Beginning in the 1500s, many European powers, including Spain, France, and Great Britain, were fighting for control in the New World. With wealthy trade and territory at stake, how could they defend their colonial outposts from enemy attack?

In 1658, Spain established St. Augustine to protect its Gulf Stream shipping route and anchor its claim to La Florida (roughly today’s Florida and parts of surrounding states). By the early 1600s, British colonies encroaching from the north threatened the city. The Spanish built nine wooden forts before constructing the stone fort that stands today, preserved as part of Castillo de San Marcos National Monument. From its first stones to its later massive walls, Castillo de San Marcos was constructed between 1672 and 1695. Once completed, this structure never fell in battle.

Explore the Castillo. Buy tickets at the extreme station, then head into the Castillo through the sally port. Your tour is self-guiding, so go at your own pace. We recommend at least two hours. Some rooms are historically furnished to recreate their original purpose. Other rooms house museum exhibits or serve as administrative offices or facilities like restrooms. Download the park app for more options to explore the Castillo and grounds.

The Castillo’s layout changed from the time it was built. Surfaces are uneven and can be slippery. This coat of arms represents Spain’s united kingdoms: Castile (castle) and León (lion). Spain’s Coat of Arms

This small tower kept here in time of siege. This coat of arms represents Spain’s united kingdoms: Castile (castle) and León (lion).

Features Inside Castillo de San Marcos

- Gun Storage Rooms. Spanish features lived in town with their families unless on guard duty. During their 24-hour rotation, guards occupied these quarters.
- Museum Exhibits. Explore over 400 years of history in the exhibit rooms. Florida’s ingenuity, fort design and construction, everyday life in the fort and city, and the Castillo’s preservation.
- Storage Rooms. Food, tools, and other items were kept safe and dry here. A remote outpost, St. Augustine depended on supplies from the Castillo, especially in times of siege.
- Meet the People. Spanish and other Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans have passed through St. Augustine. Exhibits share some of the history and traditions to the city.

City Gate

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"Although I have seen many castillos of considerable size," La Florida’s governor said to Spain’s king in 1573, "this one is not surpassing by any of those with greater character." But could Castillo de San Marcos withstand an enemy attack?

A few years after its 1695 completion, European nations were again at war, and the colonies were dragged into the conflict. In November 1702, English forces from the Carolina colony made a preemptive strike at St. Augustine by land and sea. They quickly overtook the Spanish city and its surrounding outposts.

Around 1,500 Spanish civilians and soldiers were already secured in the Castillo with two months of provisions. For several weeks, the English laid siege and attempted to gain entrance, cutting off supplies and bombarding the walls. The Castillo’s coquina-stone walls held, absorbing the cannon fire instead of shattering. By the end of December, Spanish reinforcements arrived from Havana, Cuba, and the outnumbered English burned St. Augustine to the ground in their retreat. The Spanish rebuilt the city and added earthenwork defenses.

In 1740, the Castillo again fended off the English when British Gen. James Oglethorpe beset the town for about a month, before giving up and returning to the Georgia colony. When the British finally took possession of Florida in 1763, it was through political negotiation, not by force.

Present Day: Volunteer reenactors bring the Castillo to life when demonstrating historical crafts, foods, medicines, tools, and weapons.

1821 - US ratifies Florida annexation treaty.
1825 - Under US control, the Castillo is named Fort Marion.
1850 - US Civil War - Fort Marion and Castillo de San Marcos are proclaimed national monuments. In 1933, both are transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service.
1893 - The US Army brings 74 people from Indian Island (now S. Carolina) to St. Augustine to establish Fort Marion.
1895 - The US Coast Guard graduation ceremonies at Fort Marion.
1914-18 - World War I - The Castillo is used as a training base.
1924 - Fort Matanzas and Fort Marion (Castillo de San Marcos) are proclaimed national monuments. In 1933, both are transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service.
1939-45 - World War II - Castillo is a gunnery training base.
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1719 - Fort Matanzas erected north of St. Augustine to protect St. Augustine and the Matanzas River.
1721-22 - The Spanish build Castillo de San Marcos to protect St. Augustine. The moat, quarters, bastions, latrines, and seawall are finished by 1722.
1732-14 - Siege of the Florida peninsula.
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