

# Space Coast Date: Behold Sea Turtle Nesting on a Turtle Walk

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Walking hand in hand along the beach under the light of the moon, shoes off and water lapping over your feet is quite a magical way to end a date night on the Space Coast. But there are a couple of months during the year where being on the beach at night brings a different wonder. It's a wonder of nature that is central to Florida's Space Coast and not found in many other places: a guided Sea Turtle Walk to observe sea turtle nesting.

With 72 miles of gentle sand beaches, Florida's Space Coast is home to three of the world's seven species of sea turtles.

Every year, loggerheads, leatherbacks and green sea turtles lumber up the beach to nest along the Space Coast shoreline. In fact, Florida alone is home to 90% of all sea turtle nests laid in the United States each year. However, seeing a sea turtle nest is often missed by the untrained eye. And given the endangered status of our turtles, interaction with them is heavily regulated.

Joining a Sea Turtle Walk invites you to passively observe this process.

## **TURTLE WALKS ON THE SPACE COAST**

The best way to experience a nesting sea turtle is to participate in a "Turtle Walk." The [Sea Turtle Preservation Society \(STPS\)](#) and the [Sea Turtle Conservancy \(STC\)](#) at the Barrier Island Sanctuary are both permitted by the State of Florida to lead Turtle Walks. These conservation-based centers have made it their life's work to help preserve sea turtles, educate the public, and share these magnificent creatures in a respectful way.

Though the official sea turtle nesting season is May – October, the Turtle Walks only happen in June and July. Reservations begin May 1 for STPS and May 10 for STC, and generally sell out.

"The Leatherbacks are the 'unicorn' of sea turtles," explained Donna Simons of the STPS Education Center. "They are the most endangered and rarely seen."

"The green sea turtles take forever to nest," continued Ms. Simons. "They dig for a while. Fall asleep and take a nap. Dig a little more. Sleep again. They can take up to four hours to nest."

Given the Turtle Walks begin at 9:00pm, there's not a lot of demand for a four-hour experience.

The guided Turtle Walks are limited to the most active nesting time for loggerheads. That's in June and July. As Ms. Simons lovingly explained, "They find their spot and do their thing." The whole experience lasts about 90 minutes.



Path left by a nesting sea turtle | Image credit: Sea Turtle Preservation Society

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

Each Turtle Walk begins with an educational introduction by a member of the escort team. While they are enlightening you on sea turtles and their habitats, other tour leaders are out scouting for the nests so that they can guide you straight to the nesting sites. You'll witness the sea turtles laying their eggs and then, using her flippers, cover the eggs and scoot back to the ocean; all by the light of the moon.

By law, all lights must be off on the beach from 9pm-5am during sea turtle nesting season (May – October). This includes flashlights, cell phone lights, and even headlights in parking lots pointed towards the sand.

Turtle Walks can run as late as midnight, depending on when a nesting turtle is found. Participants should be able to walk up to a mile on a dark beach and expect to get sandy and possibly wet.

## **WHEN ARE THE TURTLE WALKS AVAILABLE?**

Both the Sea Turtle Preservation Society and The Sea Turtle Conservancy will begin taking reservations online in May. Reservations will be available for Sea Turtle Preservation Society beginning on May 1, while reservations are set to open for The Sea Turtle Conservancy on May 10. Please note that the **walks often sell out in mid-May** so book your walk early.

Sea Turtle Preservation Society offer walks on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday in June and July at several Brevard County beaches. Reservations are required and may be made on the STPS website: [seaturtlespacecoast.org](http://seaturtlespacecoast.org). Due to continued COVID concerns, group sizes are limited. The cost is a \$16 donation per person.

The Sea Turtle Conservancy offers Turtle Walks on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday nights. Space is limited to 20 people per night. The cost is \$15 per person and reservations may be made online at <https://www.conserveturtles.org/barrier-island-center-educational-programs>.

Tip: Drive over a little early and enjoy dinner before your Turtle Walk. Check out restaurant options and other things to do on the Space Coast at [FloridaBeachBreak.com](http://FloridaBeachBreak.com).

*Feature image credit: [Sea Turtle Preservation Society](#)*