



Visit Tallahassee

The Old Capitol Building in Tallahassee has been beautifully restored to its 1902 splendor. It includes the House and Senate chambers, the state Supreme Court and the governor's office. Visitors can trace Florida's colorful political history through the building's exhibits.



Mission San Luis, Florida Division of National Historical Resources

The Council House, built by the Apalachee Indians in the 1600s, is the largest known period American Indian building in the southeastern United States. It is 120 feet in diameter and is five stories high.



Mission San Luis, Florida Division of National Historical Resources

A two-room thatched home built of wattle and daub is part of the reconstruction of Mission San Luis, which was once a Spanish village.



Mission San Luis, Florida Division of National Historical Resources

Spaniards and Apalachee Indians worshipped side by side in this 17th-century Catholic church at Mission San Luis.

Two-tradition MISSION

Remarkable reconstruction in Florida depicts village where Spanish, Apalachee cultures mixed

ELEANOR BERMAN
TRAVEL ARTS SYNDICATE

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The building amazes. It is enormous, 120 feet in diameter, with a ceiling five stories high. It took 100,000 palm fronds to cover the roof, even though the center remains open to the sky, tepee-style. At first sight, all you can do is stand in awe.

This reconstructed Council House, like those built by the Apalachee Indians in the 1600s, is a highlight of one of Florida's most surprising historic sites, Mission San Luis in Tallahassee. Of more than 100 Spanish missions that once stood in Florida, this is the only one that has been re-created and the story it tells is unique. It gives a whole different slant to a visit to the state.



Arkansas Democrat-Gazette

The westernmost Spanish settlement in upper Florida, the mission was not only the military and religious headquarters of the Spanish but also the principal village of the Apalachee Indians, a once-fierce tribe who peacefully shared the site with the "newcomers." From 1656 to 1704, more than 1,600 Spaniards and Indians formed an unlikely partnership, until both groups were forced to flee from British invaders.

Three centuries after being destroyed by fire in 1704, and after decades of extensive archaeological research, the reconstructed structures of both groups form a remarkable 60-acre living history site. The mission is a National Historic Landmark and winner of a "Preserve America" Presidential Award.

It is a lively place to visit, thanks to costumed re-enactors who bring the unusual story to life. And there are many special events, including the chance

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Florida

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to learn the crafts of both bands of residents. Tours of American Indian and Spanish organic gardening techniques are another frequent feature.

A lavish visitor center opened last year, adding a museum to the complex telling the story of the years of careful archaeological research and excavations that ensured the historical accuracy of the buildings. Following more than two decades of field work, Mission San Luis represents one of the largest and most diverse collections of 17th-century Spanish and Apalachee materials available anywhere. The mission is under the auspices of the Bureau of Archaeological Research of the state Division of Historical Resources, and tours are offered periodically of the archaeology lab on-site.

The massive carved doors of the visitor center are an apt introduction to the area, with carvings that represent the dwellings, beliefs and customs of each culture.

Visitors learn that leaders of both groups saw benefits from the unusual cooperative arrangement. The Apalachee chiefs, who had converted to Christianity, thought the presence of the Franciscan friars would enhance their own importance. The Spanish wanted labor and provisions. The Indians showed the newcomers how to plant and taught skills like pottery. The Spanish introduced domestic animals. Three generations lived here amicably, forming a new colonial culture, with much intermarriage and sharing of customs.

From the visitor center, paved paths lead around a big central plaza where the Apalachees once played their ballgames. To the right is the enormous tepee-shaped Council House, the largest period Indian building found in the Southeast. It was big enough to hold 2,000 to 3,000 people. The focus of daily life among the Apalachee people, this space was where tribe members held ceremonial dances and other important gatherings. Today, storytelling sessions for families are held in this atmospheric space.

Farther around the plaza is the one-time site of the Spanish village, represented by a reconstructed two-room thatched home built of wattle and daub. "Residents" often can be seen outside working in the gardens that helped feed the family, and they are ready to tell you all about what everyday life was like on this frontier.

Across the plaza stands the church, an impressive 50-by-100-foot plank-and-thatch building constructed by the Apalachees under the supervision of the Franciscans. Spaniards and Apalachees attended services here side by side.

The building was equal in size to the main church at St. Augustine, the better-known northern Florida settlement, and it contained some of the



Mission San Luis, Florida Division of National Historical Resources

Costumed re-enactors called "residents" bring to life everyday living in the 1600s at Mission San Luis.

most elaborate furnishings sent to the province. A 1681 inventory listed engravings, statues, brass candlesticks and paintings. Reproductions of a dozen period paintings of saints and archangels and the crucifixion are displayed, rather than expose originals to Florida's heat and humidity. The friary where the priests lived also has been reconstructed.

The church is still used for special events, including an annual October blessing of the animals in honor of St. Francis and a December Mass in memory of the state's mission history, coinciding with a children's "La Posadas," a re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

El Castillo de San Luis, the military installation that provided protection for the Spanish, is at the northern end of the complex. It consists of a two-story blockhouse, palisade and dry moat re-created as they were in the 1690s.

When this special side of history has been explored, and the excellent gift shop has been visited, more of Florida's past is told at Tallahassee's excellent Museum of Florida History, which has its own impressive main galleries in the state library building. Expansive permanent exhibits include a 9-foot mastodon, Spanish galleon treasures, Civil War memorabilia, a reconstructed steamboat and an expansive interactive exhibit on World War II. One gallery is devoted to a variety of changing exhibitions.

The library is part of the state government complex, which includes a later trove of history, the Old Capitol.

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Travel

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Beautifully restored to the way it was in 1902, with its classic dome and red-striped awnings intact, it includes the old Senate and House chambers, the Supreme Court and a surprisingly modest governor's office. Exhibits here trace the state's colorful political history.

With its moss-draped "canopy roads" and multitude of antebellum houses, Tallahassee remains a perfect picture of the Old South, and springtime visitors will find one of the South's most beautiful classic gardens in full bloom at Alfred B. McClay Gardens State Park. It's a lovely setting for discovering

an unusual part of the history of Florida's state capital.

For Tallahassee information: Tallahassee Convention and Visitors Bureau, (800) 628-2866, visittallahassee.com.



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