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# Time Out for Fun

Six great family daytrips that are within three hours from Orlando.

By Lisa Beach

When it comes to family fun in Greater Orlando, do you feel like you've been there, done that? Well, maybe you just need to drive a little further.

From historical forts and beaches to marine discovery centers and museums, Orlandoans have access to adventure from coast to coast. Ready to start exploring some fantastic spots? Consider these cool day-trip destinations, most of which you can get to and back with one tank of gas.

## Canaveral National Seashore

Volusia and Brevard Counties (45 minutes)

With 24 miles of pristine beach stretching out along the Atlantic Ocean, the Canaveral National Seashore features the longest span of undeveloped public beach along Florida's East Coast—perfect for taking a dip in the ocean or building sand castles. Bring your fishing gear over to Mosquito Lagoon, where you can fly fish for red drum or reel in silver perch. Don't miss a visit to Turtle Mound, one of Florida's most famous archeological sites, built by Native Americans who tossed their oyster shells (all 1.5 million bushels of them) onto an ever-growing pile. At 35 feet high, Turtle Mound provides the perfect photo spot for breathtaking panoramic views. Before you leave, indulge in a leisurely six-mile journey along Black Point Wildlife Drive, where you might spot threatened or endangered species such as loggerhead sea turtles, Florida scrub jays and West Indian manatees.

**Tip:** You might catch a glimpse of baby sea turtles hatching and finding their way out to sea during nesting season (May-November).

## Museum of Arts and Sciences

Daytona Beach (1.25 hours)

Sitting on a 90-acre nature preserve, the Museum of Arts and Sciences (MOAS) might be one of Daytona Beach's best-kept secrets. With 30,000 pieces of art and artifacts from around the world to explore, plan to spend several hours roaming through the exhibits. Check out prehistoric Florida's giant ground sloth skeleton, tour the sculpture garden and catch one of the daily planetarium shows (or one of the weekend laser-enhanced rock

concerts). Kids will love the hands-on activities in the children's museum, including a build-your-own-car raceway, a pretend pizza shop and a tennis-ball launcher.

**Tip:** Don't miss the great photo opportunities by the restored railroad cars, antique cars and Florida's largest collection of Coca-Cola memorabilia.

## Castillo de San Marcos National Monument

St. Augustine (1.25 hours)

Looking for a hands-on history lesson? Visit the oldest masonry fort in the continental U.S., Castillo de San Marcos, which sits on 320 acres of waterfront property along the Matanzas Bay. Built between 1672 and 1695, the coquina-stone fort was designed to protect the city from invading British troops. Learn about the fort's history, design and



construction. Explore the Spanish guard rooms, chapel and artillery quarters. Watch living history reenactments in the central courtyard. Tour the bomb-proof military warehouse rooms that once stored gunpowder, weapons and cannonballs.

**Tip:** Most weekends, 1740s-era Colonial "soldiers" reenact historic weapons demonstrations, including firing the cannon on the upper gun deck. (Note: Although the lower level of the Castillo is wheelchair accessible, the upper gun deck is not.)

## Marine Discovery Center

New Smyrna Beach (1.5 hours)

The Marine Discovery Center focuses on education, research, restoration and preservation of the Florida coastal ecosystem. This small non-profit features a variety of exhibits and observation tanks showcasing local plants and sea life, such as horseshoe and hermit crabs, sport fish, seahorses and coral reefs—with docents on hand to share the stories behind the exhibits. A walk outside takes you to a trail system, butterfly garden and five-acre salt marsh. For additional fees, you can take a guided kayak eco-tour or dolphin-discovery boat tour of the Indian River Lagoon. A Florida Coastal Naturalist will interpret the trip, helping you spot some of the lagoon's 4,000-plus species of plants and animals that make it North America's most diverse estuary system.



**Tip:** If you're looking for hands-on, family-friendly volunteer opportunities, consider helping out with Shuck and Share (oyster recycling and restoration), lagoon habitat restoration, citizen-scientists, planting or trail building/maintenance.

**MOSI (Museum of Science & Industry)** Tampa (2 hours)

Ready to spend the day exploring space, technology, robotics and more? Head over to the Museum of Science & Industry (MOSI), which offers more than 450 interactive exhibits. Plummer (virtually) on the MaxFlight Roller Coaster Simulator, test your survival skills in Disasterville and take in an IMAX movie on MOSI's dome-shaped screen. Be a contestant in the *Pick Your Brain!* game show, stroll through the outdoor butterfly garden and visit the Saunders Planetarium for out-of-this-world astronomy presentations. **Tip:** If you've got kids 12 and younger, don't miss MOSI's Kids In Charge!, the largest children's science center in the country. Kids can fly a drone, tackle hands-on engineering projects, check out a futuristic Mission Moonbase and much more.

**Florida Museum of Natural History** Gainesville (2.25 hours)

Located on the University of Florida campus, the Florida Museum of Natural History features one of the nation's largest collections of plants, animals, fossils and artifacts. You'll feel like a real-life explorer as you journey through a life-size limestone cave, trek through a giant replica of a hammock forest and meander through a full-scale mangrove forest. Stop in the Discovery Room for kid-friendly, hands-on activities including a wind tunnel, a blocks-and-gears building corner and please-touch discovery bins. Fossil-hunters won't want to miss the giant shark jaw of the extinct megalodon; a 16,000-year-old, 14-foot-tall Columbian mammoth; or the three-story-high "Wall of Wings" showcasing thousands of butterflies and moths. For a fee, you can get a more up-close-and-personal interaction in the Butterfly Rainforest filled with waterfalls, tropical plants, and hundreds of free-flying butterflies and birds.

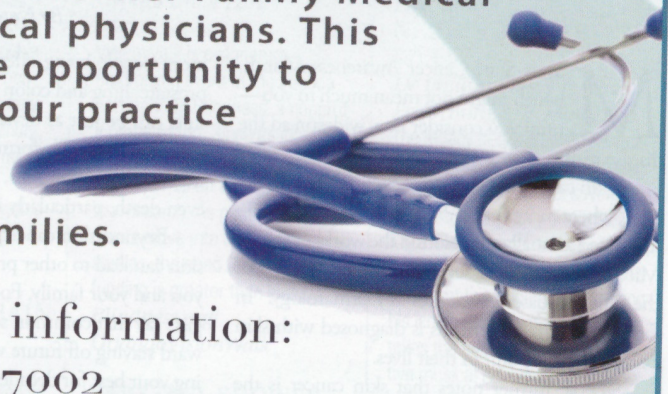
**Tip:** If your child earned an "A" in science, bring his or her most recent report card to the front desk for free admission (to featured exhibits and Butterfly Rainforest) with the purchase of a paid adult admission.

Before heading out on any day trips, call or visit these attractions online for trip-planning details, including current information on hours, fees and weather conditions. 🌿

*Lisa Beach is a freelance writer, humor blogger, mother of two teenagers, and recovering homeschool mom who lived to write about it. More of her writing can be found at LisaBeachWrites.com and TweeniorMoments.com.*

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