



A loggerhead sea turtle heads to the ocean, as onlookers watch at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park in Key Biscayne, Fla.



A loggerhead sea turtle hatchling makes its way into the ocean along Haulover Beach in Miami.

## IT'S SEA TURTLE SEASON IN FLORIDA. HERE'S HOW TO SEE THEM

Many Florida beaches welcome a special type of visitor as the weather gets warmer: Sea turtles. Female sea turtles crawl out of the water from spring to early fall to build nests and lay eggs on the beach at night. Babies hatch some 60 days later and crawl back into the sea. It's a fragile process. Only an estimated one in 1,000 turtles survives to adulthood, according to the Sea Turtle Conservancy.

It's a crime in Florida to disturb sea turtle nests or harass turtles. Visitors should keep their distance, staying behind any turtle they might see, and must not shine lights in nesting areas, including flashlights, cellphone lights or camera lights. Some beaches turn off artificial lights to promote nesting activity. There are several sanctioned ways to observe sea turtles. Turtle rehab facilities around the state sometimes hold public releases when an injured turtle has recovered enough to return to the sea.

And public sea turtle watches take place at night on a number of Florida beaches, typically with participants registering in advance for the walks, which tend to fill up quickly. Trained guides who hold special permits scout for nests, looking for a turtle that's far enough along in the process that she won't be distracted. Tour participants are then escorted to the area for a look. The tours usually take place between 8 p.m. and midnight.

Sign-ups open May 1, for example, for weeknight walks June 1-July 27 in Melbourne Beach, Florida, hosted by the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. The walks cost \$15 and are limited to 20 people a night. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation

Commission lists guided sea turtle walks as well as facilities that house captive sea turtles at <http://myfwc.com/education/wildlife/sea-turtle/where-to-view/>.

In many areas where nesting takes place, turtle patrols hunt for nests by day and rope them off so they can't be disturbed. In Gulf County in northwest Florida, where sea turtle season runs from May 1 to Oct. 31, the St. Joseph Peninsula Turtle Patrol on Cape San Blas takes a "turtle walkabout" each morning at dawn looking for signs of crawls. Nests are marked, and small groups of visitors can join part of the patrol, which includes measuring and marking nests with posts and caution tape so beachgoers know to stay away. Three varieties of sea turtle, green, leatherback and hawksbill, are classified as endangered. Two varieties, loggerhead and olive ridley, are listed as threatened.

Sometimes, visitors may simply stumble across a nest or nesting turtle. For example, it's not unusual to see loggerhead turtles on Florida's central east coast, where they nest by the thousands. "When it's high season for nesting," said Visit Florida spokesman Tim Declaire, "all you need is a late-night walk on the beach." Just remember: Don't get too close and don't shine any lights. When nesting is disrupted, a turtle may fail to lay her eggs or may not fully camouflage her nest. Hatchlings face additional challenges: They may die before reaching the water or be caught by predators. — AP



File photo shows Bill Ahern, a conservation specialist for the Miami-Dade County Parks, holds a loggerhead sea turtle egg as he prepares to relocate the nest on Haulover Beach in Miami.— AP photos



This undated photo shows the Myrtle Beach Airport Quiet Room in South Carolina. — AP photos



Photo shows Ryan Cunningham in the Sensory Room at Shannon Airport in Shannon, Ireland.

## Quiet rooms for autistic children popping up at airports

Quiet rooms for children on the autism spectrum are popping up at airports. Shannon Airport, which serves the southwestern region of Ireland, opened a "sensory room" for children and adults with neurodevelopmental challenges, including autism, on March 29. The room is located off the airport's departure lounge. It's designed to be a soothing place, with features like a wavy wall and color-changing lights. The official opening of the room came ahead of World Autism Day on April 2.

On this side of the Atlantic, there are quiet rooms at airports in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and in Atlanta. Delta opened a multi-sensory room at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in April 2016 in partnership with The Arc, an autism advocacy group. The room, located in a quiet space on F Concourse, contains a mini-ball pit, bubbling water sculpture, a tactile activity panel and other calming features.

The quiet room at the Myrtle Beach airport also opened in April 2016. It came about after a local mom, Becky Large, approached airport administrators about providing "some sort of support for families." "We came up with a quiet room at baggage claim, which has worked out wonderfully," said Large, who runs a group called Champion Autism Network and has two children, one of whom has Asperger's. A caregiver can stay with a child in the room while someone else "retrieves bags and rental cars. There are cubbies and seating and a glass door so the child can be cordoned off and can't run away. It gives them a place to decompress."

### 'Wings for All'

London Heathrow opened a quiet room in 2013 as part of a family lounge in Terminal 3. Though it's mainly for children, it's not necessarily for those with autism. It's open to any family that

would like to use it. Some airports and airlines also offer families with travelers on the spectrum opportunities to become familiar with airport experiences that may be stressful. Harrisburg International Airport in Pennsylvania, for example, offers a "Wings for All" program that allows children with autism and sensory processing disorder to experience a run-through of what it's like getting on a plane, getting ticketed and getting seated so that they'll know what to expect when it's time for a real trip. A similar program took place at Myrtle Beach earlier this year, and Shannon launched a customer care program last year, providing special caps and wristbands for travelers with autism and other special needs so staff can identify them and interact appropriately.

"Going through security even for those without autism can be challenging," said Michael Schiferl of Chicago, whose daughter is on the spectrum, but it's even more challenging for kids who are easily overwhelmed by beeping machines, taking off shoes and crowds. He said TSA workers have been "very helpful" when told of his daughter's special needs. Large also had her hometown, Surfside Beach, which is near Myrtle Beach, declared an "autism-friendly destination" last year, after restaurants, hotels, parks and other venues participated in training on how to interact with children with autism. For example, she said, they may "become overstimulated by light, sounds, smells, crowds," so a restaurant might seat their family in a "low-traffic area away from the kitchen."

Large said a bigger goal is to increase understanding at all levels for special-needs children who may exhibit unusual or awkward behavior. "Many times when we leave the house with our kids, people look at you like you're a horrible parent," she said. "It results in a lot of judgment. Many people stay home. Our mission is to have them come out and play with us." — AP