

SUNSET CRATER

AREA INFORMATION SHEET

Sunset Crater National Monument
Rt. 3, Box 149; Flagstaff, AZ 86001
(602)527-7042

LOCATION

Sunset Crater National Monument is a 3,040 acre natural unit of the National Park System located in a forested area northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona. To get to Sunset Crater, drive north out of Flagstaff on Highway U.S. 89 about 15 miles (24 km). Turn right on the paved loop road (U.S. Forest Service road 545) and continue driving for two miles (3.2 km) until you come to the Sunset Crater Visitor Center. You can get information on what to do and see at the Visitor Center.

ACCESS

Plane, train or bus transportation will bring park visitors to Flagstaff and from there, rent-a-car, bus or aerial tours may be arranged. The monument is open all year. Roads going through the monument are usually passable except for a few hours after heavy snow storms. There is no entrance or admission fee.

NATURAL FEATURES

Sunset Crater is the most recent volcanic cinder cone in the San Francisco Peaks Volcanic Field, a volcanic area containing more than 400 volcanoes. Dendrochronologists, scientists who study the growth of tree rings, have determined that the eruption of Sunset Crater began between the growing seasons of A.D. 1064 and 1065. The eruption may have taken up to 200 years to complete. Associated with the volcanic cinder cone are lava flows, a lava tube (ice cave), spatter cones, squeeze-ups and more; all of which may be seen in the monument. The ashfall from Sunset Crater covered an area of about 800 square miles, including a large part of the desert country to the northeast of Sunset Crater. The ash created a water conserving mulch over the desert soil and made it possible for Indians to farm the area 800 years ago. Next to their fields they built the stone villages that are still visible at Wupatki National Monument today.

VISITOR/INFORMATION CENTER

The Sunset Crater Visitor Center is open every day except Christmas and New Year's Day. Summer hours (Memorial Day to mid-August) are 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.. Off season hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.. The Visitor Center serves as a sales outlet for the Southwest Parks and Monuments Association. Contact the monument for a list of publications available to purchase.

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

Conducted walks, evening campfire programs, the O'Leary Bus Trip and other interpretive activities are available during the summer months. A schedule of summer interpretive activities may be obtained at the Visitor Center. Visitor Center orientation talks are given to organized groups upon request.

TRAILS

The Lava Flow Trail is an easy one mile (1.6 km) loop that begins near the base of Sunset Crater, two miles (3.2 km) east of the Sunset Crater Visitor Center. It takes 30 to 45 minutes to complete the walk. Self-guiding trail booklets are available at the Contact Station which is located at the trail head. Hiking on Sunset Crater is prohibited due to erosion. Those wishing to look into Sunset Crater should sign up for the O'Leary Peak Bus Trip (summer only). Extended hiking trails are available in Coconino National Forest. Interested persons should write to the Forest Supervisor, Coconino National Forest, 2323 East Greenlaw Lane; Flagstaff, Arizona 86001.

WEATHER

The Sunset Crater Visitor Center is at an elevation of 7,000 feet (2,100 m) above sea level. Summer daytime temperatures typically range from 70 to 85⁰F (21 to 29⁰C); nights are usually cool with a range of 35 to 50⁰F (2 to 10⁰C). Autumn days are pleasant but nights may be chilly. Snow is common from November to March, with light snows coming as late as May. It is recommended that you carry tire chains during winter months. Spring can be quite windy making a visit unpleasant at times. Average annual precipitation is 16 inches (40.6 cm). About one-third of this precipitation comes from thunderstorms during the months of July and August.

RESTRICTIONS

Hiking on Sunset Crater is not allowed. All vehicles are restricted to designated roadways. The collection of natural objects and firewood inside the monument boundaries is prohibited. The use of firearms is not allowed. Pets are not allowed on the Lava Flow Trail or in the Visitor Center. In areas where pets are allowed, they must be on a leash or kept under physical control at all times.

PICNICKING

There are picnic areas located along the loop road. A few picnic tables are located at the Visitor Center as well as across the road from the Lava Flow Trail, two miles (3.2 km) east of the Sunset Crater Visitor Center. Seven miles (11.2 km) east of the Sunset Crater Visitor Center is the Painted Desert Vista Picnic Area.

CAMPING

Bonito Campground, located directly across the road from the Sunset Crater Visitor Center, contains 44 sites and is open April 15 to November 1. The camping fee is \$7.00 per night.

SERVICES

The nearest stores, gas stations and lodging facilities are located in Flagstaff. Flagstaff is 15 miles (24 km) southwest of the Sunset Crater Visitor Center. For specific information on motels and restaurants in Flagstaff, please contact the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce, 101 West Santa Fe Avenue; Flagstaff, Arizona 86001.

