

## 15 WAYS TO OFFEND A FLORIDIAN by James Hill

Serve them “Southern food” such as gator or frogs legs. Just because we live in the South does not mean we’re open to eating *anything* that walks. In fact, we may raise an eyebrow if you even think this is part of our diet.

Condemn us for buying a Siberian husky. A beautiful breed, these dogs have origins rooted in cold climates and, like any domesticated animal, they deserve a home. While we can’t control Florida’s hot temperatures, we can do our best to accommodate a Siberian. So, the next time you see an owner walking one, don’t make a not-so-subtle remark.

Refer to Florida as Mickey’s House. Imagine you just had a family reunion in New York. You had a great time, eating at Club A Steakhouse, catching up with cousins you haven’t seen since the days of playing in the backyard. Just as you’re saying your goodbyes, a relative comments that you have to get back to Mickey’s House. In your head, you hear a screeching record. You pause and ponder whether that was sarcasm, a brazen jab at where you live, or a frightening revelation...that the cute mouse really does run Florida.

Live the life of a snowbird. We understand the interest. Florida is a haven to the merciless winters Northerners face. We sympathize, honestly, but don’t take refuge to avoid the cold and then hightail it when the wintry storm has passed. In Palm Beach County alone, statistics show that over 140,000 people migrate there during the winter. That’s a ton of temporary residents. What, Florida isn’t good enough for you to live permanently?

Giggle at their southern drawl. Most regions have some kind of unique accent and dialect. The moment we open our mouths to newcomers, lips curl and cheeks swell. “You talk country” is the normal response. Hey, stay a while in Florida and soon you’ll be talking just like us. Can’t wait.

Question our education system. Every school has its flaws and some schools are more advanced than others, regardless of the state. According to News Herald, Florida’s grade has rose to a B-minus rating. See, our schools aren’t zoos.

Assume everyone speaks Spanish. Florida has a huge Hispanic population consisting of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, just to name a few. Unfortunately, it doesn’t mean that every resident speaks Spanish. U.S. Census Bureau statistics reveal that almost 8.0% of the entire population speaks only Spanish. So the next time you cross paths with an old Floridian friend or relative, don’t frown when you discover he’s not bilingual.

Pick a side between the University of Florida and Florida State University. Gators and Seminoles. Both are phenomenal schools, yet there is a bit of a rivalry. The last

thing you want is to reveal your passion for UF if you're among die-hard FSU friends or vice versa. You may not make it home without a thrashing. In this rivalry, no one wins.

Criticize our driving. Contrary to popular sentiments, we are not the worst drivers. In fact, it seems Florida is considered the worst driving state by word of mouth only. A recent article at USA Today shows we don't even crack the top ten. True, many of our drivers seem to be allergic to switching on their turn signals or darting across lanes of traffic for fun, but evidence is evidence. Florida isn't a bad place to drive.

Persuade the elderly to move down for retirement. After working hard for so many years, a retiree has earned the right to choose where to live for the rest of his life. Some may be more comfortable spending their days in their current state. Convincing them to, otherwise, live in Florida is almost like twisting their arm and it also contributes to the how-unfortunate negative stigma that Florida is a retirement state.

Believe the hillbilly stereotype. Yes, Florida is located in the south and its residents have a southern drawl, but that doesn't mean everyone walks around barefoot all year long. Many do walk around wearing sandals all year long and are pretty well educated. The US Census Bureau reports that 86% of Floridians at least graduate high school.

Take a vacation in South Florida aka Miami. It's an inside joke among us Floridians that Miami is the east coast version of Hollywood. Full of glamour, palm trees, and the like, it's a celebrity's destination. And let's not forget LeBron James popularizing the "take my talents to South Beach" phrase likely contributed to Miami's prominence. We're not jealous that one of our cities has garnered so much attention. Well, maybe a little. But our other cities need love, too. So what do you say? Give the rest of us a chance. Please?

Tour: We know there's nothing we can do to stop it and don't mind providing directions to newcomers, but more tourists means fighting through fields of traffic. The Miami Herald reports that a little over 90 million visitors checked out the Sunshine State in 2013. Talk about scheduling the right times to get out in traffic.

Plan weekend activities around the beach. Make a reservation at a beachfront hotel. Check. Play volleyball at the beach for hours in the daytime. Check. Eat dinner at a restaurant located near the beach. Check. What's wrong with this picture? Your Floridian friend ignoring your calls the next time you come into town.

Categorize us as insane: Take for example, an incident in St. Petersburg where a man built a gun range in his yard. Though his neighbors were outraged, he at least had intentions to give them a warning when he would practice. We're not all bonkers. The news just showcases a less than flattering side.