

Desert Parks of South Australia



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The Desert Parks of South Australia is one of the largest desert reserve systems in the world, offering visitors the opportunity to experience an array of contrasting landscapes. From red sand dunes, gibber plains and salt lakes, to wetlands, artesian springs and river systems, the desert parks showcase unique scenic and cultural environments on an immense scale.

The parks and reserves allow visitors to experience a broad range of activities such as bush camping in the remote outback, fishing along the shady banks of the Cooper Creek, watching the thousands of birds that flock to the desert wetlands, four-wheel driving over challenging landscapes, discovering the dramatic history of both Aboriginal and European occupation of this challenging land and, most importantly, experiencing insignificance while marvelling at the sheer vastness of this desert wilderness.

The most enjoyable times to visit the desert parks are autumn, winter and spring. Travel is not recommended throughout summer, when temperatures are often in the high 40°Cs.

Plants of the desert

The desert parks cover an array of vegetation types, ranging from dense coolibah woodlands and shady River Red Gums to sparse Mitchell Grass communities and herbs that cling to mobile sand dunes. Mulga and Gidgee trees fill drainage lines, while spinifex, grasses and herbs cover the valley floors between dunes.



Melaleuca glomerata

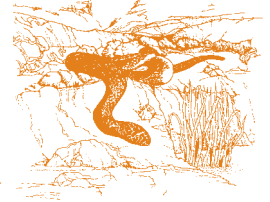
The vegetation of the desert has adapted to the dry conditions – seeds lie dormant until thunderstorms trigger them to life. Masses of wildflowers blanket the desert after soaking rains.

Desert fauna

The animals of the desert parks are many and varied and include some very rare species, such as the Eyrean Grasswren, once thought to be extinct, and the Lake Eyre Dragon, which lives on the margins of the great salt lake.

The region is prolific in birdlife, with hundreds of different species observed in the area. Lake Eyre (when flooded) and the Coongie Lakes system draw vast numbers of waterbirds, while the mound springs and even the watercourses of the Simpson Desert attract birds accustomed to the harsh conditions of the outback.

There are few large native mammals to be seen in the desert environment, but visitors can often spot Dingoes and occasionally Red Kangaroos. Reptiles are also difficult to observe; however the desert is home to a range of dragon lizards, goannas, skinks, geckoes and snakes, including the world's most venomous snake, the Fierce Snake or Inland Taipan.



Western Brown Snake
Pseudonaja nuchalis

Aboriginal culture and heritage

At least 10 distinct groups of Aboriginal people lived on the land now designated as Desert Parks.

As a result of this long association with the land, visitors may see the remains of Aboriginal occupation throughout the parks. Scatters of stone material indicate places of tool manufacture.

Visitors may encounter rock engravings and burial sites. All Aboriginal sites are protected under law and must not be disturbed.

Co-management

Several of the desert Parks are co-managed. Co-management of a park involves a partnership between the Government of South Australia and traditional owners to share responsibility and decision making for the strategic management of the park.

Heritage sites

Despite being so isolated and intimidating, the South Australian desert region has seen much European activity in the form of exploration, pastoralism and petroleum production. The desert was the site of Burke and Wills' ill-fated expedition, the beginning of Sir Sidney Kidman's pastoral empire, the backdrop for the rise and fall of many pastoral properties and is Australia's largest onshore petroleum production region.

Visitors can visit the ruins of several outback stations, including Dalhousie Homestead ruins. Innamincka Regional Reserve is home to many tributes to Burke and Wills – their grave and, King's Tree.



Desert Parks Pass

A Desert Parks Pass is required to enter and camp in the Simpson Desert Regional Reserve and Conservation Park. The pass is valid for 12 months. The pass includes all the maps necessary to visit the area, information on the parks and requirements for safe travel through this outback region of South Australia. The Desert Parks Pass allows access and camping in the following parks and reserves:

- Witjira National Park, including Dalhousie Springs
- Simpson Desert Conservation Park (closed from 1 December to 15 March)
- Simpson Desert Regional Reserve (closed from 1 December to 15 March)
- Innamincka Regional Reserve
- Coongie Lakes National Park
- Lake Eyre National Park
- Tallaringa Conservation Park
- Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park (camping not permitted).

Day Entry Permit for:

- Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park
- Lake Eyre National Park.

Day Entry and Camping Permit:

- Dalhousie Springs in Witjira National Park
- 3 O'Clock Creek in Witjira National Park
- Innamincka zone in Innamincka Regional Reserve
- Coongie Lakes National Park
- Tallaringa Conservation Park.

Fees collected are used for conservation and to maintain and improve park facilities for your ongoing enjoyment.



Coongie Lakes National Park



26 661 hectares

Coongie Lakes is listed as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance: the system of channels, lakes, swamps, waterholes, deltas and flood plains attracts a high diversity of waterbirds for an arid wetland. These ephemeral lakes rarely dry out and are home to 205 bird species that feed, rest and breed at the site, making it a birdwatchers' paradise.

The area supported several Aboriginal groups by providing a permanent source of food, water and shelter. The park showcases the sharp contrast between harsh desert landscape and tranquil wetland oasis and is a haven for both animals and people seeking serenity and solitude.

Coongie Lakes National Park is located within Innamincka Regional Reserve, 112 km north-west of the Innamincka township.

Innamincka Regional Reserve

in the reserve



1 354 506 hectares

With connections to some of Australia's most famous explorers, diverse wildlife and the wetlands of the Cooper system, Innamincka Regional Reserve is both culturally and naturally rich. In this oasis of striking contrasts, visitors can boat along a gum-shaded creek, explore historic sites such as Burke and Wills' graves, or fish in one of the area's many waterholes, surrounded by vast expanses of sandy desert and arid plains. The Elizabeth Symon Nursing Home in the Innamincka township operated as an Australian Inland Mission from 1928 to 1951. It has since been restored and is now home to the reserve's park headquarters and information centre.

Lake Eyre National Park

To /



1 352 307 hectares

The appeal of Lake Eyre lies in its stark wilderness and timeless landscape. However, when floodwaters cover the lake (on average about every eight years), the area teems with migratory waterbirds. Australia's largest salt lake becomes a breeding ground for masses of waterbirds such as pelicans, gulls, stilts and terns. The lake is also home to the specialised Lake Eyre Dragon and tiny forms of aquatic life that appear when the lake contains water. The lake has only ever filled to capacity three times in the last 160 years. The lake is the lowest point in Australia at 15.2 metres below sea level.

Access to the lake is via Public Access Routes – south of William Creek to Halligan Bay or through Muloorina Station via Marree to Level Post Bay.

Elliot Price Conservation Park

63 645 hectares

Vast, lonely and inaccessible, Elliot Price Conservation Park helps conserve the wilderness that is Lake Eyre. There is no public access to this park.

Simpson Desert Conservation Park and Regional Reserve



688 142 hectares (conservation park)

2 919 123 hectares (regional reserve)

Located in the driest region of Australia, the Simpson Desert is a vast sea of parallel sand ridges, ranging from red to white. The parks border the boundaries of South Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory. Together with Witjira National Park, these parks represent one of the world's best examples of dunal desert. There is a diversity of desert flora and fauna, such as the rare Eyrean Grasswren, protected in a landscape of varied dune systems, spinifex grasslands, acacia woodlands and salt lakes. It's the real outback, a remote and harsh area of spectacular sand dunes, which are smothered in wildflowers after life-giving rains.

Strzelecki Regional Reserve

814 203 hectares

This reserve includes the vast, pale sand dune country of the Strzelecki and Cobbler deserts and the mostly dry bed of the Strzelecki Creek.

There is no public access to this reserve.

Witjira National Park

in the park



768 853 hectares

The attraction of swimming in the Dalhousie Main Spring, part of the largest complex of artesian springs in Australia, combined with some delightful camping spots and visitor facilities, make Witjira one of the desert parks' most popular national parks. The Dalhousie Springs complex contains over 120 mound springs. The springs are of particular Aboriginal cultural significance, and contain rare species of fish found nowhere else in the world.

Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park



12 064 hectares

The major attractions of this park are The Bubbler and Blanche Cup mound springs that are fed from the Great Artesian Basin. These remarkable springs support a lush growth of aquatic plants and provide habitat for many waterbirds. The natural wetlands infuse a feeling of life and vitality into the otherwise parched landscape. The flat-topped Hamilton Hill is one of a number of extinct mound springs in the region. The park has no facilities and is for day entry only. Camping is available at nearby Coward Springs.

The National Parks Code

Help protect your national parks by following these guidelines:

- Leave your pets at home.
- Take your rubbish with you.
- Observe fire restrictions, usually 1 November to 30 April. Check CFS hotline 1300 362 361.
- Conserve native habitat by using liquid fuel or gas stoves.
- Respect geological and heritage sites.
- Keep our wildlife wild. Do not feed or disturb animals, or remove native plants.
- Keep to defined vehicle tracks and walking trails.
- Be considerate of other park users.
- Firearms and hunting are not permitted.
- The use of chainsaws is not permitted.

Thank you for leaving the bush in its natural state for the enjoyment of others.

KEY



Canoeing



Bushwalking



Fishing



Fishing prohibited



Photo opportunities



Bush camping



Swimming



Toilets



Showers



Accommodation



Phone



4WD access



Birdwatching



Drinking water



Landing ground



Ranger station



Meals available



Campfires prohibited



Fuel

Outback travel safety with minimal impact

The outback of South Australia is a vast, wonderful and rewarding place to visit. To ensure that you get the best out of your experience it is important to obtain good advice and thoroughly prepare for your journey.

The Desert Parks Pass contains extensive safety information and comprehensive maps. Reading this information will help you plan a safe and memorable outback trip.

Fire safety

- Wood fires are not permitted in the parks during the Fire Danger Season. Please use liquid fuel or gas stoves only. Further restrictions apply in some parks. Check restrictions by calling the CFS hotline on 1300 362 361.
- On Total Fire Ban Days, all fires (liquid, gas and wood) are prohibited in the parks.
- Please do not collect firewood as fallen timber provides refuge for small animals. It is preferable you use a liquid fuel or gas stove.

Minimal impact

- Camp away from troughs to allow stock and native animals access to water.
- Avoid washing close to water supplies and creek beds, as even a small amount of soap or detergent will cause pollution.
- Bury toilet waste well away from water and burn toilet paper.
- Be aware that water coming from artesian bores can be extremely hot. Exercise extreme caution. Artesian water also contains minerals that make it unsuitable to drink.
- Bag and carry out all rubbish.

Driving safety

- The Desert Parks of South Australia is one of the most arid and isolated regions in the country. Ensure you are well prepared and carry adequate supplies of fuel, food and water.
- You are responsible for your own safety. Notify a responsible person of your itinerary and expected date/time of return.

- Use only recognised public access tracks and designated camping areas.
- Prior to your journey, make sure your vehicle is serviced, in good condition and you have sufficient spare parts to cover most contingencies.
- The use of a four-wheel drive vehicle with high ground clearance is strongly recommended in the desert parks, and is essential for crossing the Simpson Desert.
- It is strongly recommended that trailers not be towed across the Simpson Desert.
- We recommend you carry a satellite phone, EPIRB and an HF radio. Normal mobile phones do not work in most outback areas.
- Do not leave your vehicle in the event of a breakdown.
- Note where petrol stations are and their hours of operation.
- Take frequent rest breaks and change drivers regularly.
- Obey road closure signs and remain on main roads. Substantial fines apply for travelling on closed roads. Deviating can create tyre marks that last for decades. The surface of salt lakes is especially fragile.

Wet conditions and even flooding can occur at any time, often without warning. Check up-to-date road conditions via the Far Northern and Western Areas road report – Phone 1300 361 033. Alternatively, call the Desert Parks information line on 1800 816 078.

For further information contact:

Desert Parks Hotline

Freecall 1800 816 078

Email desertparks@sa.gov.au

Department for Environment, Water and Natural Resources SA Arid Lands

9 Mackay Street, Port Augusta SA 5700

Phone (08) 8648 5300 Fax (08) 8648 5301

For information on other SA parks and reserves

Phone Information Line (08) 8204 1910

Email dewnrinformation@sa.gov.au

Website www.parks.sa.gov.au