

Ready for the rough tracks? Your guide to 4WD safety

South Australia has some of the most stunning beaches, parks and remote landscapes in the country. Exploring them in a four-wheel drive (4WD) is a great way to immerse yourself in our beautiful state, but it's important to make sure you and your vehicle are prepared.

Below is a simple guide to help you plan, stay safe and enjoy your adventure.

Before you head out

Make sure your 4WD is suitable for the terrain and uneven tracks. Check:

- Your vehicle has **low-range gear selection**.
- There is **enough ground clearance**, especially around the differentials.
- Your vehicle is **loaded safely** with balanced weight distribution.
- Your **vehicle's tyres including the spare, lights and fluid levels**.

Planning your trip

Good preparation can make all the difference.

- Carry a **map of the park or track** you plan to drive.
- Check the **weather and tide times**. Travel at low tide, or within two hours either side.
- **Tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return**. Sharing your planned route is encouraged.
- Whenever possible, **travel with other vehicles or persons**.

What to take with you

Make sure you pack:

- **Recovery gear** for your vehicle and terrain.
- An **air compressor** to reinflate tyres.
- A **mobile phone**, and consider extra communication tools like a CB radio, satellite phone or EPIRB in case you lose service.



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- Enough **food and water** for longer than your planned trip.
- A **first aid kit**.
- Safety apps such as **What3Words** to help emergency services locate you.

Driving on sand

Remember, **Australian Road Rules still apply** when driving on sand:

- You must hold the correct **licence**, your vehicle must be **registered and insured**, and drink-driving laws still apply.
- Always **drive on the left**.
- Use **designated tracks** where they exist.
- **Drive at a speed** that allows you to react if a vehicle approaches from the opposite direction.
- On narrow tracks, look for a **pull-over bay** to let others pass safely.
- If unsure about a tricky section, **stop in a safe place and walk it first**.
- **Slow down** around busy beach areas – children, pets and pedestrians can appear suddenly.
- Soft sand can collapse under your tyres. Avoid driving too close to the **edges of dunes or tracks**.
- When driving on dunes, assume the top may have a **sharp drop**. Walk the crest to check the other side before driving over.

Common hazards to watch out for

- **Unmarked areas:** Always stay on marked tracks. Many areas are culturally significant to First Nations people, and leaving tracks can be unsafe and unlawful.
- **Seaweed:** Avoid driving over it – sea life, rocks or holes underneath can damage your vehicle or cause a rollover.
- **Rocks:** Rocks may be larger than they appear, can be hidden by sand or seaweed, and may be sharp or slippery.

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- **Night driving:** Beaches and tracks become extremely dark. Hazards and tide movements are hard to see. Plan to travel during daylight.
- **Changing conditions:** Tracks can change quickly due to tides, wind and traffic. Do not assume the return trip will be the same as the way in.
- **Tyre pressure:** If you've lowered your pressure for sand, reinflate as soon as you return to normal roads. Low-pressure tyres can roll off the rim during sharp or high-speed turns. Drive slowly until you can reinflate.

Setting up camp

When you're ready to stop:

- **Park well clear** of any driving tracks.
- Check **tide times** to ensure you won't be caught by rising water.
- Choose **stable ground** where you can safely secure your gear.
- Avoid parking on **vegetation or dunes**.

Enjoy South Australia – safely

Take time to prepare, slow down, and be mindful of other road and track users. Responsible driving helps protect you, your passengers, the environment, and the communities you visit.

Disclaimer

This guide provides general advice to help you stay safe while driving on beaches and coastal 4WD tracks. It is **not a complete list** of all safety considerations and does not replace practical training.

Before undertaking any 4WD trip, you should complete a **practical four-wheel driving course**.



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About the SA Police Road Safety Centre

The SA Police Road Safety Centre leads the way in road safety education across South Australia. Our programs help reduce road trauma by building the awareness, knowledge, and skills of all road users – supporting safer journeys through lifelong learning.

Want to learn more?

Explore our full range of programs and resources:

 www.police.sa.gov.au/road-safety

Or simply **scan the QR code** in this fact sheet to go straight to our road safety page.

Book a FREE road safety session

We offer engaging, practical sessions for schools, community groups, and organisations.

 SAPOL.RoadSafetySection@police.sa.gov.au

Stay connected

Follow us on Instagram for tips, updates, and road safety insights:

 [@sapolroadsafety](https://www.instagram.com/sapolroadsafety)

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