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Sunshine State's Birthday Party Florida Celebrates 500

By Doc Lawrence



Who doesn't want to meet a king and queen? According to insiders, Spain's King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia will be in Florida early next year to take part in the ceremonies honoring the 500th anniversary of Florida's discovery by Spain's legendary explorer, Juan Ponce de Leon.

I believe these the intrepid Spanish explorers deserve a great deal of credit. Among many other things, they introduced the wines of Europe to Florida and the New World. Before the ceremonies begin, we have time to become more familiar with regal reds like Garnacha and Spain's food-friendly white wine, Albarino.

Today, Florida juxtaposes many cultures, a heritage that began nearly five hundred years ago. 2013 marks the official celebration of the Sunshine State's discovery by European explorers, but things are already stirring here and in Spain.

The groundwork for the celebration began a few years back and involves Florida and federal agencies and similar ones in Spain. The potential for both Florida and Spain is enormous and includes developing closer cultural ties, encouraging meaningful tourism and showcasing products like food and wine that are connected to Florida and Spain.

Laura Lee, a top Pensacola tourism executive and a board member of Viva Florida, the state agency heading the 500th festivities, said during a recent interview that *"American history started in Florida The Spanish landed on Florida's shores nearly 500 years ago."* She added that *"Viva Florida is all about celebrating our unique culture—the culture that can be seen in our architecture, tasted in our cuisine, and touched at our museums. The initiative will raise awareness of the richness Florida offers as a destination – that not only boosts tourism but it offers visitors a more enriching vacation experience."*



VIVA FLORIDA 500™

WHAT'S AHEAD ~

Much of Viva Florida's planning has been at Mission San Luis in Tallahassee. Fully restored, the Mission is on the Spanish Trace, the ancient trade route connecting St. Augustine and Pensacola to New Orleans with many missions and forts along its path.

One of the taste adventures that will be at the forefront comes in a bottle. Get accustomed to names



Rioja is one of Spain's venerable regions producing wines brought to Florida 500 years ago.

like Tempranillo, Albarino, Verdejo and reunite with Sherry, the regal fortified wine from Iberia. Spain's great wine regions like La Mancha, Navarra, Penendes and Cava have wines poured daily in Florida restaurants. Some of them have DNA that matches the wines brought over by Ponce de Leon and company.

To mark the 500th, the academically oriented Spain-Florida Foundation and other institutions like the Frost Art Museum are working on several exhibits and cultural activities, recognizing that Florida's story is global, extending into the Caribbean, across the Atlantic to the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of Europe. History connects Florida to Africa and the slave trade. Exhibits and other programs will provide visitors a glimpse into the lives of some of the more colorful and intriguing people who lived in Florida including black conquistadors and Doña María, a slave in St. Augustine who served as a nurse and cook in the first hospital in America.

Native Americans were always part of the Spanish settlements from the Appalachees at Mission San Luis to the Seminole Nation, which has countless stories involving Spain. Spanish Florida was a place where Europeans from many nations resided. There were two Englishmen in Pedro Menéndez de Avilés's initial expedition to Florida in 1565.

Themes include early St. Augustine, a cosmopolitan garrison, Spain and the American Revolution, missions, Africans in La Florida, Florida's Indians, the women of La Florida, and the economy of Spanish Florida: ranches, cowboys and wheat.

Spanish recipes that remain popular here and heralded Spanish wines will be showcased. The Cracker horses and cows seen grazing in central and north Florida are descended from the ones the conquistadors brought from Spain.

Trinidad Jimenez, Spain's Foreign Minister, observed during a visit to Washington, D.C. that the 500th agenda was an opportunity to strengthen relations between her country and the U.S. Some of the ongoing activities between Florida and Spain include the presentation of a statue of St. Augustine's founder, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, to Mission San Luis by the Government of Asturias, and the debut of the Ponce de Leon award honoring exceptional Hispanic-Floridians.



Paella, a favorite with Florida and Spanish gourmets, is perfect with wines from Spain.

Nothing seems more appropriate than a toast honoring these visionary efforts: fill those flutes with a Cava sparkling rosé wine and join in a robust

SALUD!



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