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What to do in Daytona Beach, Florida

By [Helen Wright \(https://www.passportstamps.uk/author/helles/\)](https://www.passportstamps.uk/author/helles/)

Wandering along the water's edge carrying your flip-flops, you could be forgiven for thinking that laid back Daytona Beach is just another sunny beach town with not much else to offer. But don't be fooled by the 23 miles of golden sand and the calm glow of sunset warming the boards of its 1920s pier. If you are wondering what to do in Daytona Beach, the coastal community just over an hour's drive from Orlando, get your notebook ready because this lively sun spot is full of surprises. Some UK visitors don't realise that there is no beach in Orlando – being in central florida you'll have to settle for the fake beaches at [Discovery Cove \(https://www.passportstamps.uk/reviews/orlando-discovery-cove/\)](https://www.passportstamps.uk/reviews/orlando-discovery-cove/) and the waterparks. This means that Daytona is the ideal place to go if you're looking for a beach close to Orlando. Here, you won't need a fast pass to enjoy what's on offer and more often than not, the locals will greet you with a cheerful high five.

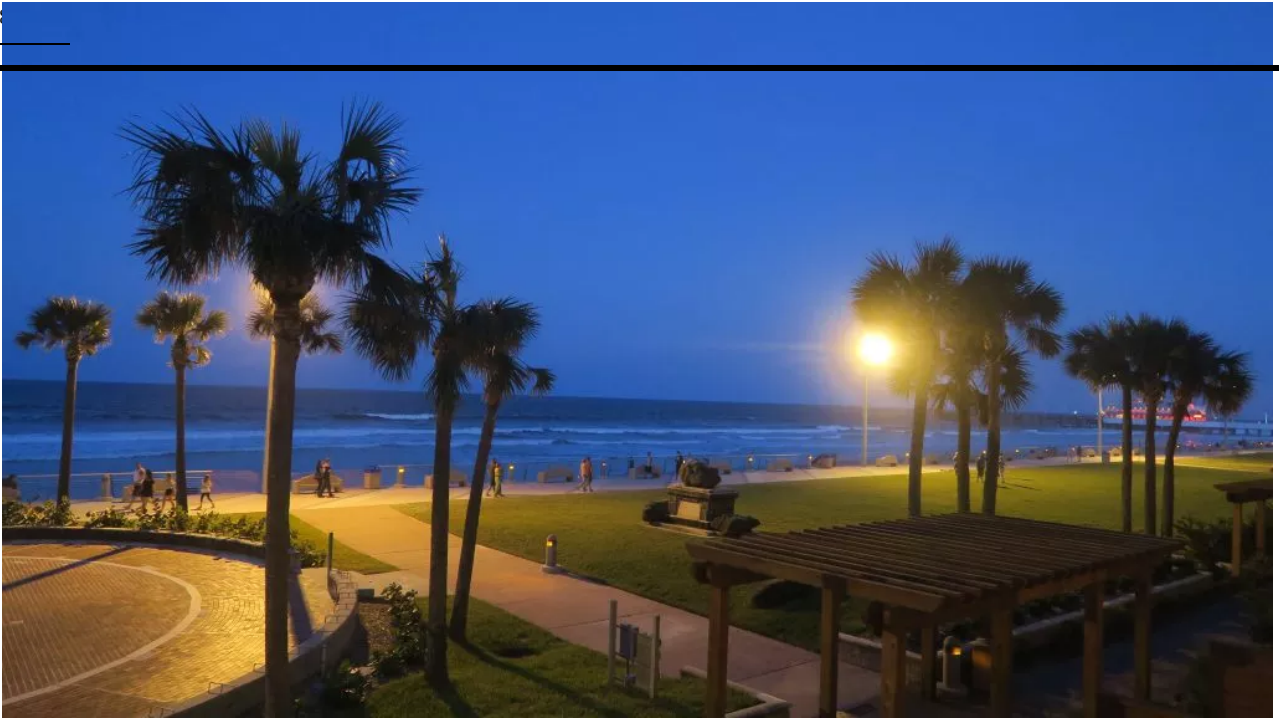
If you are headed to Orlando, everything you need to know can be found in our [Complete Guide To Orlando \(https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/complete-guide-to-orlando/\)](https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/complete-guide-to-orlando/)

ESCAPE FOR THE WEEKEND



There's always room for a road trip

During our trip to Orlando (<https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/orlando-two-week-itinerary/>) we drove up to Daytona for the weekend to take in some sea air and enjoy some down after all the theme park excitement. The drive is around an hour but we hit a little bit of traffic leaving Orlando so it took us around 90 mins. The Hilton Daytona Beach Oceanfront Resort is right on the boardwalk and taking the opportunity to ditch the car for a few days we wanted to be right on the beach and walking distance to bars / restaurants. This hotel was ideal and we lucked out as our room had a sea view too!



View of the beach from our room at the Hilton

Planning a USA road trip in the future? We have tons of helpful advice on how to rent a car and some key USA driving tips [here](https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/uk-driving-in-usa/) (<https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/uk-driving-in-usa/>).

WHAT TO DO IN DAYTONA BEACH



The pier has all the classic charm of old school Florida

The vibe here is slow-paced and chilled out. A lot of breakfast places didn't open until gone 9am and there's no urgency about life here, which is part of its classic charm. We asked around for breakfast recommendations and one local dude actually said 'breakfast isn't really a thing here, we do lunch'. This really made me laugh because, to me, breakfast is always a thing. It's true though, there is no thriving food scene or cool foodie movement going on in Daytona Beach, but what you will find is reliable old school diners serving what they do best – the all American breakfast. Plus, lack of hipster credentials does mean cheap eats and budget-friendly options. One such place that kept popping up when we were searching for the best breakfast in Daytona Beach was Rossi's diner (<http://www.rossisdiner.com>), a proper American restaurant that's been around since the early 80s and still kinda looks like it. The food was good, nothing jazzy but a nice atmosphere, mainly frequented by locals.



You can't go wrong with pancakes

The main draw here is the wide, sandy beach. The gorgeous white sand goes on further than the eye can see (23 miles) and the beach is huge, meaning even in peak time it never feels over-crowded. The water is warm most of the year but be prepared for breaking waves causing a splash. Stretches of Daytona Beach are actually a registered highway, meaning you can drive your car right down to the sand and pitch up for the day. This is so cool. It's the only place I have ever driven on the beach. If you pack a picnic and fill the cooler with drinks you can stay on the beach all day with no stress! And, even better, you can lock your valuables in the car when you go for a swim in the sea, which is a brilliant perk. Entry is \$20 per car for the whole day.



The best beach for posing

If you don't fancy spending all day topping up your tan, there are also so many opportunities to get out on the water with a choice of outdoor adventures including parasailing, kayaking, paddle boarding, fishing and, if you have the skills, the waves here are also perfect for surfing. There is also a choice of tours, some include dolphin and manatee spotting on the Halifax River.

FAMILY FUN



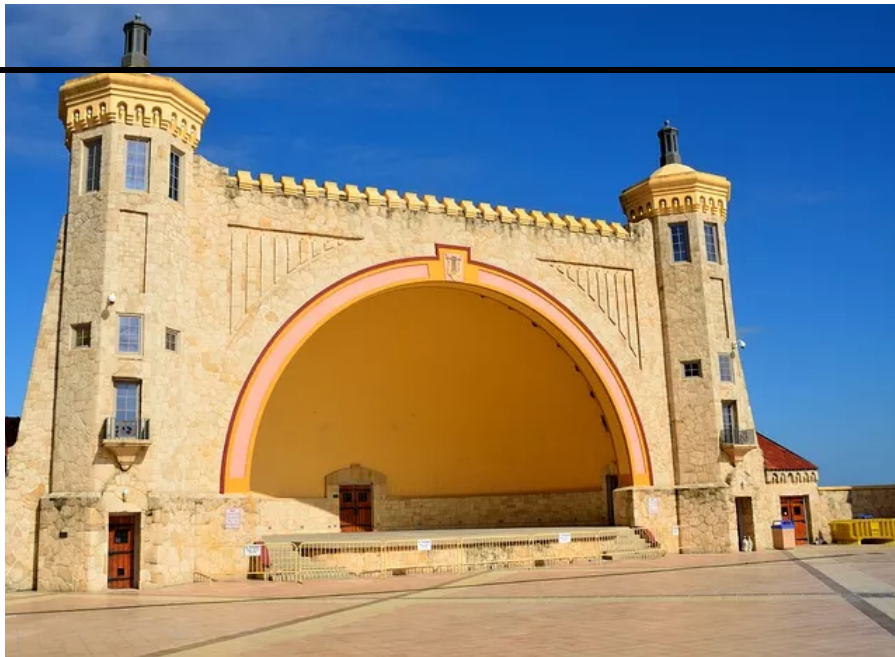
The beach is ideal for families

Unlike Orlando, Daytona Beach doesn't dazzle with high-tech attractions and million dollar shows. What I like most about this place is the good wholesome fun it provides for families. The [Museum of Arts and Sciences \(https://www.moas.org\)](https://www.moas.org) will keep everyone entertained with a hands-on children's area and a Planetarium show. In fact, there is actually a specific children's museum as part of the complex. Those with a bit more energy can climb the 175-foot tower to the top of the historic [Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse \(http://ponceinlet.org\)](http://ponceinlet.org) – Florida's tallest lighthouse. Complete all 203 steps for panoramic views of Ponce Inlet and Daytona Beach – the ideal place to see the spectacular coastline in all its glory.



The Ponce de Leon Inlet Lighthouse and its incredible view

If you can, find time to catch one of the summer concerts or some free live music at the [Daytona Beach Bandshell](http://www.daytonabandshell.com) (<http://www.daytonabandshell.com>) entertainment area at Oceanfront Park. Mix with locals and visitors for a classic Daytona Beach pastime. The quirky venue was actually built from shells in 1937 and accommodates up to 5,000 people – but you have to see it to believe it.



Like something straight out of Disney!

If you are enjoying our guide to Daytona Beach, please big us up on social media! We can be found on Twitter [here](https://twitter.com/passportstampuk) (<https://twitter.com/passportstampuk>) and Instagram [here](https://www.instagram.com/passportstampsuk/) (<https://www.instagram.com/passportstampsuk/>). Plus, we're also on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Passport-Stamps-UK/190042917711593>) and Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/passportpins/>)!

CHASING CARS



Daytona Speedway – thank you for the photo Dennis Pires

The city really comes alive during February for the famous Daytona 500, which is held at the Daytona International Speedway, known as 'The World Centre of Racing'. Having recently benefited from a \$400 million upgrade, you can tour the whole stadium, get a glimpse at the pit road, check out the driver's room and learn about the history of NASCAR (£16 per adult). Real thrill seekers can even get a chance to whizz around the famous track first-hand in a race car with a professional driver on the NASCAR Racing Experience (£107 per adult). We didn't visit this time but it is firmly on my list for a return visit. It's a car-lover's dream day out.

WHERE TO GO IN DAYTONA BEACH FOR FOOD AND DRINK

I have to be honest, we stumbled across this place and lazily spent a lot of time there – because it was so much fun and we loved the people, music and location. The Ocean Deck Restaurant and Beach Club (<http://oceandeck.com>) has been serving fresh seafood and cocktails on the beach since 1952 and I later discovered is somewhat of a local institution. The holiday vibe is felt here all day, with food being served from 11 am just a few steps from the beach. If you're game, the speciality here are the 'gator bites'. Alligator nuggets in breadcrumbs... The upstairs restaurant appeared to have a reggae theme but downstairs it was just beach bar personified. We had my young son, Finn, with us and they were so relaxed with him. We could not have felt more welcome or more in the holiday spirit. After dark, the venue becomes a busy bar with live music until the last guests stumble out onto the sand.



Finn was a regular at Ocean Deck

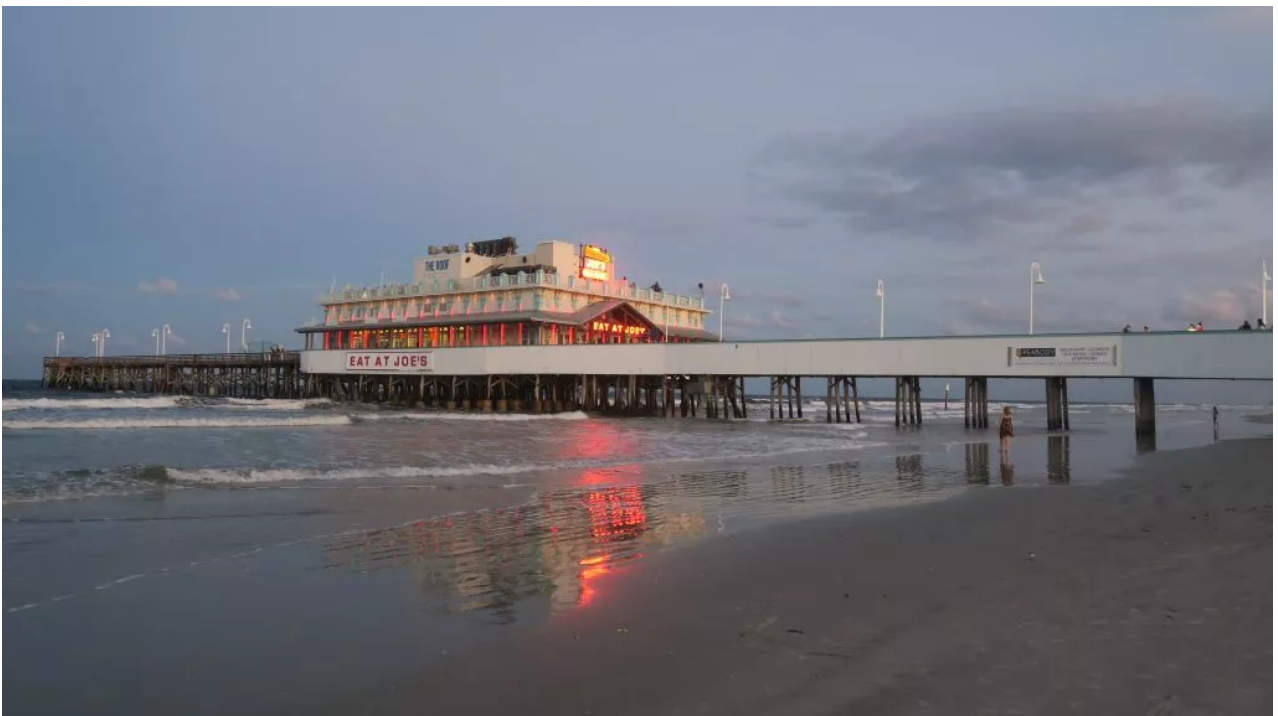
For something a bit more fancy, (again, slightly lazy) but the [Hyde Park Prime Steakhouse](http://hydeparkrestaurants.com) (<http://hydeparkrestaurants.com>) next to our hotel has a menu of quality steak and fish with a stylish sun deck and a 'Mad Men' feel. We were originally attracted by the Happy Hour (Sunday – Friday 4pm – 6.30pm) and since we had a great spot on the deck, just decided to stay for dinner. Get there in time for the happy hour to enjoy the half price cocktails – which are delicious!



Cocktails at Hyde Park, Daytona Beach (not sure why I look so miserable – I definitely wasn't!)

NIGHTLIFE IN DAYTONA BEACH

This area is not known for the wild nightlife you might find in Miami but apparently during Spring Break it can get quite lively! The Ocean Deck became our haunt. There was live music nightly and it was a short walk back to our hotel along the beach, which was well-lit and felt safe. I love blue skies and sandy beaches but I really thought Daytona Beach looked most beautiful by night. Walking back to the hotel the waves were lapping at our feet and the water was still warm!





Daytona by night. Watching the sunset with a cocktail is my top holiday must-do

Before heading back to Orlando, I couldn't resist a stop at Florida institution [Pappa's Drive In \(http://pappasdrivein.com\)](http://pappasdrivein.com), which is along the route between Daytona Beach and New Smyrna Beach. This was about as old school as it gets. A local haunt since 1970, this often pops up as one of Daytona's best breakfasts but you do need a car to reach it. The drive was around 15-20 minutes from Daytona Beach pier.

If you are looking for somewhere inexpensive and low key to break up your Orlando holiday, I highly recommend Daytona Beach. Local, honest values mean cheap eats, budget hotels, relaxed vibes and a giant beach that never feels packed. Plus, swimming in water that feels as warm as a bath? Yes please!



Finn heard the food was good!

Find out more about what is going on in Daytona Beach at [daytonabeach.com](https://www.daytonabeach.com/about-us/) (<https://www.daytonabeach.com/about-us/>)

WANT MORE FLORIDA?

We ask six Florida regulars for their [secret insider tips for Orlando](https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/orlando-insider-tips/) (<https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/orlando-insider-tips/>).

Heading to the Florida Keys? [This hotel](https://www.passportstamps.uk/reviews/amara-cay-resort-florida/) (<https://www.passportstamps.uk/reviews/amara-cay-resort-florida/>) is our firm favourite.

Guess where our most-viewed YouTube video is set... FLORIDA, of course! Follow our adventures in Key West and the Florida Keys [here](https://www.passportstamps.uk/video/video-helen-wright-explores-key-west-and-the-florida-keys/) (<https://www.passportstamps.uk/video/video-helen-wright-explores-key-west-and-the-florida-keys/>).

Want to see more Orlando? The last leg of our recent [Around The World Trip](https://www.passportstamps.uk/blog/why-quit-job-travel-the-world/) (<https://www.passportstamps.uk/blog/why-quit-job-travel-the-world/>) was in Orlando and Miami – find out more [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZsuFWGBfZk) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZsuFWGBfZk>).



Click here to return to our [Complete Guide To Orlando \(https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/complete-guide-to-orlando/\)](https://www.passportstamps.uk/travel/complete-guide-to-orlando/).

About the author



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Helen Wright is a freelance journalist & Highly Commended VUSA Travel Writer of the Year 2013.

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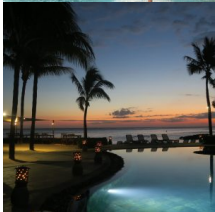
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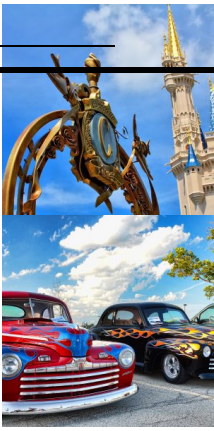


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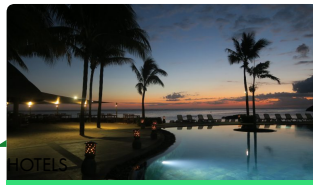
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