It’s 1742. Your orders this morning are to watch over this inlet from the new Torre de Matanzas—Matanzas Tower. As a Spanish soldier, you spend most of your time doing drills and making repairs to this small fort. You must always be prepared. At any moment, French pirates or English outlaws could shatter the natural tranquility here. Will it be today?

Suddenly, an osprey raises an urgent alarm. You scan the inlet’s entrance for signs of human invaders; then, you relax. Except for skimmers rippling the surface to find breakfast, these waters are calm. Separating you from the Atlantic’s crashing waves, miles of undeveloped marshland buzz with life. Not far from you, two leaping dolphins splash near a sandbar. Sanderlings scurry along coquina deposits on the beach. Offshore, a North Atlantic right whale breaches. You take a moment to enjoy the rare sight—the whale industry has nearly wiped out this species in the hunt for their valuable oil.

This afternoon, you will hike the island to forage for supper under the baking sun, mindful that fresh water here is scarce. Tonight, you will return home by boat to St. Augustine and civilization after a long thirty days on watch. For now, you guard La Florida and your family to the north from the fortified watchtower on this fragile, isolated island—preserved and protected today as Fort Matanzas National Monument.
Fort Matanzas

The main threat to St. Augustine is from the north by sea. The city is also vulnerable from the south by river. Beginning in 1565, Spain’s military builds a series of wooden watchtowers along the Matanzas River, approaching St. Augustine. Wind, water, and heat repeatedly wore down the towers. In 1740 the Spanish replace the southernmost tower with a masonry fort.

Fort Matanzas proves its worth before it is even completed. In 1742 twelve British ships led by Gen. James Oglethorpe appear offshore. Before they can enter the inlet, the Spanish troops repel them with cannon fire from the fort’s gun deck.

The site…was the most advantageous and proper to keep under cover the entrance into the bay through this point.

The Life of a Soldier in the 1760s
Every 30 days, a fresh crew—an officer, two gunners, and four privates with provisions—renews from Castillo de San Marcos for rotations at Fort Matanzas. The soldier spent six months at the fort, where the soldado (Spanish soldier) likely worked a second job. From this remote outpost, he took part in patrols, Spanish officer, 1706s.

Anastasia Island

Visit the Park

Fort Matanzas National Monument is 14 miles south of St. Augustine on SR 207 via FL A1A. The park is open 9 am to 5:30 pm daily; closed Thanksgiving and December 25. Admission is free.

The visitor center has information, a film, a sales area, and exhibits on natural and historic features.

Visit the fort only by ranger-led tour. A passenger ferry runs hourly on the half-hour from 9:30 am to 4:30 pm, weather permitting. Get a boarding pass (free) at the visitor center. Enjoy a Safe Visit: The climate is hot and humid. Drink plenty of water. Watch for overexposure. Wear sunscreen, cool clothing, sunglasses, and a hat. Watch the weather. Seek shelter during storms. Do not climb or sit on fort walls, rocks, or cannon. Do not walk on oyster shells.

EMERGENCIES CALL 911

Regulations

Alcohol and metal detectors are prohibited. Glass containers are prohibited on the beach. Dredging private vessels at the fort and letting off passengers are prohibited. Pets must be leashed. Clean up after your pet. Federal law prohibits firearms in many areas; refer to signs posted at entrances. For more information contact a ranger. A complete list of regulations is on the park website.

Accessibility: We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For more information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website. The ferry and Coastal Hammock Trail are wheelchair-accessible; the fort is not.

More Information: Fort Matanzas National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about National Park Service programs in America’s communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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To stop French expansion, Spain claims Florida. Rover struggles among Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain play out in the New World over the next few centuries. The main threat to St. Augustine is from the north by sea. The city is also vulnerable from the south by river. Beginning in 1565, Spain’s military builds a series of wooden watchtowers along the Matanzas River, approaching St. Augustine. Wind, water, and heat repeatedly wore down the towers. In 1740 the Spanish replace the southernmost tower with a masonry fort. Fort Matanzas proves its worth before it is even completed. In 1742 twelve British ships led by Gen. James Oglethorpe appear offshore. Before they can enter the inlet, the Spanish troops repel them with cannon fire from the fort’s gun deck.

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