



An American Tour: 84



Florida's Kennedy Space Center

The John F. Kennedy Space Center is the United States launch site that has been used for every NASA human space flight since 1968. Although such flights are currently on hiatus, KSC continues to manage and operate unmanned rocket launch facilities for the U.S. government's civilian space program from three pads at the adjoining Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. Its Vehicle Assembly Building is the fourth-largest structure in the world by volume and was the largest when completed in 1965. Located on Merritt Island, Florida, the center is north-northwest of Cape Canaveral on the Atlantic Ocean, midway between Miami and Jacksonville on Florida's Space Coast. It is 34 miles long and roughly 6 miles wide, covering 219 square miles. A total of 13,100 people worked at the center as of 2011. Approximately 2,100 are employees of the federal government; the rest are contractors.

Since December 1968, all launch operations have been conducted from Pads A and B at Launch Complex 39. Both pads are on the ocean, 3 miles east of the VAB. From 1969–1972, LC-39 was the departure point for all six Apollo manned Moon landing missions using the Saturn V, the largest and most powerful operational launch vehicle in history, and was used from 1981–2011 for all Space Shuttle launches. The Shuttle Landing Facility, located just to the north, was used for most Shuttle landings and is among the longest runways in the world.

KSC is a major central Florida tourist destination and is approximately one hour's drive from the Orlando area. The Visitor Complex offers public tours of the center and Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. Because much of the installation is a restricted area and only nine percent of the land is developed, the site also serves as an important wildlife sanctuary; Mosquito Lagoon, Indian River, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Canaveral National Seashore are other features of the area. Center workers can encounter Bald Eagles, American alligators, wild boars, Eastern Diamondback rattlesnakes, Florida panthers and Florida manatees. KSC is one of ten major NASA field centers, and has several facilities listed on the National Register of Historic Places. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kennedy_Space_Center]

