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Photo Shoot with the Space Shuttle

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The Vehicle Assembly Building that houses and protects the space shuttle when it's on earth.

"Knowing that there are seven people attached to the biggest rocket you've ever seen, propelling upwards and reaching speeds of 17,000+ mph before breaking out of our atmosphere and into space. That's simply amazing."

Chris Ayres

Discussion The shuttle didn't die!

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The Approach

It's not hard to tell when you're getting close to NASA. Once you turn off of 50 onto 407, you can tell you're close. Passing by the Astronaut Hall of Fame and the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex, both with full-sized space shuttles parked out front, it's hard to miss!

Around 5:35 a.m., I passed through the gate that only NASA employees or visitors with the appropriate credentials can get through, and made my way toward the only building visible, the Vehicle Assembly Building (also called the Vertical Assembly Building) – usually shortened to just the VAB. The VAB covers

Student Lands Dream Photo Shoot of Space Shuttle Discovery

By Christopher Ayres, Digital Arts & Design student

[Click here to view a slideshow of the space shuttle launch.](#)

4:15 came way too early this morning. But there's no way I would miss this day, the day that I get to photograph the space shuttle Discovery as it's being moved from the Vehicle Assembly Building to its launch pad. As I drove down the moonlit S.R. 50, on my way to the Space Coast, I couldn't help but think about my excitement over this opportunity.

The reason I am on my way to the NASA complex, media pass in hand, is because of a fascination with space and the shuttle program that stems from growing up in an Air Force family as a child. I've been to a couple launches, and it is the most amazing thing I've ever witnessed. Knowing that

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eight acres, is 525 feet tall, 716 feet long and 518 feet wide. It encloses 129,428,000 cubic feet of space. Anyway, you can't miss it, and that was my only point of reference to where I needed to go.

After a few minutes of driving around I found the Media Center where we started our day. Around 6:15, just as the sun started to peak over the horizon, and after being sniffed by a K-9 bomb unit dog, we were on the bus and on our way to the shuttle.

It's a pretty amazing thing, taking this drive to the launch pad. As we pull onto the road, I quickly realize that we're driving literally 10 feet from the crawler road (the road where the 'crawler' transports the shuttle to the pad), with nothing blocking us from the road or a view of the shuttle. About three miles later, we make our final approach to the drop-off spot.

The Thrill of Discovery

I've got to tell you, seeing the space shuttle that close up for me was almost as surreal as seeing my wife as she walked down the aisle on our wedding day. It truly is an amazing sight.

The bus came to a stop in a parking lot on the side of the road, just by a gate that is the final barrier before you reach the pad. They let us off the bus with the words "have at it." That's all I needed to hear. I left the bus, and there it was, less than 200 feet in front of me: a \$3 billion shuttle, just waiting for me to take pictures of it. So I did.

For the next 90 minutes, I was given free reign, within eyesight of our escorts of course, to photograph the shuttle in all her glory. All around me were professional photographers from all sorts of publications, shooting the breeze and just doing a job, a job that I certainly wouldn't mind having! I leaned over and asked one of our escorts, as she was taking a picture with her camera phone, if doing this ever gets old. She simply said, "No."

After the shuttle came to a stop on the pad, they called it a day and took us back to the media center where we all went our separate ways. I went inside the media building and collected as much information as I could, making many contacts before leaving.

On December 7th, the Space Shuttle Discovery Mission STS-116 is set to launch around 9:30 p.m., to take the third support truss segment to the International Space Station. This piece will help to power the I.S.S. once it is installed. The I.S.S. has basically been running on generators for the last 8 years. With the truss segment that was installed in the last mission to the I.S.S., and this mission, the station will be able to run on power generated by the solar panels being installed. STS-116 is the 20th shuttle mission to the I.S.S.

To learn more about Shuttle Mission STS-116, head over to the official [Mission STS-116 page](#) at the NASA website.

A shuttle launch is a great experience for anyone to go see. If you are interested in viewing a launch, you can either purchase tickets to go see it from a much closer area, or you can head to Titusville or Cocoa Beach for a free viewing and still a great experience. This site has a great FAQ for seeing a launch. (<http://www.spacelaunchnews.com/visitorinfo/launchfaq.htm>).

You can also check out the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex or the Astronaut Hall of Fame, both just minutes apart, and both in Titusville. A maximum access pass at KSC will set you back a meager \$38 for a full day of fun and a launch viewing if it's the right day.

On your way over to the Kennedy Space Center, you can also stop in and see Capt. Ray for an Air Boat ride! It's on S.R. 50 just 15 minutes from Kennedy Space center.

Check out these other great links for more information on NASA and the Shuttle program:

[Kennedy Space Center Official Page](#)

[NASA Official Site](#)

[Shuttle Launch F.A.Q.](#)

[Mission STS-116 Information](#)

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Stay tuned for Christopher's coverage of the Dec. 7 launch.

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