



Backcountry Camping



White Sands National Monument offers the opportunity to backcountry camp amongst the glistening gypsum dunes of New Mexico. Deserts have their own unique hazards. The key to having a fun and exciting experience hiking and camping at the monument is preparation and common sense. Your safety is your responsibility.

General Information

Backcountry camping, hiking at least a mile to a camp site, is the only type of camping that is permitted at White Sands National Monument. Car camping and RV camping is not allowed. Due to the hiking distance required those who are not prepared for backpacking may want to consider other camping options in the area. Ask at the visitor center desk for a brochure about area campgrounds.

In order to camp, you must obtain a permit in person at the visitor center. No advance reservations are accepted. A specific campsite will be assigned when the permit is issued. Groups are limited to no more than six people per site. Larger groups should contact the monument to make other arrangements at least two weeks in advance.

There is a cut-off time for issuing backcountry camping permits that varies throughout the year.

Please call (575) 479-6124, ext. 236 to inquire about specific times.

There are 10 primitive backcountry sites along the two-mile trail. These sites are on a first-come, first-served basis. The earlier you arrive, the better chance you have of obtaining a site.

Camping in the dunes requires you to hike up and over steep dunes and loose sand. These sites are primitive and do not have any shade or amenities. The nearest restroom is at the trailhead approximately one mile away from each site. Sites do not have any water. The last place to fill up your water containers is at the visitor center, which is located six miles (10km) from the backcountry parking lot. At least one gallon (4 liters) of water is recommended per person per day. It is vital that you take enough water to last you through the day and overnight. You will not be able to access water during the night.

Fees

Campers are required to pay monument entrance fees as well as camping fees. There are no refunds. There is a 50% discount on camping fees for holders of the Access and Senior interagency passes only.

The discount is only valid for the cardholder. It does not apply to other campers in the group. All fees are collected at the entrance station at the beginning of the Dunes Drive.

Weather

Visitors need to be prepared for a variety of weather conditions, which can change quickly. During the summer months, daytime temperatures can exceed 100°F (38°C) and drop to approximately 65°F (18°C) at night. In winter, nighttime temperatures frequently drop below

freezing. The daily temperature difference can vary from 30°F to 60°F (-1°C to 15°C), especially after the sun sets. Spring is usually very windy. During the summer, thunderstorms can move rapidly into the area. Tents do not protect you from lightning.

Planning and Preparation

The following is a list of highly recommended items for camping at White Sands National Monument:

1. Clothing that can provide comfort in a variety of weather conditions. A wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses are essential for hiking and cutting down on the harsh glare of the sun from the bright white sand.

2. A minimum of one gallon (4 liters) of water per person, per day. Fill water containers at the visitor center. There is no water available in the dunefield.

3. Bring high-energy food and snacks. Open campfires are NOT permitted in the dunes. Make sure you plan accordingly. Small, light-weight camp stoves are allowed.

4. We are surrounded by an active missile range. From time to time, debris from missile tests falls into the monument and is buried by sand. If you see any strange objects, please do not touch them. Make a note of their location and tell a ranger.

5. There are no restroom facilities in the backcountry area. Bury human waste three to six inches (7cm -15cm) and pack out all trash including toilet paper. Consider using a human waste disposal bag to pack out human waste. This will lesson your impact on the dunes.

6. Bring a compass, flashlight, headlamp, whistle, mirror, and first-aid kit. A GPS may be handy but not always reliable here.

7. Make sure your cell phone is fully-charged when you arrive at the monument and bring a portable charger (battery bank if you have one). There are no outlets for electricity available to charge cell phones or other ectronics at the monument.

8. Turn your phone off. Conserving your battery for emergencies could mean life or death. In an emergency, call 911 first. However, data and cellular strength can vary drastically in the monument. For better service, head to higher ground. If you are unable to make a call, you may still be able to text a friend who can call the 911 for help.

Camping Regulations

1. Your camp must be set-up an hour before it gets dark. A tent is highly recommended. It can provide shelter from the weather.

2. Strongly suggested that you do not wander or leave your campsite after dark. It is extremely easy to lost in the dunefield after dark.

3. Camp only in your assigned site within five feet (1.5m)of the site marker.

4. DO NOT camp on top of a dune. Everyone deserves a great view.

5. Sleeping in your vehicle is not permitted.

6. No fires are permitted. Camp stoves are allowed and they must be elevated at least six inches (15cm) above the sand. Heat from campfires and camp stoves may melt the sand.

7. Pack out what you packed in. Do not burn or bury trash. Dumpsters are available at the trailhead.

8. Quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Be respectful of other visitors. No loud music or noises anytime of day.

9. The monument gates are locked every night one hour after sunset. You cannot leave until the next morning.

10. Vacate the site by 1 p. m. the following day. If you wish to renew your permit, you must do so in person at the visitor center the following day.

11. Pets must remain on a six-foot (2cm) leash and under physical control at all times.

12. No metal detectors, fireworks, or glass containers are permitted.

13. Remember everything is protected in a national park. It is unlawful to remove sand, pick/damage plants, or disturb wildlife.

14. All other park regulations apply.

Leave No Trace

In addition to following camping and general park regulations, campers and hikers are asked to follow the principles of Leave No Trace, a minimum impact skills program, designed to help protect the environment. Here are some of the key principles that will help preserve White Sands for generations to come:

1. Hike on the open sand along the edge of the dunes. Avoid the fragile bumpy soil (cryptobiotic crust) in between dunes. When camping restrict your movement in these areas.

2. All trash must be packed out, including toilet paper. Use dumpster located at trailhead to dispose of all trash.

3. Respect wildlife. Do not follow or harass animals. Properly store your food and trash in a ziplock bag in your backpack.

4. Properly dispose of urine and solid waste. If you do not have a human waste disposal bag, make sure you bury solid waste at least 100 feet (30m) from the trail/site and at least three to six inches (7cm -15cm) deep. Cover urine with a fresh layer of sand. Do not urinate on plants.



Scan for more information on cryptobiotic soils

Finding Your Campsite

The backcountry camping trail is marked by orange trail markers with a spade symbol. The wind can erase your footprints in a matter of minutes, and a GPS unit may be unreliable. Always follow trail markers. If you cannot see the next marker, do not continue. Return to your car and report the missing tail markers to a ranger. To assist you in locating your site, a map is posted at the trail head and on the back of your permit.

Camp sites are marked orange trail markers with a tent symbol and the site number. Tents must be placed within five feet of this marker. Camp only in your designated site and keep your permit with you at all times. For your safety, you must be in your campsite and set up by dark. Remember, it is easy to become disoriented in the dunes after dark, so don't stray far from your campsite. Have fun and be safe!



Backcountry camping and site trail markers.



SAVE YOUR BATTERY
Keep it off while hiking
It could save your life!