



COVID-19 Response

Following guidance from the White House, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state and local public health authorities, we are increasing access and services in a phased approach across all units of the National Park System. Before visiting a park, please check the [park website](#) to determine its operating status. Updates about the overall NPS response to COVID-19, including safety information, are posted on www.nps.gov/coronavirus.



Hiking Etiquette



Cyclists on the trail in Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail

NPS Photo / Bhoj Rai

Hiking is one of the best ways to spend time in the great outdoors. With more than 400 national parks across the country, the opportunities to get out and take a hike are nearly endless. Whether you're hiking alone or in a group, be sure to follow the written and unwritten rules of the trail. Proper hiking etiquette helps instill respect for other trail users, and it promotes stewardship of the land.

The best thing you can do when hiking is to remember the "golden rule": treat others the way you would want to be treated.

Here are some main points of hiking etiquette.

- **Know your right of way.** Check signage for the trail you are hiking, and follow the correct right of way yields. Signs may vary from park to park, but these are the general guidelines of yielding on the trail
 - **Hikers coming uphill have the right of way.** If you're descending the trail, step aside and give space to the people climbing up.
 - **Bicyclists yield to hikers and horses or other pack stock.** Come to a full stop and step to the side to give the right of way. Be mindful of the plants or animals that are near the trail if you must step off the trail. Bicyclists should always ride within their abilities. Before your visit, check individual park regulations to see if biking is allowed.
 - **Hikers yield to [horses](#) and other pack stock.** Slowly and calmly step off to the downhill side of a trail. If you approach from behind, calmly announce your presence and intentions. Horses and other pack stock can frighten easily, so avoid sudden movements or loud noises.
- **Make yourself known.** When you encounter other hikers and trail users, offer a friendly "hello" or a simple head nod. This helps create a friendly atmosphere on the trail. If you approach another trail user from behind, announce yourself in a friendly, calm tone and let him/her know you want to pass.
- **Stay on the trail.** Don't step off trail unless you absolutely must when yielding. Going off trail can damage or kill certain plant or animal species, and can hurt the ecosystems that surround the trail. Always practice Leave No Trace principles: Leave rocks, vegetation, and artifacts where you find them for others to enjoy.
- **Do not disturb wildlife.** They need their space, and you need yours, too. Keep your distance from the wildlife you encounter. Some parks require you to stay a certain distance from wildlife, so check park regulations before your visit. Never leave the trail to try and get a closer look at an animal because it can hurt the habitat and the animal and put you in danger. For more information about safely viewing wildlife, check out our [7 ways to safely watch wildlife](#).
- **Be mindful of trail conditions.** If a trail is too wet and muddy, turn back and save the hike for another day. Using a muddy trail can be dangerous, damage the trail's condition, and damage the ecosystems that surround the trail.
- **Take time to listen.** When hiking in the great outdoors, let nature do all the talking. Be respectful of both nature and the other users, and keep the noise from electronic devices at bay. Not only will other visitors appreciate the peace and quiet, but so will the wildlife. Many wildlife species rely on natural sounds for communication purposes, and disrupting those sounds can hurt their chances of survival.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** Always be aware of your surroundings when hiking in our national parks. It will help keep you and any members of your group safe, and it will help keep wildlife and their habitats safe and healthy. Know the rules for [hiking in bear country](#), and know what to do if you encounter a bear on the trail.

These are some hiking etiquette guidelines that will help you have a safe, fun, and relaxing trip next time you go hiking in a national park. When in doubt about something just remember the "golden rule" — treat other trail users how you want to be treated, and respect the wildlife and lands of our great national parks.

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