



## Hiking At White Sands



Is the vast sea of snow-white gypsum dunes beckoning you to go for a hike? The silence and solitude of the dunefield and stunning views of the surrounding mountains will be yours to enjoy. Hiking at White Sands is truly unique. Being prepared will help you enjoy this experience.

### Safety First



Exploring the outdoors comes with risks. The National Park Service works to reduce those risks but your safety depends on your own good judgment, adequate preparation, and constant awareness. Your safety is your responsibility. Your tomorrow depends on the decisions that you make today.

Keep in mind that minor and moderate health or medical issues can be easily exacerbated by hiking up and down steep dunes. Know your limits, pace yourself,

and pay attention to how you're feeling.

Start your hike with a fully charged cellphone. Bring a portable charger if you have one. No outlets for electricity are available at the monument. Turn your cellphone off while hiking. Conserving your battery for emergencies could mean life or death. In an emergency, call 911. Data and cellular signal strength can vary drastically in the monument. You may be able to send a text for help to a friend who can call 911 for you.

### Be Prepared



Remember water is life! Bring enough to survive. Drink water before you start hiking. Have at least one gallon (4L) of water per person per day and high-energy snacks such as fruit and nuts.

Fill up water containers at the visitor center. There is no water available in the dunefield. You will need more water than you think. Sweat evaporates quickly in the desert giving the false impression you are not sweating when in fact you are sweating and losing water quickly.

Take a minimum of two 32 ounce/liter bottles of water per person on every trail, double for longer hikes. When your water is half gone, return to your car.

The sun's reflection off the white sand can cause severe sunburns. Wear a wide-brimmed hat, sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher, sunglasses, and lightweight, loose-fitting clothing with long sleeves and long pants to help protect skin from the sun.

In addition, take the park map, a compass, flashlight/headlamp and extra batteries, whistle, signal mirror, first-aid kit, and extra clothes that can be layered for varying weather on your hike. A GPS unit may be handy but not always reliable here.

Always have a plan when you hike. Tell someone who is not in with you where you are hiking and when you plan to return. Avoid hiking alone if possible. Hiking in groups is the safest way to enjoy nature. Always keep your children in sight. Do not allow them to get ahead of you or fall behind.

When hiking in a group, each member of the group should carry water and food in case the party becomes separated.

Follow the trail markers, look carefully for the next trail marker before continuing. If you cannot see the next marker because of blowing sand or if a marker is down, turn back. Make sure you are off the trail by sunset.

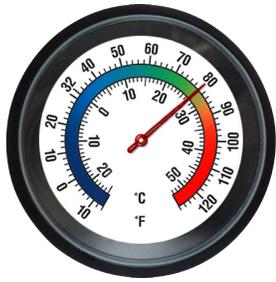
### If You Get Lost Stop! Do not wander!

You may be lost for a longer period of time if you continue to walk around. Stop and sit on top of a dune. Sitting in one spot conserves energy and makes it easier for a search party to find you. If you have cell service, call 911. Describe your location in as much detail as possible and the location

from where you started. Use a small mirror or piece of aluminum foil to flash sunlight at potential rescuers. At night, a camera flash or flashlight can be used. Wandering can endanger your life and can make finding you more difficult.



## Weather



*Know the temperature before you hike. It is recommended that you do not start a hike if the temperature is at or above 85°F.*

Weather in the Tularosa Basin can change quickly. Temperatures can drop very quickly once the sun sets or during storms. Visitors need to be prepared for a variety of weather conditions.

**Wind.** During our windy season, February through May, dust storms can move in fast and reduce visibility, greatly increasing the chances of becoming disoriented. Do not hike out during a windstorm or rely on your footprints to return to your car.

**Heat.** Our summer months, May through August, daytime temperatures can exceed 100°F (38°C) and drop to approximately 65°F (18°C) at night. June is usually the

hottest month of the year. It's recommended that you do not start a hike if the temperature is at or above 85°F (30°C).

**Storms.** July through September is our monsoon season. Storms can quickly build. Lightning often occurs in the desert during thunderstorms, even if there is no rain. Avoiding a thunderstorm before one arrives is the best way to stay safe.

**Cold.** November through February, early morning and nighttime temperatures are frequently below freezing. Daytime temperatures can range from 30°F to 60°F (-1°C to 15°C). Dress in layers that can be easily removed or added as needed.

## Pets

Pets are welcome within the park. Pets must be on a six-foot (2m) leash and under physical control at all times. Carry plastic bags to clean up after your pet. No one

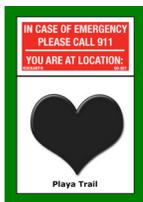
wants to step into pet waste. Many people walk barefoot in the dunes. Your dog will be affected by the radiant heat. Also carry a bowl and extra water for your pet.

## Leave No Trace

Always pack out anything you pack in, including trash such as food wrappers and empty bottles. In addition to aesthetic concerns, there are health concerns for people and wildlife. 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 (30 meters) from the trail and at least three to six inches (7cm -15cm) deep. Cover urine with a fresh layer of sand. Do not urinate on plants.

## Playa Trail



Length: 0.5 mile (800m) round-trip  
Trail marker color: Green  
Trail marker symbol: Heart  
Average Completion Time: 30 minutes  
Difficulty: Easy

The Playa Trail is a short, level hike that leads to a small playa. On this self-guided

hike, you'll discover the importance of a changing playa and how it creates habitats for plants and animals. It may be brown, white, filled with water, or growing crystals. Hike out and see what it looks like today. Please stay on the trail. Footprints destroy the vital cryptobiotic soil crust.

## Dune Life Nature Trail



Length: One mile (1.6 km) loop  
Trail marker color: Blue  
Trail marker symbol: Clubs  
Average Completion Time: 1 hour  
Difficulty: Moderate

Meet Katy the Kit Fox on this family oriented trail. Look for tracks of the animals that call

these dunes home. Kit foxes, badgers, birds, rodents, and reptiles all live in this area. Though not difficult, this hike does require hikers to climb two steep dunes and loose sand. Keep in mind this trail is for observing plant and animal life. If you want to play in the sand, drive further down the road into the heart of the dunes, near the picnic areas.

## Interdune Boardwalk

Length 0.4 (650m) round-trip  
Average Completion Time: 20 minutes  
Difficulty: Easy

Take an easy wheelchair-accessible stroll

through the dunes and experience a different view of the dunefield. The boardwalk is a great place to take a break under the shaded canopy, listen for bird calls, observe lizards, and plants in bloom.

## Backcountry Camping Trail



Length: 2 miles (3.5 km) round-trip  
Trail marker color: Orange  
Trail marker symbol: Spade  
Average Completion Time: 1.5 hours  
Difficulty: Moderate

Although used most frequently by backpackers who want to spend a night under the stars in the dunes, the backcountry camping trail is also open to visitors that

want a shorter hike through the heart of the dunes. This trail is located at the fork near the end of the Dunes Drive. This trail requires hikers to climb over several steep dunes and loose sand. There is no shade, no water, and no toilet facility along this trail. It is recommended that you do not start the hike if the temperature is at or above 85°F (30°C).

## Alkali Flat Trail



Length: 5 miles (8 km) round-trip  
Trail marker color: Red  
Trail marker symbol: Diamond  
Average Completion Time: 3 hours  
Difficulty: Strenuous

Leading you through the Heart of the Sands over unbroken dunes that stretch for miles and unfold into a stunning white vista, the Alkali Flat Trail skirts the edge of what is now the final remnant of Lake Otero.

This trail is not flat! You will be hiking hard up and down dunes all along the way. Wind, temperature, and lack of humidity can make the Alkali Flat Trail even more difficult. At times, you may be the only hiker on the trail. Go only if you are prepared. There is no shade, no water, and no toilet facility along this trail. It is recommended that you do not start the hike if the temperature is at or above 85°F (30°C).

## Off-Trail Hiking

While off-trail hiking is not prohibited, we encourage all visitors to hike established trails to minimize safety concerns. Should you choose to hike off-trail, please follow the safety guidelines outlined above and tell a friend or family member where you are going

and when you plan to return. Do not rely on your footprints. Many people get lost each year in the dunefield. Use a compass, familiarize yourself with landmarks and know how to return to your car!