



**DESERT INSTITUTE**  
JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL  
PARK ASSOCIATION

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# BACKPACKING: EXPLORING INNER SPACE & OUTER SPACE

FIELD ADVENTURE / FALL 2023

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Unplug from the chaos of everyday life as the desert becomes a canvas for self-reflection. Led by Sydney and Barry Williams of Hiking My Feelings, this 20-mile backpacking trip through Joshua Tree National Park will awaken your spirit and send you home feeling reconnected and refreshed.

As we move through the backcountry, immerse yourself in the art of mindful presence, where the serenity of the desert landscape becomes a gentle invitation to quiet the mind, embrace the whispers of the wind, and rediscover a profound connection to your inner and outer wilderness. At camp each night, we'll share guided self-reflection techniques to help explore your inner space as we count stars and fall asleep under the Milky Way, enveloped by the expansive wonder that is outer space.

## MEETING LOCATION

[Joshua Tree Visitor Center](#) parking lot, 6554 Park Blvd, Joshua Tree, CA 92252

## DATES and TIMES

Friday, October 6th, 1p through Sunday, October 8th at 3p (we will meet at the Joshua Tree Visitor Center on Friday and caravan as a group to our trailhead at Geology Tour Road, where everyone will leave their cars for the duration of the trip.)

*Please arrive on time; we start classes promptly, and in the case of hikes or other classes on the go, we cannot wait for students who arrive late.*

## ACTIVITY LEVEL: STRENUOUS!

Participants in this class should be comfortable hiking 6-7 miles per day with a loaded backpack (30-40 lbs) through uneven terrain for a total of 20 miles and 2,174 feet of

elevation gain, over the three days. If you are new to hiking and backpacking and would like tips to prepare and some training suggestions, please email us at [desertinstitute@joshuatree.org](mailto:desertinstitute@joshuatree.org). Please contact us if you have questions about accommodations or your ability to participate.

## EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

While this is a beginner backpacking trip, participants should have experience setting up their tent and sleep system, cooking meals in the backcountry, and be comfortable with the physical requirements of the trip.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Admission to Joshua Tree National Park (please download or print your park pass ahead of time, or you will have to pay fees at the gate!)
- First aid and emergency supplies for the group
- Lodging (in the form of backcountry campsites!)
- Drinking Water for days 2 and 3

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Meals
- Transportation
- Camping and backpacking equipment
- Drinking water for Day 1

## A NOTE FROM YOUR GUIDES

Whether you're brand new to backpacking or a seasoned adventurer, the backcountry of Joshua Tree National Park is a sanctuary, a refuge, and an oasis of possibilities. One of the things we love most about the park is how much of the sky you can see at night. In other wilderness areas, you may have some of the sky obstructed by tall trees or mountain ranges. Out here, the sky expands nearly 180 degrees overhead, reaching across the horizon, with silhouettes of Joshua Trees and ancient rock formations framing the Milky Way. To be able to experience the expansive backcountry during the day for all of its "see for miles ahead of you" glory and at night for the sheer size of the night sky is an open canvas for exploring your thoughts, feeling into your body's signals, and communing with nature. If this is your first time in the desert, be prepared to be astonished by how much life wants to happen out here.

## GET TO KNOW YOUR GUIDES: Sydney and Barry Williams

**SYDNEY WILLIAMS:** When former collegiate athlete and competitive skydiver, Sydney Williams, unexpectedly found herself on the receiving end of a Type 2 diabetes diagnosis, while grappling with decades of unresolved trauma, she set out on a mission: turn her pain into power. After two hikes on the Trans-Catalina Trail, she founded Hiking My Feelings® to help others tap into the mind-body connection and healing power of nature that helped kick her self-limiting beliefs and disease into remission. Five years and 400+ events later, Sydney's work has helped thousands of people find wellness in the wilderness.

**BARRY WILLIAMS:** Hailing from New Hampshire, Barry grew up in the outdoors and has hiked most of the White Mountains and Presidential range, in addition to various walkabouts around the US. Before Hiking My Feelings, Barry was a professional skydiver for more than 16 years. Combining a degree in psychology from the University of New Hampshire, his experience as an educator, and his training as a Wilderness EMT, Barry is uniquely equipped to lead hikes, facilitate educational programming, and ensure everyone's safety in the outdoors at our events.

## PROGRAM AGENDA

### DAY 1

We start at the Backcountry board on Geology Tour Road, hike along the California Riding and Hiking Trail to Water Cache 1 (restock on water) and on to Camp 1. Participants can look forward to a nice walk in the desert, connecting the dots between the wilderness of Joshua Tree and the wilderness within ourselves. When we arrive at camp we will set up, relax and re-hydrate, and then prepare dinner. As the sun sets and the night sky comes alive, we'll share stories and reflections from our adventures so far as we wrap up our first day under the Milky Way.

### DAY 2

We start the day with breakfast and at 8am, we gather for our Trail of Life Self-Reflection workshop. This workshop is the foundation of all the work we do at Hiking My Feelings and will build upon the previous day's self-reflection programming. After we break down and pack up, we will share seven miles together to our next camp. Along the way, we will be exploring our inner space, integrating our observations from day one. After we set up camp and eat dinner, we will circle up for another reflection session as we observe the expanse of the night sky, offering an opportunity for a fresh perspective on our lives in the context of the Universe and the landscape we have traveled through together so far.

## DAY 3

On our final day, enjoy your final backcountry breakfast and break camp before our guided meditation and journaling practice at 8am. We will set off on the trail by 9am, completing our final seven mile hike and returning to our cars by 2-3pm.

## SPECIAL NOTES ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

There is no cell service in the park! Print or download your park pass ahead of time, and please allow ample travel time to arrive at the meeting location—extra time if you are meeting on a weekend morning (see FAQ notes about late arrivals.) Please make sure you check the weather ahead of time and dress accordingly. **All participants must complete the [health questionnaire and liability waiver](#) at least one day ahead of the program.**

This is a strenuous activity and it involves extensive preparation and equipment. Desert Institute will be contacting all registrants upon registration to make sure you have access to or will acquire all necessary equipment, and that you are able to meet the physical requirements for this 20-mile hiking adventure.

## WHAT TO BRING

### Required equipment and supplies

- hiking boots or appropriate athletic shoes for long days of walking with weight on the back
- water bladder and/or water bottles (you must have capacity to carry at least 4L of water with you.)
- headlamp or small flashlight, extra batteries
- Tent
- 55L or larger overnight backpacking pack
- sleeping pad—this is for warmth from the cold ground, not comfort. It is not negotiable!
- sleeping bag—it is recommended that if you sleep cold, to bring a 30F bag or warmer. Temperatures could be down below freezing at night
- hand sanitizer
- If making warm beverages and food, small camp stove, fuel canister, and lighter
- backpacking bowl and utensils, mug if you plan to drink warm beverages (long spoon is the best!) if cooking, a bowl that doubles as a cooking vessel is best
- Meals: 2 camp lightweight breakfasts, 3 trail lunches (or snacks), 2 camp lightweight dinners

- any snacks and other food items you need between meals. Nuts, trailmix, jerkies, chocolate, salty things with calories are best! Snacks are often the way to go instead of lunch, for quick, no-fuss energy on the trail.
- personal medications
- appropriate clothing (suggested list is on following page)
- Sun protection: sunscreen, sunglasses, hats/visor, bandana, long-sleeved, light-weight shirt to protect arms

## Optional equipment and supplies

- lightweight camp shoes
- running gaiters (to keep dirt out of shoes while hiking)
- electrolytes to stay hydrated
- minimal toiletries: tooth care, hygienic wipes in place of soap, moisturizer or after-sun lotion
- phone/camera
- power bank
- dry sack for electronics
- lighter or matches
- Knife or multitool
- trekking poles
- first aid kit (DI will carry two FA kits)
- Compass and GPS system, such as Alltrails or GAIA (download maps of area ahead of time to use while phones are in airplane mode in the park)
- Paper map of JTNP

## Suggested clothing list: a place to start

### **For daytime and being out in the elements:**

- Fleece, lightweight down jacket, or warm insulating layer
- outer shell layer (this can be a wind jacket or rain jacket—check forecast, as rain is a possibility)
- rain pants (if rain looks possible)
- one midweight top layer
- 1 pair hiking pants (preferably not cotton, moisture wicking or quick-dry materials recommended)
- 1 base layer (can be a short-sleeved or long-sleeved moisture wicking shirt)
- 1 white or light-colored hiking shirt or sun hoody, to protect arms from sun if it is warm

- 2 pairs hiking socks that are NOT cotton (smartwool and darntough are great!)
- 2-3 pairs underwear, as you see fit (icebreakers makes nice wool undergarments)

**For nighttime and sleeping:**

- long underwear/base layers (either mid or heavy weight depending on weather)
- down jacket for insulating layer
- gloves
- beanie (hooded insulating layers are great so you don't have to bring one)

# FAQ

## WHO DO I CONTACT IF I AM RUNNING LATE?

Please call our main line: 760-819-4714 and if no one answers, please call the Desert Institute coordinator, Benny Lopez: 949-241-9693.

For classes meeting in the park, please take into consideration the time it will take to go through the entrance gate—on weekends after 9am, you may wait up to 45 minutes! (15-20 minutes is typical.) For afternoon activities, you will also want to allot time to park, as parking lots tend to be congested between 10am and 4p in the busy season. **There is no cell service in the park**, so please plan accordingly!

## WHAT IF I NEED TO CANCEL?

Desert Institute will provide a full refund if we are notified 14 days in advance. If we are notified less than 14 days in advance, we are unable to process refunds for any reason. (But we would like you to notify us if you are unable to attend.)

## DOES DESERT INSTITUTE CANCEL ACTIVITIES FOR WEATHER OR LOW ENROLLMENT?

Desert Institute runs classes rain or shine, with the exception of astrophotography classes, which require mostly clear skies in order to be successful. If we do not meet our minimum of 4 registered participants for any given activity, we will cancel the activity with 48+ hours notice. We recommend that you purchase travel insurance, as we are unable to reimburse for expenses you incur due to a canceled class, such as airfare and hotel.

## ARE THERE ANY THINGS I NEED TO DO TO PREPARE?

All participants must return the completed [health questionnaire and signed waiver](#) before the day of their activity. **Failure to do so will cancel your registration.** If your course enters Joshua Tree National Park, you must **download or print your park pass** ahead of the class, or you will pay the entrance fee at the gate, which is currently \$35 per vehicle.

## CAN I BRING MY KIDS? MY SPOUSE? PETS?

Only registered participants may attend Desert Institute activities unless noted in the activity description. If this is a kid-friendly activity, please make sure your child(ren) meets the age requirements. As much as we love our pets, we don't allow them in the field with any of our activities.