

The Eastern Atlantic Coast Gets Its First International Dark Sky Park

Here, you will want to look up



[Cape Lookout National Seashore](#), a 56-mile stretch of natural barrier islands on North Carolina's Crystal Coast, boasts some of the darkest night skies on the East Coast. And in December, it was officially certified an IDA International Dark Sky Park (IDSP), joining the ranks of some-80 parks, monuments, and preserves in the U.S.^[1]

The first national park on the Atlantic Coast to be designated a Dark Sky Place, the national seashore has long been a hot spot for stargazing.^[2] In addition to a summer NASA Solar System Ambassador program, Cape Lookout hosts monthly [Astronomy Nights at its Harkers Island Visitor Center](#), where amateur astronomers can peer into telescopes and try to spot planets, nebula, and other celestial phenomena.

"This certification is both an honor for our community and recognition of the unique values that make this park a national treasure," said Jeff West, superintendent of Cape Lookout National Seashore, in a statement. "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."

According to IDSA, IDA designations are given to "land possessing an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment."^[3]

"We are proud to include Cape Lookout National Seashore into our International Dark Sky Places Program. Not only do they serve as another exceptional National Park Service unit that understands and is fully committing to dark-sky efforts, but they also visibly demonstrate the balance between using light efficiently and coexisting with the natural, nocturnal environment with their lighting decisions," said Ashley Wilson, the IDA's director of conservation, in a statement. "While the majority of the park's lighting is dark-sky friendly, the demonstration is most notable with the IDA Fixture Seal of Approval fixtures using adaptive controls at the Core Sound Museum and Heritage Center."

While celestial enthusiasts may wish to plan a trip for Astronomy Night, Cape Lookout National Seashore welcomes visitors 24/7. However, attractions like the Harkers Island Visitor Center and the Light Station Visitor Center & Keepers' Quarters Museum operate at different times throughout the year.

For those wishing to embark on a truly immersive experience, park-goers can enjoy primitive camping for up to 14 consecutive days on the beach. While visitors are permitted to camp out of their cars, drivers must stick to the "oceanside beach seaward of the primary dunes," as well as follow [other measures that serve to protect the vegetation](#). In addition, camping is banned in numerous spots throughout the park, including Harkers Island, in Portsmouth Village, and on top of the dunes. [Special Use Permits](#) are required for overnight groups of 25 or more campers. For the complete list of regulations and restrictions, see [NPS' Camp Lookout page](#).