

Canaveral

Official Map and Guide

National Seashore
Florida

Merritt Island

National Wildlife Refuge
Florida



The inviting seashore



A green turtle at the sea's edge



An annual ritual



A refuge resident: a bald eagle

Sanctuaries for Man and Beast



Each fall thousands of ducks, like this pintail, and other waterfowl fly in to the marshes and waters around Merritt Island.

This barrier island, subject to the powers of wind, water, and shifting sand, is a place of constant physical alteration. Atlantic waves break on its eastern side and the waters of Mosquito Lagoon and Indian River lap quietly on the west. These waters moderate the temperatures and help create a year-round subtropical haven. Hammocks of ancient oak trees draped with Spanish moss grow within walking distance of palmetto-covered sand dunes. Salt marshes, man-made impoundments, mangrove islands, and the estuaries of lagoon and river serve as feeding grounds for an array of animals. Pine flatwoods and other vegetation create habitats for a variety of wildlife.

Today you can enjoy the recreational opportunities of ocean beaches, fishing, boating, hunting, and wildlife watching, but man is no

newcomer here. The earliest known inhabitants were aboriginal Indians. Some of their burial mounds and shell middens remain as evidence of their civilization along the shores of Mosquito Lagoon. Later groups included Spanish explorers, British colonists, and citrus growers. In more recent years, mosquito control activities and rocket launches have left their mark on the landscape.

In the early 1960s the Kennedy Space Center was established on part of Merritt Island. Not all the land was needed for the space program, and two other agencies were invited to help manage the area. In 1963, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with NASA, established the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge as a sanctuary for wintering waterfowl. With the creation of Canaveral National Seashore in 1975,

the National Park Service took on the dual responsibility of preserving the primitive barrier beach while providing for public enjoyment of its resources. Thus three different governmental agencies have joined to ensure the proper mesh of the Nation's highly technical space program, wildlife management, and public recreation.

Birdlife abounds on Merritt Island, with more than 310 species recorded. Gulls, terns, sandpipers, herons, egrets, ibises, pelicans, and osprey provide a colorful array of movement and song. The patient birdwatcher may also get to see the majestic flight of the bald eagle, the comical dance of the reddish egret, or the colorful display of the roseate spoonbill. The best time of day to observe birds and other wildlife is the early morning and late afternoon.

Shallow marshes along the border between water and upland areas and along the beach and dune line are excellent places to find birds. Not all wildlife is as evident and spectacular as some of the birdlife, but patience and luck will pay off with glimpses of other animals. The ghost crab is one creature dependent on both land and sea. Although of marine origin, this nocturnal scavenger lives in burrows on the upper beach and dunes. These same beaches serve as nesting sites for giant loggerhead and green sea turtles during summer nights. By morning, only a bulldozer-like track remains to mark the turtles' route.

A variety of other amphibians and reptiles inhabits the dunes and the sand scrub community behind them, where rodents and other prey are plentiful. Vividly marked pine snakes and king

snakes are sometimes seen, as are diamond-back rattlesnakes and harmless box turtles. American alligators, symbols of the subtropics, often bask in the sun at the edge of the inland waters. Raccoons, bobcats, and armadillos roam throughout the area and are sometimes seen along park roads. Whales and dolphins are occasionally sighted offshore, while manatees, or sea cows, live in the waters of Mosquito Lagoon and Indian River.

Several of the nation's endangered and threatened wildlife species are found at Merritt Island. These include the southern bald eagle, peregrine falcon, scrub jay, manatee, Atlantic salt marsh snake, eastern indigo snake, wood stork, and the green, ridley, leatherback, and Atlantic loggerhead sea turtles.

Facilities and Area Information



Canaveral National Seashore and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge are located midway down Florida's east coast between Melbourne and Daytona Beach. The Seashore and Refuge are readily accessible via major routes such as U.S. 1 and I-95. New Smyrna Beach, the northern access point, is located on Fla. A1A. Titusville, the southern access point, is located on Fla. 402. The Intracoastal Waterway, which links Florida with the north by water, skirts the western edge of Mosquito Lagoon before entering the Indian River via the Haulover Canal. You may obtain information about the Seashore and Refuge at the Canaveral National Seashore Information Center located approximately 7 miles south of New Smyrna Beach on Fla. A1A and at the visitor information center for Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge located on Fla. 406/402, 4 miles east of Titusville. Books and brochures on the area and schedules of special park

activities are available at the center. Rangers can assist you in planning your visit.

Playalinda Beach on the Seashore's southern edge is within easy viewing distance of the NASA rocket installations and is now the principal beach area. The climate of the area is subtropical, with short, mild winters and hot, humid summers. Ocean temperatures remain relatively warm all year. Playalinda Beach and other sections may be closed at times because of activities at Kennedy Space Center.

A limited amount of backcountry camping is allowed. A backcountry permit is required. No other camping is allowed. Many private campgrounds are located in nearby communities. Picnicking is permitted on the beaches, but no open fires may be built. Portable grills may be used, if the coals are removed from the beach.

Drinking water is available only at the Apollo Beach information center and at the Refuge visitor center during normal office hours. There is no running water available elsewhere, and there are no beach showers for swimmers.

Mosquito Lagoon is not a whimsical name; when visiting the inland areas away from the influence of offshore breezes, be sure to carry a repellent to protect yourself from mosquitoes.

Preservation of this natural environment is a primary goal of the Refuge and the Seashore. Please help by observing the following rules: All natural, historic, and archeological features are protected and are to be left undisturbed. Vehicles are restricted to the roads; they are not allowed on the beach. Dogs and other pets are not allowed on the beach. Pets must be physically restrained at all times.

Metal detectors and airboats are prohibited, and glass containers are not permitted on the beach.

Take precautions to protect your property. Automobile break-ins occur commonly in the beach parking areas. Do not leave valuables in your vehicle.

The Seashore and Refuge are located beneath the Atlantic Flyway, which is a major migratory route for birds between their southern wintering grounds and northern breeding areas. For many birds, the journey begins in the tundra regions of Alaska and Canada and, for some, it ends in the tropics of Florida and the Caribbean. This journey covers 4,000 to 6,000 miles and, if conditions are right, can take less than a week. Merritt Island is a key wintering area and supports populations of 50,000 to 70,000 ducks

and more than 100,000 coots. Each fall, hunting of migratory waterfowl is allowed within the boundaries of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. For generations, hunting in the marshes and lagoons of Merritt Island has been an annual rite, an important part of the area's history, and a major aspect of waterfowl management. The use of firearms is permitted only in accordance with the hunting season as regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Florida.

For more information, write to the superintendent, Canaveral National Seashore, 308 Julia Street, Titusville, FL 32796, or to the manager, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 6504, Titusville, FL 32782.



At the Beach



Playing in the sand with some of your friends is a delightful way to spend time at the beach.

Two beach areas can be reached by road: Playalinda Beach at the south end and Apollo Beach at the north. Both have parking areas and crosswalks that provide access to the beach without trampling the native dune vegetation. A limited number of crosswalks at each area are accessible to mobility impaired persons. Areas may be closed when parking areas fill to capacity.

Swimmers should be aware of rough surf conditions, strong ocean currents, stinging jellyfish, and Portuguese man-of-war. Ocean temperatures remain relatively warm all year. Violent thunderstorms with abundant lightning are common during the summer—don't be a target. Get out of the water and off the beach. Wait out the storm under shelter. Surfing is permitted throughout the Seashore.

Surf fishing in the breaker zone will yield scrappy bluefish, whiting, pompano, and a variety of other sport fish. Size and possession limits are subject to Florida fishing regulations. Freshwater and saltwater fishing may require a Florida state fishing license. Inquire at the information centers.

The section of beach between Apollo and Playalinda is accessible by foot only and offers a chance to enjoy sea and sky undisturbed by any intrusion. In planning this or any other beach hikes, keep in mind the absence of drinking water and the possible effects of sun and biting insects. Timing is important, too. The right combination of high tides and rough surf can leave hikers with little or no beach on which to walk.

On the Island

Indian River and Mosquito Lagoon, with their shallow, brackish water and dense aquatic grass beds, provide ideal feeding and breeding conditions for mullet, redfish, trout, and other sport and commercial fish. Crabbing, clamming, and shrimping are also popular activities. The freshwater impoundments in the interior of the island offer fishing for large-mouth bass and bream. Check locally for current fishing regulations. Boat-launching sites provide access to both the lagoon and the river. Each is excellent for pleasure boating, sailing, waterskiing, and other water sports. Canoeists can explore the island's network of streams and open water. Backcountry camping is permitted in certain seasons in some areas of the island. Backcountry permits are required.

All in all, you will be surprised at what you find here. Despite human attempts to subdue nature, as shown by the marks on the landscape, few intrusions are readily visible in the Seashore or the Refuge. A scenic drive permits visitors to easily explore the wildness of this coastline. The Black Point Wildlife Drive meanders through pine flatwoods and impounded marsh and is an excellent place to observe waterfowl and marsh and wading birds. Allow 30 to 45 minutes for this drive.

Several short hiking trails located on the island also offer opportunities for discovering the Seashore and Refuge. Oak Hammock Trail is a hiking loop that gives you an opportunity to observe the ecology of a hardwood hammock.

Allow about 30 minutes to walk the complete loop. At Turtle Mound, a short self-guided trail leads to the top of an Indian shell midden. The midden itself will give you an idea of a prehistoric lifestyle, and its top serves as an excellent point for viewing the Atlantic Ocean and Mosquito Lagoon. Walking time is about 15 minutes round trip. Short trails are also located at Eldora Hammock and at the Castle Windy midden.

A self-guided canoe trail approximately 2 miles long circles through a wild area of the Seashore just south of Turtle Mound. Campers can stay at either of two backcountry campsites along the trail.