



Frequently Asked Questions

1) **When is the park open and how much does it cost?** The park is open every day, except December 25, weather and road conditions permitting. Purchase cave tickets at the visitor center information desk. A general admission ticket is required for anyone entering Carlsbad Cavern. Adults 16 years and older are \$6, children 15 and younger are free. There are additional fees for guided tours.

2) **Does the park give senior or other discounts?** Discounts are available only to those holding a Golden Age Passport, National Park Pass, Golden Eagle Passport, or Golden Access Passport card. They cover the general admission tickets only. Guided tours require an additional fee. Ask about these passes at the information desk.

3) **When is the cave open?** The park has two “seasons.” If you’re unsure, please call the park at 505.785.2232.

<u>Season</u>	<u>Visitor Center Hours</u>	<u>Cave Trails Open</u>	<u>Last Entry Natural Entrance</u>	<u>Last Entry Elevator/Big Room</u>	<u>Last Elevator Out/ Cave Trails Close</u>
Labor Day to Memorial Day	8 a.m. – 5 p.m.	8:30 a.m.	2 p.m.	3:30 p.m.	4:45 p.m.
Summer (Memorial Day to Labor Day)	8 a.m. – 7 p.m.	8:30 a.m.	3:30 p.m.	5 p.m.	6:30 p.m.

4) **How do we get to the park?** From the city of Carlsbad, go south on US Highway 62/180 about 20 miles. Turn right at Whites City and go 7 miles to the visitor center. Sections of the park road are steep and winding.

5) **How can we see the cave?** There are several tours of Carlsbad Cavern, including self- guided and ranger- led tours. A general admission ticket allows access to two self- guided trails. Get all tickets at the visitor center desk.

The **Natural Entrance Trail** is a steep 1/4- mile (2 km) descent equivalent to about 79 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 1/4- 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, trail signs provide basic cave information. For in- depth descriptions of the cave’s features, geology, and history, rent a handheld audio guide for \$3.

6) **Are there any guided tours?** Several guided tours are available. Reservations are required for all guided tours. For advanced reservations, call 1.800.967.2283. 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. Guided tours are half price for children ages 15 and younger and Golden Age and Golden Access cardholders.

<u>Tour</u>	<u>Offered</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u>Minimum Age</u>	<u>Group Size</u>	<u>Length</u>
Kings Palace	Daily	10:00 and 2:00*	\$8	4	75	1.5 hrs
Left Hand Tunnel	Daily	9:00 AM	\$7	6	15	2 hrs
Lower Cave	M- F	1:00 PM	\$20	12	12	3 hrs
Slaughter Canyon Cave	Sat & Sun*	10:00 AM**	\$15	6	25	2 hrs
Hall of the White Giant	Saturday	1 PM	\$20	12	8	4 hrs
Spider Cave	Sunday	1 PM	\$20	12	8	4 hrs

*Memorial Day to Labor Day KP tours also at 11:00 and 3:00. **SCC Offered daily in summer at 10 AM and 1 PM

☞ Tours are listed based on difficulty—from relatively easy to strenuous.

7) **What should we do if we have only short time to spend in the park?** Have about an hour? Then, choose the most famous part of the cave—the Big Room! Enter the cave by elevator and walk the Big Room self- guided tour. To learn more as you walk, rent the audio guide.

8) **Is the cave wheelchair accessible?** Yes, part of the Big Room tour is wheelchair accessible with assistance. Ask for an accessibility guide pamphlet at the visitor center information desk. It has a map of the wheelchair route. Turn- around points ensure you avoid steep areas. **The park does not provide wheelchairs.**

- 9) **Can we take pictures in the cave?** Yes, but remember that camera flashes will not light much of the cave. Cameras, including video cameras and cell phone cameras, are not permitted during the bat exit flight.
- 10) **Can we take food and drinks with us into the cave?** Only plain water, please. Eating and drinking anything but water is not allowed on cave trails because food litter and smells could make a mess of trails and attract animals, like raccoons and skunks, into the cave. You may eat and drink in underground lunchroom only where you will find a snack bar, restrooms, and drinking fountains. The restaurant on the surface in the visitor center has a large menu. Picnic tables are available outdoors at the edges of the parking lots.
- 11) **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. Backpacks for carrying babies are available for purchase in the visitor center gift shop. Also, for a small fee, pets are sheltered in a kennel in the visitor center while you visit the park. Pets must not be left in your car if the outside temperature is more than 70°F (21°C), as heat may cause serious injury or death.
- 12) **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 bring a flashlight if you like. The cave is very humid, bring your inhaler if you use one. The trails are steep, so wear sturdy, closed- toe shoes.
- 13) **What facilities are in the cave?** Restrooms, drinking fountains and a snack bar are located in the underground lunchroom near the elevators only. On the surface, there are restrooms, fountains, a bookstore, a restaurant and a gift shop.
- 14) **Can we camp in the park?** There is no campground in the park. Overnight parking is not allowed. Commercial campgrounds are available at Whites City and in the city of Carlsbad. Backcountry camping requires a permit and a minimum half- mile (1 km) hike. Get a backcountry permit for free at the visitor center.
- 15) **When can we see the bats?** From about mid- April to mid- October, thousands of bats fly out of Carlsbad Cavern every evening, weather permitting, to eat insects. The free evening Bat Flight ranger talks start in mid- May at the Bat Flight Amphitheater. Check with a ranger for talk time or call 505.785.3012. **Cameras are not permitted during the bat flight.**
- 16) **Are the bats safe?** Yes, bats are safe. They do NOT attack people. Usually, people hurt bats through loss of habitat, pesticide use, or fearful acts due to misunderstanding. Lights on video recorders or from camera flashes bother the bats, so cameras are not permitted during the bat flight. You won't see them in the cave, but an exhibit in the visitor center can tell you more. Bats do much good worldwide, like eating insects and pollinating flowers.
- 17) **When was Carlsbad Cavern found?** We will never know. Native Americans who lived in the area for centuries and early local residents knew about the cave. We credit Jim White for being the first “explorer” of the cave in 1898.
- 18) **How was the cave formed?** The cave was dissolved along cracks and faults in the limestone rock by sulfuric acid. The limestone was laid down about two- hundred and fifty million years ago, as part of a reef complex along the edge of an inland sea. Seventeen to twenty million years ago, the ancient reef rocks that had been buried under thousands of feet of younger rocks began to lift upwards. Tectonic forces pushed the buried rock layers up and erosion wore away softer minerals to expose the ancient reef as the Guadalupe Mountains. Deep in the basin, a brine originating from oil and gas deposits and rich in hydrogen sulfide was forced into the limestone at the edge of the basin. When this brine encountered oxygen- rich rainwater moving down through the rock, it created sulfuric acid. This acid dissolved the limestone creating cave passages. As the Guadalupe Mountains continued to lift up, the water drained out of the cave allowing fresh water to percolate through and leave minerals on the ceiling, walls, and floors that we know as cave decorations.
- 19) **What are the formations called?** Scientists call them speleothems. The carrot- like ones clinging “tight” to the ceiling are stalactites. Stalagmites “might” reach the ceiling. There are also columns, draperies, soda straws, popcorn and helictites. Rain water trickles down through the soil and picks up carbon dioxide gas, creating carbonic acid, which acid dissolves the limestone, and then re- deposits it in the cave as calcite “decorations.”
- 20) **Are there other caves in the area we could visit?** Carlsbad Cavern is the only local commercial cave with paved walkways, handrails and lights. Park rangers also lead tours through Spider Cave and Slaughter Canyon Cave (see above table). Both have minimal development. Various undeveloped (wild) caves may be explored on nearby US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands, check with these agencies for access and locations.