

# Fort Matanzas

National Monument  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Self-guiding Map

*The fort is made of a fragile natural shellstone called coquina. For your safety, and to help us preserve this historic structure, please do not climb, sit on or touch the walls.*

## Welcome...

to Fort Matanzas. You have arrived at this small Spanish outpost by boat, much as the soldiers did in the 1700's. As you enter the fort you are stepping into a page of our country's distant past. The island, in the soldiers' time, was small and surrounded by water. Today, marshes and woodlands have taken the waters place.

The small watchtower's main purpose is to prevent enemy vessels from passing through the inlet south of the Fort, thus protecting this approach to St. Augustine. Fort Matanzas served that purpose from its completion in 1742 until it became United States property in 1821.

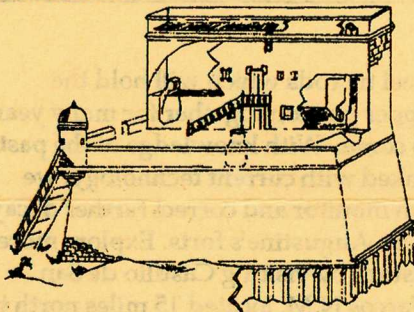
## Entrance



Upon approaching the fort 200 years ago, you would have found a wooden ladder in the place of today's stairway. Each night the ladder was drawn up. Every morning a sentry on top of the tower scanned the area for possible threats before giving the

command to lower the ladder and begin the day's activities. The gun platform is solid fill. This was necessary to support the heavy cannons.

## Gundeck



Fort Matanzas' main strengths were the artillery and its strategic location. The five cannons which once guarded the fortress covered all approaching directions. Each cannon could easily reach the inlet, at that time only a half mile away. The two cannons which are seen here are the original cast iron cannons left behind by the Spanish at

their departure in 1821. At the rear of the gundeck under the stairs, you see a water cistern. The roof of the fort caught rain water which passed into the cistern through a wooden pipe similar to the square pipe next to the stairs. There was no other source of fresh water on the island.

## Quarters

The lower room was the enlisted men's quarters. Normally 7 to 10 men occupied the fort on a month's tour of duty. They were rotated from the garrison in St. Augustine, bringing their supplies with them in longboats. The soldiers cooked, ate and slept in this room. Opposite the fireplace was a long wooden sleeping platform, probably the origin of the low, square holes in the wall. Benches and a table

completed the furnishings. Notice the windows in this room. The smaller openings were for ventilation as well as safe points for soldiers firing muskets. The larger windows had shutters to keep out the rain and the damp chill of the winter winds.

## Officer's Quarters



After ascending the stairs, stop a moment to look around you. Here the one officer, often a corporal or sergeant, made his quarters. Sitting at his desk or lying in bed, the officer probably appreciated the sea breeze which cooled the summer day and kept down the gnats and mosquitos. The powder magazine and low wall across the room kept the dangerous

black powder from the open flames used for heat and light. The magazine extends down into the wall to the level of the gundeck. Note the slope of the vaulted ceiling, built for structural strength.

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## Observation deck

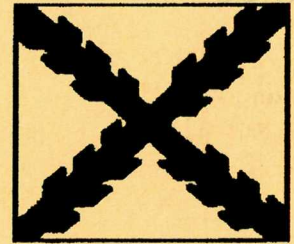
Then, as now, the narrow ladder was the only access to the top of the tower. The scuttle you just came through and the chimney to your right had structures shielding them from the elements. This point provided a good

view of the inlet to the south. At that time the inlet was about a half-mile closer, within easy range of the artillery. To the north the waterway leads to St. Augustine, 15 miles away.

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## Early Spanish Flag

The Spanish flag you see flying over the Fort was recognized for over 250 years as the Spanish ensign. In 1785, King Charles III decreed the national flag would be a red and gold striped ensign; however, the old flag continued to be used until the mid 1800's as a banner in the Spanish Army regiments.



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## About your visit today

As you approach the dock, stop to look back at the fort. Built to withstand naval assaults, it could not hold off the attack of time. The high walls, originally vertical, now lean with age. Repairs were not always successful in stopping the decline. However, we are making progress. The large, yellow coquina blocks near the top of the structure cover stainless

steel tie rods which will hold the upper portion together for many years to come. With knowledge of the past linked with current technology, we can monitor and correct further decay of St. Augustine's forts. Explore more history by visiting Castillo de San Marcos N.M. located 15 miles north in St. Augustine on Route A1A.



Fort Matanzas National Monument is administered by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. For information, write to: Superintendent, 1 Castillo Drive, St. Augustine, FL 32084.