



## **EASTERN VIRGINIA**

### **PRIMARY HORSE TRAILS AND TRAILHEADS IN VIRGINIA THAT HAVE PUBLIC ACCESS**

The Virginia Horse Council does not control and cannot guarantee the timeliness or accuracy of information provided by other organizations and individuals, nor does the VHC endorse any specific facilities.

For changes or additions contact VHC Representative, Sally Aungier, at [saungier@mindspring.com](mailto:saungier@mindspring.com) or (804) 379-9829.

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# Assateague Island National Seashore

## Contact:

Mailing Addresses Only:

National Park Service  
PO Box 38  
8586 Beach Road  
Chincoteague, VA 23336

Assateague Island National Seashore (MD)  
7206 National Seashore Lane  
Berlin, MD 21811

By Phone  
Maryland District Visitor Information  
(410) 641-1441  
National Seashore Camping  
(410) 641-3030  
Virginia District Visitor Information  
(757) 336-6577

## Where To Go:

Accomack County, Virginia and Worcester County  
Maryland, Assateague Island National Seashore

Locate on Google Maps:

Toms Cove  
[Lat: 37 54.767, Long: 75 20.654](#)

Assateague State Park  
[Lat: 38 12.163, Long: 75 9.150](#)

NPS Website  
<http://www.nps.gov/asis/planyourvisit/horseback-riding.htm>

Virginia Map:  
<http://www.nps.gov/asis/planyourvisit/upload/horseuseva2008.pdf>

Map – MD campgrounds:  
<http://www.nps.gov/asis/planyourvisit/upload/campgroundmaps.pdf>

Detailed map of OSV zones  
<http://www.nps.gov/asis/upload/OSV08-2.pdf>

## Description:

Assateague Island National Seashore is a 37-mile-long barrier island along the coasts of Virginia and Maryland. It includes marsh islands and waters up to one-half mile from shore. At its widest point this island is only 1.5 miles across. This area is probably best known for the herd of feral horses that roam over both the Maryland portion and the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge located on the Virginia end of the island.

The Chincoteague Fire Department manages the wild pony herd on the Virginia side through the annual pony penning and auction; the Maryland side is maintained with equine contraceptives by the National Park Service.

Assateague is an essential part of the Atlantic flyway and is prime habitat for thousands of migratory waterfowl.

The trail on the Virginia side is located on the outermost barrier island; accessible from Chincoteague Island by bridge. It is managed by multiple agencies – the National Park System, the US Fish and Wildlife Service; additionally the state Department of Natural Resources participates in the management of the Maryland side trails.

**Trails:** If galloping through the surf is on your list, try this beach ride at Assateague. But give your horse some time to look things over! Watch out for the island's wild (Chincoteague) ponies.

You can access the trails from either the Virginia end or the Maryland side; however, the trails themselves do not connect.

Riders are advised that the best riding is at low tide when there is more space along the beach front. Consult the tide charts on the Internet when planning your trip.

**Trail from Virginia side:** The Beach area around Tom's Cove Hook is open October 9 through May 14; and a small area fronting Tom's Cove Bay is open all year.

The trail itself is linear with no loops. You have to double back the same way you went out but the trail is along the beach. Horseback riding is permitted in the Over Sand Vehicle (OSV) Zone in the Virginia district of Assateague Island. This area is subject to intermittent closures due to migratory bird nesting. Please refer to the Virginia District Horseback Riding map for details. In the OSV zone, riding is permitted in all areas authorized for public OSV travel. Riders must stay on the ocean side of the black & white posts and avoid visitors engaged in other recreational activities such as hiking, fishing, or sunbathing. Riders may not access areas posted for authorized vehicles, trails, public boardwalks or any other unauthorized area.

Bird nesting activities may require more restrictive, interim closures. For closure updates, please call the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge at (757)336-6122 or Toms Cove Visitor Center at (757)336-6577.

**Parking:** Horse trailer parking is authorized in parking lot near the Toms Cove Visitors Center.

**Directions:** From I-64 east, exit onto US 60 onto Ocean View Ave., heading east; go left on US 13 across Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel (expect toll of \$20 or more for truck and trailer); go north on through 13, then right on VA 175; cross bridge onto Chincoteague and immediately turn left, then right on Beach Drive; follow Beach Drive across bridge to Assateague; main road will take you to parking area at Toms Cove, which is on the southern tip of the island.

<b>Details:</b>	
<b>Trail Type:</b>	Designated and marked
<b>Terrain:</b>	Flat, ocean front
<b>Amenities:</b>	Note – no drinkable horse water along the route
<b>Fee:</b>	An entrance pass is required for any vehicle entering the park. Check the park website for current rates.
<b>Camping:</b>	Not available in Va section of park
<b>Miles of Trail:</b>	4 linear miles. The entire loop on OSV (over sand vehicle) road. Available mileage dependent on season. See details.
<b>Surface:</b>	Natural, sandy.
<b>User Type:</b>	Equestrian, Hiking, Biking, Wildlife Watching. Off road vehicles, beachcombing, swimming, crabbing

**Trail from Maryland side:** Day use horseback riding is permitted each year from October 9 through May 14 when the risk of insect borne disease is less of a risk (e.g. Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA), and West Nile Virus (WNV)).

Horseback riding is permitted on the beach in the Over Sand Vehicle (OSV) zone located 1.5 miles south of the ranger station. The stretch of beach between the ranger station and the beginning of the OSV zone is to be used only as a corridor for the entering and exiting of day use riders. In the OSV Zone, riding is permitted in all areas authorized for public OSV travel. Riders must stay on the ocean side of the white posts and avoid visitors engaged in other recreational activities such as hiking, fishing or sunbathing. The only dune crossing riders may use is the sand road access leading to and from the ranger station. Riders may not access areas posted for authorized vehicles, backcountry campsites, the back trail behind the dunes, paved roads, public boardwalks and all other unauthorized areas.

**Day Parking Areas:** All day use riders must park in the North Ocean Beach parking area and check in at the ranger station. Riders are instructed to lead their horses from the North Ocean Beach parking area through the ranger station employee parking area following the sand road dune crossing to the top of the dune. Riders may mount at the top of the dune and ride south on the beach.

**Directions:** From the Bay Bridge Tunnel, stay on U.S. 13 North, and then take U.S. 113 north towards Snow Hill/Ocean City. Turn Right on MD 376, then turn right on MD 611 to Assateague Island.

**Equestrian Camping:** Assateague Island National Seashore (MD side) operates 2 primitive campsites for horse camping October 16 through April 14. Each site will accommodate up to 6 people and 6 horses. At present, the fee is \$25/site/night in addition to the \$10 entrance fee for each vehicle. Horse camping sites may be reserved no more than 6 months in advance. For reservations or more information about horse camping call the North Beach Ranger Station at (410) 641-3030. The camp does have water access for the horses. Riders have access to cold showers and port-a-johns in camp.

<b>Details:</b>	
<b>Trail Type:</b>	Designated
<b>Terrain:</b>	Flat, ocean front
<b>Amenities:</b>	Note – no drinkable horse water along the route
<b>Fee:</b>	An entrance pass is required for any vehicle entering the park. Check the park website for current rates.
<b>Camping:</b>	Limited camping. See details above.
<b>Miles of Trail:</b>	12 linear miles along the OSV designated path.
<b>Surface:</b>	Natural, sandy.
<b>User Type:</b>	Equestrian, Hiking, Biking, Wildlife Watching. Off road vehicles

## **Other things you should know about riding either the Virginia or Maryland trail:**

Riders must clean all manure and hay debris from parking lot so take a muck bucket and shovel to aid in cleaning the area.

Because of frequent storms riders should call ahead to make sure the beach is open to horses and trailers. The trails could be closed for a number of weeks after a storm so don't presume that closures are based on the weather from the previous few days. It is a long trip to make to turn around and return home without ever unloading your horse.

Any time an area is marked off (in the parking area) with cones – do not park OR RIDE HORSES over it as there are often serious washouts and horses have gone down in deep cave ins.

NO PETS, even in your car or trailer, are permitted. No exceptions. This regulation is strictly enforced.

Take lots of insect repellent!