

Nature

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12). Information: 857-1135, ext. 0, or texas-stateparks.gov.

Junior Ranger Day activities for kids are 10 a.m. Sunday, **Dec. 10**, to learn about "Turkey Vultures." No reservations needed.

A Celebration of Winter is 5:30 p.m. Sunday, **Dec. 17**, with a luminaria-lit trail, winter solstice stories and hot chocolate. No reservations needed. Entry closes promptly at 5:30; no exceptions.

Bring water, hiking shoes and sunscreen for all daytime events:

Special events (space is limited; reservations required):

- Women's Only Hike is 9 a.m. Saturday, **Dec. 9**. Open to all women.
- Birding hike is 8 a.m. the third Saturday of the month (**Dec. 16**).

Reservations are recommended for the self-guided area and for camping: (512) 389-8911.

North Mountain is available for self-guided day use, for up to 70 people at a time; reservations recommended. There is an annual orientation program for visitors. Guided access is offered to the rest of the site. Picnicking allowed at ten tables closest to headquarters. Wood and charcoal fires are not permitted. Bicycles permitted only on designated paved areas. Pets allowed only in camping or picnic areas. Call for reservations and other information: 857-1135.

White Sands National Monument

The glistening gypsum dunes are about 15 miles southwest of Alamogordo, N.M., on U.S. 70. Visitor Center hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Dec. 16; 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 17-24, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 26-31. Park hours are 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Dec. 24; 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Dec. 26-31. Entrance fee: \$5 age 16 and older. Closed Christmas Day. Free for children. Information: (575) 479-6124, ext. 236 or (575) 679-2599, ext. 232; or go to nps.gov/whsa.

Sunset strolls are offered daily one hour before sunset: 4 p.m. through Jan. 5.

Ranger-guided Lake Lucero Tour is 10 a.m. Saturday, **Dec. 30**, to learn about the formation of the sands and the special plants and animals that live in and around the dunes. Program fee is \$8 (\$4 age 15 and younger); reservations required and available one month prior to tour.

"Skins and Skulls" mammal identification talks are 3 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park

— 110 miles east of El Paso on the way to Carlsbad, the 86,416-acre park includes the highest point in Texas: Guadalupe Peak, 8,749 feet. Entry fee: \$5 for ages 16 and older, good for one week and all trails. Pine Springs Visitor Center hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Camping is \$8 per site per night. Information: (915) 828-3251 or nps.gov.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park

The park is about 160 miles east of El Paso, off the Carlsbad Highway (U.S. 62-180). Information: (575) 785-2232 or nps.gov/cave.

Visitor Center open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily; tours available 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Last entry into cave via natural entrance is 2 p.m. with last entry into cave via elevator 3:30 p.m. (be in line to exit cave by 4:30 p.m.).

Plan 3-1/2 hours for a walk-in tour and 1-1/2 hours for Big Room tour of the Caverns. Cost is \$10 (free or ages 15 and younger). The park's audio self-guided tour is \$3 extra (also available in Spanish).

Other guided tours are available; call or check website for details.

Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument

— 44 miles north of Silver City on NM Highway 15 in the middle of the majestic Gila Wilderness, the first and one of the largest wilderness areas. Entrance fee: \$5 per person; \$10 per family. Information: (575) 536-9461 or nps.gov/gicl.

The trail to the cliff dwellings is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. year-round. Everyone must be off the trail by 5 p.m. Visitor center is open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park

— 1504 Miehl, Carlsbad, N.M. Admission: \$5 (\$3 ages 7-12; free for 6 and under). Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily (last entry at 3:30 p.m.). Information: (575) 887-5516.

Holiday Bells music performed by The Touch of Joy Ringers is 11 a.m. to noon Saturday, **Dec. 2**. Holidays with the Animals is 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, **Dec. 9**, with children's activities such as making cards and treats from the zoo's animal residents.

New Mexico State Parks — Day-use fee is \$5 when visiting any state park. All programs are free with park entrance, unless otherwise listed. Information: (575) 744-5998 or nmparks.com.

• Elephant Butte Lake State Park, Information: (575) 744-5923.

The annual Luminaria Beachwalk and Floating Light Parade is 5 to 8 p.m. Saturday, **Dec. 9**.

• Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, 5000 Calle del Norte in Mesilla. Information: (575) 523-4398. Audubon Bird Walks are 7:15 a.m. Saturdays, led by park volunteers. Ranger-led Nature Hikes are 2:30 p.m. Sundays. Fitness in Nature walks with the Second Chance Walker Program are 8:30 a.m. every Saturday beginning at the Visitor Center.

• Rockhound State Park, five miles south of Deming on SR 11 and then east on Rockhound Road (State Road 141) for nine miles. Day use hours: 7:30 a.m. to sunset. Information: (575) 546-6182 or (575) 744-5998. Luminaries Night is 5 to 6:30 p.m. Saturday, **Dec. 9**.

• Pancho Villa State Park, Columbus, N.M., State Roads 11 and 9. Day use hours: 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Information: (575) 531-2711.

Pancho Villa Luminaria Tour and Night Sky viewing is 5 to 7:45 p.m. Saturday, **Dec. 9**.

• Leasburg Dam — 12712 State Park Road in Radium Springs, two miles off I-25 at Exit 19. Hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. for day use. Information: (575) 524-4068.

Turning Back the Sun Winter Solstice Celebration is noon to 8 p.m. Saturday, **Dec. 9**, with live demonstrations, food samples, night sky viewings and more.

Discovering the Camino Real at LDSP ranger-led hike, exploring why Juan de Oñate and his party left a lush and abundant river valley to begin a treacherous trek across the Jornada Del Muerto, is 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Wednesday, **Dec. 13 and 27**, and Saturday, **Dec. 23 and 30**.

A First Day Hike is 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday, **Jan. 1**.

• City of Rocks State Park, off Hwy 61 in Faywood, N.M., about 130 miles west of El Paso. Information: (575) 536-2800.

Star Party is 5:30 to 7:45 p.m. Saturday, **Dec. 16**. A First Day Hike is 10 a.m. to noon Monday, **Jan. 1**.

Alameda Park Zoo — Alameda Park, 1321 North White Sands Blvd. (U.S. 54/70), Alamogordo. Hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Admission: \$2.50 (\$1.50 ages 3-11 and 60 and older; free for ages 2 and younger). Information: (575) 439-4290.



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