

# Assateague Island National Seashore

## Horseback Riding

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Please observe the following horseback riding rules and safety guidelines so everyone can have a safe and enjoyable day. In case of emergency, call park dispatch at 757-898-0058.

**General Horseback Riding Rules:** An entrance fee is required for all vehicles entering the Maryland and Virginia districts of Assateague Island. Proof of a current negative Coggins test for each horse is required. Horseback riding is allowed on the beach on both the Maryland and Virginia Over Sand Vehicle (OSV) zones. Riders must stay east (ocean side) of the black and white posts. Riding is **not** permitted in any other areas, including but not limited to dunes, dune crossings, trails, boardwalks and paved roads. Avoid groups of people engaged in other activities, and do not ride between the ocean and vehicles parked on the low beach. Before leaving the park, it is your responsibility to clean the parking lot of any manure, hay, or feed dropped as a result of your visit. Either of the OSV zones may be closed due to hazardous conditions or wildlife management practices, and riders will not be permitted in the OSV during such closures.

In warmer weather, usually late spring through early fall, biting insects are active that are capable of spreading diseases to horses and/or humans. These include Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), and West Nile Virus (WNV).

**Maryland Day Use Riding:** Day use horseback riding is permitted in Maryland from **October 9 through May 14**. All Maryland day use riders must check in at the ranger station, and then park at the south end of the North Beach Parking Lot. Riders must follow the dune crossing sand trail to the beach, which passes south of the shade pavilion at the south end of the parking lot, and once on the beach travel south 1.5 miles to enter the OSV zone (see map on second page). **Riding is permitted on the beach only, east (ocean side) of the black and white posts. No dune crossing is permitted** other than at the crossing leading to and from the North Beach Parking Lot. There is a cumulative limit of 50 horses per day, including any horses at the horse camp sites. Groups of more than 25 riders must obtain a special use permit in advance.

**Virginia Day Use Riding:** In Virginia, horseback riding is permitted in the South OSV zone and also along a limited section of the inside of the Toms Cove hook. Please note this area is typically closed during the summer months for the protection of threatened and endangered species. In Virginia, horse trailers must be parked in lot #4, the southernmost parking lot. Stop in or call the Toms Cove Visitor Center at 410-641-1441 (press 2) for more information.

**Safety Around Wild Horses:** All visitors must remain at least 40' (forty feet) away from the wild horses, however, while horseback riding it is advised that you remain much farther away from them. While on your ride, do NOT attempt to approach or interact with wild horses or encourage their approach; wild stallions have behaved aggressively towards riders' horses. Persistent aggressive behavior by a wild stallion creates dangerous and challenging riding conditions, for even experienced riders. During your ride, be vigilant for the approach of any wild horse. If a wild horse appears to be approaching you from ANY distance, turn your horse and ride in the opposite direction. Ride at your own risk.

### Horseback Riding Safety:

- Know your skill level and ride at your own risk.
- One rider per horse.
- It is recommended that all riders wear safety helmets.
- Owners are responsible for the behavior of their horses.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- For the welfare of your horse, be sure your horse is fit enough for a beach ride and consider planning your trip around low tide so your horse will not have to move through deep sand throughout the ride.

**Horse Camping:** Assateague Island National Seashore provides two campsites for horse camping October 16 through April 14. Each site will accommodate up to six people and six horses. Campsites include hitching posts, fire rings, picnic tables, restrooms and potable water. The fee is \$50/site/night in addition to the required entrance fee for each vehicle. Reservations are available through [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Horse camping sites may be reserved no more than six months in advance. Campers must clean up all garbage, manure, hay and feed. Generator use is permitted in horse campsites except during quiet hours, which are from 10:00 PM to 6:00 AM. Registered horse campers may use the dune crossing at the horse camp site and travel south to access the riding area. In addition to campground regulations the following apply:

- Do not leave your horse unattended. Wild horses are present in all areas of the park and can act aggressively towards your animals.
- Use a processed complete feed or certified weed-free hay to eliminate introducing weed seeds into the park—hay may contain seeds of non-native plants that can take over and destroy habitat for native species.
- Never leave feed where wildlife can get to it—wildlife attracted to feed can come into conflict with people.
- Only tie horses to hitching posts. Do not hitch animals to water supply faucets or picnic tables.
- Campers are allowed to bring portable corrals.
- Remove all manure piles from within the campsite to reduce odors and insect problems, and to maintain the appearance of the site.

**Be a Responsible Visitor:**

- Feeding, petting, and/or approaching the wild horses is illegal.
- Treating wild horses like tame animals is dangerous.
- Enjoy them from a distance of at least 40' (forty feet).

**Maryland Day Use Riding**

