

Beaches

Canaveral National Seashore's (CANA) 24 miles of shoreline is the longest stretch of undeveloped public beach on the east coast of Florida. One of the reasons Congress established the park was to provide an alternative to the crowded, commercial atmosphere of other beaches. Over one million visitors are drawn to this quiet and peaceful setting each year. Although this is a large number of people, the parking areas and boardwalks are strategically spread out over 12 miles of beach to prevent overcrowding.

For those who seek it, solitude can easily be found. This can often be gained by simply taking a short stroll along the beach away from the boardwalks and parking areas. The middle 12 miles of the beach is a particular gem, being accessible only by horseback or foot. This area essentially looks as it did over 450 years ago when the Spanish first arrived. As a person enters, signs of civilization are soon left behind and all that remains are the wind, waves and wildlife. This center section of beach provides a haven for several reclusive mammals (see Animals/Mammals). A backcountry permit is required to access this area.

CANA has a sloping beach that can be from 30-50 yards wide or completely covered by water, depending on the tide. The sand is primarily composed of quartz and calcium carbonate (shell fragments). The quartz originally came from the Appalachian Mountains as fragments of eroding rocks that were transported by streams and rivers to the sea and ultimately to Florida's beaches. For more information on the geology of the beach and barrier island, see the Coasts/Shoreline section.