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Florida's Historic Coast Leads the Way in Preservation & Protection

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and The Beaches prioritize historical, architectural and natural sustainability

St. Augustine, Fla. (October 17, 2023) – Residents and visitors alike are charmed by the historic sites and natural beauty of Florida's Historic Coast. Cresting the Bridge of Lions, you're more likely to feel like you're descending into a Spanish village than a coastal town in Florida. This is thanks to the incredible dedication both St. Augustine and St. Johns County have made to sustainability and preservation.

Much of St. Augustine was built by new residents hailing from Spain, providing the city with a European look. The core of downtown holds many of the earliest buildings that are still in existence. The oldest is the González-Alvarez House, also appropriately named The Oldest House. It was built in 1723 and is a testament to the dedication of St. Augustine's protectors. Many sites, including the González-Alvarez House, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The last count puts St. Augustine's total at 46, with seven distinct neighborhoods under consideration. The St. Augustine Historic District is a Historic Landmark itself. To be considered for the registry, the property must meet certain criteria – how old it is, whether its integrity has been preserved, and whether it is significant in some way. Being listed on the register offers these properties certain protections, access to funding, and grants for preservation and ensures any repairs or upgrades are sympathetic to the place's original design and intent.

Recently, The Governor's House Cultural Center and Museum, located in the heart of historic downtown St. Augustine and overlooking the Plaza de la Constitución, was honored with a historical marker designating the Governor's House as the original clerk's office in Florida. The site, which has a long and fascinating history of being home to several government offices since 1598, is located at the intersection of King Street and St. George Street.

Keeping Florida's Historic Coast, well, historic, is a big job. St. Augustine created a Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) to help with that. Using an extensive library of historic plans and materials as reference, such as original paint pigments from the Spanish colonial period, a board of specialists reviews construction and renovation applications to ensure that the historic integrity of the city's most precious properties is preserved. While many properties do perform upgrades to provide the most modern amenities, property owners ensure that the original buildings are never compromised. St. Augustine is one of the few American cities to employ a full-time archaeologist. Not only do they research, investigate, and evaluate potential construction sites, but they also preserve and maintain a large collection of artifacts uncovered throughout the city.

Even older but just as precious are the natural resources of St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and The Beaches. These lands have been the site of numerous historic moments, and their preservation is just as

important. The natural environment of the area boasts over 40 miles of pristine beaches, tens of thousands of acres of maritime hammocks, marshes, oyster beds, and more.

There are many local efforts to protect the natural habitat. Both the City of St. Augustine and St. Johns County have banned balloon and lantern releases, both posing a significant danger to coastal marine wildlife. In fact, they were the first county in Florida to do so. An incredibly active group of volunteers, supported by the county and permitted by the Florida Wildlife Commission, patrol the beaches to locate and mark sea turtles' nests for protection. Both the State and National Parks Systems actively promote responsible environmental impact and sustainability practices to protect their historic buildings, like the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, and seashores, like Anastasia State Park. The Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTM Research Reserve) works with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to provide stewardship, facilitate research, and educate the public.

Visitors are eager to learn about this spectacular environment that locals have grown up appreciating and protecting. Eco-tourism allows travelers to experience the natural habitat with tour operators that approach tourism ethically and sustainably. Outfits like St. Augustine Sailing, Ripple Effect Ecotours, and GeoTrippin Adventure Company offer education-based tours that explore the ecosystem and its wildlife thoughtfully and non-invasively. Wind-powered boats and kayaks use minimal to no fossil fuels and don't produce noises that disturb wildlife or obscure the sounds of nature.

Located in the historic neighborhood of Lincolnville, St. Augustine Distillery, which produces craft spirits like bourbon and gin, has made a commitment to sustainability since its inception eight years ago. It's home, a repurposed ice plant built in 1917, has been recognized by the Urban Land Institute of North Florida for preserving as many elements of the original building as possible. St. Augustine Distillery also utilizes water-saving efforts, has installed solar panels to help run production, and uses a natural gas-powered boiler. And when it comes to local agriculture, the distillery is at the forefront of sourcing from The Sunshine State whenever possible including, corn, wheat, sugar cane, and other produce. They also partner with Florida farmers to dispose of their "distillers grains" composed of leftover corn, wheat, and barley, which go to feeding local livestock.

Preserving the natural environment and historic splendor of St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and The Beaches is a job that visitors and residents alike take very seriously. Plan a trip to Florida's Historic Coast to experience the area's unparalleled commitment to preservation and sustainability. For images to accompany postings click here.

Located midway between Daytona Beach and Jacksonville, Florida's Historic Coast includes historic St. Augustine, the outstanding golf and seaside elegance of Ponte Vedra Beach, and 42 miles of pristine Atlantic beaches. For more information, call 1.800.653.2489 or go to the Visitors and Convention Bureau website at www.FloridasHistoricCoast.com. Check us out on social media Instagram @FloridasHistoricCoast
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