# Desert trips and getting stuck in sand

A desert drive or camping trip can turn dangerous fast if a car gets stuck or breaks down far from help in high heat. This page helps you plan the route and kit, get a vehicle out of soft sand, and spot heat illness early.

## CHECKLIST

- [ ] At least one US gallon (about 4 litres) of water per person per day, plus extra
- [ ] Extra food and any needed medicines for several days
- [ ] First aid kit
- [ ] Spare tyres and a jack with a base plate
- [ ] Tyre inflator and pressure gauge
- [ ] Shovel
- [ ] Sand recovery tracks
- [ ] Good map
- [ ] Torch and extra clothing for after sunset
- [ ] Hat, sunglasses and sunscreen
- [ ] Satellite communicator or emergency beacon
- [ ] Fire extinguisher for the campsite

## BEFORE

- Plan your route and check road and weather conditions before you set off.
- Tell someone your route, destination, return date, and your car's make and plate number.
- Use a high-clearance 4x4 with off-road tyres, and fill the tank before leaving.
- Do not rely on phone map apps alone, as they may not work in remote areas.
- Carry a satellite communicator or emergency beacon, as phone signal may be absent.
- Pack at least one US gallon (about 4 litres) of water per person per day, plus extra.

## DURING

- Lower tyre pressure to about 20 psi or less on soft sand, and drive slowly.
- If you get stuck, stop spinning the wheels. Reverse gently in your own tracks, then go forward.
- Still stuck? Let out more air, down to about 10 psi in very soft sand.
- Dig a clear path for each tyre, then drive out.
- If the car breaks down, stay with it. It gives shade and is easier for rescuers to see.
- Avoid hard effort in extreme heat, drink water freely, and wear a hat and sunscreen.
- For headache, dizziness or heavy sweating, get out of the heat and take frequent sips of cool water.
- Confusion, slurred speech or passing out can mean heat stroke. Call for help and cool them fast.

## AFTER

- Pump tyres back up before you return to normal roads.
- Get medical help if heat symptoms get worse, include vomiting, or last over an hour.
- Do not give drinks to someone with heat stroke. Get them to hospital straight away.
- Keep your campsite clean.

## IN THE UAE

In Dubai, winter camping needs a Dubai Municipality permit and takes place in the designated Al Aweer camping area during the season (check Dubai Municipality's announcement for the current season). Fire extinguishers are compulsory at camps and fireworks are banned.

## MY NOTES

Sources: US National Park Service (Death Valley), News release, 21 August 2026: visitor death and desert travel safety (https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/news/2026-08-21.htm); US National Park Service (Mojave National Preserve), Safety (https://www.nps.gov/moja/planyourvisit/safety.htm); US National Park Service, Desert driving safety (https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/desertdrivingsafety.htm); Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (Western Australia), Shark Bay and Francois Peron National Park sand driving information (https://www.dbca.wa.gov.au/media/6434/download); CDC (NIOSH), Heat-related illnesses (https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/heat-stress/about/illnesses.html); US National Weather Service, Heat illness (https://weather.gov/safety/heat-illness); Dubai Municipality, Winter camp reservations open with all-new features (https://www.dm.gov.ae/winter-camp-reservations-open-with-all-new-features/); UAE Government portal (u.ae), Handling emergencies (https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/justice-safety-and-the-law/handling-emergencies)
General guidance in our own words. Always follow your local authorities.