

## **ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA, CELEBRATES HISPANIC HERITAGE ALL YEAR LONG WITH ITS LIVING SPANISH, AFRO-CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICAN CULTURES**

**ST. AUGUSTINE, Florida** — As the entire country prepares to honor the many contributions of Hispanic Americans during this year's national Hispanic Heritage month, which takes place from September 15 to October 15, nowhere puts on quite the show that the city of St. Augustine — birthplace of Hispanic influence in the U.S. — does year-round. This city established Spanish influence in what would become the U.S. some four decades before the first English settlement was ever founded in continental North America.

St. Augustine stills holds its Hispanic heritage close to its heart throughout the year. The tales of the adventures of Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon, who first claimed the land of this town April 3, 1513, and its later settlement by another Spanish explorer, Pedro Menendez de Aviles in 1565, are commonly told in the town. In addition, its 16th century Spanish architecture — complete with narrow, brick-paved streets — is similar to that found in other renowned cities of its kind and time, such as San Miguel de Allende, Mexico; Cartagena, Colombia; and San Juan, Puerto Rico, the other oldest city in the U.S.

Today, visitors to St. Augustine will find that this is a city where Hispanic culture and history are part of daily life. Historical locations include the legendary Fountain of Youth Archeological Park; the Mission Nombre de Dios the actual location where Pedro Menendez de Aviles and the Spanish settlers celebrated the First Mass and Thanksgiving in the history of the U.S.; and the Castillo de San Marcos, the first masonry fortress built in the country. Another extraordinary, stand-out location Fort Mose, where freed slaves established the first legally sanctioned free black settlement in the U.S. in 1738. Their home was [chartered as the settlement of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, or Fort Mose, for short](#). When Florida was transferred to the British under a treaty signed in 1763, these settlers of African descent evacuated to Cuba with the rest of the Spanish.

Living Hispanic culture remains a part of the community in St. Augustine, as the flavors of the city are deeply rooted in Latin American traditions. Some of St. Augustine's most iconic and beloved restaurants take their culinary direction from Hispanic kitchens. Columbia Restaurant, for example, offers diners a traditional Spanish setting in the city's historic district. The restaurant is more than 100 years old and has a menu of award-winning Spanish and Cuban cuisine.

Other top Latin American restaurants in St. Augustine include Asado Life, with Argentinian meats; La Cocina International Restaurant, serving Latin, Colombian, Spanish and South American dishes; Casa Maya Restaurant for Mexican cuisine; Llama Restaurant, which highlights Peruvian cuisine; and Casa Reina Taqueria & Tequila, offering a fusion of Mexican, Latin and Cuban flavors. Also, not to be missed is Michael's, for a modern take on Latin American staples.

Major Hispanic heritage events, some connected to cuisine, take place throughout the year in St. Augustine. On September 9, 2023, the City of St. Augustine will celebrate the [458<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of St. Augustine](#) by Pedro Menendez de Aviles, who along with 800 settlers including artisans, soldiers men, women and children established the settlement of St. Augustine. The commemoration takes place at Mission Nombre de Dios and the Fountain of Youth Archeological Park. Activities include a reenactment landing of Menedez and his men, greeted by the Native Timucuan Indians, A Celebration of Mass at the Rustic Alter, a reenactment of the first Thanksgiving and Spanish military encampments.

And, the annual St. Augustine Spanish Food & Wine Festival that takes place in February each year to coincide with the celebration of Pedro Menendez de Aviles birthday, celebrates all of the Spanish culinary and wine influences found throughout the city's dining establishments. This ~~The event~~ festival features tapas, wine and spirits, as well as a cava dinner reception and grand tasting. More than 100 Spanish wines are available to sample throughout the three-day event, along with Spanish-inspired cuisine prepared by local chefs.

In May, Unidos en la Musica: A Latin American Festival celebrates the wide variety of Latin American music and pairs beats perfectly with authentic dance, food and games.

From mid-November through January each year, the celebration of St. Augustine's Hispanic heritage continues during Nights of Lights. Locals and visitors enjoy the city-wide display featuring millions of tiny white lights, a practice inspired by the Spanish tradition of lighting candles in the windows during the holiday season. During Nights of Lights, on December 15, Noches de Navidad” and Las Posadas, a live nativity, Eucharistic Adoration, and a 16th-Century Spanish procession of “Las Posadas” (the Inns) takes place at Mission Nombre de Dios

Overall, St. Augustine is one of the best cities in the nation for honoring and celebrating the Hispanic and Latin American influences that are such a vital part of the fabric of Florida and the U.S. Taste, listen, see and feel where it all began — in the oldest city on the North American Continent.

**About St. Augustine:** St. Augustine lies along Florida's northern coast between Daytona Beach and Jacksonville. It is one of the most important stops on Florida's Historic Coast, which includes the city itself, as well as the 42 miles of Atlantic beachfront. Visitors can access St. Augustine through Daytona Beach International (DAB) and Jacksonville International (JAX) airports.

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