BRAND USA

NEWS RELEASE

Brand USA Highlights Space-Themed, Dark Sky Experiences Across the U.S. as Artemis II Crew Prepares for Splashdown

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Featured Image: Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, Visit Orlando

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 9, 2026) — As NASA's Artemis II crew returns to Earth on April 10, global attention is turning to the United States as a hub for space exploration and discovery. Beyond the mission itself, the U.S. offers a diverse range of space-themed experiences—from iconic launch sites and world-renowned museums to breathtaking dark-sky destinations—inviting visitors to explore the stories, innovation and sense of wonder that define the unique destinations across the USA.

"The United States is the ultimate destination for travelers seeking space-related experiences—from the places where missions launch and have landed to aerospace museums and some of the most breathtaking stargazing locations in the world," said Fred Dixon, president and CEO of Brand USA. "As Artemis II brings global attention back to space exploration and the United States role in it, this is an exciting moment for travelers to immerse themselves in these iconic experiences across the country."

BLAST OFF

Along Florida's Space Coast, just 45 minutes east of Orlando, the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex brings visitors face-to-face with the Space Shuttle Atlantis, while exhibits and simulations connect directly to current missions. Nearby, Port Canaveral offers a different vantage point—where beachgoers and cruise travelers can sometimes catch rocket launches rising over the coastline.

In Houston, Texas, Space Center Houston provides a behind-the-scenes look at NASA's Johnson Space Center, including historic Mission Control and astronaut training facilities. And in Huntsville, Alabama, known as "Rocket City", the U.S. Space & Rocket Center houses one of the world's largest collections of rockets, including the Saturn V, tracing the path from Apollo to Artemis.

WHERE TO WATCH & SLEEP UNDER THE STARS

Some of the most memorable space experiences don't require a rocket, just a clear night sky.

In Texas, Big Bend National Park is known for its exceptionally dark skies, where the Milky Way often stretches clearly overhead. Along Lake Michigan, Headlands International Dark Sky Park offers wide-open views and is a favorite for meteor showers in the Midwest.

For those in the eastern U.S., Cherry Springs State Park in Pennsylvania has become a go-to destination for serious stargazers, with designated viewing areas and minimal light pollution.

In Utah, Capitol Reef National Park, a certified International Dark Sky Park, and Bryce Canyon National Park both offer remote conditions and some of the clearest night skies in the country. Nearby, travelers can extend the experience with stargazing-focused stays. From boutique properties like Compass Rose Lodge in Huntsville, Utah, which features its own observatory and telescope, to Clear Sky Resorts Bryce Canyon's glass Sky Domes designed for overnight viewing under the stars.

Nearby, Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona combines dramatic landscapes with similarly exceptional viewing conditions, often hosting astronomy programs and star parties. Don't miss out on a unique stay at places like The Outpost at Grand Canyon in Williams, Arizona, where glamping accommodations pair rim views with stargazing opportunities.

In Colorado, near Great Sand Dunes National Park, stargazing extends beyond the park itself at places like Kosmos Stargazing Resort & Spa in Mosca, Colorado, where accommodations are designed specifically for night-sky viewing.

In Hawai?i, Mauna Kea offers a different perspective entirely, where guided stargazing experiences take place above the clouds at one of the world's leading astronomy sites.

SPACE MUSEUMS & IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

In Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum displays historic spacecraft including the Apollo 11 command module, alongside exhibits focused on the future of spaceflight. In New York City, the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History offers immersive space shows and cutting-edge astrophysics exhibits. On the West Coast, the California Science Center in Los Angeles is home to the Space Shuttle Endeavour, offering a close look at the engineering behind NASA missions.

In Chicago, Illinois, the Adler Planetarium combines live sky shows with interactive exhibits along the lakefront, while Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles remains one of the most accessible places to observe the night sky through public telescopes. In Flagstaff, Arizona, Lowell Observatory—where Pluto was discovered—continues to welcome visitors with historic telescopes and ongoing research.

In Sunriver, Oregon, the Oregon Observatory offers one of the largest collections of telescopes available for public viewing, with guided nighttime programs that make astronomy accessible to visitors of all experience levels. Also in Los Angeles, the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art explores storytelling across mediums, including science fiction and space-inspired narratives.

SPACE-INSPIRED CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

At Disney parks in Florida and California, Space Mountain sends riders through a dark, space-themed track, while Mission: SPACE at EPCOT recreates the feeling of a rocket launch through simulation. In California, LEGOLAND's new Galacticoaster, debuting this year, brings a space-themed ride experience to the LEGO Galaxy area, designed with younger explorers in mind.

At Universal Orlando Epic Universe, Stardust Racers—located in Celestial Park—features a dual-launch coaster that sends riders racing side-by-side through a space-inspired course.

Elsewhere, space takes on a more social form. In San Diego, California, The Mothership Bar blends tropical and sci-fi design into a bar that feels like a spacecraft landed on another planet. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Space Bar pairs a futuristic setting with experimental cocktails and a design inspired by classic space franchises.

The Space Bar in Titusville, Florida offers an open-air rooftop where visitors can watch rocket launches as they happen.

From standing beneath historic rockets to watching a launch rise over the coastline, or simply tracing the Milky Way across a dark sky, the United States offers countless ways to experience space without ever leaving Earth. Plan your visit today at AmericaTheBeautiful.com.

Note to the Editor

Accompanying high resolution imagery can be found here.

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About Brand USA

Brand USA is the nation's destination marketing organization, dedicated to attracting legitimate international inbound travel to strengthen the U.S. economy, increase exports, create quality jobs, and promote community prosperity. By running data-driven campaigns and unifying messaging across industry and government, Brand USA positions the United States as a top global destination while providing current visa and entry information.

Over the past 13 years Brand USA has driven 11.3 million additional international visitors who spent $38.1 billion in the United States, leading to $82.9 billion in total economic impact and sustaining an average of more than 40,000 jobs each year. These efforts have generated nearly $11 billion in attributable tax receipts at the federal, state, and local levels.

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