

FLORIDA

## CELEBRATING 500 YEARS

### Old-time places their fans will never tire of visiting

BY DIANE BAIR AND PAMELA WRIGHT  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

If you think the Sunshine State is nothing but strip malls and over-the-top amusement parks, you haven't seen the real Florida. Yes, it still exists — enchanting pockets where the local fishing pier is a happening zone, and sandy trails lead to lush jungles of live oak, strangler fig, and gumbo limbo trees. Exit off the interstate and explore a world of tiny islands and powdery beaches you can sleep on, with time out to paddle under a canopy of mangroves in the company of manatees. Hesitant as we are to share, here are five favorite slices of old Florida:

**MATLACHA: one funky island**

"Island people are odd people," says artist Leoma Lovegrove of Matlacha. "You have to sacrifice a lot to live on an island," she notes, especially one that's a mere one mile wide and one mile long, with no schools and no churches.

That's Matlacha. Most people find it by accident, on the way to the barrier islands off the coast of Fort Myers.

Matlacha (pronounced mat-lah-SHAY) would be hard to miss: It's a happy jumble of colorful buildings, where bait shops sit next to art galleries, and the art practically spills onto the causeway.

OLD FLORIDA, Page M6

### Anniversary events promote history, culture

BY DIANE DANIEL  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

These days, Florida welcomes more than 87 million tourists a year, but five centuries ago, when Juan Ponce de Leon landed on what is now known as the east coast of Florida, visits from afar were rare. The Spanish explorer's voyage, a failed attempt to find gold, brought European settlers to the land inhabited by Native Americans and launched a new era in Florida's history.

To celebrate the New World discovery in 1513, the Sunshine State is hosting a long list of cultural and heritage events under the campaign "Viva Florida 500."

"This is the first time in modern memory that Florida as a state is prominently promoting its history and cultural heritage," said Kerri Post, deputy secretary of state in the Office of Cultural, Historical and Information Programs and one of the people guiding community efforts.

"We're known for our beaches and our theme parks, but our history gets overlooked. So we look at the anniversary as an opportunity to examine our heritage, not just Spanish but also African-American, Caribbean, Native American. Florida has always been multicultural."

More than 300 happenings are on the calendar statewide, with some communities still in the planning phase.

"Our goal is to have events in all of Florida's 67 counties," Post said. "After all, this is our opportunity to talk about 500 years of history, something no other state can claim."

Many of the celebrations focus on history, including reenacting milestone events, especially

Ponce de Leon's landing; others pay homage to Florida's natural side, Post said.

One, called FLOR500, is a participatory art, nature, and history project being developed at Florida International University in Miami where 500 Florida artists are invited to depict 500 native wildflowers that were growing in 1513.

Others focus on coastal and inland waterways. "Our heritage is not just by land, it's also by sea," Post said. "And we want to spread the conservation message as well. We're not just looking at our nautical history 500 years past, but also what our waterways are going to be like 500 years from now."

Coastal stewardship is the main aim of Expedition Florida 500, arguably the most ambitious of Viva Florida 500 events. Led by Justin Riney of Vero Beach and sponsored in part by Quicksilver, a crew of paddlers from across the country is exploring the entire state by standup paddleboard. Along the way, they paddle with locals and organize waterway cleanups.

"The adventure is amazing, but I want people to know that it's really about conservation," Riney said on the phone during his second week out. That morning, as the paddlers approached Destin, on the Florida Panhandle, they were greeted by a pod of cresting dolphins, a scene captured on video and posted to Expedition 500's Facebookpage, where the public can follow the group's trip.

Following are some Viva Florida 500 highlights. Several are in St. Augustine, considered to be where Ponce de Leon first dropped anchor. All events and updates can be found at [www.vivafloida.org](http://www.vivafloida.org).

ANNIVERSARY, Page M4

The Galleon, a replica of the vessels that traveled the coasts of Florida between the 16th and 18th centuries, will be stopping at ports this year to celebrate Viva Florida 500.

## A TASTE ACQUIRED OVER TIME

By Diane Daniel  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

I imagine a conversation between Juan Ponce de Leon and his childhood buddy Vasco da Gama in 1513

would go something like this:

"Hey, Vas, I just discovered the most beautiful place, filled with lush vegetation and white sandy beaches. I didn't find gold, but the weather was perfect. I couldn't locate the fountain of youth, either, but I'm sure it's there somewhere. I named it Florida, for 'place of flowers.'"

"Are you kidding me, Juan? Granted, I haven't actually been, but I hate your 'Florida.' Sure, the climate was great — because you were there in April. Try visiting in the summer. It's the heat and the humidity, and don't forget the mosquitoes. Aren't you bright enough to know those beaches will be lined with condos in no time? And I can

ESSAY, Page M4

BOCA RATON M3 | BOCA GRANDE M6 | ST. PETERSBURG M6 | PALM BEACH M8 | DELRAY BEACH M8

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NEW ENGLAND

**SNOW DAY**  
Ski Bradford is only an hour north on the commuter rail. M10



DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**SKY LIGHTS**  
Capturing the aurora borealis near Presque Isle, Maine. M10



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