

# 10 FANTASTIC Florida Vacations

*Where Katy Families Enjoy Sizzling Summer Fun*

*Written by Miranda Enzor*



Photo courtesy of the Walt Disney Company

Mickey, Minnie, and friends strike a pose at the doorstep of Cinderella Castle in the Magic Kingdom

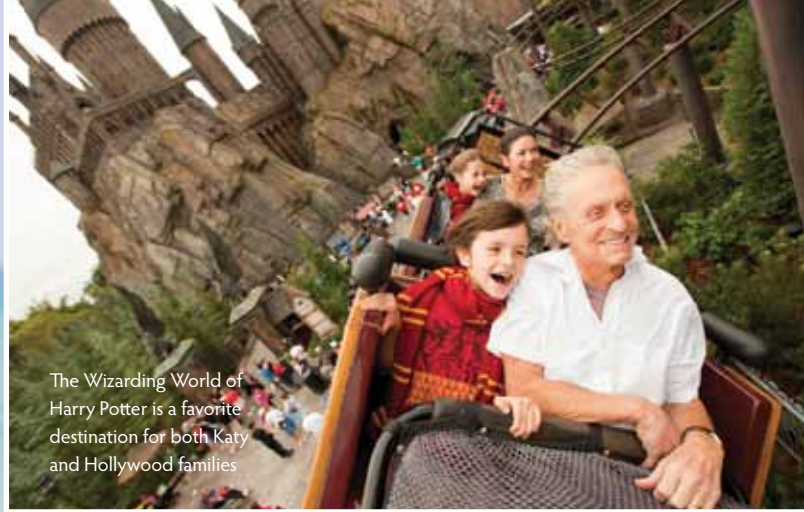


Water fun at the dueling gators at Gatorland





Florida's sparkling beaches are a sure bet for family fun in the sun



The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a favorite destination for both Katy and Hollywood families



A scenic dive off Key Largo in the Florida Keys

Photo by Garth Vaughan



Visitors can walk in the footsteps of American Astronauts at the Kennedy Space Center



The Gulfarium's dolphin training demonstration is popular among visitors



Experience adventures on the high seas at the Pirate and Treasure Museum



Florida might just be the perfect vacation spot for Katy families. With more than 1,800 miles of coastline, the Sunshine State has endless options when it comes to pristine beaches. For families who love to play and learn, there are plenty of parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and museums to explore. With a huge variety of theme parks, Florida is also a popular destination for thrill seekers. And it's all just across the Gulf of Mexico from us.

So do we have you convinced yet? If not, maybe some of Katy families' favorite spots to visit will convince you that Florida is a great spot to vacation this summer. The best part? Several Florida hot spots are within reasonable driving distance, making it easy to plan an action-packed vacation no one in the family will ever forget.

### 1. Destin

#### Florida Panhandle

If you're looking to be a beach bum, Destin is a top spot for sand, sun, and fun. Popular for its sandy white beaches – some of the whitest in the world – and sparkling emerald waters, more than 80% of those visiting Florida for beach time choose Destin. With 12 beaches to choose from, families won't have to worry about overcrowding. Since Destin was originally a fishing village, visitors can charter fishing vessels from the harbor or visit the city's History and Fishing Museum. When you've had enough fun in the sun, take a short 20-minute drive east to the Sandestin Golf and Beach resort for golfing, spa amenities, and more. Visit [destinchamber.com](http://destinchamber.com) or [cityofdestin.com](http://cityofdestin.com).

### 2. Wizarding World of Harry Potter

#### Orlando

Perhaps the most popular destination currently in Florida, the year-old Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a must-see for fans of the books and movies. Step into Harry's world as you wander through Diagon Alley, Gringotts Bank, and even Hogwarts Castle! Send a postcard to friends back home at the Owl Post or sip a butterbeer at the Three Broomsticks, Harry, Ron, and Hermione's favorite hangout away from school. Brave the Dragon Challenge roller coaster and take a trip through Hogwarts Castle on the ride Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey. Before you leave, be sure to stock up on chocolate frogs, Fizzing Whizzbees, and all your other favorite Harry Potter candies at Honeydukes for the trip home. Visit [universalorlando.com/harrypotter](http://universalorlando.com/harrypotter).

### 3. Flamingo Gardens & Wildlife Sanctuary

#### Fort Lauderdale

This nonprofit wildlife sanctuary, aviary, and botanical garden is located just west of Fort Lauderdale. The 60-acre park contains more than 3,000 species of tropical and subtropical plants, the largest collection of wading birds in the country, and a wide variety of wildlife, making it the perfect spot for nature and animal lovers. Explore 200-year-old oak trees and learn to identify the sanctuary's 300-plus species of palms. Visit the Alligator Lagoon, river otter, bobcat, or panther habitats, or take in a wildlife encounter show for an up-close look at some of Florida's native creatures. Also take a guided tour of the Wray Home, built in the early 1930s and preserved as a museum. Visit [flamingogardens.org](http://flamingogardens.org).



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#### 4. Florida Keys

##### South Florida

This archipelago of 4,500 islands starting at the southeastern tip of Florida is truly a spectacular piece of nature to behold. It is the country's only living coral barrier reef, teeming with marine life just waiting to be discovered. Ecotourism is the most popular activity in the area, so if you're a family that enjoys water activities like scuba diving, snorkeling, or fishing, this is the spot for you. Explore ship wrecks under the crystal-clear waters or simply spend a day on the beach, soaking up the sun. Don't forget about the area's hidden gems, like the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum, Audubon House and Tropical Gardens, and the Florida Keys History of Diving Museum. Visit [fla-keys.com](http://fla-keys.com) or [floridakeys.com](http://floridakeys.com).

#### 5. Walt Disney World

##### Orlando

Recently named one of 15 places kids should see by age 15 by *Budget Travel* magazine, Walt Disney World is a landmark experience for any child – or adult for that matter. With the Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios, and Disney's Animal Kingdom, there's a spot for adventure lovers of every interest from sports to animals. Spin in Alice's iconic tea cups or brave a wild ride through the dark on Space Mountain at the Magic Kingdom. Take a trip around the world in a single day at Epcot. Learn about movie magic at the studio back lot tour or become a Jedi Knight at Star Wars Jedi Training at Hollywood Studios. Prefer to take a more scenic route? Enjoy the spectacular Tree of Life, safaris, and more at the Animal Kingdom. Visit [disneyworld.disneygo.com](http://disneyworld.disneygo.com).

#### 6. Pirate & Treasure Museum

##### St. Augustine

Ahoy matey! Sail the high seas and search for pirate treasure at the Pirate and Treasure Museum. This unique museum is perfect for Katy kids with limitless imaginations. Learn about infamous pirates like Blackbeard and get an up-close look at pirate weapons. See one of the only two surviving Jolly Roger flags in the world, dating back to 1850. Read Captain William Kidd's journals written during his final voyage across the high seas in 1696 and discover real shipwreck treasures recovered by the Florida Division of Historical Resources. Visit [thepiratemuseum.com](http://thepiratemuseum.com).

#### 7. Gatorland

##### Orlando

Visiting the Alligator Capital of the World is everyone's dream vacation, right? Even if it's not, Gatorland is sure to entertain your entire family. This 110-acre theme park and wildlife preserve was founded in 1949 by Owen Godwin and is still privately owned by the Godwin family. Gatorland is home to thousands of alligators and crocodiles, as well as a breeding marsh with a boardwalk and observation tower, reptile shows, an aviary, petting zoo, and swamp walk. For the extra-adventurous, take a behind-the-scenes tour and get up close with reptiles. Take a Gator Night Shine tour after hours or even shadow a trainer for the day for some truly hands-on experience with these reptiles. Visit [gatorland.com](http://gatorland.com).

#### 8. John F. Kennedy Space Center

##### Cape Canaveral

You've visited mission control right here in Houston – now visit NASA's launch site. Located at Cape Canaveral, just one hour east of Orlando on the Atlantic coast, the John F. Kennedy Space Center

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Photo courtesy of The Walt Disney Company

Your Katy cutie can be as pretty as a princess in the BibbidiBobbidi Boutique located inside Cinderella Castle at the Magic Kingdom

(KSC) is a popular tourist destination for space lovers. KSC offers public tours of the center, as well as the adjacent Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. Visit the Astronaut Hall of Fame or meet an astronaut in person at the visitor complex. The site also serves as an important wildlife sanctuary for bald eagles, American alligators, wild boars, Florida panthers, and more. Visit [kennedyspacecenter.com](http://kennedyspacecenter.com).

### 9. Everglades

#### South Florida

These ruggedly beautiful subtropical wetlands cover the southern portion of the state and are a great option for a family of nature lovers. Sprawled across more than 1.5 million acres, the Everglades offer never-ending adventure in a unique landscape. Spend your time photographing birds, taking a hike to see alligators in their natural habitat in the afternoon, and for the super-adventurous, spending the night camping at Everglades National Park. Take a trip on the water via boat, canoe, or kayak. The park also offers visitors tram and boat tours or ranger-led tours. For those with a specialized interest, check out the park's fishing guide, eco tours, or even canoe and kayak tour. With never-ending options to explore, the Everglades is a favorite spot for family fun and adventure. Visit [nps.gov/ever](http://nps.gov/ever).

### 10. Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum

#### St. Augustine

Prepare to be amazed, amused, and horrified all at once! This St. Augustine staple is the original in the family of Ripley's Believe It or Not museums. Housed in one of the city's most unique buildings, a poured concrete castle called Warden Castle, this is a great spot for inquisitive kids who enjoy a touch of whimsy in their day. Robert Ripley was well known for collecting odd artifacts, like shrunken heads and rosaries made of human bones. Following his death, Warden Castle, then a hotel he frequented, was turned into a museum for his collection and it grew from there. The Odditorium is filled with more than 800 strange items, exhibits, and artifacts one has to see to believe (or not believe), such as a vortex tunnel, a two-headed rabbit, and the new pirate exhibit. Visit [staugustine.ripleys.com](http://staugustine.ripleys.com).

### A Summer of Florida Fun

No matter what destination you choose, Florida is sure to offer your Katy family a summer vacation they won't soon forget. **KM**

*MIRANDA ENZOR can't wait to visit the Wizarding World of Harry Potter on her next vacation in Florida.*



The cast of the haunted St. Augustine Train Ride at Ripley's Believe It or Not museum

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