

Death Valley Spring Sampler

with Naturalist Journeys



March 12 – 17, 2023

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**“I enjoyed the camaraderie
of our small group to
explore Death Valley with
great guiding experience.”**

— Kathy Potrepka



Death Valley: this foreboding yet intriguing name belies the hidden wonders of this two million-acre national park. From the Badwater Basin, 282 feet below sea level, to the 11,049-foot height of Telescope Peak, this park and surrounding areas of the Mojave Desert offer a diverse and exciting world to discover. With adequate winter rains, spring wildflowers decorate the landscape with every color of the rainbow. What better way to explore it than on foot, on trails that vary from dry desert salt pans to wind-sculptured forests in the mountains.

Nearly 1,000 different species of plant have been recorded in the diverse habitats of Death Valley, including 19 species of cacti and a whopping 23 species endemic to the park. More than 380 springs in the park provide habitat to five species of Desert Pupfish, relict populations from a wetter time in the region's long history. The valley is a geologist's paradise, with nearly two billion years of history recorded in the rocks. Layers of sandstone and limestone tell of times of great inland seas while volcanic features bear testimony to centuries of dynamic change. Learn these stories as we hike some of the park's most popular trails, and some favorites where we see few other visitors.

Walk amid sand dunes, water-sculpted canyons, and salt pans remaining from ancient seas, lush hidden springs, and cool mountain forests. Look for Ring-tailed Cat, Kit Fox, Kangaroo Rat, Black-tailed Jackrabbit, and Desert Bighorn Sheep. Listen for sounds of desert birds in the clear morning air: Gambel's Quail, Rock Wren, Western Kingbird, phoebes, and flycatchers. Photographic opportunities abound, particularly in the magical, subtle light of dawn and dusk. Blue skies frame the rugged Panamint Mountains of Death Valley, a sister range to the Sierras that reaches over 11,000 feet. On the mountain slopes, ancient bristlecone pines cling to windy ridges and Desert Bighorn ewes give birth on ridgelines near the valley floor.

We also take in some local culture and color—visiting local restaurants. Miners, ranchers, and the Timbisha people have all left traces of their lives in the Mojave Desert Region; we pass by old mine sites and look for petroglyphs etched in rock walls on our hikes. The average temperatures in March are in the 70s to 80s (though cooler in the mountains)—perfect weather for our hikes. So, shed your winter gear, get out the boots, and join us as we explore spectacular Death Valley National Park and surrounding areas of the Mojave Desert in the spring.

Tour Highlights

- Enjoy simple travel arrangements with flights into and out of Las Vegas
- Spend four full days exploring the wonders of Death Valley National Park
- See volcanic landforms like Ubehebe Crater and ancient inland seas
- Discuss the local plants and their adaptive characteristics
- Look for the unique Desert Pupfish
- Watch for western birds like Juniper Titmouse, Mountain Bluebird, Clark's Nutcracker, and Pinyon Jay
- Take time to hike, explore, immerse, and simply soak in the stunning landscapes of Death Valley, so otherworldly, but right here in the USA

Tour Summary

6-Day / 5-Night Death Valley Sampler Tour
\$3295 DBL / \$4295 SGL, from Las Vegas
Airport is McCarren International (LAS)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sun., Mar. 12

Arrivals in Las Vegas | Red Rock Canyon | Death Valley National Park

After arrivals at the airport (by 2:00 PM please), we travel west to Death Valley National Park. En route we pass through BLM's colorful Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, where we stretch our legs on a warm-up walk. Then it's on to the park, for stunning views of Telescope Peak and the Panamint Range. Travel through the park's scenic landscape to the date palm oasis at Furnace Creek, where we have accommodations for the next four nights. Enjoy a welcome dinner tonight at the Last Kind Words Saloon & Steakhouse.

Accommodations at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park (D)

Mon., Mar. 13

Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes | Mosaic Canyon | Ubehebe Crater | Scotty's Castle

We start early in the morning with a walk among some of the park's amazing sand dunes. There is no set trail and we wander dune ridgelines and valleys. At this time of day the light is dramatic, animal tracks are fresh, and the world beckons us to explore. We then drive a short way to Mosaic Canyon to hike amid a tapestry of rock colors and patterns. In this cooler, shaded ravine we can learn about the complex geology revealed in the rock walls. This is a good place to find Rock Wren, which nest in the area.

Then we head north to the end of the paved road to visit a series of volcanic craters that are less than 10,000 years old. The largest is Ubehebe Crater, and here we hike the rim looking at plants and discuss their adaptive characteristics, along with some older habitation sites. Scotty's Castle is scheduled to reopen in 2022 after rehabilitation from flood damage in previous years. This is a very interesting place, and an even more interesting man who built this stunning home in an area with so many challenges.

This afternoon we enjoy a walk through Golden Canyon, perfect at this time of day. Common Raven dance overhead in spacious skies; on the trail we find a variety of lizards. We end the day with a scenic drive to Artist's Point, stopping for photos and to enjoy the cooling air and the spectacular late afternoon light.

Accommodations at the Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park, CA (B,L,D)

Tues., Mar. 14 **Salt Creek | Aguerberry Point | Wildrose Peak**

Salt Creek, one of Death Valley's major drainages, is home to the unique Desert Pupfish, as well as a host of interesting birds and aquatic invertebrates. We take a peek at the area on a short boardwalk trail. Raptors, migrants, and waders often frequent this small valley. With luck we may find Northern Harrier, Common Yellowthroat, American Avocet, and Greater Yellowlegs, as well as other species.

From here we climb up the Panamint Mountains in elevation to Aguerberry Point and the Eureka Mine. Be prepared: At this elevation in March, we may encounter snow! The higher elevation is quite a contrast to our hikes on the valley floor. We hike around the mine and over to Aguerberry's cabin before heading out to the point to eat lunch and take in the stunning view of the Valley floor and the Funeral Mountains.

Then we head further south and higher in elevation to the Wildrose Peak Trailhead (6800'). On the trail we find conifer-loving birds such as Juniper Titmouse, Red-naped Sapsucker, Townsend's Solitaire, Mountain Bluebird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Mountain Chickadee. Listen for calls of Clark's Nutcracker, Pinyon Jay, and Common Raven, which may fly in to investigate our picnic lunch. At the trailhead we also explore and learn more about local mining history as we visit the picturesque remains of charcoal kilns left from the boom-and-bust endeavors

in Death Valley. Dinner tonight is at another of the park's restaurants at Stovepipe Wells.

Accommodations at the Furnace Creek Ranch (B,L,D)

Wed., Mar. 15

Zabriski Point | Dante's View | Artist Drive | Twenty Mule Team Drive

We start the day with a pre-breakfast visit to Zabriski Point to watch the morning light creep up the face of the point and spread across the Valley and the mountains to the west. After breakfast we head up and into the Amargosa Range to Dante's View, where we can scan the entire panorama of Death Valley. In this dramatic setting, we outline the geologic events that created this stunning environment and you have time to take some spectacular photographs in the morning light. The parking lot is also the trailhead for the Mt. Perry trail. This is the start of an optional eight-mile round trip hike to Mt. Perry, with rewarding views. We can go to the summit, or just as far as the group wishes today. Along the route, we look for wintering White-crowned Sparrow, and newly arrived Ash-throated Flycatcher, Western Kingbird, and Green-tailed Towhee. Gambel's Quail and possibly another quail relative, the Chukar, are year-round residents that should make an appearance. Enjoy a picnic lunch on the trail. We return to our lodgings for a mid-day break, and perhaps a swim in the pool. Trees around the facility may harbor Northern Mockingbird, wintering Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Hermit Thrush, and more. Later in the afternoon lighting is the perfect time to explore the multi-colored rock formations and mud hills of Artist Drive and Twenty Mule Team Drive.

Accommodations at the Furnace Creek Ranch (B,L,D)

Thurs., Mar. 16 Titus Canyon | Badwater

This morning we head out early to Titus Canyon, which is cut deep into the Amargosa Mountains. We drive this remote and boldly sculpted canyon where we read the geologic story in the rock walls and look for the rock art of early cultures along the waterways. Plants in this canyon exhibit many adaptations to the environmental extremes. We return to the lodge for lunch or a swim if you'd like.

In the afternoon, we take two hikes near Badwater, along with time to explore the amazing salt pan to marvel at the immense sense of space! The permanent spring-fed pool here is not poisonous, but does contain large amounts of chloride, sodium, and sulfate. The surrounding area may be the hottest place in the world with temperatures reaching over 120+ degrees for more than thirty days each summer. Our first hike is a moderate three-mile loop through the colorful badlands of Desolation Canyon and the second, an gentle one-mile walk to the Natural Bridge. We return to our accommodations at dusk, and enjoy the sunset as we drove back over Telescope Peak. We enjoy a celebratory farewell dinner tonight.

Accommodations at Furnace Creek Ranch (B,L,D)

Fri., Mar. 17 Departures from Las Vegas

We return to the airport in Las Vegas today, a drive of about three hours. We plan to arrive by 11:00 AM so please plan on flights out after 12:30 PM—important as we simply cannot get there much earlier! If you wish to take an earlier flight, plan on going out tomorrow; we're happy to drop you off at a hotel near the airport, or you can use the convenient shuttles of many of the casinos. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with [Allianz Travel Insurance](#). Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$3295 DBL / \$4295 SGL per person from Las Vegas.

This cost includes all accommodations, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour cost does not include: round-trip transportation from your home city to Las Vegas, optional activities or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, house cleaners, gratuities, or beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

Plan to arrive at Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport by 2:00 PM on March 12. Please plan your departing flights for after 12:30 PM on March 17.

Photo Credits

All scenic photos courtesy UnSplash; Vermilion Flycatcher, Carlos Sanchez; Mountain Bluebirds, Bryan Calk.

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