

Fire Island

National Seashore
New York

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior





Fire Island stretches 55 kilometers (32 miles) from Democrat Point on the west to Moriches Inlet on the east. This barrier island stands defiantly facing the Atlantic Ocean while protecting the waters of Great South Bay and the mainland of Long Island at its back. People have created 17 separate communities on Fire Island primarily for summer recreation, but efforts have been made to preserve the natural life, too, whether it be a hidden hardwood grove or long-legged herons stalking stiffly through grassy wetlands. Here, too, wild geese and brant fly over the salt marsh and occasionally a startled deer dashes off through the thicket. Yet, this national seashore is almost within sight of New York City's skyscrapers. The contrast makes any amount of time spent here enjoyable.

In 1980 the 11-kilometer (7-mile) stretch of Fire Island from Smith Point West to Watch Hill—an area of approximately 570 hectares (1,400 acres)—was designated by Congress as wilderness, the only area in New York State to be honored in this manner. With the exception of the boardwalk trail for the handicapped at Smith Point West, the wilderness is accessible only by foot. If you're willing to invest the time and energy necessary

to hike it, the wilderness will reward you with a view of the island as it must have been when the first Europeans saw it 400 years ago. The wilderness is an amazing place, and every swale, every blow-out, and every grove of pines has its own fascination.

Throughout the year the park presents different faces at different seasons. In winter the beach is deserted and the ocean booms as it assaults the land. The forests are stark as the leafless trees stand bare against their evergreen neighbors and the sky full of clouds. Springtime brings a greening to the land and a muting of the ocean, while the noise of new life quickens in the marshes. Rafts of migrating waterfowl bob on the protected waters of Great South Bay. Summer is the hot, golden sun on the white sands of the beach and the exhilarated laughter and voices of people being refreshed by the cool water. Fall sees the birds return on their way south as quiet once again invades the island. The small animals prepare for winter, and summertime residents close up their houses.

No matter what the season, fishing is good. In Great South Bay, you will find bluefish, striped bass, winter flounder,

and other species. In the surf you can cast for striped bass, bluefish, mackerel, weakfish.

Not to be missed is the Sunken Forest—so called because of its location down behind the dunes—directly west of Sailors Haven. Gnarled holly, sassafras, tupelo, and shadblow form the canopy and vines of catbrier, poison ivy, and wild grape climb from the forest floor toward the sun.

Fire Island National Seashore is a jewel of many facets; there's always something new to discover or a new way to look at something familiar.



Poison Ivy

To say that poison ivy flourishes on Fire Island is an understatement. Study the picture at left so that you will recognize the plant wherever you see it. Doing so will spare you the discomfort of enduring a skin irritation. The old adage "leaflets three, let it be," is wisely taken.

Things That Live and Play at the Seashore

Here on the fringes of the Nation's largest population concentration is Fire Island, a place rich in marine life, waterfowl, and other wildlife, and a place where you can enjoy recreational pursuits or just a little solitude. Boating takes place at Watch Hill marina, and the lighthouse shows the imprint of man on the land. Common terns are just one of the bird

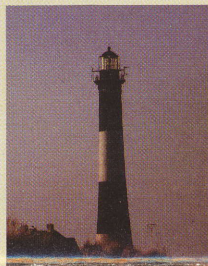
species that nest here, and when they do, take great care to avoid them. Some nesting areas are marked in the spring, but keep your eyes open wherever you walk.

In spring and fall you will find great numbers of waterfowl resting upon the quiet waters of Great South Bay during their semi-annual migrations. Of the many varieties the

mallard ducks are the most familiar to the untrained eye. Less common animals are also found on the sand and oftentimes your patience will be rewarded with a glimpse of a fox making its rounds. The shallow waters of the bay are home to the horseshoe crab and seeing it is a special treat, for so often only its cast-off shell is found on the beach. And it may happen that you will

look up to discover that you are being watched by the soft, large eyes of a whitetail deer. Monarch butterflies decorate a pine tree with a beauty that surpasses any man-made object. Unlike the deer, these hardy yet delicate creatures escape the snows and spend their winters in Southern and Baja California. In spring and summer they wing their way northeastward.

The beach is a place for man, too. On the wide, white stretches of sand, children, invigorated by the fresh sea air, play hard at games. Others swim in the ocean or relax on the sand, far removed from the cares of everyday life and lulled by the sound of the crashing surf and the gentle breezes off the water. Enjoy Fire Island's many moods and faces.



Know These Park Rules

Swim only at the beaches where life-guards are on duty. Periodically the life-guards present programs that will alert you to special hazards to watch for while swimming. Attend one of these programs at the earliest opportunity. Do not swim where people are fishing or in the crowded marina area. Boardwalks are a good source of splinters, so wear some type of footwear when using them. In the marinas be especially cautious when getting on and off boats; when boating be sure to wear a life vest. Watch small children on the docks and make sure that they are wearing either life belts or jackets. Occasionally jellyfish appear in the waters. Their stings are basically harmless but can be quite annoying. Please leave the wildflowers for others to enjoy. Do not disturb or destroy any plants, animals, or other natural objects. And do not walk on the dunes. The fragile vegetation protects the existence of the whole island.

Access

Access by car to Fire Island National Seashore is limited to the eastern and western ends of the park. Fees are charged for parking in Robert Moses State Park (west end) and in Smith Point County Park (east end).

Ferries operate from the mainland to the park from May to November. From Bay Shore, ferries sail to Fair Harbor, Ocean Beach, Dunewood, Saltaire, and Kismet. From Sayville, ferries leave for Sailors Haven, Cherry Grove, and Fire Island Pines. And from Patchogue, ferries go to Davis Park and Watch Hill. Stations of the Long Island Railroad are within a short distance of the three ferry terminals, making access from New York City and western Long Island relatively simple.

Sailors Haven Access: Ferry from Sayville (516-589-8980) and private boat.

Marina has 36 slips and coin-operated pump out; 516-597-6171. Interpretive center with activities, snack bar, groceries, ice, umbrella rental, picnic tables, pay telephone, showers, bathhouse, restrooms, and dog walk are also available. Visitor center: 516-597-6183.

Watch Hill Access: Ferry from Patchogue (516-475-1665) and private boat.

Marina has 158 slips, water, coin-operated pump out, and some electricity; 516-597-6644. Reservations are necessary for the campground with a maximum stay of four nights. Call 516-597-6633 for family campground and 516-289-4810 for group campground. Picnic tables, showers, bathhouse, restrooms, interpretive center and activities, snack bar, groceries, and ice are also available. Visitor center: 516-597-6455.

Smith Point West Access: Car or bus via William Floyd Parkway and Smith Point Bridge.

Parking at Smith Point County Park (fee charged). Interpretive activities include walks, talks, and nature trail, which is suitable for use by the handicapped. Hunting and recreational permits available at the visitor center. Visitor center: 516-281-3010.

Patchogue: Park Headquarters Access: Car

Fire Island National Seashore is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. For more information, write the superintendent, 120 Laurel Street, Patchogue, New York 11772, or call 516-289-4810.

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