



20 Most Often Asked Questions

1) When is the park open? The park is open every day, except December 25; weather and road conditions permitting.

2) What are the park's hours? From Labor Day to Memorial Day, the visitor center opens at 8:00 a.m. and closes at 5:00 p.m. Cave trails open at 8:30 a.m., with access to the Natural Entrance closing at 2:00 p.m. and last elevator entry into the Big Room at 3:30 p.m. In the summer, the visitor center opens at 8:00 a.m. and closes at 7:00 p.m. Cave trails open at 8:30 a.m. Access to the Natural Entrance route closes at 3:30 p.m. and last elevator entry into the Big Room at 4:00 p.m. Cave trails close and last elevator exits 15 minutes before the Visitor Center closes.

3) How do we get to the park? From the city of Carlsbad go south on US Highway 62/180 for about 20 miles. Turn right (west) at Whites City and go 7 miles to the visitor center. A general admission ticket is required for anyone that enters the cave. Access to surface facilities is free. Tickets may be purchased at the visitor center information desk. GPS Coordinates for the park Visitor Center: 32.174212°N; 104.445855°W

4) How can we see the cave? Choose from several tours of Carlsbad Cavern, including self-guided or ranger-led tours. Your general admission ticket (\$6 adults, children 0-15 years are free) allows access to two self-guided trails.

The **Natural Entrance Trail** is a steep 1¼-mile (2 km) descent of the equivalent of about 75 stories from the cave entrance to the Big Room. This one-hour tour is recommended only for those in good physical condition.

The **Big Room Trail** may be accessed from either the elevator or the bottom of the Natural Entrance trail. Allow one to two hours for this 1¼-mile (2 km) walk. A short-cut is available that cuts the length and duration in half.

Audio Guide: To enhance both self-guided tours, interpretive signs are provided for basic cave information. For more in-depth descriptions of the cave's features and natural and human history, rent a handheld audio guide. This easy-to-operate device may be rented and picked up in the Visitor Center.

5) Are there any ranger-guided tours? Several ranger-guided tours are available. Reservations are required for all ranger-guided tours. For reservations, call (877)444-6777 or visit www.recreation.gov. The following guided tours range in difficulty from walking on paved trails to walking rough dirt trails to crawling through narrow cave passages. Consult the park newspaper or website or ask a ranger for more information regarding difficulty and required equipment. Tours are half price for children and Golden Age and Golden Access card holders.

<u>Tour</u>	<u>Offered</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u>Age Limit</u>	<u>Group Size</u>	<u>Length</u>
Kings Palace	Daily	10:00 and 2:00*	\$8	4	55	1.5 hrs
Left Hand Tunnel	Daily	9:00 a.m.	\$7	6	15	2 hrs
Lower Cave	M-F	1:00 p.m.	\$20	12	12	3 hrs
Slaughter Canyon Cave	Sat & Sun*	10:00a.m.**	\$15	8	25	2 hrs
Hall of the White Giant	Saturday	1 p.m.	\$20	12	8	4 hrs
Spider Cave	Sunday	1 p.m.	\$20	12	8	4 hrs

*Memorial day to Labor day tours at 11:00, 12:00, and 3:00 also. **Offered Friday, Saturday, Sunday at 10 a.m. from Labor Day to mid-August ☞ Tours are listed in difficulty from relatively easy to strenuous. Camera stands not allowed on guided tours.

6) What can we do if we have only a short time to spend in the park? Have time for only one tour? Then, go to the most famous part of the cave. Enter the cave by elevator and walk the Big Room self-guided tour. You set the walking pace, but figure between 30 minutes to 2 hours.

7) Can we take food and drinks with us into the cave? Eating and drinking, except plain water, are not allowed on cave trails. To contain food litter and smells, eating and drinking are permitted only in the underground lunchroom which has a snack bar style restaurant, restrooms, and drinking fountains. The restaurant on the surface in the visitor center has a larger menu. Picnic tables are available outdoors at the edges of the parking lots.

8) What other items are not permitted in the cave? Walking sticks, baby strollers and pets (except for service dogs) are not permitted in the cave. For a small fee, the kennel in the visitor center can board your pet while you visit the park. Please do not leave pets in your car, as serious injury or death may occur as a result of the extreme heat. Backpacks for carrying babies are available for purchase in the Visitor Center gift shop.

9) Can we take pictures in the cave? Yes, though remember that camera flashes will not light much of the cave.

10) What is it like in the cave? Carlsbad Cavern is 56°F (13°C) year round, so a light jacket or long-sleeved shirt is recommended. The trails and cave features are electrically lit, but take a flashlight if you like. The cave is very humid, so bring your inhalant medication if you are prone to needing it under these conditions.

11) Are discounts available, such as for groups or AARP? The park does not offer a group rate. Discounts exist with an *America the Beautiful – National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass – Annual Pass, Senior Pass, Access Pass, and Volunteer Pass*. Where a per person entrance fee is charged, the pass admits the cardholder plus three adults. Additional fees are required for guided tours. Ask about these passes at the ticket desk.

12) Is the cave wheelchair accessible? Yes, part of the Big Room tour is wheelchair accessible *with assistance*. Ask for an accessibility guide pamphlet with a map of the wheelchair route at the visitor center information desk. You will find turn-around points on the trail to ensure you avoid steep areas. The park does not provide wheelchairs.

13) What facilities are in the cave? Restrooms, water fountains and a snack bar are located in the underground lunchroom near the elevators. The visitor center on the surface has restrooms, water fountains, book store, restaurant, and gift shop.

14) Can we camp in the park? There is no car/RV campground or overnight parking available in the park. Commercial campgrounds are available at Whites City and in the city of Carlsbad. Backcountry camping requires a permit and a minimum of a half-mile (1 km) hike. Acquire a backcountry permit for free at the visitor center information desk.

15) Can we see the bats year round? Rarely, most of the park's bats migrate south for the winter where their food (insects) is more abundant. Evening Bat Flight ranger talks occur at the Bat Flight Amphitheater mid-May through mid-October. Located just east of the visitor center at the outdoor seating area by the natural entrance to Carlsbad Cavern; the program is free. Cameras are not permitted during the bat flight. Check 575-785-3012 for talk time.

16) Are the bats safe? Yes, bats are safe. They do NOT attack people. Usually it is people who hurt the bats, through loss of habitat or pesticide use. Cameras and cell phones are not allowed during the evening bat flights because both the flash of light and ultrasonic noises from electronics affect the bats.

17) When was the cave found? We will never know. American Indians who lived in the area for centuries and early local residents had knowledge of the cave. We credit local cowboy Jim White for being the first “explorer” of the cave in 1898.

18) How was the cave formed? A sulfuric acid solution dissolved wide passages and rooms from cracks in limestone rock. The stone formed about 250 million years ago from a reef complex along the edge of an inland sea. Much later, geologic forces pushed the buried rock layers up and erosion wore away softer minerals and exposed the ancient reef as the Guadalupe Mountains. The sulfuric acid resulted from leaked hydrogen sulfide gas from deep oil and gas deposits which moved through rock and eventually mixed with rain water percolating down from the surface. After the rock hollowed and the acidic water drained out, dripping mineral-rich water left “decorations” on the caves walls and floors.

19) What are cave formations called? One way to remember is that stalactites hang tight to the ceiling and stalagmites might reach the ceiling one day. Area caves also contain columns, draperies, soda straws and helictites. When water from the surface moves through the ground, it picks up carbon dioxide gas, creating carbonic acid. This weak acid dissolves the limestone; then re-deposits it in the cave as calcite, creating formations or “decorations”.

20) Are there other caves in the area we could visit? Carlsbad Cavern is the only local commercial cave with paved walkways and lights. Rangers lead adventure tours in other park caves with minimal development (see table above). Caves in the park's backcountry may not be entered without a permit. Several undeveloped caves in the park are open to recreational caving, but a permit must be acquired through the park's Cave Resource Office.