

The Space Coast



The space shuttle is to the Space Coast what pastel hotels are to South Beach, and you'll be amazed, amused (and exhausted?) by the celestial themes swirling in every gas station, roadside café and hotel lobby within a meteorite's throw. C'mon, even the area code is 321! Not surprisingly, the Kennedy Space Center is both the largest attraction in the area (occupying more than 140,000 acres) and the biggest (more than 1.5 million visitors spin the turnstiles annually).

In contrast to the high-tech buildings and bad space puns, however, the area also boasts some of Florida's most deliciously undeveloped areas. The Space Center only uses about 10,000 acres for its purposes. The rest of the area is set aside as a federally protected wildlife refuge, so don't be surprised to see sunning alligators, soaring birds (including bald eagles), and rooting wild pigs, giving new meaning to the term 'government pork.'

Along the coast, you can find some of Florida's finest sea turtle observation programs and among the most pristine beaches in the state. For adventure-holics, the waves from Sebastian Inlet to Cocoa Beach offer the state's gnarliest surfing and just west of the barrier island, the lagoon is dotted with quiet, undeveloped islands, perfect for wiling away warm summer days.

However, if neither space ships nor surfing nor barren islands make your socks go up and down, then cruise on south to the quaint but cool sister cities of Melbourne and Indialantic, where you can savor small town friendliness peppered with an authentic beach vibe.

And for shoppers? Well...there's no shortage of places to browse – just hope you like surfwear!

HIGHLIGHTS

- Partying before (and after) a shuttle launch at **Kennedy Space Center** (p340), a once-in-a-lifetime experience – if the heavens align
- Watching a sublime sunset at Cocoa Beach's **Sunset Waterfront Grill & Bar** (p347)
- Paddling among lush mangroves and deserted islands at **Canaveral National Seashore** (p343), and finding a secluded, remote campsite near frolicking manatees
- Hanging ten on the gnarliest wave breaks in Florida at **Cocoa Beach** (p345) and getting lost in the legendary Ron Jon Surf Shop
- Having lunch at the remote **Mosquito Lagoon** (p343), where it's just you and several hundred deserted islands



