

Countdown to Atlantis' next mission: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ...

Grand opening at KSC Visitor Complex is Saturday

By Jennifer Sangalang
FLORIDA TODAY

For more than 30 years, watching the bright flame of a space shuttle rocketing toward space until it was no more than a blip in the sky was one of the joys of living in Brevard.

Starting Saturday, you can get an up-close and personal view of shuttle Atlantis at Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex in a setting that shows off just how magnificent that blip really is.

The newest attraction at KSC opens with great fanfare. Tonight, as part of the VIP experience, there will be refreshments and music with guest speakers. The same goes for Saturday morning. Close to 50 astronauts are on the guest list with at least one from each of Atlantis' 33 missions. Apollo astronauts also are expected to attend.

"Atlantis is on display as she would be normally in flight. It's the first time ever that a lot of people are going to see her this close," said Tim Macy, director of project development for Delaware North Companies Parks and Resorts.

"Here we are dealing with a national treasure," Macy said. With a cost of \$1.66 billion, "it's a priceless artifact."

Through logistical and engineering feats, the shuttle was tilted at a 43-degree angle with her payload doors open. Visitors can walk under, around or "nose level" to the massive craft. During the planning phase, thousands of pictures were taken. Those images later helped organizers choose the blueprint for how Atlantis would be displayed — the view an astronaut would get as he or she

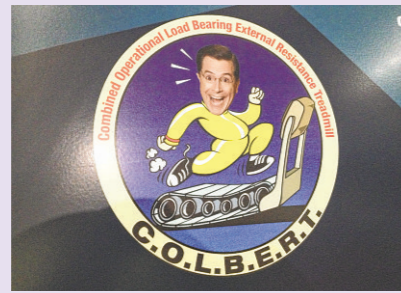


In the Angry Birds Space Encounter at Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, guests have the opportunity to experience seven interactive exhibits.

MALCOLM DENEMARK/FLORIDA TODAY

Stephen Colbert of "The Colbert Report" on Comedy Central makes an appearance in the exhibit — via a NASA treadmill. See a video of the exhibit at florida.com/atlantistoday.com/atlantistoday.com/atlantistoday.com/atlantistoday.com.

FOR FLORIDA TODAY



OTHER FUN AT KSC

» **Angry Birds Space Encounter:** This interactive exhibit opened March 21. NASA collaborated with KSC, calling the project an opportunity to encourage young people in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects. Exhibits include the Eggsteroids Slingshot target game, Red Planet Lazer Challenge and Danger Zone, a mirror maze. Included with general admission.

» **Shuttle Launch Experience:** Guests get to feel like an astronaut, checking out the sights, sounds and sensations in the shuttle launch simulator. Included with general admission.

» **U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame:** The museum features exhibits, artifacts, space memorabilia and various displays from space missions through the years. You can learn about our nation's history in the space program and who played an important part leading the missions. Open from noon to 5 p.m. daily. Included with general admission, allows for a second day at the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame

» **Astronaut Training Experience:** KSC's ATX program takes you through a shuttle mission simulation, astronaut training exercises and hands-on space exploration activities at the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame. Reservations required for the half-day program. Cost is \$145 for those 14 and older. ATX family prices are \$175 for those 12 and older, \$165 for ages 7 to 11.



Atlantis is tilted with its payload bay doors open. RIK JESSE/FLORIDA TODAY

THE DETAILS

What: Atlantis exhibit

When: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily

Where: KSC Visitor Complex on State Road 405

Cost: Admission is \$50 for adults, \$40 for ages 3 to 11.

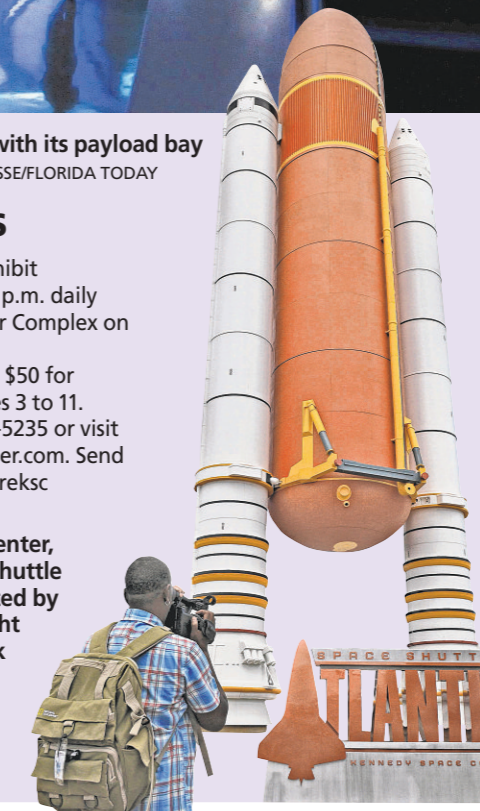
Info: Call 866-737-5235 or visit kennedyspacecenter.com. Send a Tweet to @exploreskc

At KSC Visitors Center, guests at Space Shuttle Atlantis are greeted by a full-scale, upright external fuel tank and two solid rocket boosters.

RIK JESSE/FLORIDA TODAY



At Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, construction crews have just completed the \$100 million, 90,000-square-foot facility that showcases the space shuttle Atlantis. TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY



looked out the International Space Station window as Atlantis was pulling away.

How it began

Although KSC wasn't officially announced as Atlantis' permanent home until April 2011, the idea for the exhibit came about five years ago, with development starting a couple years later and construction going on for the past 17 months. Delaware North worked with engineers from NASA, a design team and technical adviser.

The \$100 million project was funded through money borrowed from Space Florida, money generated from KSC Visitor Complex admission fees and money made from food and merchandise, Macy said. No government funds or tax dollars

were used.

Atlantis was wrapped in plastic before her big move from the Vehicle Assembly Building to the state-of-the-art exhibit facility last fall. That 90,000-square-foot building boasts an impressive theater, giant LED screens and 1,700 light fixtures. Quotes from people who played a role in the Atlantis program line the walls along with breathtaking photography of the shuttle and its glory.

"The bird itself, everyone thinks it's slick and going to be pretty. But we're showing you what it looked like when it landed after STS-135," Macy said. "It went straight from the landing strip, over to the orbiter processing facility, and then in November, we rolled it over

here and lifted it up 30 feet and tipped it at 43 degrees."

NASA offered to clean it up and make it pristine, he added, but the team wanted the space dust to remain.

What to expect

Along with Atlantis, the exhibit features more than 60 interactive displays, continuous films in a theater and in the display area. An impressive mockup of the Hubble Space Telescope hangs near the gift shop.

A 1983 airstream used by astronauts for various events is on display, as well as an astrovan, the vehicle used to ferry astronauts to and from launches and landings. The gift shop features space-themed artwork and an area where

guests can dress up like astronauts for photo ops.

The play zone features a giant slide and "astronaut training" exercises.

Pop-culture phenomenon Stephen Colbert of "The Colbert Report" on Comedy Central makes a special appearance in the exhibit — via a NASA treadmill. In 2009 during a NASA contest, the political pundit lobbied to name one of the rooms at the ISS after him. "Colbert" beat out NASA suggestions Serenity, Legacy, Earthrise and Venture. As a compromise, NASA introduced the Combined Operational Load Bearing External Resistance Treadmill. The treadmill is used for exercising in space. You can see Colbert's "mission patch" at KSC.

TRIVIA

Test your shuttle Atlantis knowledge

By Tim Walters
FLORIDA TODAY

1. How many astronauts flew on shuttle Atlantis?

- 77
- 101
- 156
- 275

2. What astronaut holds the record for most flights aboard Atlantis?

- Jerry Ross
- Charles Bolden
- Robert Cabana
- Ken Bowersox

3. Atlantis was the first orbiter to dock with the Russian Space Station Mir on mission STS-71. What year did that take place?

- 1991
- 1995
- 1999
- 2001

4. STS-71 held another major milestone. What was it?

- Atlantis surpassed 100,000,000 miles flown in space.
- It was Atlantis' longest mission.
- It had four first-time astronauts.
- It was the 100th U.S. manned space flight.

5. How many times did Atlantis land at Edwards Air Force Base?

- 3
- 6
- 9
- 13

6. Atlantis is roughly 122 feet long and 57 feet tall. About how much did it weigh when it had its three shuttle engines attached?

- 52,000 pounds
- 176,000 pounds
- 378,000 pounds
- 942,000 pounds

7. Atlantis holds the distinction of having the quickest turnaround time between two missions of any orbiter. It occurred after its maiden voyage. How quickly was the orbiter turned around from its first flight to its second?

- 12 days
- 27 days
- 54 days
- 99 days

8. STS-46, launched on July 31, 1992, had astronauts from two countries that had not before had a citizen flown into space. They were Claude Nicollier of Switzerland and Franco Malerba of what country?

- Italy
- Spain
- Mexico
- Argentina

9. STS-117, launched on June 8, 2007, was the longest duration space flight mission by Atlantis. How long was it?

- 10 days, 21 hours, 27 minutes, 19 seconds
- 11 days, 11 hours, 11 minutes, 11 seconds
- 13 days, 20 hours, 12 minutes, 44 seconds
- 16 days, 2 hours, 31 minutes, 6 seconds

10. Atlantis was featured in three major motion pictures during the course of its service. Which of the following is NOT one of those three movies?

- "2001: A Space Odyssey"
- "SpaceCamp"
- "Deep Impact"
- "Armageddon"

How'd you do? Answers, Page 23

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