YOUR FIRST DAY AT DEL MAR

A Practical Guide to the Races

You do not need to know every racing term to enjoy a day at Del Mar. Start with a little planning, give yourself time to explore, and treat the first race as a chance to get comfortable.

This guide walks you through the practical decisions: choosing your day, buying tickets, arriving prepared, and finding a rhythm once the horses reach the track.

1. Check the racing calendar before making plans

Del Mar has summer and fall racing seasons. A date within a season does not automatically mean there is live racing that day. Check Del Mar's official season information and calendar for your visit.

Look for two separate times: when the gates open and **first post**, the scheduled start of the first race. Check again before leaving, especially around holidays and special events.

Our suggestion for a first visit is to aim for roughly an hour inside the grounds before the first race, when the gate schedule permits. Add time for the drive, parking, and entry. That leaves room to find your seat, get something to eat, and look around without rushing.

2. Choose tickets around the day you want

Del Mar sells racetrack admission, reserved seats, and trackside dining options. General admission provides trackside access; if having an assigned place to sit matters, look at a reserved seating option. Compare the details for your specific date on the official ticket page.

- **Want to explore?** Start by reviewing the admission option and where it allows you to go.
- **Want a home base?** Consider reserved seating so your group has a place to return between races.
- **Making it a social occasion?** Review trackside dining availability, table capacity, and any separate dining charges or conditions.

Check exactly what is included before paying. Prices and offerings change between dates and seasons, so use the current ticket listing for the final details.

3. Plan your arrival before you leave home

The racetrack's published address is **2260 Jimmy Durante Boulevard, Del Mar, CA 92014**. Use current event directions and signs as you approach.

Del Mar's ticket FAQ says parking is charged per vehicle on entry, with no re-entry. If you plan to leave and return, clarify the applicable parking and admission rules first.

For mobile tickets, open them before joining the entry line. Del Mar's arrival instructions explain how to access digital tickets through its app using a SeatGeek account. Make sure you can sign in and see the correct event date while you still have time to resolve a problem.

4. Pack for an outdoor afternoon

Our practical packing list is simple: comfortable walking shoes, a light extra layer, sun protection, a charged phone, and a payment method. Check the weather and the conditions attached to your particular seating or dining reservation.

Read the venue's current entry and bag guidelines before packing food, drinks, or a cooler. Do not assume the same rules apply in every area.

If your plans include the Turf Club, check its specific access requirements and dress code through the official ticket site before choosing your outfit.

5. Get your bearings before the first race

Once inside, find your seat or a comfortable public viewing area, then locate the restrooms and a convenient food stop. If you are meeting friends, choose an easy landmark rather than relying on everyone finding one another in a crowd.

Ask a staff member where visitors can watch the horses before the race. Viewing from the public paddock area is a useful way to connect the names in the program with the horses you will see on the track. Stay in public areas and follow staff directions.

For the first race, choose a viewing position early enough to watch the start and follow the field. You can try a different permitted spot later once you know your way around.

6. Follow one race at a time

You do not need to understand the entire race program at once. Begin with the race number, the horses' program numbers and names, and the scheduled start time. Check the day's changes for horses that have been withdrawn, known as scratches.

Pick a horse to follow with your eyes, even if you are not betting. Watch how the race develops, then compare what you saw with the result. A few races will make the sequence much more familiar.

When you are ready for more, our guide to reading horse racing odds explains the numbers, while our guide to bet types introduces the terminology. Keep those as references; there is no need to learn everything before enjoying the afternoon.

7. Keep betting optional

A day at the races can simply be a day watching horses and spending time with friends. If you choose to wager, decide beforehand what you are comfortable spending on entertainment, separately from tickets, transportation, and food. Do not increase that amount to recover a loss.

It is fine to watch a race without placing a bet, or to stop betting while continuing to enjoy the day. Our beginner betting-plan guide offers a place to organize your limits before arriving.

Visiting with children or arranging accessible seating

Del Mar currently offers free admission for children 17 and under accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. Seating can carry a separate charge. Its FAQ also explains accessible reserved seating, parking, and assistance; check those arrangements before your visit. The Accessibility Office is listed at **(858) 764-1075**. See the official FAQ for current details.

Your before-you-leave checklist

- Confirm live racing, gate opening, and first post for your date.
- Check your tickets, seating details, and parking plan.
- Open mobile tickets and charge your phone.
- Review weather, clothing needs, and entry rules.
- Agree on a meeting place and an entertainment budget.

A little preparation goes a long way

For your first visit, leave yourself room to explore and ask questions. You can build your racing knowledge one afternoon at a time.

Want a simple introduction before you go? Download The Paddock's free beginner booklet, or browse our horse racing guides.

The Paddock is an independent educational resource and is not affiliated with Del Mar Thoroughbred Club. Venue information was checked November 12, 2026; confirm current details directly with Del Mar before visiting.