



Course Overview

Joshua Tree Pathfinder - 30 Days

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 (Xawitł kwñchawaay) 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.

Pathfinder Courses

Pathfinder courses are geared towards students looking for direction and purpose in life. Outward Bound facilitates this by developing strong leadership skills within those who are willing to take on the challenges they face. Instructors focus on the development of your personal leadership style, strengths, and life purpose. Leadership and service are the two key elements of your Pathfinder experience that will ultimately leave you walking away with a newfound appreciation for the next phase in your life. There is also a strong emphasis on the transference of life skills and goals from the Outward Bound course to your life back home. To help facilitate this transfer of skills, Outward Bound staff will support students in creating a transition plan. This may include creating a written plan for you to take home and/or an opportunity to have a phone call with your instructors and a mentor of your choosing at the end of your course. These plans and/or calls are designed to support you in following through with the goals you set on course once you return home.

Desert Backpacking and Course Terrain

You will travel both on and off-trail. The trails, when present, are usually of high quality. The off-trail routes can be especially challenging as these routes travel through boulder filled canyons and across vast desert plains. You will resupply food and water along the way at many different water cache sites that Outward Bound California uses. Though the landscape can be demanding, there are few places in the world that compare to the beauty and uniqueness of where this backpacking leads.

Rock Climbing

The rock climbing section will start off by establishing a backcountry base-camp for introductory rock climbing skills: how to climb, belay and rappel. During this time you may explore canyons and wander through the boulders looking for your next backcountry climbing area. With practice and focus, you will learn skills that will help you be a supportive climbing partner after your course. You may experience a wide variety of climbing styles, like crack-climbing, face climbing and bouldering. This section offers a unique experience to climb on some of the highest quality granite out there in one of the most popular destinations for rock climbers in the world.



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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 3-15 miles a day as terrain and fitness allow. Route and distance will vary depending on weather and activities planned for that particular day.

Weather

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 and wind!** 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.

Physical Fitness

Students must come prepared for a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding yet equally rewarding experience. Please use our physical prep guide and arrive in good shape for this course. Alumni often report that the more time they spent preparing for course, both physically and mentally, the more successful their course experience was.

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.

Instruction and Skills

Previous backpacking and 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 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 skills include: group travel, 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 allowing ample time to draw parallels between the rigors of course and life back home. This is your expedition and you will take a hands-on approach to the day to day experience. For more details please read [Attending Outward Bound](#).

Training, Main & Final

Fundamental in Outward Bound's educational outcomes is the concept of "Training," "Main," and "Final." Our hope is to transfer leadership and decision-making skills over to students through an intentional progression. As the course advances, instructors will take on more of a "coaching" role. This provides a safety net for students to work through their decision-making and risk management development. Read about the culminating Final Expedition below.



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Course Start

There is a 1 to 2 hour drive from the airport to the course start location. You will spend the first day gearing up for the field and meeting the other members of your team. Group gear like food, shelters, kitchen equipment and first aid supplies will be divided up among group members. Depending on your specific itinerary, you may hike a few miles on Day 1. As this is not a guided trip, all group members will pitch in to do camp chores, including cooking, washing pots and setting up shelters.

Peak Attempt

Most groups will attempt to summit at least one peak. As Joshua Tree is a high desert, some parts of the park are higher than 5,000 feet. A peak attempt often requires pre-dawn starts, waking as early as 4am. You will typically launch from a basecamp so that you can leave some of your gear at camp. During your peak attempt you will gain an understanding of terrain management, hazard assessment and weather consideration to make a successful peak attempt. For all the effort they require, successful peak attempts are often the most rewarding experiences of an Outward Bound course.

Solo

The solo experience provides an important break from the rigors of the expedition. With sufficient equipment and an adequate amount of food and water, you'll spend time alone at an assigned campsite to rest and reflect. Instructors choose your solo site to offer as much solitude as possible, but within earshot of instructors for management considerations. You will not travel during this time and your instructors will check on you periodically. Many students are initially nervous about solo, but most are ready for a break from the group when the time for solo arrives. This activity may be abbreviated or eliminated as instructors assess the weather, terrain, or other factors that could affect the outcomes of solo. For this program, a solo progression is structured into course. For example, you may start with a solo lasting only a few hours and culminate with a full 3-day solo towards the end of your course. Many of our past students express solo as being one of the most powerful elements of their courses.

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 students culminating with a "Final Expedition." Near the end of course, if you and your group have 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 weeks. Final Expeditions can last for one to five days, depending on staff assessment of students' abilities and terrain. Outcomes are to work together, problem solve, and accomplish a goal independently, while utilizing all the skills they have acquired.

Service

Service is an integral part of the Outward Bound Pathfinder curriculum. We encourage service to the environment in the form of leaving campsites cleaner than we find them and practicing Leave No Trace ethics throughout the course. We coordinate service projects with land managers (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, local land trusts, etc.) Expect at least one full day set aside to work directly with one of these organizations. These service projects could include anything from trail maintenance to measuring and collecting data on the unique plants that exist in the Mojave Desert.



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Final Days

In preparation for your travel back home, the second-to-last afternoon of your course will be spent de-issuing and cleaning all Outward Bound gear followed by a special graduation ceremony. Simple backcountry showers will be offered. Departure from the trailhead will be between 6 - 8am.

NOTE: Outward Bound courses are physically and socially demanding. Students who are unmotivated or struggle with inappropriate behaviors on course may be expelled. Students who are expelled are not eligible for a refund. Please see our [Payment, Cancellations & Admissions Policies](#) for more details. You and your family should be prepared to make a commitment to being in a challenging, formal educational setting for the entire length of the course.

Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what your 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
Days 2-11	Backpacking expedition: introductory lessons to backpacking, camp craft, and navigation
Day 12	Transition to rock section
Days 13-14	Solo
Days 15-20	Rock climbing section (belaying, rappelling, climbing)
Days 21-27	Backpacking & Final Expedition
Day 28	Service Project
Day 29	De-issue gear, Graduation Ceremony, Mentor Phone Calls
Day 30	Course end and transportation to airport