

By Tanner Callais – July 4, 2019

## Complete Guide to Cruising from Port Canaveral

While its sister port in Miami might get the notoriety as the world's largest cruise port, Port Canaveral near Orlando is no slouch. Despite maybe not being at the first port on the list when many people think of cruising, Port Canaveral sees 4.5 million passengers each year, making it the second-busiest cruise port in the world.



Meanwhile, the port continues to grow. With a new terminal currently under construction, the capacity of Port Canaveral simply keeps increasing. All told, 2020 will see approximately 580 cruise ship departures from the port. That's not

to mention the ships that dock here during their cruises to allow passengers to visit nearby Orlando.

But as with any major port, first-time cruisers (or those who simply haven't visited recently) may have lots of questions about sailing. To help you out, we've covered everything you need to know about cruising from Port Canaveral, along with tons of information about parking, terminals, navigating the port, and much more.

## Fast Facts

- Distance from Orlando Airport: 45 miles
- Number of Terminals: 5 (plus 1 under construction and one casino ship terminal)
- Passengers Carried Each Year: 4.5 million
- Cruise Ship Dockings Each Year: 580+

## Port Location



Port Canaveral is located in eastern central Florida, approximately an hour from Orlando. Just south of the famous Kennedy Space Center, the area surrounding the port offers a lot to see and do within minutes. Nearby are the towns of Cocoa, as well as Cocoa Beach and Titusville.

The port itself is a large, “L-shaped” complex with a number of cruise terminals on the far western edge. In addition, there are cruise terminals (with more on the way) along the southern end of the port.



While each terminal has a slightly different address, they are all in the same complex. If you plan to drive in, you can use the following address for navigation:

**9241 Charles M Rowland Dr  
Port Canaveral, FL 32920**

Once in the port area, you'll see signage directing you to each individual cruise ship in port that day.

If you are flying into the Orlando area, then the chances are good you'll be spending some time in the area at the numerous attractions and theme parks. Here are the distances and times to get to Port Canaveral from a number of popular spots in the region.

- Orlando Airport: 45 miles | 45 minutes
- Disney World: 67 miles | 1 hour 15 minutes
- Universal Studios: 60 miles | 1 hour
- Downtown Orlando: 55 miles | 55 minutes
- Kennedy Space Center: 18 miles | 30 minutes
- Cocoa Beach: 5 miles | 10 minutes
- Not sure how to get the Port Canaveral from Orlando? We outline your choices below.
- **Getting to Port Canaveral (Transportation)**
  - The bad news about Port Canaveral is that it's not extremely convenient to get to if you are flying into or staying in the Orlando area. The good news? There's a thriving industry that caters to cruise passengers, including

transportation options to get you back and forth between Orlando and the cruise terminals.

- On our Port Canaveral transportation page, we've covered the main transportation options in depth. Below, we hit the highlights of how you can get to the port.



### **Driving to Port Canaveral**

If you live in the area, then driving to the port is convenient. Driving allows you to arrive whenever you want and head home when you want to without waiting on anyone else's schedule. As well, given the distance between Orlando and the port — as well as the number of things to do in the area — driving is especially nice as an easy way to get around.

If you do drive, keep in mind you'll need to park your car. Parking at the port is convenient, but costs \$17 per day. There are independent lots that are cheaper. See more details in our parking section below.

### **Independent Shuttles**

Not driving? As we mentioned earlier, there's an entire industry that's popped up catering to cruisers. Case in point: There are a number of companies offering shuttles back and forth between Orlando and Port Canaveral. The most convenient place to catch one of these shuttles is from the airport, however many will pickup from other spots like Disney. Expect to pay \$30-40 per person roundtrip for the shuttles, which isn't bad considering the distance.

### **Hotel Shuttles**

With so many hotels around Port Canaveral, there are several that will provide a plum service — they will pick you up at the airport with a shuttle, take you to the hotel, and then give you a ride to the cruise port. When you return, they will offer the same in reverse. It's a nice perk for those flying in and planning to stay at a hotel the night before their cruise.

### **Other Modes**

Interested in other modes of transportation to Port Canaveral like taxis, Uber/Lyft, and cruise line shuttles? They can all get you to the port but are typically more expensive and/or less convenient than the ways listed above. Still, you can read all your options on our Port Canaveral transportation page.

## Hotels in the Area



Given the location of Port Canaveral — about 45 minutes from the Orlando Airport and an hour from the city proper — it's a good idea to head to the area the day before your cruise and stay the night. That way there's no rush on embarkation day and you can relax before your cruise starts.

And as a beach town, Cocoa Beach, right next to the port, offers a ton of options where to stay. Many hotels include shuttles to the port and/or cruise parking, making them especially attractive for cruise passengers.

Here are a number of hotels in the areas that are near the port:

- Country Inn & Suites By Radisson
- Homewood Suites by Hilton Cape Canaveral-Cocoa Beach

- Radisson Resort at the Port

For the most part, the hotels near the port are well-known, reputable chains.

## Things to Do Near the Port

One of the good things about Port Canaveral is that the port complex and the surrounding area have a number of things to do nearby.





## **Exploration Tower**

When you arrive at the port, you can't miss the tallest structure in the area that looks like the sail of a ship. It's the Exploration Tower — an observation deck with exhibits about the port area on each floor. It offers a great view of the area and a unique vantage point where you can see all the ships in port.

## **Restaurants**

In the port area are several restaurants that sit right on the water. Not only can you get a bite to eat or something cold to drink, but you can also have a first-rate spot to see the ships in port. If you aren't sailing, then the cruise ships also pass right in front of you as they head out to sea. Places to eat include Grills and Fishlips.

## **Kennedy Space Center**

Of course, being on Cape Canaveral you are right near the Kennedy Space Center. Here you can see rockets launch (if they match your schedule) or visit the center to get up close and personal with NASA's history with tons of exhibits. They even have the retired space shuttle Atlantis on display for visitors.

## **Cocoa Beach**

While you are headed to the beach on your cruise, why not get it started early? Cocoa Beach is just a short distance from the port. There you can hit the beach or explore the area where there are a ton of tourist activities, shops, and restaurants. Check out the area near the Cocoa Beach pier for one of the most popular hangouts.

## Cruise Terminals

All told, Port Canaveral has five terminals that serve cruise ships, with another one on the way.



### **CT1**

Located on the south bank of the port and to the east of most of the other terminals, CT1 is home to Royal Caribbean. There's a small retail area and a parking garage right at the terminal. If you're into ship spotting, there are restaurants right near the terminal that can give you an up-close look at the ship in port.

### **CT3**

Currently under construction (slated for opening in 2020), CT3 will be home to Carnival Mardi Gras — the cruise line's largest ship to date. The terminal is the largest single project in the port's history and set to measure a staggering 185,000 square feet.

## **CT5**

Located in the northern part of the port, CT5 is home to Carnival. As with other ports, a parking garage is just a few steps from the cruise terminal.



## **CT6**

Right next to CT5, this terminal is also home to Carnival. Most notably, you'll see ships like the Breeze, Elation, and Sunshine sail from here. It's also in the middle of the northern part of the port, giving great views of any other cruise ships in port on embarkation day.

## **CT8**

As you might expect given the distance to Disney World in Orlando, Disney Cruises has a large presence at the port. CT8 is the Disney terminal, where you'll

find its ships embarking to take families on cruises to the Bahamas and Caribbean.



## **CT10**

The last cruise terminal on the western side of the port is CT10, which serves Norwegian ships. From here it's a nearly straight shot out to sea.

## **Dropping Off/Picking Up Passengers**

Are you taking someone to the cruise port? Or maybe you are picking up someone after their vacation? That can save a lot of money in parking fees, and make it much easier for them to start their cruise.



If you do plan to drop off or pick up, then just know that it's a relatively simple concept. Just follow the signs to the appropriate terminal. From there, you will see signs pointing you to the drop-off and pick-up areas.

The procedure is much like the airport. You can pull up, let passengers out and they get their bags. In all, it should only take you a few minutes.

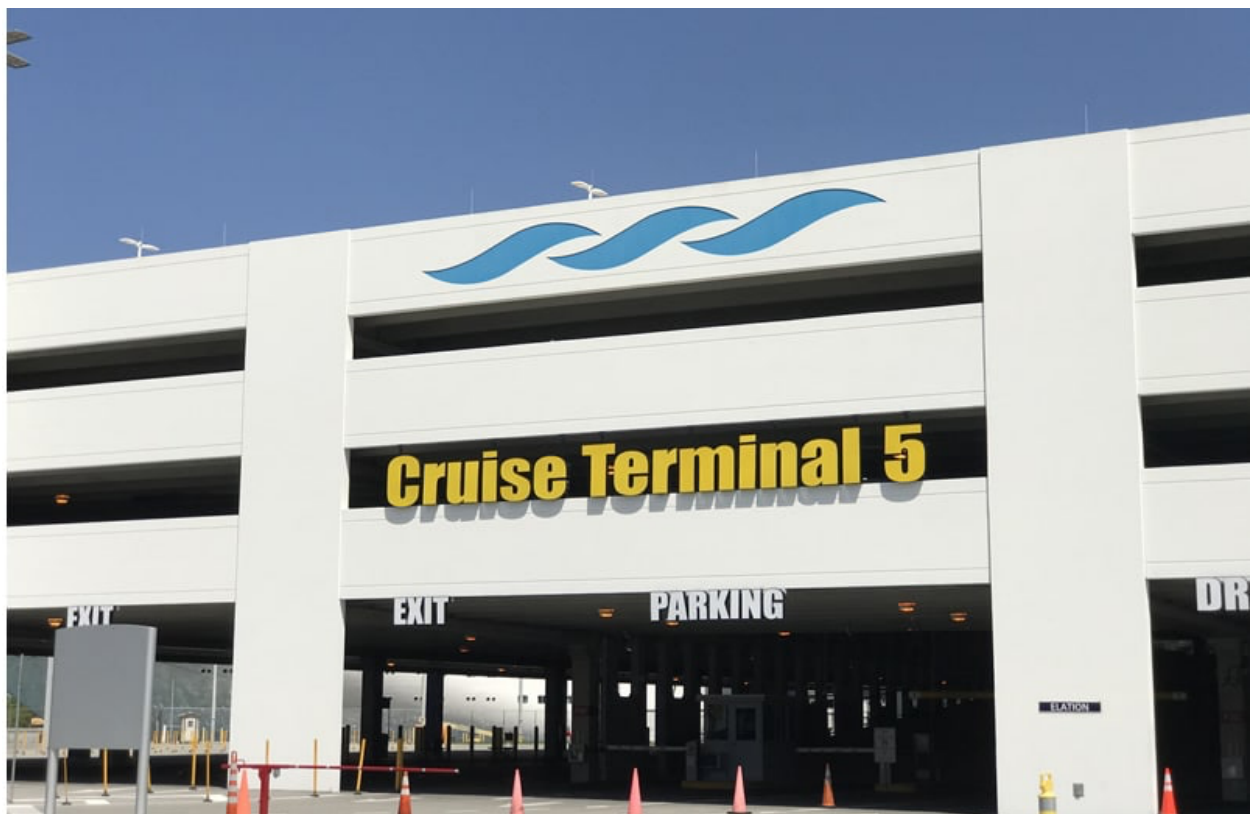
One word of warning — the port area (especially the western terminals) can be a bit confusing to get around. There are lots of signs, but also lots of twists and turns. It's helpful to have a passenger to focus on the signage to direct you where to go while driving.

## Parking for a Port Canaveral Cruise

If you are driving into Port Canaveral, then there is the question of what to do with your car while you are on your cruise. Given the size of the port, there are a number of parking options. We cover all your options on our Port Canaveral cruise parking page — including prices and locations. Below, we cover the main options — parking at the port, independent lots, and hotels with cruise parking.

### **Official Port Parking**

Looking for the most convenient parking for your cruise? Look no further than the official port parking. Each terminal has a parking garage that's just across the street from their respective terminals. In other words, you can park and be at the terminal in just minutes. When it's time to head home, you have only a short walk back to your car. Most garages offer more than 1,000 spaces.



While convenient, be prepared to pay handsomely for parking. The port charges \$17 per day for most vehicles. Oversized vehicles (taking up more than one space) are charged \$29 per day. One thing to note is that the garage charges by days, not nights. Say you have a three night cruise that departs Friday afternoon and gets back Monday morning. In this case, you're charged for four days (Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday) even though your ship gets back first thing Monday morning.

If you're a disabled cruise passenger then you may be able to park for free at the port. If your vehicle has accommodations such as ramps or lifts, or you have a Florida Toll Exemption permit, or a Disabled Veteran plate from Florida, then you can get free parking. If you think you might be eligible, then call the port at 321-783-7831 for more details.

### **Independent Parking Lots**

One of the great things about sailing from Port Canaveral is that there are a number of independent parking lots near the cruise ships. The lots may not be right at the port, but they are close and offer shuttles. Best of all, they offer much cheaper parking rates that can be around \$10 per day (and in some cases even cheaper). Similar to the cruise port, these lots usually charge by the day instead of the night. So a 3-night cruise will have you paying for four days of parking, even if you get your car back early in the morning.

### **Hotels with Cruise Parking**

A nice perk with such a tourist hotspot is that there are a lot of hotels competing for your business. And as a cruise town, that means many hotels in Cape Canaveral will allow you to park your car while you cruise in return for a night's stay. Sometimes parking is free, but usually its part of a package or an extra charge each night. Hotels will also set up a ride to the port for you.

In general parking at the hotel is even cheaper than parking at independent lots. That said, if you don't plan to stay in a hotel before your trip, the added expense of a night's stay isn't worth the savings on cheaper parking.

## Check-In & Security

Ready to get on your ship? Before you can board, you'll have to go through two things at the port: security and check-in. The good news is that both are relatively easy.

As you reach the port, the first thing you'll do is drop any checked bags with a porter before you enter the terminal building. These bags will be taken, loaded on the ship, and arrive at your cabin later in the evening. You don't have to check any bags if you don't want to. It simply makes it easier to board the ship than having to carry all your luggage round.

For most passengers, they likely envision security like going to the airport — long lines, invasive searches and tight rules on liquids. Cruise security is more relaxed. As you enter the building, you'll have someone check your boarding documents. You'll then place your bags on an x-ray machine while you walk through the metal detector. Unless something comes up, that's it. From there you head to check-in.

These days many cruise lines have online check-in, which actually allows you to skip this step. You simply walk your way to the ship and your room keys will be waiting for you at your cabin door.

If you elect to check-in the traditional way, then you'll stand in line and wait for an agent. Normally there are dozens of agents working, making the line move



quickly. Once at the agent's desk, you'll set up your onboard spending account, get your room key and then head to the ship. That's all there is to boarding your cruise.

## Disembarkation

One of the funny things about cruising is that while everyone can't wait to get on the ship to start their vacation, they are just as eager to get off the ship when it arrives back in port. And as a major cruise port, the disembarkation of the ship at Port Canaveral is usually smooth and relatively quick given the number of passengers on a modern cruise ship.



When you get back to port, you'll have the option of carrying all your bags off the ship yourself, or setting out the larger bags to be picked up and brought ashore by the porters. Many people opt to just carry all bags themselves as this means you can be among the first group to get off the ship.

Once you depart the ship, you'll enter the terminal and pick up any luggage that you had the porters carry off the ship ahead of time. You'll then enter the line to be checked back into the country by customs agents. All told, the process will vary in length of time depending on a few factors — most notably the number of agents working to process the ship.

Once you return, simply head out the doors to find your ground transportation. If using a shuttle service or if someone is picking you up, be sure to make plans on where you'll be picked up before you get back to port. This will make it much easier and faster to get out of the port after disembarking.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What About the Casino Cruise Terminal?**

Not every cruise ship that calls Port Canaveral home heads to the Caribbean or Bahamas. Victory Casino Cruises operates out of CT2, next door to where CT3 (the new Carnival terminal) is being built. The casino ship runs two daily trips to out of state waters where gambling is legal.

On board you will find slot machines, dozens of table games, sports betting, a buffet and more. Considering that gambling is localized to only a few spots in Florida, the casino ship is a big draw for those looking to get their fix for a few hours.

### **What's the Cheapest Place to Park?**

As we mentioned above, parking at the port itself is convenient, but runs \$17 per day. The cheapest spot we've found is parking with Go Port Canaveral. They actually allow you to park for as little as \$40, plus \$5 for each additional traveler. So a couple sailing on a weeklong cruise would only pay \$45. It's a bit different

than the traditional pricing of paying by the day, but the end result is cheap parking.

### **What's the Cheapest Way to Get to the Port?**

Thanks to the competition between shuttle companies, there are a number of inexpensive options to get between Orlando and the cruise port. A hotel with a shuttle will likely be the cheapest overall way assuming you plan to stay anyway. Other shuttles can be around \$30-40 roundtrip.

### **What's the Earliest I Should Schedule a Return Flight?**

Many people fly into Orlando for their cruise. That leaves the question of when should you schedule the flight back home? Cruise ships return to port early in the morning (6-7 a.m.), and then it can take 2-3 hours for everyone to get off the ship. That means you can get off the ship and on your way anywhere between 8-10 a.m. Of course, you then have a 45 minute ride to the port, followed by security screening.

That's why we suggest not scheduling a flight back until after 1 p.m. Yes you may be able to get to the earlier, but this will allow plenty of time so that it's not a mad dash to catch your flight.