

Below is the proposed itinerary for the trip. As is true on any adventure travel trip, plans for any specific day may be modified due to weather considerations, unforeseen circumstances, new opportunities, and group interests.

## **DAY 1**

### **Arrive Las Vegas, Introductions and Welcome Dinner**

Spring is an excellent time for hiking, with temperatures in the high 70s. The following itinerary may be adjusted because of weather, availability of ranger talks, group wishes, etc. Our trip starts today in Las Vegas. Arrive any time before 5 PM. Catch a convenient shuttle (not a hotel shuttle), cab or Uber to our hotel, where we will meet at 5:30 PM. We'll start getting to know each other and review our plans for the trip, before sharing our first dinner. The evening is free for you to get to bed early or wander the strip. (D)

## **DAY 2**

### **Drive to Death Valley, visit Ash Meadows and Rhyolite Ghost town**

Today we will make our way to Death Valley National Park, a drive that takes about 2.5 hours. Death Valley and Joshua Tree are all about water the overabundance and lack thereof! Our first stop will be Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, the largest oasis in the Mojave Desert. A biodiversity hot spot and home to 30 endemic species include the famous pupfish. After our picnic lunch we will continue to Rhyolite Ghost town, a collection of the remnants of a boom-and-bust mining town. It will be hard to believe that the town had over 3,500 inhabitants at one time. After leaving Rhyolite we will stop at "Hells Gate" and you will get your first glimpse of Death Valley and its amazing geology. We will head to the Ranch at Death Valley, where we spend the next three nights. Overnight Ranch at Death Valley (B, L, D)

## **DAY 3**

### **Hike Golden Canyon-Gower Gulch Loop, Free Afternoon**

This morning we hike the Golden Canyon-Gower Gulch Loop. This 4.5-mile loop trail first takes us through colorful Golden Canyon and then up and over a ridge, passing beneath Manley Beacon. (Named after William Manly who lead a group of ill-fated prospectors out of Death Valley during the 1849 Gold Rush.) The trail then drops into Gower Gulch, another canyon but with a completely different feel and footing than Golden Canyon. The loop ends with a traverse along the base of the cliffs (an alluvial fan) that rise abruptly from the flatter plain below. If you want some time on your own during this trip, the rest of the afternoon is free for you to do as you choose, perhaps enjoying the thermally heated pool or seeing the Visitor's Center. Alternatively, we will head to the Harmony Borax Works to learn about borax mining in Death Valley. Lots of good choices! We will meet again in the late afternoon for a trip to Badwater Basin, the lowest point in North America. Overnight Oasis at Death Valley Ranch. (B, L, D).

## **DAY 4**

### **Hike Ubehebe Crater, Salt Creek Interpretative Trail, visit Badwater Salt Flat**

Death Valley is a huge park, a fact we will appreciate more fully after today. We'll begin our day a bit earlier to make sure we have time for everything! After driving an hour into the northern part of the Park, our first stop will be the 600-foot deep Ubehebe Crater, the remnants of a massive maar volcanic explosion 300 years ago. We will hike along the west rim of the Crater to Little Hebe, before continuing around the rim for a total of 1.5 miles. On the way back, we will have a desert picnic and stopping at the Salt Creek Interpretative Trail. An easy boardwalk takes us to the Creek, a stream of salty water that is the habitat for cold water pupfish, cousins of the Ash Meadows pupfish. Returning to the ranch before heading out to in the late afternoon for to the Mesquite sand dunes. The late afternoon setting sun adds to the beauty of the dunes. (B, L, D)

## **DAY 5**

### Good-bye Death Valley, Stop at Zabriskie Point, Drive to Joshua Tree National Park

Today we load up for the drive to Joshua Tree National Park. It's a long drive (over 4 hours) but full of desert beauty and stop along the way to break it up. We will say goodbye to Death Valley from Zabriskie Point which overlooks the valley and one of our hiking trails. Continuing on to the Mojave National Preserve, we'll stop in Kelso at the Kelso Depot Visitor Center to learn about the once thriving railroad depot. We then continue to Joshua Tree National Park and stop by the Oasis of Mara visitor center before heading into the park and our first hike in the park. (B, L, D)

### DAY 6

### Hike a Few of Joshua Tree National Park's Spectacular Trails

Joshua Tree has a rich geological and human history. Designated as a national monument in 1936 and a national park in 1994, it straddles the California Mojave and Colorado deserts with their diverse ecosystems. Ranging from 3,000 to 5,185 feet above sea level, the park is both higher and generally cooler than Death Valley. It is also home to the bizarrely shaped Joshua Tree and is a playground for climbers and hikers alike. We will begin a full day in Joshua Tree National Park by hiking the Split Rock Trail and Skull Rock Trails. The Split Rock Trail is approximately 3.5 miles of diverse terrain, taking us through rock formations, sandy wash, and rolling desert landscapes. We will combine it with the Skull Rock trail to the aptly named rock formation, Skull Rock trail. For our lunch spot we'll head to the Hidden Valley area with a chance to explore the valley that was used to hide purloined cattle. After lunch we hike to Barkers Dam Loop or The Wall Street Mill hike to see remnants of the human history of Joshua Tree. (B, L, D)

### DAY 7

### Hike 49 Palms Oasis and go to Palm Springs CA

Our visit to Joshua Tree has been quick but we do not want to leave without visiting the 49 Palms Oasis. The 3-mile trail ascends a 300-foot ridge before dropping back down to the desert oasis. Along the landscape is dotted with the barrel cacti and spring flowers (hopefully). We will stop for our picnic lunch at the oasis before returning on the same path. If energy and time permits, we will stop at the western section of the park for a hike in the Black Rock area. We sadly leave Joshua Tree National Park behind as we head to Palm Springs. We will spend our last night in Palm Springs CA. (B, L, D)

### DAY 8

### Leave anytime today from Palm Springs airport

You are free to leave at anytime today or stay and enjoy Palm Springs! The airport is a 10 minute taxi ride away from the hotel. (B)