

Visitors Guide

Sable Island, Nova Scotia

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General information for Residents and Visitors to Sable Island

1. Sable Island Administration

Sable Island is located approximately 300 km east-southeast of Halifax, N.S. It's approximately 45 kilometres long and 1 kilometre wide and composed entirely of sand.

The Meteorological Service of Canada, a branch of Environment Canada, maintains a continuous presence on the island. There are also seasonally occupied facilities belonging to Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Coast Guard and these include a number of buildings, two lighthouses, two helicopter landing pads and a navigation beacon.

Island access and activities are administered by the Canadian Coast Guard on behalf of the Government of Canada, pursuant to the Sable Island Regulations of the Canada Shipping Act.

Except for emergencies, no person is allowed to land on the island without permission from the Director of Maritime Services, Canadian Coast Guard.

Persons failing to observe these regulations may be subject to legal action.

2. Risk and Liability

Sable Island is a remote outpost, and the normal range of commercial, municipal, and medical services are not available. The nature of the environment means that hazardous conditions will frequently exist. Visitors must exercise caution at all times and in all places.

No health services exist, and in conjunction with travel delays, this means that minor medical concerns can be aggravated into life-threatening situations on Sable Island. **Visitors must be financially prepared to assume the cost of chartering aircraft for medical evacuation or other emergencies.**

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canadian Coast Guard, and Environment Canada will not accept any liability. If equipment belonging to visitors is damaged for any reason, it is entirely the responsibility of the visitors themselves.

Visitors who damage island facilities or equipment will be required to pay the costs of repair or replacement.

All buildings and facilities on the island are restricted to authorized persons only.

3. Permission to visit Sable Island

Requests to visit Sable Island must be made in writing to

Director of Maritime Services,

Canadian Coast Guard.

Fax: (902) 426-4828.

Email: simont@mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

The written request should include:

- reason for the visit
- number of people, with names
- mode of transportation to and from the island
- projected dates of arrival and departure
- Logistical support required (aircraft operations, accommodations, vehicle and driver, etc.)

Logistical support on the island must be arranged well in advance. Contact the Officer-in-Charge at (902) 453-9350 (phone and fax).

4. Travel to the island

Once permission is obtained, visitors would normally charter their own airplane, helicopter, or boat to travel to the island. The most common mode of transport is a fixed wing aircraft chartered through Maritime Air Charters Ltd. Phone (902) 873-3330 Fax (902) 484-5322 email info@maritimeair.com .

In addition to the charter costs, visitors face other charges associated with the landing on the island as well as any required ground support. Fees are listed at the end of this document.

The most favourable travel conditions exist between August and October, but it's not uncommon to experience travel delays due to lack of a landing area or poor weather conditions. A normal delay might be a day or two, although flights will occasionally be delayed significantly longer. Visitors must ensure they have enough supplies to deal with unplanned delays.

Arriving by aircraft

Contact the island in advance (902 453 9350) to ensure you've properly arranged any logistical support, and that your proposed itinerary will not interfere with island operations.

It's recommended you observe safe practices as described in the Health and Safety section of this document.

Arriving by sea

1. Vessels should contact the island before departing the mainland (902 453 9350) to ensure that island staff is aware of their itinerary and to ensure vessels are informed of island or offshore activities that may affect their plans.
2. Vessels should contact the island on Marine Radio Channel 8 or 16 when within 10 nautical miles of the island to confirm their safe arrival, and to obtain any special instructions.
3. There are no wharf facilities, and visitors will need to bring their own zodiac or other small boat to get ashore. Vessels **must** anchor off the **north** side of the island, **opposite** the main station - at longitude 60.01W. There are submerged sand bars off the beach, and vessels should maintain their distance – 500 meters is usually sufficient, although there are times small boats are able to approach within 200 meters.
4. Vessels should contact Sable Island on Marine Radio Channel 8 or 16 to advise when they are anchored.
5. Visitors must not attempt to land on the beach until island staff is in position to monitor their arrival, lend assistance, and to provide the required briefing.
6. Visitors must leave the island by 6 p.m. unless authorized.
7. Boaters should observe the recommended safe practices described in the Health and Safety section of this document.

5. Wreck and materials found on Sable Island

Items classified as wreck include any aircraft, ship or other vessel, or any part thereof, the cargo, stores or tackle of any vessel, and the property of persons.

Persons finding such **wreck or any other material** on Sable Island are required to inform the Receiver of Wreck and complete the applicable documents. Removal of wreck is considered plundering, and may result in search and seizure or legal action.

Further information can be found in "*A Guide to Reporting Wreck*". Copies of this booklet are available to visitors on Sable Island, or from the Superintendent, Navigable Waters Protection Branch (902) 426-2726.

6. Facilities

All facilities and structures are restricted to authorized personnel only. All persons must refrain from entering premises, climbing on structures, poking around, snooping, and other types of “just looking around”

7. Natural Environment

Terrain

The terrain is vulnerable to disturbance. No construction or excavation is permitted without written authorization. No activities are permitted on steep dune slopes. In some circumstances, foot traffic on vegetated terrain may be restricted.

Vegetation

No species of plant or animal may be introduced without authorization.

Plants should not be disturbed. Some plants found on the island are very restricted in distribution. Since such plants generally occur in sites with lush and wetter vegetation, it is necessary to minimize activities in such areas.

Walking on stable vegetation **is permitted**, but persons should follow existing horse paths when possible.

Walking on steep slopes, both vegetated and non-vegetated, is **prohibited** as it leads to dune collapse.

Birds

Sable Island is a Migratory Bird Sanctuary with protection for all migratory birds, their nests, their eggs, and their habitat. During spring and summer, nesting colonies on the dunes or beaches must be avoided and care must be taken to avoid disturbing ducks, shorebirds and sparrows nesting in the areas of heath and pond-edge vegetation.

During the period April through July, visitors should avoid:

- The area south of the road to west light
- Tern colonies located at the end of the road to south beach, and along the south beach dune line.

Note that terns also nest on the open beaches.

Both terns and gulls will aggressively defend their nests, and can injure humans. If you find yourself 'under attack' turn and leave the area immediately.

Horses

The horses are protected by law. They must not be interfered with or harassed. **Horses must not be fed.**

Some of the horses near the main station can be approached within a few meters. If they find your presence disturbing they'll just walk away. It's important to be conscious of how horse herds are approached, and avoid getting 'in the way'. Don't approach young foals. The best strategy is to sit down, as horses are curious and may approach to check you out.

There have been a number of instances where people have been injured by horses. In all cases, the humans were agitating the horses, trying to feed them, trying to pet them, or interfering in herd movements. Be careful!

Seals

Grey Seals: These are the most common and breed in January and February. More than 50,000 pups are born every year. During the summer, their numbers are reduced but they're still common.

Harbour Seals: These are also year-round residents but are less numerous than Grey Seals. They breed in May and June. This population is in decline and it's important to avoid disturbing them, either on vehicles or on foot.

These seals can bite! Keep your distance, and avoid getting in their way.

Sharks

There are 18 varieties of shark on the Scotian Shelf. You may notice the beach contains many carcasses of seals that have been killed by sharks.

Should you find yourself under attack by a shark, please try to note identifying features. If you survive, researchers would like to know which shark species was responsible.

8. Miscellaneous Island Policies:

1. Firearms and explosives are not permitted on the island without authorization.
2. Visitors to the island are responsible for taking their garbage back to the mainland. Littering is not permitted.
3. Open-air fires such as beach fires, bonfires, or campfires are prohibited.
4. Camping is prohibited.
5. No pets are permitted.
6. Biological studies

Long-term studies of the horses are underway, and horse skulls or bones should not be moved.

Walrus skulls or bones are part of an ongoing study. If found they may be taken, but should be shown to the Officer-in-Charge to be photographed and measured.

Notify the Officer-in-Charge if you find any beached whales, dolphins, or sea turtles.

Electronic measurement or tracking devices occasionally wash ashore from ongoing studies of whale or seal movements. Please advise the Officer-in-Charge if any are found.

9. Vehicle Regulations

There are no vehicles for rent, but visitors may be able to charter a station vehicle and driver. The availability of staff and vehicles is subject to operational requirements.

Visitors with their own vehicles must observe the vehicle use regulations:

1. Vehicles may be driven on the beaches, and the two approved roads:
 - a. From north beach to south beach through the station
 - b. From the station to west light.
2. To cross from the north beach to the south beach, vehicles must use one of the five approved crossing areas. These areas are marked with red posts.
3. Vehicles may not be driven
 - a. Over vegetation, no matter how sparse.
 - b. On dune slopes, whether or not they are vegetated.
 - c. In blowouts
 - d. Any other portion of the island behind the dune line.
4. Vehicles must be driven with proper care and attention to avoid injury.
5. Vehicles must go out of their way to avoid horses, seals, or birds.
6. On the inland roads,
 - Vehicles must drive very slowly to minimize the hazards to wildlife, pedestrians, and other vehicles.
 - When vehicles meet on the roadway, one vehicle must back up to the marked passing area.
 - Wildlife has the right-of-way. If wildlife is in the road, vehicles must stop and wait for them to move.

10. Health and Safety Policies and Recommended Practices

Air travel.

- a. Pay attention to the pilot's safety briefing.
 - Note the door exits, and note the position of the handle, and how the handle is moved to open the door.
 - Note how the emergency window exits are opened.
 - Note the location of the first aid kit
 - Note the location of the fire extinguisher in front of the front seats.
 - Note the location of the EPIRB beacon between the front seats.
 - Note the location of the life raft, and ensure you understand the pilot's instructions for deploying it.
 - Once you've taken your seat, close your eyes, and feel around for the door handle, and the emergency window exit. You should be familiar enough with your physical situation to enable an exit in total darkness.
- b. It's recommended you wear your life jacket at all times.
- c. Ensure your seat belt is fastened at all times.
- d. After landing, wait until the pilot opens the door for you.

Visitors coming ashore on small boats:

- a. Boat passengers must have a VHF radio and maintain communications with the beach party on Marine Channel 8.
- b. All passengers must have life jackets.
- c. Zodiacs must not be overloaded beyond the manufacturer's recommended carrying capacity.
- d. Rough surf conditions may exist, so it's important to exercise extreme caution when coming through the surf zone.

Hazardous materials

Hazardous materials must be kept in approved containers, be stored in designated areas, have proper spill containment, and comply with all federal and provincial regulations regarding the storage, handling, and transportation of hazardous substances. Contact station staff for more information.

Hazardous debris on the beach

Marine litter and debris periodically wash up on the beach and can include hazards such as sharp or pointed objects (glass, metal), toxic marine life (jellyfish), hazardous materials (propane cylinders, containers of fuel or solvents), and even military debris such as smoke markers or munitions. Some of these items may contain dangerous chemicals. Visitors must exercise caution, and give such materials a wide berth. Unknown or hazardous objects should be reported to the Officer-in-Charge.

Travel on the island:

Visitors should discuss with the Officer-in-Charge the hazards to travel unique to Sable Island:

- Wildlife (seals, horses, birds)
- Ice covered water, salt-water slush, and quicksand
- Flooding
- Uneven terrain, unstable ground, and steep slopes
- Flotsam and jetsam on the beach
- Drainage rivers and riverbeds
- Litter and debris

Visitors should ensure someone on the island knows of their travel plans including departure time, route, and expected time of return. It's usually a good idea to carry a cell phone or marine radio and develop response plans within your group, or with Station staff.

When travelling away from the station area in winter, persons should carry dry clothing in a waterproof pack.

Severe Weather

In lightning conditions, avoid telephones and metal objects. Stay inside.

In high winds,

- Ensure any windows and doors are securely closed and latched.
- If you must go outside, use exits on the downwind side of buildings.
- Be careful of what's upwind. There is usually little warning before debris on the ground or parts of buildings become airborne.
- If you hear flapping or other noises suggesting something is loose and blowing around, notify the Officer-in-Charge.

Medicines

Visitors taking medication must ensure they bring sufficient supplies for the duration of their visit and extra quantities in case of unplanned delays.

Visitors with severe allergic reactions must provide their own medication and ensure they carry it with them at all times.

Emergency Communications and working alone

Visitors using a vehicle or working alone should have a hand-held marine VHF radio or cell phone, and make arrangements for check-in procedures and emergency support.

11. The Sable Island Station

Visitors to the station will be permitted on site only as long as they cooperate with station policies and procedures.

Visitors are expected to be as self-sufficient as possible. Station tools, materials, and equipment are not available for public use. Where support is required the appropriate fees will be charged.

The station occasionally has spare accommodations. Availability must be arranged well in advance, and visitors may have to share accommodation space.

Visitors who have obtained authorization for overnight stays must provide their own:

- Food & beverages
- Sleeping bag or other bedding, including pillows
- Personal toiletries and towels
- Tobacco

Smoking is not permitted in station buildings.

Communications

The priority for the station's radio and satellite communications equipment is station operations. Fees apply to any use of the communications system.

Bell-system cell phones are usable on Sable Island, but visitors should keep in mind that premium rates apply.

Supplies

Visitors must ensure they have enough supplies in case of transportation delays

Alcohol or drug abuse

Persons abusing drugs or alcohol are a hazard to themselves and others, and may be removed from the island and face legal action.

Miscellaneous

In emergency conditions, visitors may be conscripted to assist station staff.

When departures are delayed due to weather or beach conditions, persons are expected to demonstrate good humour and mature behaviour.

12: Emergency Procedures

Sable Island Officer-In-Charge:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Local Island numbers: | dial 0, or *009 (truck phone) |
| Marine Radio VHF-FM, | Channel 08 |
| Sable Island phone: | (902) 453-9350 |
| Vehicle phone: | (902) 497-8963 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Distress (air or marine) | 1 800 565 1582 |
| Environmental emergency | 1 800 565 1633 |

Medical emergencies and injuries:

- a. Check the area for hazards and make the area safe.
- b. Advise island staff
- c. Follow standard First Aid procedures:
 - Make sure the airway is open.
 - Check for breathing. Give artificial respiration if needed.
 - Check for shock and bleeding and give first aid if needed.
 - Reassure the casualty and provide care until assistance arrives.
 - Don't give anything by mouth.

In Case of Fire

1. Sound the alarm and evacuate the area.
2. If the fire is small, attempt to put it out with an extinguisher, otherwise get out of the building immediately.
3. Contact the Officer-in-Charge

In Case of Fire Alarm

In the station compound, visitors must report to the marked muster points and remain there until directed by the Officer-in-Charge.

Environmental Emergency

Contact the Officer-in-Charge

13. Environment Canada Fee Schedule

| | |
|---|--|
| Aircraft Landing Fixed Wing Helicopter | (Includes transportation to main station area) \$500 each \$200 each |
| Fuel Diesel Gasoline Propane (emergencies only) | \$1.55 per liter \$2.60 per liter \$150/cylinder |
| Electricity | \$1.48 per Kwh |
| Vehicles Crew-cab Pickup Gator utility vehicle Bombardier tracked vehicle Tractor Loader | (1 hour minimum, plus driver at labour rate) \$90 per hour \$40 per hour \$140 per hour \$85 per hour \$85 per hour |
| Accommodations | \$150 per person per night |
| Access to station food supplies | \$55 per person per day |
| Labour Mon–Sat, 0800–1630 Outside of normal hours Sundays Callout (less than 4 hrs notice) | \$90 per hour \$135 per hour \$180 per hour Minimum of 3 hours at applicable rate |
| Communications Services Fax Phone Cell call Internet Access | \$5 + \$1 per page \$1 per minute \$2 per minute \$0.50 per minute |
| Waste Processing and Disposal Burnable waste Recyclable waste Non-burnable, non-recyclable Hazardous material | \$0.50 per pound No charge if properly prepared \$0.60 per pound \$1.50 per pound |
| Freight Storage and Handling | \$1 per day per Kg |

All charges must be paid with cash, traveller's cheques, or credit card (Visa / MasterCard). Personal cheques are not accepted.

14. Contacts

Director, Maritime Services

Canadian Coast Guard

Foot of Parker Street

P. O. Box 1000

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

B2Y 3Z8

Phone: (902) 426-9022

Facsimile: (902) 426-4828

Navigable Waters Protection Program

Receiver of Wreck

Transport Canada

PO Box 1013

Dartmouth, NS

B2Y 4K2

Phone: (902) 426-2726

Facsimile: (902) 426-7585

Director, Environmental Monitoring, Meteorological Service of Canada

Environment Canada,

45 Alderney Drive,

Dartmouth, N.S.

B2Y 2N6

Phone: (902) 426-4519

Facsimile: (902) 426-1595

Maritime Air Charters Ltd.

549 Barnes Road

Halifax International Airport

Enfield, Nova Scotia

B2T 1K3

Phone: (902) 873-3330

Facsimile: (902) 484-5322

Email: info@maritimeair.com

Officer-in-Charge,

Sable Island Station

c/o Environment Canada,

16th floor, 45 Alderney Drive,

Dartmouth, N.S.

B2Y 2N6

Phone: (902) 453-9350

Facsimile: (902) 453-9350

Receiver of Wreck

Acknowledgement

I have read the Sable Island Visitors Manual.

1. I recognize that Sable Island is a remote location, without the normal range of municipal and medical services.
2. I understand that Sable Island has hazards associated with travelling to and from the island, hazards associated with the wildlife, hazards associated with materials found on the island or washed ashore, and hazards associated with the natural environment and island operations.
3. I understand that items found on Sable Island are the property of the Government of Canada, and may not be removed without authorization.
4. I understand that access to all buildings and structures on Sable Island is restricted to authorized persons.
5. I understand that all wildlife on the island is to be given a wide berth, and that horses, seals, and birds are not to be disturbed, fed, handled, or interfered with.
6. I understand that the island ecosystem is very fragile, and no activities are permitted that would damage the terrain or vegetation.
7. I understand that I'm responsible for my actions and those of my dependants.

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Officer-in-Charge _____ Date: _____