

## This lesser-known US national park is the latest International Dark Sky destination



Cape Lookout National Seashore is the latest in the US National Parks system to achieve a certified Dark Sky Park designation. © Crystal Coast Stargazers/Alex Gu

Those looking for a new, under-the-radar spot to marvel at the stars may want to point their compass toward a lesser-known national park on the southern [Outer Banks of North Carolina](#).

Comprised of 56 miles of undeveloped beach across four barrier islands that dot the Atlantic coast of North Carolina, [Cape Lookout National Seashore](#) is already known as an idyllic location to enjoy a beach day watching wildlife like birds or [the wild horse herds](#).

Now, it's the latest place in the [US National Park](#) system to receive an [International Dark Sky Park](#) designation, making it an ideal place to gaze at a sky full of stars thanks to reduced light pollution.

Certified Dark Sky Parks that achieve the designation are “publicly- or privately-owned spaces protected for natural conservation that implement good outdoor lighting and provide dark sky programs for visitors,” according to the International Dark Sky Association which administers the certification. Along with clouding a view of the stars, the organization says light pollution can disrupt ecosystems, waste energy, and contribute to climate change.



The certification required a rigorous, two-year application process that the park said comprised of evaluating artificial light within the park and its surrounding area. That meant evaluating light fixtures and in some cases, retrofitting or replacing them.

Jeff West, superintendent of Cape Lookout National Seashore, called it an honor for the community which worked together to achieve the certification.

“Embarking on this project helped me remember the wonder and amazement I felt gazing into the night sky as a child. The possibilities I imagined then are still there, dwarfing life's daily demands when put in perspective. Maybe we all need a little star gazing right now,” West said.

Founded in 2001, the International Dark Sky Places program encourages “communities, parks, and protected areas around the world to preserve and protect dark sites through effective lighting policies, environmentally responsible outdoor lighting, and public education.”

More than 190 locations have received the Dark Sky certification. Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Joshua Tree, Death Valley and [Zion National Parks](#) are among those in the U.S. National Parks system who have achieved the dark sky certification.