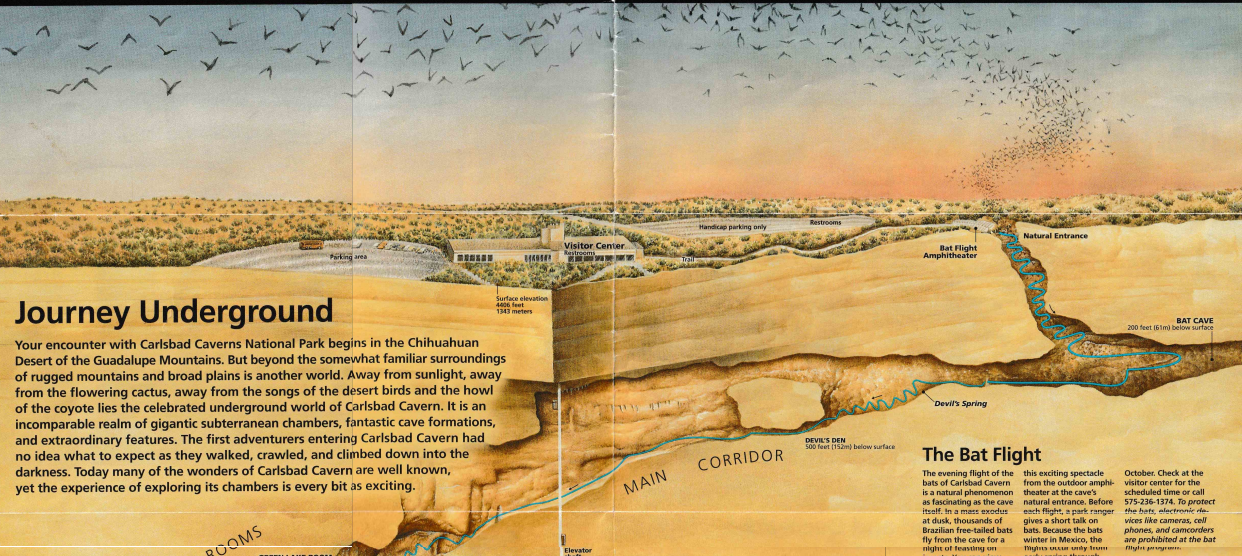
Carlsbad Caverns

Carlsbad Caverns National Park
New Mexico

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Journey Underground

Your encounter with Carlsbad Caverns National Park begins in the Chihuahuan Desert of the Guadalupe Mountains. But beyond the somewhat familiar surroundings of rugged mountains and broad plains is another world. Away from sunlight, away from the flowering cactus, away from the songs of the desert birds and the howl of the coyote lies the celebrated underground world of Carlsbad Cavern. It is an incomparable realm of gigantic subterranean chambers, fantastic cave formations, and extraordinary features. The first adventurers entering Carlsbad Cavern had no idea what to expect as they walked, crawled, and climbed down into the darkness. Today many of the wonders of Carlsbad Cavern are well known, yet the experience of exploring its chambers is every bit as exciting.

The Bat Flight

The evening flight of the bats of Carlsbad Cavern is a natural phenomenon as fascinating as the cave itself. In a mass exodus at dusk, thousands of Brazilian free-tailed bats fly from the cave for a night of feasting on insects. You can view this exciting spectacle from the outdoor amphitheater at the cave's natural entrance. Before each flight, a park ranger gives a short talk on bats. Because the bats winter in Mexico, the flights cease only from early spring through October. Check at the visitor center for the scheduled time or call 575-236-1374. *To protect the bats, electronic devices like cameras, cell phones, and camcorders are prohibited at the bat flight program.*

Preserving a National Treasure

Protection and preservation of Carlsbad Cavern is the mission of the National Park Service. It's your responsibility, too. Unfortunately, over the years careless people have damaged many of the cave's smaller and more delicate formations.

Experimental techniques, like those that enable rangers to match pieces of broken stalactites and painstakingly glue them back together, are sometimes successful, but in practically all cases damage is irreversible.

Cave Regulations
Please help preserve Carlsbad Cavern and other park caves by observing park regulations.

Touching any cave formation is prohibited. Formations are easily broken, and the oil from your skin permanently discolors the rock.

Smoking or any use of tobacco is prohibited. Eating and drinking are prohibited except in the underground rest area and lunchroom.

Throwing coins, food, or other objects in cave pools is forbidden.

Foreign objects ruin the natural appearance of the pools and are difficult to remove. Also, the chemical reaction among the foreign objects, the water, and the rock can leave permanent stains.

Photography is allowed on most cavern tours. Photographers should not step off the trails or rest tripods or other camera equipment on formations.

Strollers are prohibited because parts of the trails are steep and narrow.

Carlsbad Cavern Tours

Self-guiding Trails:
Big Room Route
1.25 miles (2km), 1½ hours
easy to moderate

Natural Entrance Route
1.25 miles (2km), 1 hour
steep and strenuous

Ranger-guided Tour:
King's Palace Tour
1 mile (1.6km), 1½ hours
easy to moderate

Cave tour routes wind through the chambers of Carlsbad Cavern, shown in the illustration above, many of them just as exquisitely decorated. Altogether over 30 miles of passages have been

Explore the Cave

Choose from three main cave tour options depending on your time, interest, and physical ability. Two tours are self-guiding; the third is ranger-guided.

Your first stop for any cave tour is the visitor center information desk where rangers can answer your questions about tours and you may purchase tickets. The basic entry fee allows you to take either

Highly decorated and immense, the 8.2-acre Big Room is a must-see tour for all visitors to the park. Elevators in the visitor center take you to the Big Room. Relatively level, well-lit trails make this the ideal tour for visitors with limited time or walking difficulties. Parts of the Big Room are accessible to visitors in wheelchairs; a map is available at the visitor center information desk. Visitors in

Main Corridor. The route culminates in the lunchroom and underground rest area, near the elevators and the Big Room Route starting point. Visitors in good health who plan to take both self-guiding tours may enjoy starting with the Natural Entrance Route. Highlights along this route include Bat Cave, Devil's Spring, Green Lake Overlook, and the Boneyard, a complex maze of dissolved, Swiss cheese-like limestone rock. Watch

require you to descend—and later climb—an eight-story-high hill. Look for cave decorations called speleothems, like helictites, draperies, columns, and soda straws. Rangers often conduct black-out programs during this tour, briefly turning off all artificial lights to reveal the permanent inky blackness of the natural cave environment. Reservations are recommended; contact the park or visit the park website. A separate fee

A pre-tour restroom stop is advisable because restrooms are only available in the visitor center and at the underground rest area and lunchroom. To promote resource protection and cavern safety, a mandatory cavern orientation precedes all tours.

Rangers are available throughout the cave to protect park resources and help you with information and questions. On both self-guiding