

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of White Sands National Monument visitors during July 17-23, 2012. A total of 477 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 226 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 51.4% response rate.

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| Group size and type | Thirty percent of visitor groups consisted of two people and 21% were in groups of four. Seventy-two percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups. |
| State or country of residence | United States visitors were from 34 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, and comprised 90% of total visitation during the survey period, with 41% from Texas. International visitors were from 16 countries and comprised 10% of total visitation during the survey period with 23% from Germany. |
| Frequency of visits | Eighty percent of visitors visited the park once in the past 12 months and 58% were visiting for the first time. Sixteen percent had visited two times in their lifetime. |
| Age, ethnicity, race, and educational level | Twenty-six percent of visitors were ages 41-60 years, 25% were ages 15 years or younger, 23% were ages 21-40 years, and 7% were 71 years or older. Twenty-one percent of visitors were Hispanic or Latino. Ninety-two percent of visitors were White, 3% were Asian, and 3% were Black or African American. Thirty-two percent of respondents had completed some college, 32% had a bachelor's degree, and 29% had a graduate degree. |
| Awareness of park prior to visit | Seventy-eight percent of visitor groups were aware prior to their visit that White Sands National Monument is part of the National Park System. |
| Information sources | Most visitor groups (80%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit through friends/relatives/word of mouth (48%) and previous visits (44%). Most of these visitor groups (91%) received the information they needed. For a future visit, 59% of visitor groups prefer to use the park website to obtain information. |
| Park website | Forty-two percent of visitor groups obtained information from the park website to plan their trip. Of those, 80% rated the quality of the website as "very good" or "good" and most visitors (91%) found the information they needed. |
| Park as destination | For 55% of visitor groups, the park was one of several destinations, and for 34%, the park was the primary destination. |
| Primary reason for visiting the area | Eleven percent of visitor groups were residents of the area (Alamogordo, Tularosa, Las Cruces). For 48% of nonresident group members, visiting the park was the primary reason for visiting the area. |
| Services used in nearby communities | Most visitor groups (91%) obtained support services in nearby communities. The communities most often used were Alamogordo (56%), Las Cruces (31%), and Ruidoso (23%). |

Executive Summary (continued)

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| Transportation | Fifty-eight percent of non-resident visitor group members used a private car to travel most of the distance from their home to the park area. Most visitor groups (88%) used one vehicle to arrive at the park. |
| Number of entries | Most visitor groups (87%) entered the park one time and 9% entered twice. |
| Overnight stays | Forty-two percent of visitor groups stayed overnight away from their permanent residence in the White Sands National Monument area (Alamogordo, Tularosa, Las Cruces), of which 60% stayed one night. Sixty-nine percent of visitor groups stayed in a lodge, motel, rented condo/home, cabin, B&B, etc. outside the park area. |
| Length of stay | Thirty percent of visitor groups spent two hours in the park. The average length of stay was 3.3 hours. Twelve percent of visitor groups visited the park on more than one day. |
| Local attractions visited | Sixty-eight percent of visitor groups visited other attractions in the local area. The most commonly visited attractions were Cloudcroft, Sacramento Mts. (54%), Ruidoso, Sacramento Mts. (41%), and Lincoln National Forest (41%). |
| Places visited | The most commonly visited places in the park were the visitor center/bookstore (73%), the Dunes Drive (73%), and the gift store (59%). |
| Activities on this visit | The most common activities were general sightseeing (77%), stopping at scenic overlooks/pullouts (52%), and shopping in the park gift store (47%). The most important activity was general sightseeing (39%). |
| Activities on future visit | On a future visit, 64% percent of visitor groups were interested in general sightseeing and 63% were interested in sledding the dunes. |
| Ranger-led activities/ programs | Twelve percent of visitor groups attended ranger-led activities/programs at the park. Of those visitor groups who did not attend ranger-led activities/programs, 71% did not attend due to a lack of time. On a future visit, 57% of visitor groups would likely be interested in attending ranger-led programs and of those, 61% would be interested in a program length of 1/2-1 hour. Thirty-five percent of visitor groups would be interested in interpretive services/programs on a future visit. |
| Visitor services and facilities | The visitor services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were restrooms (79%), park brochure/map (69%), and the gift shop (53%). |
| Park gift store sales items | Fifteen percent of visitor groups bought food items from the park gift store. Of those, 67% rated the quality as “very good” or “good.” Thirty-eight percent of visitor groups would prefer to have more picnic items available on a future visit. |
| Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences | The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting natural, scenic, and cultural resources included clean water (97%), clean air (visibility) (96%), and scenic views (95%). |

Executive Summary (continued)

- Expenditures** The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park) was \$291. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$108, and the average total expenditure per person (per capita) was \$88.
- Overall quality** Most visitor groups (91%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at White Sands National Monument as “very good” or “good.” Less than 1% of groups rated the overall quality as “very poor” or “poor.”

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-2585 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.