

Assateague Island National Seashore Backcountry Camping

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Assateague Island National Seashore has two oceanside and four bayside backcountry camp sites in Maryland that are accessible to back-packers, canoers, or kayakers. No camping is permitted in Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in VA. Distance to the backcountry sites from the Sinepuxent Ranger Station in Maryland is 2.5 to 13 miles; from the Toms Cove Visitor Center in Virginia the distance is 12.5 to 22.5 miles.

Backcountry Regulations:

- ☐ Permittee must be 18 years or older.
- ☐ Campers must have a backcountry permit attached to their pack at all times while in the backcountry.
- ☐ Campers must have appropriate equipment for backcountry conditions. Raingear is required. Insect repellent is highly recommended.
- ☐ Transportation of campers and/or any of their equipment by vehicle (including those with an Over-Sand Vehicle permit) or by motorized boat is prohibited.
- ☐ You may not camp anywhere other than the site(s) listed on your permit. Once your permit is issued, you may not change your itinerary. No exceptions.
- ☐ At oceanside campsites you must camp within the posted boundaries. Camping is not allowed on the beach or in the dunes.
- ☐ At bayside campsites, you must camp within 50 feet of the fire rings. Please do not move fire rings.
- ☐ Backpackers' vehicles must be parked at the North Beach Ranger Station; paddlers must park at the Old Ferry Landing Parking Area or Bayside Picnic Area. Virginia backcountry campers should ask the Toms Cove Visitor Center staff for parking information. All vehicles must display a parking tag which you should obtain at the time your backcountry permit is issued.
- ☐ Fires are permitted only within the fire rings provided in the bayside campsites. Do not move fire rings. At the oceanside campsites, fires are allowed only on the beach below the high tide line.
- ☐ Only dead wood on the ground may be collected to use as firewood. Driftwood is scarce; do not
- count on its availability. Burning trash is prohibited.
- ☐ Do not leave fires unattended. All fires must be completely extinguished with water. Do not cover them with sand.
- ☐ Please protect wildlife by securing your food and keeping a clean campsite. Petting, feeding, or approaching any wildlife, including horses, is prohibited.
- ☐ You must pack out all of your trash. Do not throw trash into toilets. Trash bags are available upon request.
- ☐ Entering or approaching any buildings or closed areas is prohibited.
- ☐ Hunting camps are not permitted.
- ☐ All pets are prohibited.

The National Park Service encourages the practice of **Leave-No-Trace** camping techniques while visiting Assateague Island National Seashore. Information about **Leave-No-Trace** skills and ethics is available at the Ranger Station and Visitor Centers.

Obtaining a Permit:

A Backcountry Camping Permit is required for use of backcountry sites on Assateague Island. Permits may be obtained at the North Beach Ranger Station in Maryland or the Toms Cove Visitor Center in Virginia. There is a \$5 fee for the permit which may be issued for up to 7 days per trip.

Due to sudden and severe changes in weather, advance reservations are not accepted. Permits are issued on the day of departure on a first-come, first-served basis.

Park/Refuge entrance fees are also required.

Check-In Times are based on the distance of the campsite from your departure point. Permits will not be issued after the times listed. You may obtain time of sunset by calling 410-641-3030 or on the internet under "Ocean City, Maryland" at http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/RS_OneYear.html.

Please consider your level of experience and weather conditions and adjust your start time accordingly.

Campground	Maryland departures	Virginia departures
Tingles Island	2 hours before sunset 3 miles	8 hours before sunset 22.5 miles
Little Levels	2 hours before sunset 4 miles	8 hours before sunset 21 miles
Pine Tree	2 hours before sunset 6 miles	8 hours before sunset 19.5 miles
Green Run	4 hours before sunset 10.5 miles	6 hours before sunset 15 miles
State Line	4 hours before sunset 11 miles	4 hours before sunset 13 miles
Pope Bay	4 hours before sunset 14 miles	4 hours before sunset 12.5 miles

Getting There:

When hiking on the beach or camping at the oceanside sites, expect to encounter up to 145 motor vehicles with Over-Sand Vehicle permits along the waters edge, especially during the summer months.

Transportation of backcountry campers and/or equipment by motor vehicle is prohibited.

In Maryland, canoe rentals are available on Assateague Island from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Call the MD Coastal Bays Program at (410) 213-2297. In the off-season, contact the Ocean City Chamber of Commerce at 410-213-0552 for local rentals. In Virginia, year-round, call the Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce at 757-336-6161 for local rentals. *Many outfitters will not rent canoes or kayaks during a small craft advisory.*

Site Description and Facilities:

No fresh water is available in the backcountry. You must carry in what you will need. One gallon per person per day is the recommended minimum. Potable water is available at the Sinepuxent District Ranger Station.

Oceanside campsites:

- camping allowed only within the posted campsite boundaries
- designated by red boundary posts
- are general camping areas which accommodate 25-30 people
- shared picnic tables and chemical toilet

Bayside sites:

- wooded (except Pope Bay – limited shade)
- individual sites with picnic table and fire ring
- restricted to a 50' radius of the fire rings
- share a chemical toilet
- size limitations:
 - Tingles Island & Pine Tree limited to 5 groups and/or 25 people
 - Green Run limited to 3 groups and/or 20 people
 - Pope Bay limited to 2 groups and/or 10 people

Bayside campsites may have high concentrations of biting mosquitoes and flies from April through October. Camping on the bayside during the summer months is not recommended.

Periods of Use:

Oceanside sites are usually open year-round; however, one or both oceanside sites may be closed during the spring and summer due to bird nesting. Bayside sites are open year-round except for a brief period in the fall due to hunting. This period traditionally includes one week in mid-late October and a two-week period starting the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Please call the Ranger Station at (410) 641-3030 for designated hunting seasons each year.

Occasionally, the park and/or backcountry campsites may be closed due to severe weather. You should obtain current weather information before starting out.

Paddlers should obtain marine weather for Coastal Waters from Fenwick Island to Chincoteague Island by calling 410-641-3030 or at: <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/data/WBC/CWF/WBCCWFAKQ.1.txt>

Backcountry Safety – Your Responsibility:

Travel in the backcountry has inherent risks. Rescue is not a certainty. Backcountry permittees assume complete responsibility for their own safety. Your safety depends on your own good judgment, adequate preparation and constant attention. Proper equipment and the knowledge to use it are essential for a safe trip. Backcountry users should be in good physical condition and able to survive on their own.

Finding the Sites:

Hikers will find 12" x 12" signs on the beach close to the dunes and on the Back Trail pointing in the direction of the campsite. Kilometer markers are also posted as points of reference. Always pay attention to your location; signs may be missing due to storm washouts. For paddlers, bayside signs are located on the marsh edge upon approach to the sites. Note: No backcountry directional signs are located on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

Coordinates of the backcountry sites are listed on this map for use with a GPS unit. USGS topographic maps are highly recommended for paddlers and can be purchased at the visitor center in Maryland or by calling the USGS at 1-800-627-0039. For backcountry use in Maryland order: Tingles Island, MD (MD0218) and Whittington Point, MD-VA (MD0231). For Virginia order: Boxiron, MD (MD0028) and Chincoteague East, VA (VA0181).

Health and Safety – Your Responsibility:

Due to high winds and soft sands, paddling and hiking can be unexpectedly rugged, even for the experienced. Use long tent pegs to secure your tent in the sand.

Rapid weather changes are common. Always check the weather forecast and do not hike or paddle when extreme weather or coastal storms are predicted. Get off the bay or beach during thunderstorms, but do not get under a tree.

Paddlers are strongly discouraged from beginning a backcountry trip during small craft advisories. If whitecaps are present on the bay, we do not recommend paddling.

The U. S. Coast Guard requires a personal flotation device for each occupant of a watercraft.

Tidal currents are strong around Chincoteague Island. The general tidal range is about one foot, but extreme monthly lows can result in some "walking" of the watercraft. Shallow waters are the general rule in the bay, although deep troughs do exist. Stay close to the shoreline. Wear foot protection.

Hypothermia, a life threatening condition involving the lowering of body core temperature, can develop at any time of the year under certain circumstances. Wet clothing, wind and fatigue can contribute to it. Always carry rain gear, extra clothing and high-energy food.

Biting insects and ticks are abundant during warm months. The potential for Lyme disease exists on Assateague Island. For more information on Lyme disease, stop by the visitor center or ranger station. Biting flies are abundant during the humid, summer months. Mosquitoes are abundant from mid-May until frost.

Poison Ivy is common in woods and shrubs.

