

SECTION TWO: Overview

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General

Isle Royale National Park (Isle Royale) is a forested archipelago surrounded by the deep, cold waters of the largest of the Great Lakes, Lake Superior, southeast of Thunder Bay, Ontario. It is part of the State of Michigan, but is closer to Minnesota. It is approximately 22 miles east of Grand Portage, Minnesota, 35 miles south of Thunder Bay, Ontario, and about 60 miles north of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. It consists on the main island, which is 45 miles long and up to 9 miles wide. The park encompasses a total area of 850 square miles, including submerged lands, which extend 4.5 miles out into Lake Superior. Besides the main island it is surrounded by about 400 smaller islands. The parks total area is 571,796 acres, divided between 133,788 acres of land, and 438,008 acres of surrounding Lake Superior waters. Approximately 200 inland lakes and ponds are scattered across the island, as are numerous bogs and marshes. Moist cool conditions near the shoreline and in the northeastern portion of the park support a northern boreal spruce-fir community, while somewhat drier conditions in the park's interior and southwestern portion favor northern hardwoods like sugar maple and yellow birch.



The main island contains a series of parallel ridges and valleys and a shoreline marked by numerous islands, narrow peninsulas, and bays. Ridges run southwest-northeast, generally with moderate slopes on the southeast aspect and steep slopes or cliffs on the northwest side. The highest point in the park is 1394 feet above sea level, almost 800 feet above Lake Superior.

Isle Royale National Park was authorized by Congress in 1931 "to conserve a prime example of North Woods Wilderness". The park was designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1976, under the Wilderness Act, and remains today, as an example of primitive America. Ninety-Nine percent of the park's land area is designated as wilderness. In 1981, Isle Royale was designated as an International Biosphere Reserve, by the United Nations, giving it global scientific and educational significance. Accessible only by boat or float plane, Isle Royale is relatively untouched by direct outside influences and serves as a living laboratory.

The park is open to the public from April 15, through October 31. Boat and Seaplane services run from early May, through early October. There is over 165 miles of hiking trails on the island, ranging from easy to difficult. Besides Lake Superior, there are hundreds of inland lakes with relatively easy portages, if going by Canoe or Kayak. It is the least visited National Park, but has the most repeat visitors. More people go to Yellowstone National Park in a day, than go to Isle Royale in a year. Due to its location, it is not an easy place to go to and takes quite a bit of planning. Once on the island, there is very little available, so you must bring everything you need with you.

The island has been used and enjoyed long before the arrival of Europeans. There are ancient pits used in the gathering of copper and hundreds hammer-stones have been found that were used to pound out the copper. Native American copper objects formed from the island's copper, have been found throughout North America. With the explorations of Douglas Houghton and others, word was spread of the existence of copper on the island, and during the 1800's, a lot of mining exploration was done and several successful mines operated. With the mines, came the establishment of towns and communities built around the mines. Most were short lived, but there are many remnants of these sites. Fishing has also always been a part of the island. From the Native Americans, to present day, the island and its waters have provided both food and a living to people. Commercial fishing began in the 1800's, and continued until the 1960's, when the fishing industry was hurt by the introduction of the Sea Lamprey and Salmon into the lake. It continued, in a limited way through the Sivertson, Strom and a many other families, but all of the fishing licenses are now gone. It was also a vacation destination for

many and many of their “camps” remain and continue to be used by their descendants. Through the continued presence of the descendants of families that settled and lived on the island, the knowledge, heritage and a way of life is still preserved.

[Source: Overall general knowledge from public sources and National Park Service publications and plaques.]

Park Information

Park Fees

The Park Service charges various fees depending on your activity. Those fees are detailed below. The fees are for this park only and one hundred percent of the revenue stays at Isle Royale National Park, and is devoted to fund backlogged maintenance projects, such as docks and trails. Other passes such as the Interagency Annual Pass, Interagency Senior Pass, and the Interagency Access Pass along with the Golden Age and Golden Access Passports provide no discounts at Isle Royale National Park.

Individual User Fees

[Note: For the first time since 1997 the daily user fee has increased from \$4 per day to \$7 per day. They have also changed the Season Pass and there is not a Boat Rider Pass. These are explained below.]

As of 2017, the National Park Service charges a \$7.00 per day user fee for individuals. It is free for children 15 and under. The fees are calculated based on the day you arrive and the day you leave. There is also a Season Pass available for \$60. This season pass covers the Daily User fee for the pass holder and up to three other people. Season Passes are only available by going to or calling the Park Headquarters in Houghton. They are non-refundable and non-transferable.

Daily User Fees are collected by the National Park Service. They can be paid in advance at the website: www.pay.gov. Go there and search for “Isle Royale” or, go directly to the Daily User Fee page at: <https://www.pay.gov/public/form/start/67093923>. They can also be paid at the Ranger Station in Houghton or, on arrival at the island at either Windigo or Rock Harbor. They accept cash, check or credit cards. They can also be purchased over the phone at the headquarters in Houghton and your passes will be mailed or emailed to you. People are encouraged to pay their user fees in advance to avoid congestion and delay when you arrive on the island.

Boater User Fees

These fees are the same as Individual User fees in that everyone on the boat has to have a permit. There is also a Season Pass available for \$60. This season pass covers the Daily User fee for the pass holder and up to three other people. Season Passes are only available by going to or calling the Park Headquarters in Houghton. They are non-refundable and non-transferable. The Individual User Passes can be obtained in the same way as listed above.

Boaters can also make a request for campsites, anchorages or dock space. A request form can be found here: <http://www.nps.gov/isro/planyourvisit/upload/-13-ISRO-BCRF-6.pdf>

Group User Fees

Advance reservations are required for group camping parties. A group is a party of 7-10 individuals, including leaders. No group maybe larger than 10 people. If your party exceeds 10, you must split into two groups, each independent and traveling on completely separate itineraries. Both groups are required to obtain advance permits. Groups are required to follow a set travel itinerary based on campsites that have been reserved. Groups are limited to camping at the group tent sites, three sided shelters or individual tent sites are not to be used by groups. No one organization can have more than 20 people on the Island at any given time and cannot exceed 80 visitors per year.

There is a non-refundable Administrative fee for processing your reservation. You still need to pay Individual User Fees for the people in your group 16 and over.

The fee is as follows:

- Two or more parties of 6 people or fewer (not to exceed 20 people total) \$25.00 for the first 10 people and an additional \$25.00 for 11 to 20 people
- One group of 7 to 10 people is \$25.00
- Two groups of 7 to 10 people is \$50.00
- One group of 7 to 10 people and one party of 6 or fewer (not to exceed 20 people total) is \$25.00 for the first 10 and an additional \$25.00 for 11 to 20 people

A Group User Application can be found at: <https://www.pay.gov/public/form/start/67094096>

The Park Service published a small brochure on Group Camping that can be found at: <http://www.nps.gov/isro/planyourvisit/upload/Groups-2.pdf>

Commercial User Fees

As of 2017, the fee for commercial use is \$200. Commercial groups such as "for-profit" camps, outfitters, tour groups and any operation providing goods, activities, or service to the general public within the park and which is undertaken for or results in compensation, monetary gain, benefit or profit to an individual, organization or corporation must obtain a Commercial Use Authorization. There is an annual fee required for a Commercial Use Authorization. Applications are accepted January 2 through May 15 and, if approved, are valid from April 16 through October 31. This can be used for Backpacking, Fishing Charters, Sailboat Charters, Kayaking/Canoeing Charters, Diving Charters and Boat Charters. The application fee is non-refundable and should be approved in two weeks.

Commercial Use Authorization Application: <https://www.pay.gov/public/form/start/67092029>

Wedding Application

If you have a wedding on the island, there is a wedding application and a non-refundable \$50.00 application fee must be included with your application. After favorable review of your application, a Special Use Permit will be prepared and mailed to you for signature. At that time, a non-refundable permit fee of \$100.00 must be remitted with your signed permit. An additional charge of \$50.00 per hour will be incurred for a National Park Service event monitor for those outdoor activities if needed, excluding those using Forever Resorts facilities. For additional information please call (906) 482-0984.

An application can be found at:

<http://www.nps.gov/isro/planyourvisit/upload/ISRO-wedding-application.PDF>

Park Operation

The park is officially open from April 16th to October 31st. However, the boats do not run that entire time and the stores and other amenities are not open that entire time. Isle Royale National Park is one of the few national parks to close during the winter. The closure is due to the extreme winter weather conditions, for the protection of wildlife, and for the safety and protection of visitors. The Park Headquarters for the winter is located in Houghton, Michigan. The summer headquarters is located at Mott Island on Isle Royale National Park.

Visitor Centers

The Rock Harbor and Windigo Visitor Centers are open from 8 am to 6 pm in July and August with a reduced schedule in May, June and September.

The Houghton Visitor Center is open June through mid-August, Monday through Friday 8 am to 6 pm and Saturday 11 am to 6 pm. From mid-August through mid-September, it is open Monday through Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm and Saturday 2 pm to 4 pm. From mid-September through May, it is open Monday through Friday 8:15 am to 4:15 pm except on holidays.

Camping Regulations

These are the regulations typed verbatim from the back of the permit I received in May, 2001 and verified from the permit I received in the Fall, 2016:

1. Fires are permitted only in designated grills and metal rings, as indicated on your permit. Use only dead and down wood.
2. Carry out all of your trash and litter, including cigarette butts and foil. Burning trash, or discarding trash or litter into pit toilets, is prohibited.
3. In campgrounds, tents must be pitched in designated sites only. Tents are prohibited at shelter sites.
4. Cross-country camping is permitted only if pre-registered with Park Ranger for zone & date on permit. Special rules apply.
5. Never feed wildlife. Keep a clean camp. Keep wildlife away from food and garbage and vice versa.
6. Keep all soap - even biodegradable soap - out of lakes and streams. Do all washing and bathing at least 100' away from the water's edge.
7. Where there is no fish cleaning station, cut remains into small pieces and dispose in deep water (>50 ft. depth) or on shorelines at least 100' from campgrounds. Leave them on shore above water and below vegetation where gulls will scavenge.
8. Dogs, cats, and other domestic mammals are prohibited on the lands and waters of Isle Royale

National Park.

9. Quiet hours are between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Eastern Time. During this time, generators are prohibited. Special rules apply to Quiet/No Wake zones.

10. Fishing on inland lakes, artificial bait only. On Lake Superior, Michigan fishing license required.

11. Streams and creeks are open for fishing from the last Saturday in April to August 15. Special rules apply for brook trout.

12. Possession of fish fillets is prohibited, unless fillets are being prepared for immediate consumption.

13. Groups (7-10 people) must have advanced camping registration and follow itinerary specified on the permit.

14. Removing, disturbing, or possessing living or dead wildlife or parts of them (such as antlers), or plants, is prohibited. Disturbance of paleontological specimens, or any cultural or archeological resources, is prohibited. Collecting and removing mineral resources such as agates, datolite, or greenstones, including those in Lake Superior, is prohibited.

My signature below signifies that I understand and agree that my party/group will abide by these conditions and other regulations specified in park brochures and posted at park ranger stations. Trip leaders and/or participants can be cited for violating these conditions and regulations.

Signature of Trip Leader _____

Pets

Dogs, cats and other pets are not allowed on the island. This includes pets on boats within the park boundaries, which extend 4 ½ miles in to Lake Superior from the outermost land areas of the park. Visitors bringing pets to Isle Royale will be required to leave immediately. Pets disturb wildlife and can transmit diseases, particularly to wolves. Special conditions apply to guide dogs. Contact the park for further information.

Island Amenities

Most amenities on the island are available from approximately Memorial Day to Labor Day. The exact dates vary year to year. Any costs listed are approximate and may have changed. The cost for utilities on Isle Royale is much higher and a utility surcharge is added to all goods and services. Check the websites listed in the “Links and Contacts” section for current schedules and pricing.

Stores

There are stores in Windigo and Rock Harbor. They contain only the bare essentials and you will pay a premium, of course. Do not rely on the stores to purchase anything. They are best used to get something you forgot. If you are using liquid fuel, the most common types may be purchased there. If you are coming over on the seaplane, you will have to purchase your fuels on the island.

The Windigo store is open mid-June through early September selling groceries, sandwiches, camping supplies, fishing licenses and tackle, gifts and photo supplies for visitors. In 2009 it was open 6/2 thru 9/7.

The store in Rock Harbor is located on the main dock, close to Rock Harbor Lodge. It has standard groceries as well as freeze dried foods, fishing tackle, camping and hiking accessories, camping fuel, photo supplies, boating accessories, post cards, apparel, souvenirs, and sundries. In 2009, the Rock Harbor store was open 5/22 thru 9/12.



Rock Harbor Lodge from the boat.



Rock Harbor Lodge from a canoe (closed).



Housekeeping Cabin at Rock Harbor



Showers

There are pay showers at Rock Harbor and Windigo. As of the last time I checked, at Rock Harbor a five-minute shower will cost you \$3. You buy tokens at the Rock Harbor store. At Windigo, a six-minute shower will cost you \$6 in tokens purchased at the store, and a towel with soap is \$2. At the end of a long trip, it would be worth the money.

Lodging

At Rock Harbor, there are rooms available at the Rock Harbor Lodge and Housekeeping Cottages nearby. The lodge is located right on the shore and all rooms have a magnificent view of the lake. There are 60 rooms available; each accommodates 4, has a private bath and offers the "American plan". Advance reservations are required. There are 20 duplex housekeeping cottages located in the wooded area between Rock Harbor Marina and Tobin Harbor. They are furnished with kitchenettes including utensils and dishware, a private bath and tub, shower and dressing room, one double bed and one bunk bed, linens, towels, electric heat and a studio type living area. Rollaway beds may be added to accommodate up to six people.

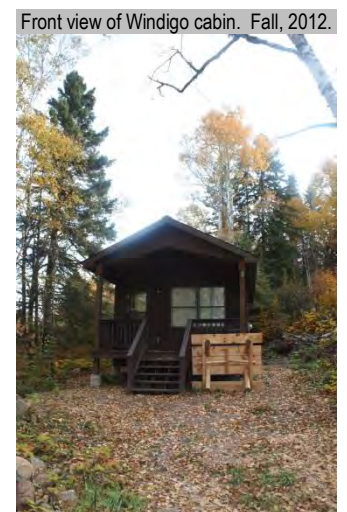
Rock Harbor Lodging <small>Rates Revised: 1/24/17</small>	
2013 Operating Dates:	Peak Season: July 5 - September 6 Non-Peak Season: May 24 - July 4
Lodge Rooms:	Peak Season: \$256/night Additional Adult: \$60/person Additional Child under 12: \$19/child Non-Peak Season: \$231/night Additional Adult: \$53/person Additional Child under 12: \$17/child
Cottages:	Peak Season: \$248/night for two Additional Adult: \$53/person Non-Peak Season: \$224/night Additional Adult: \$47/person



Side view of Windigo cabin. Fall, 2012.



Lake view from Windigo cabin. Fall, 2012.



Front view of Windigo cabin. Fall, 2012.

In 2012, there were two cabins opened in Windigo for rental. They are very nice. The cabins are rustic, one room cabins to provide shelter for people who want to camp without a tent. They are located just west of the store near each other, but with enough space to be somewhat private. The cost (as of 2017) is \$51.95 per night and they can sleep up to six people.

Two on a futon in the front room and a set of double bunks in each of the two bedrooms and they all have mattresses with covers, but do not have sheets or blankets (they are available for rent, but the mattress covers are fine for sleeping bags). There are tables and chairs inside each cabin. There are electrical outlets inside of the cabin. They are not heated and there is no indoor plumbing. However, there is a water spigot centrally located outside in between the two cabins and there is an outhouse located nearby. There are also flush toilets and showers available a short walk away east of the dock. There is a propane grill with side burners at each cabin for cooking and basic utensils are provided. No cooking is allowed inside of the cabins. Each cabin has a nice porch attached to the front and a picnic