



KEWEENAW

THE ISLE ROYALE DAY TRIP EXPERIENCE GUIDE

Author: Kayleigh White on May 9, 2023

Isle Royale National Park is one of the least visited national parks in the United States and is a remote destination for nature lovers and wilderness-seekers. This archipelago rests in the heart of Lake Superior and is only accessible by boat or seaplane. While we'd recommend you stay a few days (heck...even a week) to get the most out of the experience, some visitors may only have time for a day trip. Follow along with our guide to learn how to get the most out of a day visit from the Keweenaw to Isle Royale National Park.

IS A DAYTRIP TO ISLE ROYALE POSSIBLE?

While Isle Royale National Park is a remote destination in the middle of Lake Superior, transportation options from both Hancock and Copper Harbor make a day trip to Isle Royale possible. Isle Royale Seaplanes offers flights from Hancock (just across the Portage Lake Lift Bridge from Houghton) to both Windigo and Rock Harbor on Isle Royale, while Isle Royale Line offers day trip ferry services from Copper Harbor to Rock Harbor aboard the Queen IV. Both options offer different but enjoyable experiences depending on personal interest.

Isle Royale Seaplane

The fastest way to get to Isle Royale from the Keweenaw mainland is by seaplane. Flights from Hancock depart as early as 8AM, with return flights available until 5PM. Since the flights only last 30-45 minutes, this means you will have at most 7 hours to spend exploring the island. Not only that, but the flight itself is an incredible experience, providing birds-eye views of the Keweenaw, Lake Superior, and Isle Royale along the way. By taking the seaplane, you will also be able to choose which side of the island you explore (Windigo or Rock Harbor).

Cost: \$360 Roundtrip/ Adult, plus \$6 Parking Fee and \$7 National Park Daily Entrance Fee

Isle Royale Ferry Line – Queen IV

Day trips are also possible via the Queen IV ferry from Copper Harbor, MI. The Queen IV departs Copper Harbor at 8AM and arrives at Rock Harbor at 11:45AM. For its return trip, the Queen IV will depart Rock Harbor at 2:45PM arriving back in Copper Harbor at 6:30PM. This allows just three hours to explore Isle Royale. This mode of transportation is perfect for those who want to enjoy a long cruise across the vast freshwaters of Lake Superior. While three hours isn't a lot of time to spend on the island, we'll share a few tips on how to make the most of it.

Cost: \$80/ Adult One-way, plus the \$7 National Park Daily Entrance Fee

The Isle Royale Line also offers reduced day trip packages throughout the summer.

DAY TRIP ACTIVITIES

Isle Royale offers a plethora of fun outdoor activities. While it's impossible to hike the whole island in a day, there are plenty of experiences that can be enjoyed in a shorter amount of time. Below you

will find some of our top recommendations depending on which mode of transportation you choose to take to the island.

Special Note About Hiking: Many of the activities below involve hiking a few miles. Know your pace before you decide to go on longer hikes. These hikes can be completed in a day trip for hikers averaging at least 2 miles per hour. If you plan on hiking, make sure to get going as soon as possible to allow yourself enough time to make it back to the harbor for your seaplane or ferry departure. Keep in mind that Isle Royale hiking trails are rustic. Roots, rocks, and elevation changes may make hiking more difficult for some individuals.

WINDIGO HARBOR DAY TRIP ADVENTURES FOR SEAPLANE VISITORS

Stop by the Windigo Visitors Center

Start your adventure on Isle Royale by stopping by the Windigo Visitors Center. The visitor center's friendly staff is ready to answer all your questions and offer recommendations for your specific day trip adventure on the western side of Isle Royale. Exhibits in the visitor's center will also offer information about wildlife found on the island. Make sure to check out the second order Fresnel light from the Rock of Ages Lighthouse and get your Isle Royale National Park Passport stamped when you stop by.

Walk the Windigo Nature Trail

The Windigo Nature Trail is a beautiful gently rolling trail about 1.2 miles long. The trails begin at the Windigo Welcome Center and will take you on a scenic journey through fern-filled cedar lowlands, maple hardwoods, and boreal forest filled with wildlife. This is a fun and easy day trip hike that still allows for time to relax on the shores of Lake Superior or enjoy a short daytime paddle in the Windigo Harbor area.

Grace Creek Overlook Trail

The Grace Creek Overlook Trail offers a slightly longer hike, clocking in around 3.6 miles roundtrip. This down and back rock and root covered trail offers beautiful views of Grace Creek, Grace Harbor, and Lake Superior once you reach the overlook. Enjoy unbeatable scenery as you traverse this moderately difficult day trip hike.

Minong Ridge Overlook Hike

The Minong Ridge Trail is one of the most rugged on Isle Royale. While the entire trail stretches about 28 miles, day-trippers can hike the portion of the trail that takes them to Minong Ridge Overlook in about 3 hours roundtrip. The down-and-back hike offers a challenging 6-mile adventure, taking you through maple forests and over creeks where moose may be present. Fuel up with water and a snack as you enjoy views of Lake Superior and the Canadian shoreline from atop the rocky overlook.

Paddle Washington Harbor or Creek

Explore Washington Creek and Harbor by kayak or canoe. Daily kayak and canoe rentals are available at Windigo Camp Store for just \$23.50 for 4 hours or \$40 for 8. Watch for waterfowl such

as loons and wood ducks or keep your eyes open for high-soaring birds of prey like eagles and hawks. Paddling offers the opportunity to explore this part of Isle Royale in a quiet and serene way. Of course, always be ready to take in the sights of a moose preparing to take a dip!

ROCK HARBOR OPTIONS FOR SEAPLANE VISITORS

Flying to Isle Royale allows you additional time for longer activities. Make sure to check out the activities provided below for ferry-goers, as well. Shorter activities can also be included in your day trip itinerary.

Paddle Tobin Harbor

The calm waters of Tobin Harbor are perfect for a peaceful day of paddling. This protected harbor is a haven for wildlife, especially waterfowl. As you paddle, keep your eyes open for mergansers and loons. The call of a loon is alluring, but please respect the birds by keeping a safe distance from them as you paddle.

As you paddle through Tobin Harbor, you may see some old cabins or cottages. These cabins are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and once belonged to families who would spend summers on the island. After the Isle Royale National Park was established in 1940, many of these families were granted life leases where occupancy was allowed until the death of the lease owner. Prior to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, many of the cabins were destroyed once the lease expired, but today efforts are made to preserve them.

ROCK HARBOR OPTIONS FOR FERRY-GOERS

Stop by the Rock Harbor Visitor Center & Trading Post

Once you arrive at Rock Harbor, stop by the Rock Harbor Visitors Center. Here you can pay park entrance fees, grab some brochures and a map, or pick up last-minute supplies. The park rangers here are a wealth of knowledge and ready to share interesting facts or pointers to make your day trip a success. Make sure to ask about their daily ranger talks and programs.

Hike to Scoville Point via the Stoll Trail

This 4.4-mile figure-eight shaped loop is a fantastic easy-to-follow day trip option that takes you to Scoville Point. Hikers are treated to incredible views of Lake Superior and Tobin Harbor throughout their hike. Look for interpretive signs along the Stoll Memorial Trail that provide insight into the relationship between land and water. Listen for the cry of loons and watch for moose as you explore this peaceful part of Isle Royale. This hike takes approximately 1.5 hours for hikers hiking an average of 2mph.

Hike to Suzy's Cave

Take a hike to Suzy's Cave and discover an inland sea arch formed by wave action some 4000 years ago. The roundtrip hike takes you on a relatively easy 3.8-mile journey through boreal forest via Rock Harbor and Tobin Harbor Trails. This hike typically takes 1.5 to 2 hours to complete.

Explore Raspberry Island

Raspberry Island is just a short paddle or boat ride away from Rock Harbor. Kayaks, canoes, and motorboats are available for rent at the Rock Harbor Marina. Raspberry Island has a lovely 1-mile trail that starts at the dock and loops around the island. Home to a fragile bog and rugged rocky shores, Raspberry Island also features unusual and unique plants. The island is well-known for its insect-eating sundew and blooming pitcher plants, which can grow in the area because of the acidic bog environment. Interpretive signs along the route explain the history and ecology of the island's rich and varied plant life, making the hike an educational and fascinating experience.

Paddle Rock Harbor

Rent a kayak or canoe from Rock Harbor Marina and paddle in the Rock Harbor area. Take in the views of Raspberry Island, Bat Island, and Switchback Island as you look for waterfowl and wildlife. By sticking to the Rock Harbor area, it will be easier to make it back to shore in time for your departure back to mainland. Be sure to allow enough time to return your vessel before leaving the island!

Drop a line

With over 40 documented species of fish, Isle Royale is the perfect spot to try your hand at fishing. Whether you fish from the dock or decide to rent a boat, there are many opportunities to catch species like whitefish, lake trout, pike, perch, or walleye. You may want to bring some lightweight fishing gear with you, but you can find some supplies (and maybe some tips and tricks) at the visitor center. Make sure to brush up on Michigan Fishing Regulations before casting a line.

Relax in Rock Harbor

There's nothing wrong with sticking around Rock Harbor during your layover on Isle Royale. Enjoy a picnic on the shores of Rock Harbor as you take in the views of neighboring islands belonging to the Isle Royale archipelago or stop by the Rock Harbor Grill to enjoy a cold beverage in the outdoor sitting area. If you're feeling extra brave, try dipping your toes into the icy fresh waters of Lake Superior!

TIPS FOR THE BEST DAY TRIP EXPERIENCE

- **Bring Bug Spray:** Depending on the time of year and weather conditions, you might run into some mosquitoes or other biting insects. Bug spray or bug nets can help. Consider taking a peek at our Bug Guide to the Keweenaw for more information about dealing with pesky insects.
- **Pack a Reusable Water Bottle:** Make sure to pack a water bottle to keep you hydrated throughout the day. Potable water is available in Rock Harbor and Windigo Harbor.
- **Don't Forget to Eat:** After a few hours of hiking or paddling, you are bound to get hungry! We always recommend packing trailside snacks in your daypack in case you need a little extra energy while on the trail. Snacks are available for purchase at the Dockside Store or the Greenstone Grill in Rock Harbor. Speaking of the Greenstone Grill, if you have a little downtime before your ride arrives, consider grabbing a whitefish sandwich or burger while you wait.

- **Get a Map:** It's always a good idea to be prepared by having a map handy. Pick up a map at our Visit Keweenaw Welcome Center before you go or find them at the Rock Harbor or Windigo Visitors Center. Downloadable maps and brochures can also be found [here](#).
- **Put your Phone on Airplane Mode:** It is highly unlikely that you will have any cell service on Isle Royale. Do yourself a favor and put your phone on airplane mode so your battery lasts longer. This way you can use your phone throughout the day to take photos or videos of your experience.
- **Wear a Watch:** Make sure to keep track of the time so that you don't miss your ferry or seaplane reservation back to mainland!

RESPONSIBLE RECREATION

Isle Royale is a remote nature destination, surrounded by one of the world's greatest freshwater resources and full of pristine boreal forest. The environment here provides a home for wildlife of many kinds, including moose, wolves, birds of prey, and waterfowl. The unique ecology of the area also creates a habitat for rare plant life that is not often seen in the Great Lakes Region. Please help us protect this incredible environment (and yourself) by following the tips below.

- **Travel on Durable Surfaces:** To minimize your impact on the environment, be sure to stay on designated trails. Avoid trampling natural vegetation and stick to more durable surfaces like gravel or rock.
- **Leave What you Find:** Plants, rocks, and other natural items should be left alone. Collecting rocks on Isle Royale is not allowed.
- **Respect Wildlife:** While it's cool to see a moose or a loon, you should respect wildlife and protect yourself by maintaining a safe distance from all wildlife.
- **Be Considerate of Others:** Isle Royale is a peaceful place, be courteous to others by keeping it quiet and serene. When hiking, follow trail etiquette by yielding to uphill hikers.
- **Dispose of Waste Properly:** Pack out what you pack in! Having a trailside snack? Make sure that garbage goes back in your pack!
- **Stop the Spread of Invasive Species:** Clean your hiking gear and fishing gear before using it on the island.

Author

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Kayleigh is a U.P. native with a passion for the outdoors. Some of her favorite outdoor hobbies are rock collecting on the shores of Lake Superior, springtime foraging, and hiking. She is also passionate about flow arts and can be found recording technical double hula-hooping videos throughout the scenic Keweenaw Peninsula.

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