sun. March 3. I hope my article entices readers to visit Mission San Luis.*

*Sincerely,  
Roberta*

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