



Hiking At White Sands



Albert Einstein once said that “the only source of knowledge is experience.” This is especially true when it comes to understanding the nature of the unique environment of White Sands National Monument and the vast wealth of plant and animal life that has adapted to survive here. Venturing out onto any of our five established trails provides you with a first-hand opportunity to experience the timeless majesty and wonder of the dunes. We invite you to take a trek into the heart of the world’s largest gypsum dune field and explore the wonders of White Sands.

Safety First

Your safety is our foremost concern. Before you head out, there are a few things to consider to help ensure that

you have a safe and enjoyable experience when hiking through the monument.

Be Prepared

Wear sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses to protect you from the sun. Take plenty of water and snacks with you. We recommend a minimum of one gallon of water per person per day. Fill up water containers at the visitor

center because there is no water available in the dune field. Temperatures can cool quickly at dusk or after a storm; bring a lightweight jacket or sweatshirt.

Weather

July through September is our monsoon season. Storms can quickly build. Be aware of weather changes and avoid low-lying areas. Lightning often occurs in the desert during thunderstorms, even if there is no rain. Take cover in a building or vehicle if you see a gathering storm or hear thunder. Lie flat on the ground if you

cannot get to either a car or building. The months of February through May are our windy season. 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. Familiarize yourself with landmarks.

If You Get Lost

If you are lost, do not wander around the dunes! Conserve your energy by sitting on top of a dune and wait for a search party. 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. If you have cell service, call the sheriff’s office at (575) 437-2210. Describe your location in as much detail as possible. They will send out appropriate personnel to your aid.

Pets

Pets are welcome within the park. Please remember to keep your pet on a leash at all times both for its safety and out of consideration for other visitors.

Carry plastic bags to clean up after your pet. Remember that your dog will also need water. Carry a bowl and extra water.

Unexploded Ordinance

We are surrounded by an active missile range. From time to time, debris from missile tests falls into the park and gets buried by sand. If you see any strange objects, *please do not touch them* as they may still be able to detonate.

Make a note of their location and tell a ranger what you found and where you found it by going to the entrance station or visitor center. The ranger will dispatch appropriate personnel to remove the object in question.

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.

Though it may be tempting to take home a souvenir from within the monument, *the removal of sand, plants, rocks, wildlife and other natural or historic objects from the park is a violation of federal law and*

carries with it both criminal and civil repercussions. Please leave these treasures for future visitors.

Wild animals are unpredictable and many desert creatures are venomous. Always observe wildlife from a distance. Do not approach them and refrain from touching, teasing, or harrassing snakes, scorpions, and other wildlife.

Playa Trail

Length: 330 yards (300 m) round-trip
Average Completion Time: 20 minutes
Difficulty: Easy

The Playa Trail is a short, level hike that leads to a small playa. Playas are shallow depressions or low-lying areas that

temporarily fill with rainwater from storms and are a common feature of desert environments.

Dune Life Nature Trail

Length: One mile (1.6 km) loop
Average Completion Time: 1 hour
Difficulty: Moderate

Meet Katy the Kit Fox on this family oriented trail and learn about the plants and animals common to the dunes. Though not difficult, this hike does

require hikers to climb two steep dunes and is located along the edge of the dune field where the landscape is heavily vegetated.

Interdune Boardwalk

Length: 650 yards (585 m)
Average Completion Time: 20 minutes
Difficulty: Easy

Fully accessible for people using wheelchairs and strollers, the boardwalk leads you through a fragile interdune area, giving you a close look at many of

the wildflowers that grow here, as well as a chance to see an example of a cryptobiotic crust and a plant pedestal.

Alkali Flat Trail

Length: 5 miles (8 km) round-trip
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. Having once covered 1,600 square miles of the Tularosa Basin during the last ice age, Lake Otero dried up 4,000 years ago. The trail is marked by

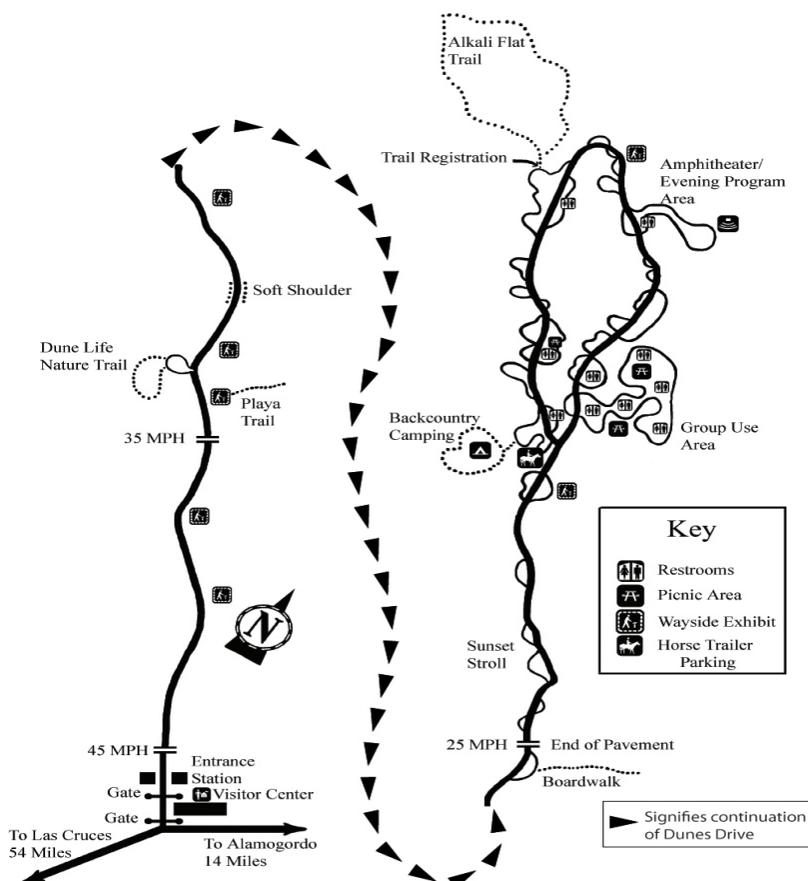
posts so look carefully for the next trail marker before continuing. If you cannot see the next post because of blowing sand and dust or if a marker is down, turn back. Especially during the spring, strong winds can reduce visibility to just a few feet and knock over markers, making it easy to get lost.

Backcountry Camping Trail

Length: 2.2 miles (3.5 km) round-trip
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.



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 rules outlined above and tell a friend or family member where you are going and when you plan to return.