

Discovering Adventures on Maryland's Eastern Shore by Peggy Sisson Spotlight on Worcester County – Assateague Island National Seashore



Greetings Horse Council friends! I wanted to take some time to share our adventures with all of you after traveling with our horses from Ohio to Maryland last Fall. I would also like to say “Thank you” to the Maryland Horse Council. After days of searching for camping and trail riding destinations on our route to Assateague Island, I reached out to the Maryland Horse Council for help. Immediately, I was provided with all the resources I needed to plan a getaway that I will not forget.

Each year, I try to pick one or two new riding destinations with my horses. I spend quite a bit of time riding in the mountains, so this year I thought a trip to the beach would be a perfect change of pace. I'm not sure about the all of you, but part of the excitement for me is planning the trip! I decided to let technology assist me and after a brief search, Assateague Island showed up and seemed to be exactly what we were looking for. Because I am from Ohio, I knew I would need to make this a camping trip. During my search I realized that Assateague Island offered horse camping on the island! Riding *and* camping on the beach felt like a dream come true and the Assateague Island experience did not disappoint.

Assateague Island has two sites that allow horses from mid-October to mid-April. Each site can accommodate six horses and six people. There are also two vault toilets available very close to the sites. I had a difficult time finding pictures of the sites, so I didn't know what to expect regarding what the area would look like or had to offer. We were pleasantly surprised to find the sites were nestled between the barrier dune and natural vegetation which provide some protection from wind. There were two posts at each site that could be used for tying horses. Naturally, the footing is sand, but there was plenty of grass in the area, although our horses had no interest in eating any of the grasses. There are also picnic tables available where we enjoyed our coffee in the morning.

Reserving a site was quite simple and done by either calling a toll-free number or reserving online (I chose the online method). By the time I had

decided on Assateague Island as our destination, there was only one night available mid-week during my time off window. Although I would have rather had a least two nights, I wasn't going to let that stop me, so I began to search for other camping and trail riding options near our travel route.

Check-in was equally as simple. Each site had plenty of room making set-up a breeze. After settling in we took our two horses in hand to the dunes to make our way to the beach and they both enjoyed rolling in the cool, soft sand. We walked on the beach and introduced them to the sound and waves and just took it all in. After our walk we went back to our camper and enjoyed the sunset and dinner. That night we listened to waves crashing on the beach and listened to the feral ponies calling out to each other. It was really magical.

The next morning, I took our dog to the beach and took a long walk while the sun came up. When I returned to our camp site, we sat down with our coffee and within minutes, out of nowhere the wild ponies emerged from the vegetation. I had done some research on camping among wild horses and ponies and we had a plan. Because we knew there would be a good chance a stallion would be with any band of ponies, we had a plan to keep all involved safe. The ponies had absolutely no interest in our horses and our horses were even less interested in them. The ponies were on a mission to check out the contents of the tent camper's sites.

After we knew the ponies had moved on, we saddled up and went for our first ride! With campers trying to clean up their sites, we had the beach to ourselves and we were able to take our time, ride at our own pace, and play with our horses. I was enchanted by the natural beauty and wildness of Assateague. Having ridden on other beaches, I can honestly say there was something very special about this beautiful island.

We thoroughly enjoyed our experience on Assateague Island and cannot wait to return next year!