



Course Overview

Joshua Tree Backpacking for Veterans

Joshua Tree National Park is an internationally known climbing and hiking destination set against the backdrop of one of California's most surreal desert landscapes. Much of the 800,000 acres of park is designated as wilderness today. These regions are the **ancestral lands** of the Yuhaviatam/Maarenga'yam (Serrano), Cahuilla, Newe (Western Shoshone), Chemehuevi, Southern Paiute and Cocopah (Xawitł kwñchawaay) nations.

Two distinctly different deserts, the Sonoran and the Mojave, merge at a transition zone where one can see different species indicative of each desert ecosystem. The park is home to an impressive array of species including the namesake Joshua Trees (which aren't trees at all but giant Yucca plants!), jumping cholla, cat-claw acacia, fifty-year-old desert tortoises, red-tailed hawks, jackrabbits, and coyotes. Canyons, small mountains, and broad valleys are the canvas that nature has used to create this intricate and subtle landscape.

Backpacking and Pack Weight

You will carry all of your individual gear, as well as a portion of the group gear - such as food, shelters, kitchen equipment, and first aid supplies. With proper planning and packing you will carry 30-40% of your body weight. Total pack weight will vary from person to person based on physical size and ability but plan to carry between 40-50 pounds.

Miles Traveled Daily

Traveling through desert terrain is exhilarating and often physically exhausting. Travel days are generally very long and require great stamina and endurance. As a general guideline, expect to travel approximately 3-8 miles a day. Crews may hike 10+ miles per day as terrain and fitness allow. Route and distance will vary depending on weather and activities planned for that particular day.

Physical Fitness

Students must come prepared for a physically, mentally and emotionally-demanding yet equally rewarding experience. One of the best ways to set yourself up for success is to arrive physically fit.

Weather

The Mojave Desert's sunny weather is conducive to maximum time on the trail. Weather in the park is generally dry and rainfall is usually sparse, but unpredictable and sometimes persistent torrents do occur. Temperatures are most comfortable in the spring and fall, with average highs of 70-85°F during the day and average lows of 40-50°F at night. Winter brings cooler days, around 50-60°F during the day with nights below freezing. Rain and even snow are possible. This is a desert environment and temperature changes of 40 degrees within 24 hours are not uncommon. Parts of the park are over 4,000 feet above sea level so it's important to stay hydrated and plan ahead for temperature changes.

Instruction and Skills

Previous backpacking experience is not necessary. We will teach you the skills for backcountry travel - both interpersonal and technical. Technical skills include: how to pack appropriately, load a backpack, set up shelters, camp craft, navigation, how to sleep warm in your sleeping bag and how to cook your group meals over backcountry stoves. Interpersonal skills include: group travel dynamics, risk



management, weather and hazard assessment, communication skills and learning how to work as a team. The Instructors will help shape the outcomes of the course and coach students towards mastery of skill, additionally allowing ample time to draw parallels between the rigors of course and life back home. This is your expedition and you will take a hands-on approach to the day to day experience. For more details please read [Attending Outward Bound](#).

Overview

Course Start - There is a 1-2 hour drive from the airport to your course start location. You will spend the first day getting to know the other members of your team and preparing to hit the trail. A “Duffel Shuffle” facilitated by your instructors will help you to sort what clothing and gear you need to bring and what can be left behind and stored. You will be taught “camp craft” skills such as how to sleep warm in your sleeping bag and how to cook your group meals with camping stoves. As this is not a guided trip, all group members will pitch in to do camp chores, including cooking, washing dishes, and setting up shelters. Depending on your specific itinerary, you may hike a few miles on Day 1 so that you can spend more nights in the backcountry.

Peak Attempt - Most courses will attempt at least one summit. Peak attempts are day-long events often requiring pre-dawn starts. Terrain covered and peaks attempted on our backpacking courses generally do not require roped travel or use of technical equipment.

Solo - Not all courses of this length have a solo. If there is one on your course, the purpose is for reflection and to take a break from course rigors. With sufficient food and equipment, you’ll spend time alone at a solo site to offer as much solitude as possible, but within earshot of your instructors. You will not travel during this time and while your instructors will check on you periodically, you will be mostly alone for the duration of your solo. Solo on courses for adults may be integrated into the daily flow of course or may take place for a set amount of time. This activity may be abbreviated or eliminated if instructors determine the weather, terrain, or other factors could make a solo unsafe.

Final Expedition - Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. In order to deliver that benefit, our instructors gradually transfer leadership responsibilities to the students culminating with a “Final Expedition.” Near the end of course, if your group has demonstrated the necessary leadership, team problem-solving and backcountry living skills, you may be given the opportunity to travel without your instructors immediately present. This is your opportunity to demonstrate the skills you have acquired in the previous week. Outcomes are: working together, problem-solving and having one final experience on course together as a team.

Final Days - In preparation for your travel back home, several hours towards the end of your course will be spent de-issuing and cleaning all Outward Bound gear followed by a special meal and graduation ceremony. Simple backcountry showers will be offered.

Sample Itinerary on the following page...



Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what a course itinerary may look like. *Your actual course plan will vary according to permitting, weather, student skills and abilities, and instructor planning/assessment.*

- Day 1 Duffle Shuffle, divide group gear and food, begin backpacking
- Day 2 Introductory lessons to camp craft, navigation and continue backpacking
- Day 3 Peak Attempt, Solo
- Day 4 Backpacking
- Day 5 Final Expedition, Gear de-issue, Graduation
- Day 6 Depart for airport