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Life / Travel / Travel Daytona

Daytona rising: It's not just for motorheads

Miles of sand, a boardwalk and pier, a famous old lighthouse, a U.S. National Wildlife Refuge, and, of course, the Daytona International Speedway make this a fun destination for all

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Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, circa 1888, this lighthouse stands as the tallest lighthouse in Florida.

By: **Becca Hensley** Freelance Travel writer, Published on Sun Jan 11 2015

Who need streets? Daytona Beach, best known as the sacred nerve centre for NASCAR, has 23-miles of hard-packed, snow-white beaches awaiting your wheels.

You won't win any speed records as you navigate this sandy highway of people-packed, vendor-heavy, sports enthusiast-thronged, ocean-fringed beach along Florida's northeast coast. The speed limit is set at just 10 miles per hour.

But hop into a convertible coupe and ramble along this famous length of sand and delve into the old-fashioned flair and festivity of one of America's most famous — and visited — beaches.

At its heartbeat, the commercial section between Speedway Boulevard and Seabreeze Boulevard, you'll have to manoeuvre around crowds, but, further afield, you can find nooks and crannies as tranquil and ideal for a romantic tryst as a private island hideaway.

Between volleyball matches, paragliders, fishermen, kids building sandcastles and surfers, the beach serves as a social gathering place for the athletically inclined.

Runners and bikers travel its winding expanse, taking advantage of its firm sand. Year round, a boardwalk and pier hold a mélange of family-owned businesses, tailor-made for vintage amusement. Arcades, pizza parlors, indoor and outdoor rides capture the attention of kids of all ages. Whip beneath the stars on the roller-coaster or circle through the briny air while seated in the immense Ferris wheel! Bumper cars crashing and bursts of childish glee? Well, it all goes without saying.



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TODD KOROL / FOR TORONTO STAR

People take in the sun and good weather on Daytona Beach, which gets eight million visitors a year to take in the beach, boardwalk, racing events, golf and wildlife.

About 10 miles south, step back into history at [the Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse and Museum](#) (see the video online at [thestar.com](#)). Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, circa 1888, this tower stands as the tallest lighthouse in Florida. Up 203 spiral steps, it soars 175 feet to offer eye-widening views of the inlet and the beach. Accompanied by an actor dressed as a former lighthouse keeper, visitors learn about how lighthouse employees and their families once inhabited this structure, and what duties they performed. A museum presents an array of artifacts.

While in the area, enjoy its many nature trails and beaches. The Marine Science Center illuminates with a variety of activities, including a “stingray touch-pool,” marine bird identification course, and sea turtle rehabilitation program. For those yearning for volunteer vacation possibilities, the centre has options for children and adults, as well as many summer camps, training programs, and events in its party space.

Pedal the Loop, a 65-km. scenic circle, made for bike travel. (Bike rental shops abound in Daytona. The Loop can be traversed on foot, by motorcycle or automobile, too.) Mounted atop a sturdy bike, marvel at the plentiful birds and wildlife. At the slower pace, you will likely see skunks, opossum, armadillos, raccoons, and countless birds, including pelicans, gannets, egrets and herons. Ornithologists believe that nearly 200 species of our feathered friends can be spotted here. Winding roads take you beneath canopies of oak trees, beside ponds and through acres of Florida’s undeveloped, natural landscapes.

Paddle a canoe through [Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge](#), a migratory bird sanctuary. Near DeLeon Springs, the terrain of the 21,500-acre protected habitat varies from swamp to creeks to marshland. Scan it with binoculars to see waterfowl and marsh birds who linger all year long. Always wanted to glimpse a limpkin? Find one at Woodruff, one of the parks in Florida where a birder has the chance for the rare opportunity. Fisherman cast for bream, bluegill, largemouth bass, and jackfish in the refuge’s waters. To join in the fun, you must have a Florida freshwater fishing license.

Daytona is a place for spectator sport. The legendary marriage between Daytona and auto racing continues today at the Daytona International Speedway. Daytona Rising, the race track complex, has been overhauled to the tune of \$400 million, and will open in time for the Rolex 24 in late January. From the iconic Daytona 500, to the newer Coke Zero 400 and Bike Week festivities, the race track draws tons of fans annually. Those who want a hands-on driving adventure can enroll in driving school via the Richard Petty Driving Experience. Spin high velocity laps around the track with your own hands on the wheel and an instructor at your side. Or, opt for being a white-knuckled passenger and leave the driving to your “personal” professional.

No matter how you look it, visitors to Daytona Beach are discovering a retreat that showcases its racing heritage and recognizes its landscape and many other attractions. With a host of new hotels and restaurants, and activities that make it easy to enjoy the region’s natural wonders, a trip to Daytona is more than just gearhead’s stop-over en route to Orlando.

It’s a destination, itself.

Events to look for

Mild weather, a burgeoning food and brew culture, and a history of understanding the fine art of celebration makes Daytona Beach ideal for festivals of all kinds. Here are some upcoming events worth a visit:

Rolex 24 at Daytona, Jan. 24-25: The Rolex 24 rolls into Daytona Beach for 24 hours of non-stop excitement that celebrates the power and prestige of North America’s premier sports car event, at the Daytona International Speedway.

Wine and Chocolate Walk, Feb. 7: Home to Angell & Phelps, creators of handmade chocolate on Beach Street since 1925, Daytona Beach goes hedonistic with this fine-wine- and chocolate-tasting event.

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Corey Mintz @coreymintz 4m
War on Cars.

Aaron Madar @AaronMadar 12h
#TDSB chair Shaun Chen nominated #Liberal party candidate in Scarborough North #LPC #CDNpoli [thestar.com/news/gta/2015/...](#)
Retweeted by Kristin Rushowy

Nick Westoll @NWestoll 2h
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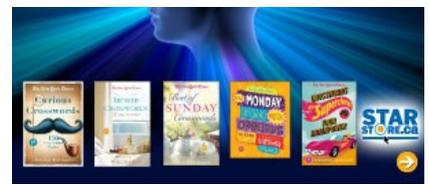
Speedweeks, featuring the Daytona 500, Feb. 14-22: A series of pre-races lead up to the Daytona 500.

Bike Week, Mar. 6-15: Daytona Beach welcomes the “World’s Largest Motorcycle Event” to the “World’s Most Famous Beach” with concerts, street festivals and manufacturer showcases.

Spring Family Beach Break, Mar. 16-31: Spring break with a filter. Daytona makes sure kids enjoy their vacation with old-fashioned activities, such as sand castle building and s’mores.

Spring Turkey Run, Mar. 27-29: Can you run faster than a car? Find out during this event, which also attracts auto-lovers to the annual classic car show.

P1 AquaX Grand Prix of the Sea, Apr. 25-26: The personal watercraft competition event features a new style of watercraft competition for sea-riding enthusiasts and spectators alike.



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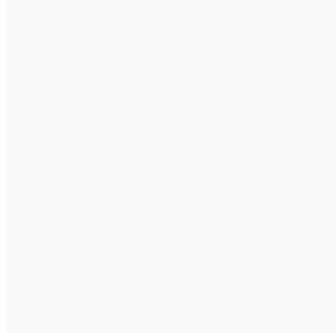
- Beaches and boardwalk?
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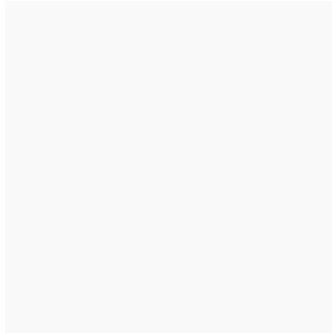
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Diversions include shopping, river cruises and a great flea market !

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