



Taking Great Photos in the Dunes



*A*nyone can take great pictures at White Sands, as long as you have a camera, charged batteries, and inspiration. You do not need an expensive camera to capture the beauty of the dunes. Use these techniques to learn to take pictures like a pro!

The shifting light, shadows, and surreal landscape make White Sands a photographer's paradise. However, it is easy to become disoriented in the dunefield especially when looking for the perfect photography spot. More than a few photographers have an unplanned night in the dunes after getting lost while taking photos.



Safety First

Have a plan. Tell someone, who is not with you, where you are going and when you plan to return. Use park trail markers. Carry a park map and compass. Orient yourself to landmarks such as water towers and know how to return to your car. Have a fully charged cell phone and conserve battery power to call

911 in case of an emergency. Be prepared for changing weather conditions and bring plenty of water - at least a gallon a day per person or 2 quarts for shorter trips. Do not touch strange objects you find; they may be unexploded debris from the active missile range that surrounds us.

Camera Care

The dunes can be a dangerous environment for your digital camera. Blowing sand can scratch the lens, penetrate the case, ruin the internal electronics, and clog buttons and dials. Be careful when and where you change your camera lenses. Always take a camera bag or backpack to store your camera when not in use. Use a soft microfiber cloth to clean the sand off your camera. Do not use canned air to clean your camera.

Time of Day

Most professionals know the golden hours are around two hours

after sunrise and two hours before sunset. Every day is different. Sometimes there are crystal-clear views of the surrounding mountains and sometimes there are awesome cloud formations that change hues by the minute.



Change Your Point of View

Climb high! Hike to the top of the highest dune around - the highest ones are toward the end of Dunes Drive.

Get down! Drop to your knees and look up. Yuccas against the sky and the delicacy of dune grasses are especially interesting from a low angle.



Avoid symmetry! Most beginners tend to center objects and include the entire object in the frame. For a more interesting photo, shoot slightly off center and only include half of the object or two-thirds of it in the frame.

Show depth! Placing a plant or rock in the foreground of your photo will help the viewer see the depth and distance in your photograph. Give the viewer an object which will help them understand size and distance of your intended subject.

Get close! The patterns left in the sand by wind blowing grasses and leaves are fascinating. The interdunal areas are great places to find animal tracks and rugged, gnarly plant growth.



Look for Untouched Places

The biggest dunes don't always make the best photographs. Because they are often the most visited, they will likely have human footprints all over them. If you are looking to photograph some undisturbed dunes, then head out towards the edges of the dunefield.



Watch Where You Walk

Avoid walking through the middle of dunes, since that will disturb those nice lines in the sand and the opportunity to photograph the dune. Instead, walk around dunes, or only walk through dunes you know you don't want to photograph.

Look for Layers and Shadows

Many dunefields are surrounded by large mountain ranges, so you can create some great images by layering the dunes with mountains in the background. You can also strengthen a photo by including stark contrast between a sunlit sand dune and the shadow behind it. Look for dunes that run north or south, especially during sunrise or sunset.

Control Your Subject Matter

Try to not include too much of the surrounding mountains or the viewer's eye may lose focus on the sand dunes as your main subject in the foreground.

The most important thing to remember is that the photographs you take are your own view of the subject and for your own enjoyment. Taking good photographs is a way to record your memories and to share them with family and friends.

If you see a good photo, take it. Try not to get so wrapped up in all the technical aspects of taking the photo that you miss the opportunity. Go out, have fun, enjoy the dunes and remember "Take only photographs; leave only footprints."

