



LET'S PLAN YOUR ADVENTURE!

Follow the steps in this guide to help you get the most out of your visit to a park. You will learn about the park environment, pick an activity that is right for your skill and experience level, and pack the necessary gear for a great adventure.



CHECKLIST: Use this checklist to track your trip planning steps. Find more details on each item inside this guide.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Learn about the park at [NPS.gov](https://www.nps.gov)
- Find out what activities you can do at the park
- Know your limits - Assess your skills, fitness, and experience
- Pick the right activity for YOU
- Look for regulations, permits, and reservations needed for your activity
- Create a backup plan
- Pack the 10 essentials
- Share your Trip Plan with Trusted Contact
- Create an Emergency Plan

ARRIVAL AT THE PARK

- Check park conditions
- Check the 10 Essentials and your gear
- Ask yourself: Are you ready for your activity?
- Put your backup plan into action, if necessary
- Pick up permits

DURING THE TRIP

- Stick to your plan
- Stay within designated areas
- Stay together
- Stay aware of your surroundings
- Keep a safe distance from wildlife
- Check in with yourself: Should you continue?

AFTER THE TRIP

- Check in with your Trusted Contact
- Think about lessons learned
- Share your experience



RANGER TIP

Traveling with friends or family?

Share this guide with them. Everyone should be involved in trip planning.

The best group adventures are the ones everyone is prepared for!



1. LEARN ABOUT THE PARK AT [NPS.GOV](https://www.nps.gov)

Every park environment is unique and can change with the seasons and natural events. Visit the park's website on [NPS.gov](https://www.nps.gov) or on the NPS mobile app to become familiar with the places you will visit. This will help you identify and prepare for hazards in the park.

Consider the following:



Amenities

Does the park have drinking water, park shuttles, or stores to buy food and gear?



Weather

What is the weather forecast during your trip? How will you prepare for it?



Wildlife

What animals live in the park and how will you prepare for a chance encounter?



Terrain

Are there uneven surfaces like unpaved trails or stairs you need to be aware of?



Water

Are there currents or underwater hazards? Is the temperature of the water cold?



Park Alerts

Are there closures, hazards, or other active alerts that may affect your visit?

2. FIND OUT WHAT ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO AT THE PARK

There is more than one way to experience the park. Find a complete list of activities on the park's website under:

Plan Your Visit

>>

Things to do

Explore the pages of the activities that interest you. Find out if the park has Ranger-guided and [Junior Ranger programs](#) and consider participating in them.

3. KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Your experience in the park is yours to decide. Only you know your abilities and your comfort level to select the right activity for you.

Assess the following about yourself:



Skills — What outdoor skills do you have? Have you used them in a park like the one you're visiting?

Experience — How often do you recreate outdoors? Have you recreated in a park like the one you're visiting?

Physical Fitness* — Are you physically fit for your trip? Are there any activities that are beyond your abilities?

Medical Conditions* — Do you have a medical condition that could be worsened by the weather, altitude, or physical exertion?

* Consult a physician if you have any questions on fitness levels, health conditions, or medications required.

4. PICK THE RIGHT ACTIVITY FOR YOU

There is more than one trail to hike, river to paddle, or mountain to climb. Pick an activity that you can safely enjoy during your visit. As you build your skills and experience, you can keep challenging yourself.

Consider the following:

Weather:



- Will the weather make the activity more difficult?
- How can you prepare for it?

Duration:



- How long will it take you to complete the activity?
- Do you have the physical fitness and endurance for it?

Difficulty:



- What is the difficulty level of the activity you'd like to do?
- Is it within your limits and your comfort level?

Skill:



- Does the activity require special skills (e.g., rock climbing)?
- Do you have that skill? If not, how will you learn it before the trip?

Gear:



- Does the activity require special gear (e.g., life jacket, helmet)?
- Do you have or can you get the right gear before your trip?

5. LOOK FOR REGULATIONS, PERMITS, AND RESERVATIONS NEEDED FOR YOUR ACTIVITY



Regulations

Regulations, restrictions, and closures protect park resources and keep visitors safe. Find out more about these rules under “Learn About the Park” on the park’s website.



Permits

Find out if a permit is required for your activity under “Plan Your Visit”. Follow the park’s instructions on how to apply and obtain a permit.



Reservations

Some parks require reservations to enter the park, access an area of the park, and participate in an activity. All reservations can be made on Recreation.gov

6. CREATE A BACKUP PLAN

Sometimes things don’t go as planned.

- The weather forecast changes
- Parking lots are full
- Areas in the park are closed
- You forget to pack an essential gear for the activity
- You simply don’t feel up to the activity you planned

Choose a backup activity that will allow you to enjoy the park and not cancel the trip altogether.



RANGER TIP

Indoor activities are great backup plan options!

- ✦ Park museums
- ✦ Historical buildings
- ✦ Interpretive exhibits

They involve light physical activity and require no special gear.

7. PACK THE 10 ESSENTIALS

The 10 essentials are a collection of first aid and emergency items that can help you in the event of minor injuries, sudden weather changes, or unexpected delays.

Tailor the 10 essentials to your trip! You may need to pack additional items like medication, bug repellent, hiking boots, a life jacket(s), and a helmet(s).

Remember to try your equipment before the trip. Make sure everything works, fits correctly, and you know how to use it properly.



RANGER TIP

Pack a whistle, especially if you are traveling with kids. If someone becomes lost, blowing a whistle can help search parties find them.



The NPS app has park maps that can be downloaded for offline use. Always carry a backup paper map. Your phone battery may not last the whole trip and you could damage or lose your phone.

8. SHARE YOUR TRIP PLAN

Tell a Trusted Contact — who is not going on the trip with you — where you are going, what you are doing, and when you will be back. Ask them to call authorities and share your Trip Plan if you are not back from your trip on time.

A Trip Plan has information that helps authorities respond if an emergency occurs or if you don't return from your trip on time.

Use the Trip Plan template at the end of this guide or create your own.



RANGER TIP

Remember to check in with your Trusted Contact once you get back from your trip.

9. CREATE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Accidents happen. You may become lost or injured while recreating outdoors. Read the Emergency Plan at the end of this guide to learn how to prevent becoming lost or injured and what to do in the event of an emergency.

- Your cell phone is not a substitute for any of the 10 essentials
- You may not have service in the park
- Battery may not last the whole trip

Your cellphone is **NOT** a ...



flashlight



map



survival kit

STEP TWO

ARRIVAL AT THE PARK



1. CHECK PARK CONDITIONS

Stop by a Visitor Center or Ranger Station. Ask a Ranger about the latest park conditions including weather forecast, active alerts, and closures. You can also visit the park's website, download the NPS mobile app, or follow the park on social media for current information.

Ask a Ranger:



Are any areas closed?
(road, trails, campsites, etc.)



What's the weather forecast?
(lightning, high temperatures, snow, etc.)



Is there animal activity?
(sightings, increased activity, etc.)



Are there other alerts?
(fires, water levels, air quality, etc.)



Where can I find drinking water?
(visitor center, along trails, etc.)

2. CHECK THE 10 ESSENTIALS AND YOUR GEAR

Check that you packed the 10 Essentials, any additional gear necessary for your activity (e.g., life jacket) and that they are functional.

3. ASK YOURSELF: ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR PLANNED ACTIVITY?

How are you feeling? Do you have the energy needed for your activity? Remember that you have a backup activity you can do.

4. PUT BACKUP PLAN INTO ACTION, IF NECESSARY

Implement your backup plan if:

- Park conditions have changed
- You don't have the right gear and supplies
- You're not feeling up to the planned activity

Notify your Trip Plan Trusted Contact of your change of plans.

5. PICK UP PERMITS

If a permit is required for your activity, get the permit, pay permit fees, and read all regulations and safety information.



STEP THREE

DURING THE TRIP

1. STICK TO YOUR PLAN

If you change your itinerary or route from the one noted on your Trip Plan, your Trusted Contact will not know where you are. Search and Rescue authorities may have trouble finding you.

If a safety concern impacts your activity, it may be better to turn around.

2. STAY WITHIN DESIGNATED AREAS

Stay on the trail, within established campsites, and other designated areas. You will reduce the risk of becoming lost and injured while protecting the natural resources around you.

3. STAY TOGETHER

If you are traveling with a group, stay together. If you must leave the group, use the buddy system. Separation could lead to getting lost or injured. Refer to the Emergency Plan for more tips on how to avoid becoming lost or injured.

4. STAY AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS



Watch your step



Stay alert for wildlife activity



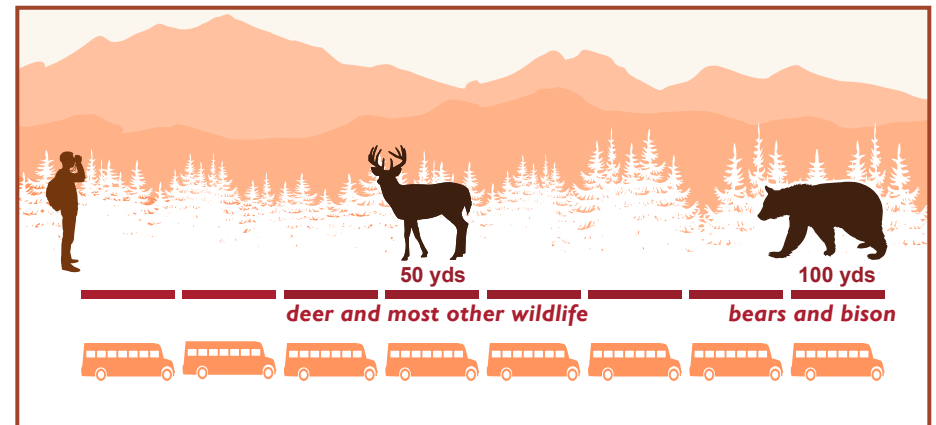
Keep an eye on the weather



Report suspicious activities

5. KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE FROM WILDLIFE

Parks are not petting zoos. Use binoculars or your camera lens to observe wildlife. When you follow [safe wildlife watching practices](#), you protect the health of the wildlife and yourself.



6. CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF: SHOULD YOU CONTINUE YOUR ACTIVITY?

Assess how you feel and if you should continue with your planned activity. Is it time to take a break? Should you turn around?

If something doesn't feel right, don't do it.

You can always visit the park on a day when you are feeling better.



AFTER THE TRIP



1. CHECK IN WITH YOUR TRUSTED CONTACT

Notify your Trip Plan Trusted Contact when you complete each activity.

2. THINK ABOUT LESSONS LEARNED

Review how you prepared for the trip, what went well, and what you can improve for your next visit to a park.

3. SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Tell others your best outdoor tips and your lessons learned to help them prepare for a fun and injury-free adventure. Use #MyParkStory when sharing on social media.



RANGER TIP

Use the NPS Trip Planning Guide to plan every trip to a park. Each time you'll learn something new.

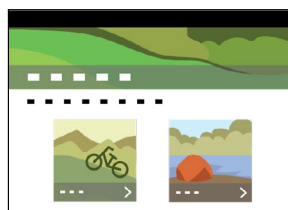
Share this guide with your family and friends. Encourage them to use it! Help them have a adventure and injury-free visit.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



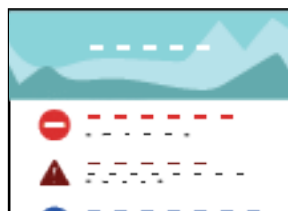
Junior Ranger Park Explorer

Traveling with kids? Get them involved in the planning process! The Junior Ranger Park Explorer booklet is full of fun activities that will help them prepare for their adventure.



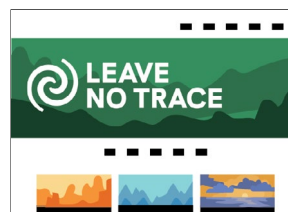
Health and Safety Tips

Whether you are fishing, biking, or watching wildlife, the Health and Safety website has safety tips tailored to your activity in a park.



Active Alerts in Parks

Visit the active alerts page to find timely information about the park's conditions including hazards and closures that may affect your visit to the park.



Leave No Trace

Help protect parks by practicing Leave No Trace principles. You can learn more about these important practices by visiting www.LNT.org.

NPS Sample Trip Plan

Form 10-1700 (Rev 3/23)

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
December 2022



WHAT IS A TRIP PLAN?

Use this sample template to create your Trip Plan which captures key information that Search and Rescue authorities will need if you don't return home from your trip when expected.

This form is ideal for capturing details of a day-long or overnight trip. If you are planning a longer visit or are traveling with a large group, use multiple pages of the Trip Plan or use your own extra paper.

A Trip Plan is **NOT** required to visit a national park.

A Trip Plan is **NOT** required to seek help during an emergency.

A Trip Plan is **NOT** a substitute for required activity permits.

DISCLAIMER

The TRIP PLAN does not guarantee your safety or rescue. It is the VISITOR's responsibility to accept the risks inherent with their trip and to be self-reliant in the event of an emergency. The TRIP PLAN relies on the VISITOR providing correct information to the TRUSTED CONTACT. Search and rescue efforts can be substantially impeded if:

- Incorrect information is on the Trip Plan
- The Visitor deviates from their Trip Plan
- The Trusted Contact does not receive the Trip Plan or
- The Trusted Contact does not contact authorities.

INSTRUCTIONS



VISITOR

The more details you provide the more help Search and Rescue authorities will have in the event of an emergency.

1. Leave this form with a Trusted Contact who is not going on the trip
2. Notify Trusted Contact if you put your Backup Plan in action
3. Notify Trusted Contact when you complete each activity
4. **Do not leave Trip Plan with the park, they will not accept it**

TRUSTED CONTACT

You have been nominated as the Trusted Contact for the Visitor listed in this form. If they do not return from their activity by the expected date and time noted in this form:



1. Try contacting the Visitor using the contact number listed under the WHO section on page 2
2. If you do not hear from them, contact authorities and share with them the information on this Trip Plan



WHO?

PRIMARY CONTACT:

Name: _____

Age: _____ Phone number: _____

Emergency distress alerting device type:

Other contacts: _____ Total participant count: _____

Name: _____

Age: _____ Phone number: _____

Name: _____

Age: _____ Phone number: _____

Name: _____

Age: _____ Phone number: _____



WHERE?

Park name: _____

Visitor center(s) name and number:

Travel or arrival method: _____

Accommodation name(s) - e.g. hotel, campgrounds:



WHEN?

Date & time of arrival at park: _____

Date & time of departure from park: _____

Date & time of expected return: _____



WHAT?

Activity: _____

Start location: _____

Start date & time: _____

End location: _____

End date & time: _____

Activity: _____

Start location: _____

Start date & time: _____

End location: _____

End date & time: _____

Backup plan:

Activity: _____

Start location: _____

Start date & time: _____

End location: _____

End date & time: _____



EQUIPMENT

Motor vehicle:

Make: _____

Model: _____

Color: _____

License: _____

Bicycle:

Make: _____

Model: _____

Color: _____

Backpack:

Description: _____

Water vessel:

Camping tent:

Other (e.g. clothing):



Accidents happen. You may get lost or injured while recreating outdoors. Help can take hours or days depending on your location, weather, and resources. Read and practice the Outdoor Emergency Plan to learn how you can prevent getting lost or injured and what to do in case it happens. Use the [NPS Trip Planning Guide](#) to plan your visit and include any family or friends traveling with you.

PREVENT GETTING LOST OR INJURED

BEFORE THE TRIP

Get a park map – Print one from the park’s website, download one from the [NPS app](#), or pick one up at the Visitor Center. Consider a trail or topographic map if your activity requires a more detailed layout. Practice reading the map.

Review your route – Review the map and your planned route. Take note of landmarks you can use as a reference point.

Pack the [10 Essentials](#) – Practice using your compass or handheld GPS. Pack extra batteries for your flashlight.

Pack a whistle – Blowing a whistle helps people find you and saves your energy from yelling.

Pack a mirror – Flashing your mirror helps signal people if you become lost and mirrors don’t run out of battery.

Wear bright clothing – Make yourself easier to see in the case of a Search and Rescue event.

Fill out a [Trip Plan](#) – Leave it with a Trusted Contact who is not going on the trip with you.

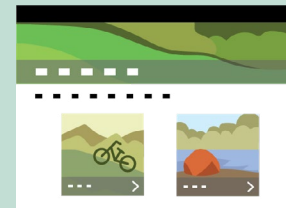
DURING THE TRIP

Stay on trail and designated areas – Reduce the risk of getting lost or injured while protecting the natural resources around you.

Stay aware – Pay attention to trail junctions, information signs, and landmarks. Frequently check that you are still on your planned route.



RANGER TIP



With a group? Check out the [Outdoor Emergency Plan](#) article to learn how to keep a group together.



Traveling with kids? Check out the [Junior Ranger Park Explorer](#) where they can learn about Hug-A-Tree.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET LOST

Help can take hours or days depending on your location, weather, and resources. Use your knowledge, skills, and tools to retrace your steps if it is safe to do so. If you call for help and are waiting for rescue, follow the steps below to inventory your resources and conserve energy.

1. RETRACE YOUR STEPS



Use your knowledge, skills, and tools to find your way.

- **Stop and breathe** – Take a moment to calmly assess your situation.
- **Find your location** – Use your map, compass, handheld GPS, or visible landmarks to try to find your location.
- **Retrace your steps** – If it is safe to do so, retrace your steps to get back on your planned route.

2. CALL FOR HELP



If you cannot retrace your steps:

- **Call 911** – Tell them:
 - GPS coordinates from your phone, if available.
 - Name of the trail or area of the park where you started your activity.
 - Your last known location before you became lost.
 - Description of your surroundings including visible landmarks.
 - Types and colors of clothing you are wearing.
 - Equipment you are carrying.
 - Any medical conditions you may have.
- **Stay put** – Changing location will make it difficult for authorities to find you. Move only if there is an immediate threat to your life.

3. WAIT FOR HELP



If you do not have a cellphone or cell reception to call 911:

- **Find shelter** – Find a place that can protect you from natural elements such as sun, rain, snow, etc..
- **Inventory and conserve your resources** – Check your 10 essentials and other items you packed to help you stay safe until help arrives.
- **Keep warm** – The temperature outside can change throughout the day. If you begin to feel cold put on any extra layers of clothing you have with you.



Do not build a fire if there is a [high fire risk at the park](#) or if it is [wildland fire season](#). It could cause a wildfire and put you and others at great risk.

- **Signal for help** – Use the following signals to help search and rescue authorities find you.
 - [Blow your whistle often](#) – Save your energy by not yelling. Blow your whistle three times, take a break, and blow three times again.
 - [Flash your flashlight](#) – Flash the SOS pattern: three times quickly, three times slowly, three times quickly. Use your flashlight wisely as this will drain the batteries.
 - [Flash your mirror](#) – To alert planes and helicopters flying in the area.
- **Make yourself visible** – Lay out the shelter from your 10 essentials or use rocks to create a shape that can be seen by aircrafts flying in the area.
- **Conserve energy** – Wait patiently for help to arrive.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET INJURED

MINOR INJURIES



When dealing with minor injuries such as scrapes, bruises, and muscle strain:

- **Treat the injury** – Use the First Aid kit from your 10 Essentials to clean and cover the affected area.
- **Rest** – Take rest in a shaded area, if possible.
- **Drink water** – Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water.
- **Eat a salty snack** – This will give you energy and help replenish electrolytes.
- **Turn around** – If the injury does not allow you to safely finish the activity.



MAJOR INJURIES



In the event of chest pain, difficulty breathing, or a major injury such as major bleeding or broken bones:

- **Call 911** – Tell them:
 - About your injury and any medical conditions you have.
 - If you have a first aid kit and any equipment that might help you stabilize the injury.
 - GPS coordinates from your phone, if available.
 - Name of the trail or area of the park where you are.
 - Description of your surroundings including visible landmarks.
- **Flag down help** – If there is no cellphone reception, flag down someone and ask them to travel back to an area with reception and call 911.
- **Stay put and minimize movement** – This will prevent further injuries. Move to another location only if there is an imminent threat to life.
- **Control bleeding** – Apply direct pressure to the wound.
- **Keep warm** – The temperature outside can change throughout the day. If you begin to feel cold put on any extra layers of clothing you have with you.
- **Make yourself visible** – If you can, lay out the shelter from your 10 essentials or use rocks to create a shape that can be seen by planes or helicopters flying above.
- **Stay safe** – Follow the steps for minor injuries while waiting for help.

SOMEONE IN YOUR GROUP IS INJURED?

- Send two or more people to alert authorities while the rest of the group stays with the injured person.
- If there is only you and the injured person, follow the steps above to help stabilize them and then go look for help.