



Course Overview

Joshua Tree Backpacking & Rock Climbing

Fantastically jumbled rock formations and plants rise out of this magical topography comprising Joshua Tree, one of California's most surreal desert landscapes. Much of the 800,000 acres of park is designated as wilderness today. These regions are the **ancestral lands** of the Yuhaviatam/Maarenga'yam (Serrano), Cahuilla, Newe (Western Shoshone), Chemehuevi, Southern Paiute and Cocopah (Xawiił kw'ichawaay) nations.

Two distinctly different deserts, the Sonoran and the Mojave, merge at a transition zone where one can see different species indicative of each desert ecosystem. The park is home to an impressive array of species including the namesake Joshua Trees (which aren't trees at all but giant Yucca plants!), jumping cholla, cat-claw acacia, fifty-year-old desert tortoises, red-tailed hawks, jackrabbits, and coyotes. Canyons, small mountains, and broad valleys are the canvas that nature has used to create this intricate and subtle landscape.

Backpacking and Pack Weight

You will carry all of your individual gear, as well as a portion of the group gear - such as food, shelters, kitchen equipment, and first aid supplies. With proper planning and packing you will carry 30-40% of your body weight. Total pack weight will vary from person to person based on physical size and ability but plan to carry between 40-50 pounds.

Miles Traveled Daily

Traveling through desert terrain is exhilarating and often physically exhausting. Travel days are generally very long and require great stamina and endurance. As a general guideline, expect to travel approximately 3-8 miles a day. Outward Bound groups may hike 10+ miles per day as terrain and fitness allow. Route plans will vary depending on weather and activities planned for that particular day.

Weather

The Mojave Desert's sunny weather is conducive to maximum time on the trail. Weather in the park is generally dry and rainfall is usually sparse, but unpredictable and sometimes persistent torrents do occur. Temperatures are most comfortable in the spring and fall, with average highs of 70-85°F during the day and average lows of 40-50°F at night. Winter brings cooler days, around 50-60°F during the day with nights below freezing. **Be prepared for cold temperatures!** Rain and even snow are possible. This is a desert environment and temperature changes of 40 degrees within 24 hours are not uncommon. Parts of the park are over 4,000 feet above sea level so it's important to stay hydrated and plan ahead for temperature changes.

Instruction and Skills

Previous backpacking or rock climbing experience is not necessary. We will teach you the skills for backcountry travel both interpersonal and technical skills. Technical skills include: how to pack



OUTWARD BOUND CALIFORNIA

appropriately, load a backpack, set up shelters, camp craft, navigation, how to sleep warm in your sleeping bag and how to cook your group meals over backcountry stoves. Interpersonal leadership skills include: group travel dynamics, risk management, weather and hazard assessment, communication skills and learning how to work as a team.

The Instructors will help shape the outcomes of the course and coach students towards mastery of skill, additionally drawing the parallels between the rigors of course and life back home. For more details please read [Attending Outward Bound](#).

Course Start

There is a 1-2 hour drive from the airport to your course start location. You will spend the first day getting to know the other members of your team and preparing to hit the trail. A “Duffle Shuffle,” facilitated by your instructors, will help you sort what clothing and gear you need to bring and what can be left behind. You will be taught “camp craft” skills such as how to sleep warm in your sleeping bag and how to cook your group meals using camping stoves. As this is not a guided trip, all group members will pitch in to do camp chores, including cooking, washing dishes, and setting up shelters. Depending on your specific itinerary, you may hike a few miles on Day 1 so that you can spend more nights in the backcountry.

Rock Climbing & Backpacking

This course includes both a rock climbing and a backpacking section. The climbing section may involve base camping, where each day the group will venture out to a different rock climbing location for the day’s activities. Each day presents a different focus with ample time for experiential learning. This part of the course will give students the skills necessary to be effective top rope climbers. The latter part of the course involves moving through the vast desert landscape - backpacking as a team towards the end of your experience.

Solo

Not all courses of this length have a solo. If there is one on your course, the purpose is for reflection and to take a break from course rigors. With sufficient food and equipment, you’ll spend time alone at a solo site to offer as much solitude as possible, but within earshot of your instructors. You will not travel during this time. While your instructors will check on you periodically, you will be mostly alone for the duration of your solo. Solo may last in duration from a few hours to a full 24-hour day. This activity may be abbreviated or eliminated if instructors determine the weather, terrain, or other factors could make a solo unsafe.

Final Expedition

Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. In order to deliver that benefit, our instructors gradually transfer leadership responsibilities to the participants culminating with a “Final Expedition.” Near the end of course, if your group has demonstrated the necessary leadership, team problem-solving and backcountry living skills, you may be given the opportunity to travel without your instructors immediately present. This is your opportunity to demonstrate the skills you have acquired in the previous week. Outcomes are: working together, problem-solving and having one final experience on course together as a team.



Final Days

In preparation for your travel back home, several hours towards the end of your course will be spent de-issuing and cleaning all Outward Bound gear followed by a special meal and graduation ceremony. Simple backcountry showers will be offered.

Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what a course itinerary may look like. *Your actual course plan will vary according to permitting, weather, student skills and abilities, and instructor planning/assessment.*

Day 1	Course Start: Duffle Shuffle, introductory lessons to camp craft
Day 2	Lessons on top-roping and belaying, climbing/rappelling
Day 3	Climbing/rappelling, begin backpacking section
Day 4	Backpacking
Day 5	Backpacking, solo
Day 6	Final expedition, clean and de-issue gear, graduation
Day 7	Say goodbyes, depart for airport