

Fresh from Florida



IMPROVING THE GIANTS
STS Mobile Launcher Platform 3/Apollo Mobile Launcher 1

The Mobile Launcher Platform from which this piece came launched three Apollo and 29 space shuttle missions.

It supported the weight and power of the massive Saturn V rocket during its first launch in 1967, a test of the rocket's ability to carry humans to the Moon. In 1969, it supported Apollo 11's most precious cargo: Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins, the first humans on the Moon.

During the Space Shuttle Program, it was repurposed and renamed Mobile Launcher Platform 3 (MLP-3), identified by the large number "3" on the piece to your left. The first mission to the International Space Station and the final launch of the space shuttle Atlantis in 2011 both launched from this platform.

MLP-3 was decommissioned in 2023, but this historic piece was preserved.

A Mobile Launcher's Big Job

Rockets are assembled, tested, and serviced atop a Mobile Launcher inside the Vehicle Assembly Building. Once ready, the Crawler Transporter moves the Mobile Launcher with the rocket on top to the launch pad, where it serves as the launch platform.

160 FEET LONG
100 FT WIDE, 20 FT HIGH

8.23 MILLION POUNDS
200,000 TO 300,000

THIS PIECE OF MLP-3 COURTESY OF: **Actvion CONSTRUCTION**

A wealth of new product could help you sell a stay to even the most seasoned Florida fan, finds Alice Barnes-Brown

Florida's theme parks, attractions, beaches and array of family-friendly accommodation make it a hit with British travellers – in fact, the latest Visit Florida Consumer Travel Survey revealed it was the second-most-popular US destination for UK travellers, with 34% of respondents considering a visit.

Time-tested attractions, from Walt Disney World Resort to the Everglades, are strong selling points. But this is a state that never stands still, and the recent Florida Huddle trade conference in Orlando revealed a host of interesting new product openings to help freshen up your sales.

AWESOME ATTRACTIONS
At the Kennedy Space Center, lift-off for *Artemis II's* crewed moon mission could take place as early as next month – and tickets to the centre are selling

fast. One of the best viewpoints to watch the launch will be from The Gantry at LC-39, which opened last summer. The four-storey platform has 360-degree views and houses a full-sized model of a rocket engine, which roars into action with light, sound and even a cooling mist to simulate lift-off.

Disney's Florida parks also have new reasons to visit this year. At Disney's Hollywood Studios, the Rock 'n' Roller Coaster – which has sported an Aerosmith theme since 1999 – will take on the mantle of The Muppets this summer. Well-timed to capitalise on renewed interest following the revival of *The Muppet Show* on Disney+, clients can spot Kermit's green felt and hear Miss Piggy's distinctive drawl while racing through its twists and turns.

Elsewhere in the park, the Magic of Disney Animation will replace the former Star Wars ➤

Guests visit The Gantry at LC-39 at the Kennedy Space Center
PICTURE: Grove Marketing Co/The Capsul

DESTINATIONS

THE US | FLORIDA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Lego alien at the entrance of Galacticoaster in Legoland Florida; Nickelodeon Hotel and Resort, opening in 2028; Cabana at The Luce, St Pete Beach **PICTURES:** Ron Blunt Studio; Shutterstock/Chad Robertson Media

Launch Bay – the walk-through attraction is being transformed into a child-friendly zone, complete with a flower garden, sketching spaces and an exhibit exploring the six stages of making an animated film.

Over at Legoland Florida Resort, the family-friendly Galacticoaster will be the park's first indoor rollercoaster, launching on February 27. Families begin by designing their own spacecraft, customising its shape, size, weaponry and wings, before a large green screen shows clients riding in their unique space-going designs.

For something a little more educational, a new manatee habitat will open at Jacksonville Zoo in March, designed to inform visitors about the threats faced by this beloved Florida species and to rehabilitate injured manatees before they are released back into the wild.

GOOD SPORT

As North America gears up for the Fifa World Cup, sports tourism is becoming a driver for travel – but football isn't the only game in town. Pickleball, one of the fastest-growing sports in the UK, will be easier to keep up on holiday with two new pickleball courts opening this year in St Pete-Clearwater and a huge 43-court complex in Fort Lauderdale.

Orlando also has its share of sports and gaming openings. A new sports and entertainment complex, Society Park, is due to debut this spring featuring three pickleball courts and nine padel courts along with shops, restaurants and a spa. Disney Springs will also add Level 99, a venue where clients can explore 60 themed game rooms, with challenges ranging from puzzles and duels to art hunts.

HOT HOTELS

For clients who like a luxurious base to explore Orlando's parks, a new W Hotel near Universal Epic Universe is set to open its doors in June. The sleek 22-storey building will contain a 2,000-seat venue, five bars and restaurants plus an adult-only pool.

One of Florida's biggest new openings will be the first Nickelodeon Hotel and Resort in the US, set to open in Kissimmee in 2028. Situated within the \$1 billion Everest Place area, the Nickelodeon hotel will have more than 400 rooms and countless opportunities for little ones to encounter their favourite characters from Dora the Explorer to SpongeBob SquarePants.

In Miami, there are 50 new hotels in the pipeline for 2026 and beyond, but one that's causing a stir is ➤



Miami is hosting seven matches at this year's Fifa World Cup, and even if they don't secure tickets to the game, clients can still savour the good vibes at watch parties and fan zones set up in public spaces and hotels across the Sunshine State. Here are the dates of all the key Florida matches agents can use to help sell a stay.

June 15
Group H
Saudi Arabia v Uruguay

June 21
Group H
Uruguay v Cape Verde

June 24
Group C
Brazil v Scotland

June 27
Group K
Portugal v Colombia

July 3
Match 86
Group J winners v Group H runners-up

July 11
Match 99
Quarter final

July 18
Match 103
Bronze final



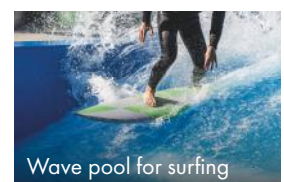


Universal Volcano Bay, Orlando

Visit Orlando has launched a new itinerary-planning tool for agents who have completed its Orlando Travel Academy. The AI-powered tool is designed to help agents create personalised itineraries for clients, complete with maps and accommodation recommendations.

For some sweet fun, the **Museum of Ice Cream** – already open in New York, Singapore and Miami – is opening a branch in the Pointe Orlando complex on International Drive.

Cocoa Beach near Cape Canaveral is upping its hotel game, with a new Westin set to open on its sugary-white sands in May 2027. A standout feature will be the wave pool, so clients can practise their surfing technique before hitting the beach.



Wave pool for surfing

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Toyakiphoto; Matt Kalinowski



ABOVE: The revamped British Airways lounge at Miami International Airport features quiet pods and shower suites

the Delano Miami Beach. The art deco hotel dates from 1947 but has been closed since March 2020. Following a huge renovation, the 171-room Delano will reopen on March 9, featuring two new restaurants, a reimaged Rose Bar (where Hollywood stars and starlets once congregated) and sleek poolside bungalow suites.

In St Pete, beachfront The Luce is set to open next month as part of Marriott's mid-range Tribute Portfolio. The three-star hotel sits on a peaceful section of private coastline, so clients can take advantage of the Gulf of Mexico's warm waters at the beach club or dip into the area's largest pool.

Also catering to mid-range travellers, a five-storey Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites will open at the end of the year in Crystal River, making a gorgeous gateway to the area's clear springs and massive manatee population. The new hotel will also have a diving shop on site, so clients can explore below the surface.

SHIPSHAPE

Port Canaveral is growing in prominence for cruise clients, with more ships homeporting there this season. *Sky Princess* joins *Caribbean Princess* in sailing six to eight-night itineraries, while *MSC Grandiosa* will join *MSC Seashore* in operating short itineraries from Port Canaveral year-round.

Ground has also been broken at Terminal G, Royal Caribbean International's new cruise terminal in Miami. The terminal is due to be completed at the end of 2027 and will be able to service the line's

“Port Canaveral is growing in prominence with more ships homeporting there this season from Princess and MSC Cruises

Icon Class vessels, which carry up to 7,600 passengers.

On the Panhandle, river and small-ship cruise company American Cruise Lines will make its first stops in Pensacola from March – part of a new Gulf Coast itinerary that begins in the beachside city, continuing on to historic coastal port city Mobile in Alabama, the Mississippi coastline and New Orleans.

AIR APPARENT

Just in time for the Fifa World Cup, Miami International Airport has gained some new additions. Since October, British Airways' premium flyers have enjoyed a BA lounge featuring an art deco-inspired bar, quiet pods and two shower suites.

A new private terminal will also provide luxury travellers with a more peaceful passage through security, customs and border control – and it's not just for private jet passengers. Set in the brutalist former Pan Am headquarters, passengers on any airline can pay from \$695 per person to access the exclusive terminal, which includes a private car transfer to the aircraft. **TW**