

THE ROAD TRIPS ISSUE

THE LOCAL

palate

FOOD CULTURE OF THE SOUTH

PLACES TO EAT
55+
AND EXPLORE

5 Ways to Wander



Alabama to Tennessee

Escape to Western NC

Little Rock to New Orleans

48 Hours in Bath County, VA

Finding Gin in Florida



Menu

ROASTED LUNCHEON PEPPERS • EGG-MILK AVAIL
FRESH CHEESE • GARLIC CRACKERS • BELLE OF GEORGIA
PEACH DUMPLINGS
PORK CHOPS • SHERRY / NIMBY / FENNEL / PORTWINE / SWEET
PICKLED SHALLOTS / PICKLED SERRANO PEPPERS / COUNTRY LEGS
SALT CRUSTED BEEF TENDERLOIN / STICK ALMOND RISOTTO
HERB-CRUSTED TOMATOES • VANILLA / RASPBERRY / LEMON
ROASTED TRUFFLE / ANDROID / BALSAMIC / BALSAMIC / BALSAMIC
ZUCCHINI CAKE • HOUSE-CURED CREME FRAICHE /
JACKSONVILLE SALT

DISPLAY UNTIL AUGUST 19, 2024

\$11.99

43>



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A large industrial distillation still in a distillery. The still is made of polished copper and has a tall, narrow column on top. It is situated in a room with brick walls and large windows. A sign on the wall reads "ST. AUGUSTINE DISTILLERY CO.". Another sign on the wall reads "50 GALLON BOTANICAL GIN STILL".

A GIN-SOAKED JOURNEY

The Sunshine State is making a splash with craft distilleries

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

ST. AUGUSTINE
DISTILLERY CO.

50 GALLON
BOTANICAL
GIN STILL

From the PANHANDLE

to the peninsula, Florida is home to a large number of craft distilleries, many producing intriguing and undeniably appealing varieties of gin. When you consider that gin is a contrivance that starts with a neutral grain spirit followed by juniper berries and other botanicals, and methods for distillation and infusing flavor vary from one producer to the next, the range of innovative flavor profiles and new drinking experiences that can be found across the state is considerable.

It's important to note that the formula for gin has been evolving for centuries. Originally produced in the 1600s in the Netherlands and referred to as "genever" (the Dutch word for juniper), this early version was made from a distillation of malt wine with added juniper berries and other botanicals. When introduced to England, the name was shortened to "gin," distillation processes improved, and the Gin Craze was born.

Once it landed in America, gin became the drink of choice during Prohibition. It was popular with Dorothy Parker and her cadre at the Algonquin Round Table, and when Ian Fleming wrote *Casino Royale*, his debut spy novel, the martini that James Bond requested included gin. Gin reached its peak in the US during the '70s, a time when martinis and cocktail parties were all the rage.

Today, with the influx of higher quality, super-premium gins, the only way to

truly appreciate them is by tasting—and there's no better place than Florida.

While Florida tends to be recognized for its warm and sunny climate, sandy beaches, and bucolic waterways, these destinations are also ideally suited for refreshing gin-based cocktails, especially the ever-popular gin and tonic. With aficionados displaying an insatiable appetite for artisanal gins and so many distilleries across the state, now is the time to get to know the impressive volume and variety of gins to be found in Florida.

David Cohen, president and head distiller of **Manifest Distilling** in Jacksonville and president of the Florida Craft Spirits Association, says the organization includes nearly 50 member distilleries and that the industry has seen rapid growth in the last 10 years. While not all of them make gin, Cohen adds, "People are searching out more unique and authentic spirits versus the ones their parents drank back in the day. That's why Manifest presents all of its spirits, including its gins, from a culinary perspective and advocates the art of craft distilling."

Along with the number of distilleries, flavor-forward cocktails are on the rise. For a taste, try **Islamorada Distilling**, one of the southernmost operations in Florida. Stephanie Harper, head distiller, says their original gin is a "good gateway gin," light with floral and citrus notes,



NORTH FLORIDA

ST. AUGUSTINE DISTILLERY St. Augustine

Built in a restored 1900s ice plant amid this city's noteworthy historical landmarks, St. Augustine Distillery has become a popular destination for both aficionados and inquisitive visitors. Complete with a self-guided tour and generous tastings, there are plenty of opportunities to discover New World and barrel-aged gin and more.
staugustinedistillery.com

while the hibiscus gin adds a distinct flavor and purple color to gin cocktails.

At **Big Cypress Distillery**, located on the southwestern edge of Miami, head distiller Fernando Plata expresses a similar sentiment. "You'll find at least six gins available in our tasting room at any given time, with 15 to 20 other styles in rotation. We make a lot of stuff. When we have visitors, we like to talk about everything. We don't keep secrets." Be sure to ask about their special gin (infused with rose and saffron), their barrel-aged gin that's released just once a year, and their Lemon City gin (made without lemons, deriving its flavor from lemon verbena, lemongrass, and lemon balm).

While many other distilleries approach gin-making in a comparable manner, Tampa-based **Fat Dog Spirits** has taken an unusual approach. As advocates of medical marijuana, they make their own hemp extract, then infuse it into their Nirvana gin made with 16 botanicals. According to senior partner Dr. Ram Ramcharran, the hemp-infused spirits offer a relaxing drinking experience.

No matter where in Florida you travel or which distilleries you choose to visit, there are worthwhile gins to taste and enjoy at every stop. While it could take a long time to visit them all, if you're planning a visit to Florida, make sure to include at least a few.



FLORIDA'S CRAFT DISTILLERIES

From Panhandle to Peninsula

There are 50 licensed distilleries around the state that currently belong to the Florida Craft Spirits Association, many producing impressive varieties of gin. For more information, visit floridacraftspirits.org

NORTH FLORIDA

MANIFEST DISTILLING Jacksonville

Manifest makes several styles of gin, including Green Label (made for mixed drinks), Florida Botanical (featuring locally sourced ingredients), and a barreled variety that changes from batch to batch. Located in downtown Jacksonville near the sports complex, the distillery invites visitors to tour, taste, and enjoy. There's always something off-menu—make sure to ask. manifestdistilling.com

30A DISTILLING CO. Santa Rosa Beach

The Florida panhandle, especially along the Gulf coast at Santa Rosa Beach, has some of the most spectacular beaches in the country. At 30A Distilling Co.'s somewhat off-the-road, speakeasy-style tasting room, visitors are invited to kick back, relax, and experience their truly artisanal gins and selection of craft cocktails. 30adistillingco.com



Manifest Distilling president and head distiller David Cohen

Islamorada's
hibiscus gin makes a
refreshing cocktail.

CENTRAL FLORIDA

FAT DOG SPIRITS

Tampa

Fat Dog Spirits was the first craft distillery licensed in Florida. While the use of hemp extract distinguishes their Nirvana gin (and vodka), their organic certification, use of locally sourced ingredients, and dedication to sustainability are also commendable. You can enjoy the widely distributed Nirvana gin in bars and restaurants along the Gulf Coast and other parts of Florida. fatdogspirits.com

SUNCOAST LOADED CANNON DISTILLERY

Bradenton

With tales of buccaneers and a spirit of adventure, Loaded Cannon (2023 Best of Florida, guidetoflorida.com) embraces a pirate theme. Their Margoza gin, American oak barrel-aged alternative, and other highly regarded spirits are named after pirates. Hear the tales and sample their treasures with a visit to their distillery and tasting room. loadedcannondistillery.com



SOUTH FLORIDA

ISLAMORADA DISTILLING

Islamorada, Florida Keys

Located in the heart of Islamorada, considered the "sportfishing capital of the world" with easy access to the Everglades, this distillery and tasting room is someplace special. Of course, their purple-hued hibiscus gin makes the visit worthwhile, but their other spirits and beers are also a great way to start a Keys-based adventure. islamoradadistilling.com

BIG CYPRESS DISTILLERY

Miami

Experience artfully crafted gins, including their Old Tom-style Magic City gin, traditionally sweetened with a neutral base distilled from sugar cane and 11 botanicals. There's lots more available in their intimate tasting room, open for small groups Thursdays through Saturdays. Ask about small-batch offerings and enjoy elevated cocktails. bigcypressdistillery.com

CHAINBRIDGE DISTILLERY

Fort Lauderdale

Recognized for their award-winning fruit brandies, ChainBridge offers several gins along with a wide range of spirits well suited to every palate. Be sure to try their barrel-aged gin, its special character derived from used brandy barrels. Intrepid visitors will want to experience their carrot spirit and beet spirit. chainbridgedistillery.com