

# The Space Coast

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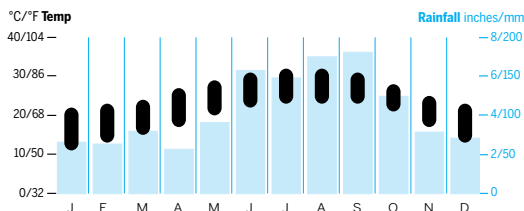
## Why Go?

More than 75 miles of barrier-island Atlantic Coast stretch from Canaveral National Seashore south to Vero Beach, encompassing undeveloped stretches of endless white sand, an entrenched surf culture and pockets of Old Florida.

The Kennedy Space Center and several small museums dedicated to the history, heroes and science of the United States' space program give the Space Coast its name, and the region's tourist hub of Cocoa Beach is the launching point for massive cruise ships. But beyond the 3D space movies, tiki-hut bars and surf shops, the Space Coast offers quintessential Florida wildlife for everyone from grandmas to toddlers. Kayak with manatees, camp on a private island or simply stroll along miles and miles of sandy white beaches – it's easy to find a quiet spot.

## When to Go

### Cocoa Beach



**Jul** Crowds diminish; prices drop; loggerhead sea turtles nest along miles of sandy coastline.

**Apr** More sunny days than any other month, and most spring-breakers have come and gone.


**Fall** Peak migratory-bird season and drier weather make for prime wildlife-spotting.

## National & State Parks

Miles of the Space Coast are dedicated to national and state parks and wildlife refuges, including **Canaveral National Seashore** (part of the national park system), **Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge** and **Sebastian Inlet State Park**. The Atlantic Ocean pounds along the eastern edge, while the calm, brackish waters of the Banana and Indian Rivers and Mosquito Lagoon separate the barrier island from the mainland to the west. See [www.spacecoasthiking.com](http://www.spacecoasthiking.com) for area trail maps and detailed descriptions. Consult [www.spacecoastbirding.com](http://www.spacecoastbirding.com) for the region's birding hot spots.

### Getting There & Around

#### AIR

**Melbourne International Airport** ( 321-723-6227; [www.mlair.com](http://www.mlair.com); 1 Air Terminal Pkwy) services Delta, Baer Air and US Airways. It is served by all the major rental-car companies and Greyhound buses. A SCAT bus stop is located outside the main terminal building.

Orlando International Airport and Sanford International Airport are about 50 minutes west of Cocoa Beach.

#### BUS

**Space Coast Area Transit** (SCAT;  321-633-1878; [www.ridescat.com](http://www.ridescat.com)) operates a local bus service including a mainland route from Merritt Island south to Melbourne Beach, a beach trolley in Cocoa Beach and a bus running along Hwy A1A from Cocoa Beach to Indialantic. Surfboards and bikes are allowed on the bus, space permitting. **GoLineIRT** ( 772-569-0903; [www.golineirt.com](http://www.golineirt.com)) services Sebastian Inlet south to Vero Beach, and **Greyhound** ( 321-723-4329; [www.greyhound.com](http://www.greyhound.com)) buses stop along the mainland.

#### CAR

Three major roads run north and south: A1A along the beaches, US 1 on the mainland and paralleling the shore of the Indian River, and I-95 close to the western border of Brevard County. Seven bridges and causeways run east-west across the lagoon, the most important being Hwy 405 to the Kennedy Space Center, Hwy 528 (the Beachline) connecting Cape Canaveral to Orlando, and Hwy 520 between Cocoa Village and Cocoa Beach.

Major car-rental agencies have offices in Cocoa Beach, Melbourne and Vero Beach.

#### TRAIN

Amtrak trains run as far as Orlando.

## Merritt Island

In 1958, in the aftermath of WWII, the US government selected the east coast of Florida as the base of its newly formed National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). From here new-age captains would launch rockets, telescopes and shuttles into the orbiting circle of the earth to discover new worlds and galaxies. Thousands of acres of scrubland were commandeered at the northern end of Merritt Island; a third of it was cleared to form the new NASA base, while the remainder was given over to the US Fish and Wildlife Service to operate as the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and the Canaveral National Seashore. The refuge and seashore provide the military with a secure and impenetrable buffer zone while also offering some 500 species of wildlife a pristine coastal habitat of saltwater marshes, hardwood hammocks, pine flatwoods and scrub.

Nowadays, this 43-mile strip of coast from the southern end of Cape Canaveral Air Station to the tip of Canaveral National Seashore is the longest stretch of undeveloped beach on Florida's Atlantic coast. It's also one of the most important turtle-nesting beaches in the US, with 7900 recorded nestings in 2013.

## Kennedy Space Center

Since 1919, when physics professor Robert Goddard published *A Method of Reaching Extreme Altitudes*, erasing the line between science fiction and reality, NASA's engineers and astronauts have thrilled and amazed us with their moon landings, satellite launches and shuttle programs.

One of Florida's most visited sights, the more than 140,000-acre Kennedy Space Center was once a working space-flight facility, where shuttles were built and astronauts rocketed into the cosmos. With the termination of NASA's shuttle program in the summer of 2011, however, the Kennedy Space Center began the shift from a living museum to a historical one, although you can still see crew-less rockets and satellites launch from its pads (see [www.spacecoast-launches.com](http://www.spacecoast-launches.com) for the schedule).

### Sights

Admission to this all-day attraction covers most of the center, a guided bus tour to the