



Honeymoon in the Heart of St. Augustine, Florida



Casa Monica Hotel, St. Augustine, Florida Photo By Holloway Productions

Plan your honeymoon where love is legendary in the nation's oldest city, St. Augustine, Florida. The Ancient City's first wedding is recorded January 24, 1594, between Gabriel Hernandez and his bride, Catalina de Valdes. The city's allure has survived throughout the centuries. Explore the intriguing tales from the pages of history while surrounded by romantic architecture and fine art. It is only natural that you begin your new life in a place where time has stood still...well almost.

Casa Monica Hotel

With its red tile roof and five towers rising out of the historic district, my husband and I easily located our luxury refuge, the **Casa Monica Hotel**. Built in 1888, the 138-room Moorish revival castle is fit for royalty. In fact, King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia of Spain lodged at this AAA Four-Diamond property on a previous visit. Listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, we were not surprised to enter through the original arched carriage entrance.



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Once inside the lobby, a flowing bronze fountain surrounded by Italian tile and hand-painted stenciled gold-leafed archways welcomed us. Lavish antique chandeliers and furniture complimented by velvet and lush tapestry and fine art completed the ambiance. Notice the large European mid-17th century oak chest with winged lions and supported on paw feet. The good news-the romantic atmosphere extends to the hotel suites.



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Make sure you reserve one of the signature suites with chic Spanish-Moorish décor and ask about the Romance Package. The spacious Anastasia Suite was our favorite-complete with a spiral staircase. For sweeping views of the city, reserve the Ponce de Leon Suite that comes with a Jacuzzi. Come morning, the hotel will provide transportation to visit the Serenata Beach Club-located just minutes away. Guests have access to this private oceanfront club with dining, adult pool and the Atlantic Ocean for a playground.

Casa Monica is not only a hot honeymoon destination, but the ultimate setting for weddings. With lush landscape of tropical palms and flowing fountains, couples can choose from indoor and outdoor venues, including poolside terrace, the Flagler Ballroom or the grand Casa Monica Ballroom. Frequently, newlyweds can be seen exiting their wedding by horse-drawn carriage through the streets of St. Augustine.

Try the gourmet cuisine at the hotel's award-winning 95 Cordova, and enjoy the breakfast sandwiches on croissants at Café Cordova. Casa Monica has previously been tagged on Travel + Leisure's "World's Best" hotel awards list. Owned by the Kessler Collection, the hotel recently became the first property to become part of the Autograph Collection, Marriott's newest brand featuring iconic independent hotels and resorts.

Romance, History, Architecture and Art

Adjoining the Casa Monica's lobby, we explored the James Coleman Signature Gallery. Our favorite painting by the nationally acclaimed Coleman was "Together" depicting two swans painted for his wife. Why swans? They mate for life. At Loves' Art Emporium, enjoy the

paintings by husband and wife team, Michael and Inessa Garmash. The Romantic Impressionist artists paint together and often finish each others paintings. Stroll the city's oldest street and enjoy the Aviles Street Gallery, where more than 20 local artist shops reside. We spent the entire afternoon on St. George Street exploring dozens of unique shops.

Railroad magnate, Henry Flagler, purchased Casa Monica in 1892. Just steps from the hotel you will want to learn...the rest of the story by touring two other former Flagler hotels, the Lightner Museum, former Alcazar Hotel, and Flagler College, the former Ponce de Leon Hotel. After honeymooning in St. Augustine, Flagler fell in love with the city and set out to build opulent hotels for the rich and famous to escape from harsh northern winters. Flagler's dream of building the "American Riviera" in St. Augustine became a reality.

The Lightner Museum and Flagler College is dripping in romantic architecture and treasures from the Gilded Age. Promptly at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m., the Lightner Museum docents will demonstrate the rare musical instruments such as the cylinder music box. This collection of art and antiques is amazing in a place that is often referred to as the Smithsonian of the South. Legacy Tours of Flagler College begin in the Rotunda where you are directed to look up into the 80-foot domed ceiling-notice the robed women copied from the temple of Diana in Greece. Ponce de Leon guests lodged for the three months at this opulent hotel that is now a liberal arts college. The tour also includes viewing 79 of Louis Tiffany's stained glass windows, crystal chandeliers, and an onyx Thomas Edison clock.

Set out on the Old Town Trolley Tours, a fully narrated seven mile historical tour of St. Augustine. A three-day pass includes unlimited on/off use of the trolley, which makes 21 stops, including the Oldest Wooden School, the Oldest House in the U.S., and the impressive Spanish Fort Castillo de San Marcos. Also, depart at the famed Fountain of Youth, a national archaeological park-where Ponce de Leon dropped by in 1513 to claim the spot for Spain. The guide will have a cup of the "timeless" water waiting on you. Stop long enough to kiss under the "Love Tree" on Cordova Street, and visit the [St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum](#), where you can climb 219 steps for spectacular views. Reserve your space at the top of this historic working lighthouse at the Sunset/Moonrise viewing events, complete with champagne toast and light refreshments.

Romantic Dining

For an unforgettable dining experience in an intimate setting, try the award-winning **Opus 39**. The talented chef and owner, Michael McMillan, an established star in the culinary field, founded this cutting edge restaurant on the premise that only the freshest ingredients are good enough. The results-tantalizing cuisine surrounded by New York chic décor. For the best samplings that Chef Michael has to offer, try the Chef's Seven Course Tasting Menu. We began with White Wine Steamed Mussels and finished with Date Molasses Cake. Ask for a table by the window, overlooking the historic district. The atmosphere was so cozy that we lingered long after our meal was finished. Here, the soft glow of the candle cast shadows on two people in love. We walked back to Casa Monica under the sky lit by a thousand stars with our memories tucked away for safekeeping.