



## **USAF Thunderbirds at Spaceport America for Winter Training**

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The United States Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron “Thunderbirds” kicked off their first ever winter training trip at Spaceport America on January 10, 2022.

“We are honored to be hosting the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds” said New Mexico Spaceport Authority Executive Director Scott McLaughlin. “Spaceport America is a unique multipurpose facility for commercial and federal aerospace customers. Our partnership with U.S. Army White Sands Missile Range allows us to attract a wide range of users for training, test and development, and the great weather in Southern New Mexico is perfect for year-round missions.”



*Thunderbirds at Spaceport America's Horizontal Launch Area*

The Thunderbirds' training season, ranging from November through March, is a time to integrate and synchronize as a team and practice the demonstration. This year, the month-long winter training trip will take place in two locations: Spaceport America, New Mexico, and Ft. Huachuca, Arizona.

Leadership from the Thunderbirds and the 57th Fighter Wing made the landmark decision to have an off-station winter training trip after assessing multiple locations based on aerospace availability, geographical location, and site surveys. In previous years, the Thunderbirds hosted training at their home base, Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.

"This is our top priority for the 2022 training season. It's crucial that we take advantage of this unique opportunity to set the tone for our 2022 show season and future training seasons," said Lt. Col. Justin Elliott, Thunderbirds commander and leader.

The move was made to increase aerospace opportunity and flexibility for the team's training needs, while also allowing them to practice in conditions of increasing difficulty.

"These two locations are excellent training environments, each serving different purposes," said Lt. Col. Elliott. "The show season subjects the team to difficult and ever-changing environments both in the air and on the ground. Training in new and different environments will allow the team to exercise the necessary muscles to ensure our demonstration is precise despite changing conditions."

The team's first training site is Spaceport America, located just outside of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. The location boasts 6,000 square miles of restricted airspace, low population density, a 12,000-foot runway, and 340 days of sunshine and low humidity. These favorable conditions, along with entirely dedicated airspace, allow the team to hone the demonstration before moving on to more challenging flying conditions and time constraints like they might see during the show season.

Note that the event is not open to the public. The exercise is for training purposes, and while Spaceport America will have some capacity for public

viewing in the future, there are few places to park outside of the secure and closed campus.

After two weeks the team will move on to Ft. Huachuca, Arizona, home to the U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence, the U.S. Army Network Enterprise Technology Command (NETCOM)/9th Army Signal Command and more than 48 supported tenants. Ft. Huachuca is comprised of 946 square miles of restricted airspace and three runways, as well as a mild winter and low humidity. This location, with many mountains close by, will challenge the demonstration team in flight with different conditions, visuals, and a more rigid flying schedule like those they'll see during the show season.

“We are extremely thankful for our hosts and counterparts at Spaceport America and Ft. Huachuca. This is a first for the Thunderbirds and it wouldn't be possible without their partnership and support.”

After the inaugural training trip the team will continue on to train with the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron, the Blue Angels, at Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro, California, to exchange best practices and lessons learned in preparation for the 2022 show season.

For more information on the Thunderbirds, visit [air force.com/thunderbirds](https://airforce.com/thunderbirds) or follow us on social media @afthunderbirds.

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**Spaceport America** (<https://www.spaceportamerica.com>) is the first purpose-built commercial spaceport in the world. The FAA-licensed launch complex, situated on 18,000 acres adjacent to the U.S. Army White Sands Missile Range in southern New Mexico, has a rocket friendly environment of 6,000 square miles of restricted airspace, low population density, a 12,000-foot by 200-foot runway, vertical launch complexes, and about 340 days of sunshine and low humidity.

Some of the most respected companies in the commercial space industry are tenants at Spaceport America: [Virgin Galactic](#), [HAPSMobile](#), [AeroVironment](#), [UP Aerospace](#), and [SpinLaunch](#).

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