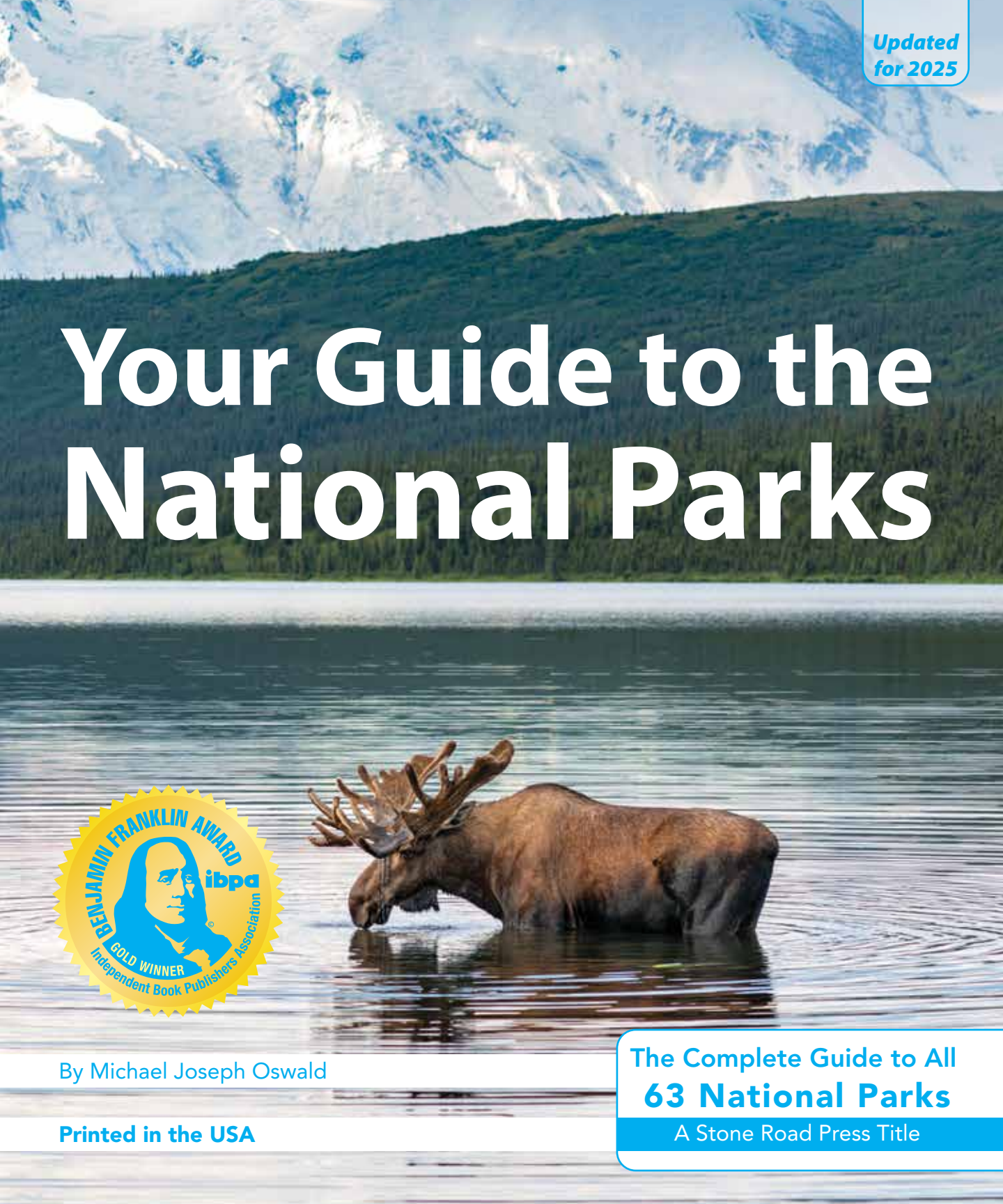
Updated for 2025

Your Guide to the National Parks



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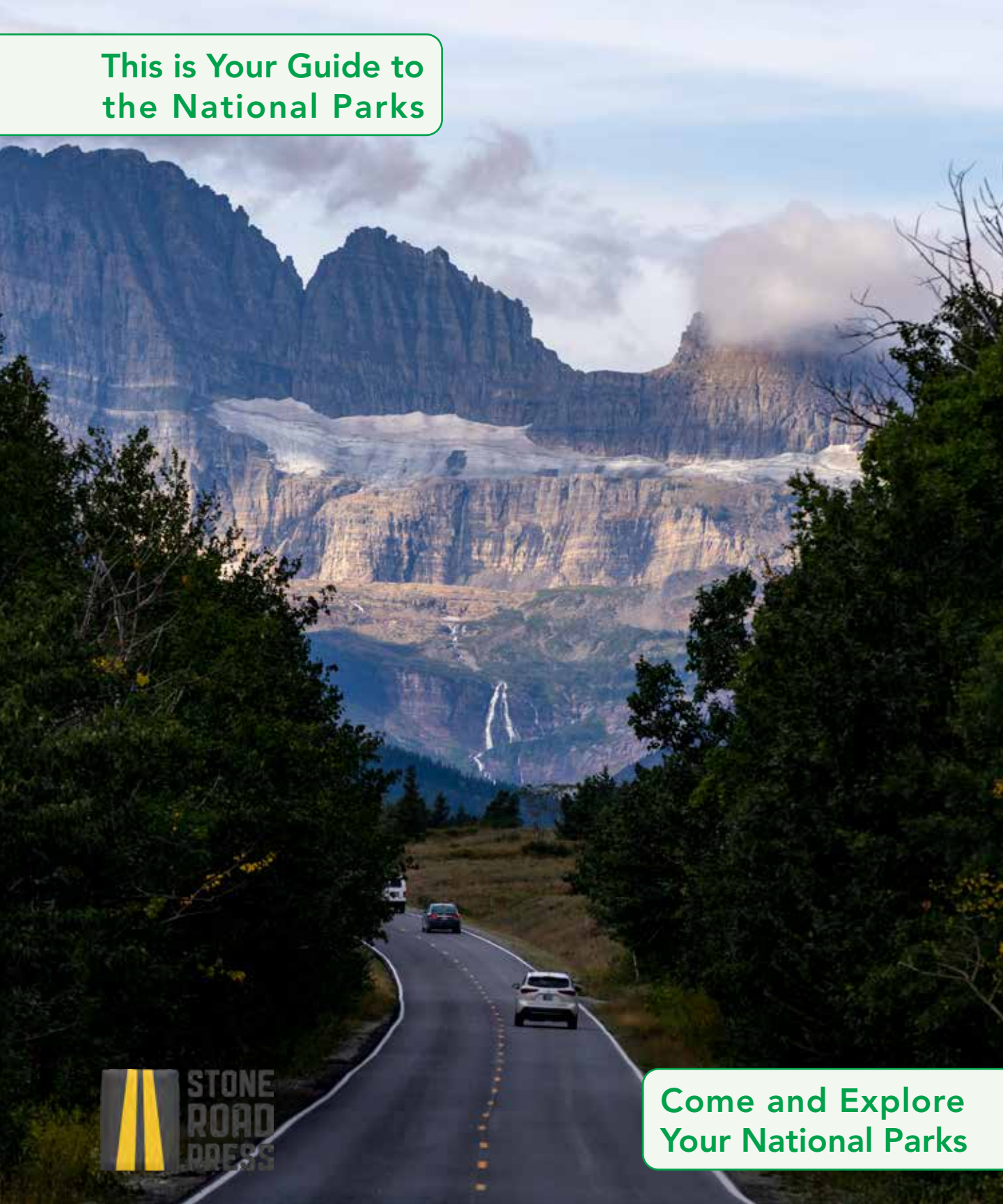
By Michael Joseph Oswald

Printed in the USA

The Complete Guide to All
63 National Parks

A Stone Road Press Title

This is Your Guide to the National Parks



STONE ROAD PRESS

Come and Explore Your National Parks



Artists Point (Yellowstone)

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Copyright © 2022 (updated in 2025) Stone Road Press, LLC, Wisconsin. All rights reserved, but I'm an easy-going guy who genuinely feels information about public land should reside in the public domain, and I'm working so travelers can make the most of their time and money while exploring our country. If you share these sentiments and would like to do something with this, collaborate, or whatever, feel free to reach out by phone (414.828.6346), email (mike@stoneroadpress.com), or snail mail (Michael Oswald, 4927 Stone Road, Whitelaw, WI 54247). I'll get back to you. However, it might take a while if I'm out there in the wilderness.

This title is also published in electronic format. Content appearing in print may not be available electronically.

Corrections/Contact

The third edition was messy. Some of it was my fault (I, somewhat surprisingly, wasn't built for a pandemic, but I fully accept responsibility, and here I am working to make it right). Other things include relatively rapid pandemic-era changes. There will be more changes, hopefully for the better. If you care to share a mistake you found, or a wonderful place/trail/activity not mentioned in these pages, please write meet an email at corrections@stoneroadpress.com. I'm always listening.

You can also find us online at StoneRoadPress.com, Facebook (facebook.com/thestoneroadpress), X/Twitter (@stoneroadpress), or Instagram (@stoneroadpress).

Disclaimer

Your safety is essential. I definitely want you to push your limits, but pay careful attention to the weather, elevation, and terrain. Know yourself, acclimate, carry what you need, start early, don't feed wildlife, and give animals the proper space. Most trails are well-marked within the national parks, but carrying a GPS, phone, and/or trail map is still a good idea to help get you out of any potentially precarious situations.

The primary purpose of this guidebook is to enhance our readers' national park experiences, but the author, editor, and publisher are not responsible for any unfortunate events that may occur while traveling.

Cover and Introduction Photo Descriptions

Front cover: Wonder Lake (Denali National Park)
Introduction Page: Many Glacier (Glacier)
Opposite Author Page: Angel's Window (Grand Canyon)
Opposite Contents: Fairyland Trail (Bryce Canyon)
Page 31: Gateway Arch (Gateway Arch)
Page 32: Spruce Flat Falls (Great Smoky Mountains)
Page 481: Titus Canyon Road (Death Valley)
Page 636: Bear at Brooks River (Katmai)
Page 702: Waimoku Falls (Haleakala)
Page 745: Mohave Point (Grand Canyon)
Page 746: Chicago from West Beach (Indiana Dunes)
Back Cover: Pedersen Lagoon (Kenai Fjords), Denali Park Road (Denali), Brooks Falls (Katmai)



Acknowledgments

Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes (Death Valley)

First, I must acknowledge that the third edition wasn't up to my expected standards. I'm full of excuses. Pandemic! Changed distribution partners! Blah blah blah. None of that matters. It's my responsibility to make the best book possible, and even if that was the best one given the circumstances, it wasn't good enough. So, here is a much better product, completely updated for 2025. I hope you like it.

Cherish your partners, people ... and if you don't have the travel companion you desire yet, I'm right here!



A Note to Readers

National Park trips are getting more complicated. Campgrounds are migrating to reservation-only. Ultra-popular parks require timed-entry permits to enter during peak hours. Parks are going cashless (for entrance and camping fees). And, while I feel National Parks should be more aligned with the Costco hot dog than sporting event tickets, parks, park campgrounds, and just about everything in gateway communities have taken advantage of these inflationary times. In 2012, it cost $20.50 to spend a night at Jenny Lake Campground (Grand Teton). Today, it costs $56. (Reservations are snapped up in minutes, so it's hard to argue against the price increase, still ...) I wish my work could have real-time data, but that isn't how publishing works. The information in this book was as correct as it could be when it went to print, but things change. Be sure to check with the park about timed-entry details. And most importantly, enjoy your parks!

One More Thing

I didn't make an index. If you'd like a PDF to search or travel light, e-mail me (mike@stoneroadpress.com).

One Small Favor, Too

If you enjoy my work, please share it with others. Printing costs have been wild during the pandemic. It has more than doubled. But I will continue to print in the United States. At the same time, I only raised the price by $3 to try and beat inflation and compete with the household names. No sponsors, advertisers, donors, or grants are helping me. I work for you, and I feel like that's the way it should be. Hopefully, I've made a product that improves your life as you explore this planet we're fortunate to call home.

This is it, I Promise :)

I'm documenting park updates and book corrections at stoneroadpress.com/updates



About the Author

Chasm Lake (Rocky Mountain)

You might wonder, "Why should I listen to this guy looking up at Longs Peak from Chasm Lake?" Since you asked :) … while touring the parks, I quickly realized most visitors only explore areas accessible by car. Families zip through, stop at the occasional pull-out or parking lot for a quick photo-op, and continue on their merry way. While most parks cater to motorists, one cannot experience their essence from the comfort of your driver's seat. You must walk among the trees and the mountains. Listen to nature all around you. Sit back, close your eyes, and immerse yourself in its beauty. America's 63 national parks are irreplaceable treasures, yet they are our parks, preserved for our enjoyment. And if you want to experience them to their fullest, you will need a good guide.

That's where I come in. I admit my first trip to a national park was your typical affair. A group of friends drove to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. We peered in, snapped a few photos, shrugged, and returned to our rental car. Did we know adventurous hikers were resting their tired legs at Phantom Ranch, 5,000 feet below? No. Did we know how to reach the North Rim? Probably not. The point is, we didn't know much about the Grand Canyon. In all, we spent no more than a few hours in the park. We were your typical visitors, and millions of poorly-prepared individuals unwisely follow in our footsteps each year.

It's been a long and winding journey since those first steps atop the South Rim. I've spent years exploring and photographing the parks, with hundreds of nights sleeping in my tent or vehicle. This became much more than an assignment. It was an awakening. A communion with life and land as I learned to immerse myself in nature. I also learned how to get to the North Rim, and even hiked down to Phantom Ranch to prove that people were making regular trips to the canyon floor. Did I hike all the trails and participate in all of the activities listed in this book? No, but I'm working on it! I have logged thousands of miles hiking, paddling, and pedaling across America and through its parks, revisiting most of them for each edition. In spring/summer 2024 alone, I hiked over 1,200 miles and drove 38,000! But more importantly, I've researched every site in this book, integrating those findings with my unique perspective and the input of hundreds of park patrons and National Park Service employees. You should follow these tracks, and holding this book is the first step to an unforgettable adventure.


FAIRYLAND TRAIL
TOWER BRIDGE 1.5 MI.
FAIRYLAND POINT 5.5 MI.



Table of Contents

A Grand sunrise from Teton Point

Introduction
Plan Your Trip 2
Best of the Parks 14
How to Use this Book 28

East
Acadia 34
Cuyahoga Valley 52
Shenandoah 62
New River Gorge 74
Mammoth Cave 86
Great Smoky Mountains 96
Congaree 110
Biscayne 118
Everglades 126
Dry Tortugas 136

North
Indiana Dunes 146
Gateway Arch 156
Isle Royale 164
Voyageurs 176
Badlands 186
Wind Cave 196
Theodore Roosevelt 204
Grand Teton 216
Yellowstone 230
Glacier 256

South
Hot Springs 280
Big Bend 288
Guadalupe Mountains 298
Carlsbad Caverns 306
White Sands 316
Petrified Forest 324
Saguaro 332

Southwest
Rocky Mountain 344
Great Sand Dunes 360
Black Canyon of the Gunnison 368
Mesa Verde 376
Arches 386
Canyonlands 396
Capitol Reef 410
Bryce Canyon 420
Zion 430
Grand Canyon 442
Great Basin 470

West
Joshua Tree 482
Channel Islands 494
Pinnacles 504
Death Valley 514
Sequoia & Kings Canyon 530
Yosemite 544
Lassen Volcanic 566
Redwood 576
Crater Lake 586
Mount Rainier 594
Olympic 608
North Cascades 624

Alaska
Glacier Bay 638
Wrangell–St. Elias 648
Denali 656
Kenai Fjords 668
Lake Clark 676
Katmai 682
Gates of the Arctic 690
Kobuk Valley 696

Remote Islands
Virgin Islands 704
Haleakala 714
Hawaii Volcanoes 724
American Samoa 738

Photo Credits 744


PACIFIC (Washington, DC, minus 3 hours)
MOUNTAIN (Washington, DC, minus 2 hours)
CENTRAL (Washington, DC, minus 1 hour)
WEST
SOUTHWEST
NORTH
SOUTH
Olympic
North Cascades
WASHINGTON
Mount Rainier
Glacier
MONTANA
NORTH DAKOTA
Theodore Roosevelt
OREGON
IDAHO
Yellowstone
Crater Lake
Grand Teton
SOUTH DAKOTA
Redwood
Wind Cave
Badlands
WYOMING
Lassen Volcanic
CALIFORNIA
NEBRASKA
NEVADA
Yosemite
Great Basin
UTAH
Rocky Mountain
COLORADO
Arches
Capitol Reef
Black Canyon of the Gunnison
Pinnacles
Kings Canyon
Sequoia
Zion
Bryce Canyon
Canyonlands
KANSAS
Great Sand Dunes
Death Valley
Mesa Verde
Grand Canyon
Channel Islands
Joshua Tree
Petrified Forest
OKLAHOMA
ARIZONA
NEW MEXICO
PACIFIC OCEAN
Saguaro
White Sands
ARIZONA
Canyon de Chelly NM, Hubbell Trading Post NHS, and Navajo NM observe daylight saving time. Other NPS units in Arizona do not.
Carlsbad Caverns
Guadalupe Mountains
TEXAS
Big Bend
ALASKA
ALASKA (Washington, DC, minus 4 hours)
RUSSIA
Gates of the Arctic
Kobuk Valley
ALASKA
CANADA
Denali
Wrangell-St. Elias
Lake Clark
Kenai Fjords
Glacier Bay
Katmai
BERING SEA
PACIFIC OCEAN
ALEUTIAN ISLANDS
0 200 400 Kilometers
0 200 400 Miles
REMOTE ISLANDS
HAWAII (Washington, DC, minus 5 hours; minus 6 hours during daylight saving time)
KAUA'I
NI'IHAU
O'AHU
MOLOKA'I
Haleakala
MAUI
HAWAII
HAWAI'I
PACIFIC OCEAN
Hawai'i Volcanoes


EASTERN (Washington, DC)
Voyageurs
Isle Royale
LAKE SUPERIOR
LAKE HURON
LAKE MICHIGAN
LAKE ONTARIO
LAKE ERIE
MINNESOTA
WISCONSIN
MICHIGAN
IOWA
ILLINOIS
INDIANA
OHIO
PENNSYLVANIA
NEW YORK
MAINE
VT
NH
MA
CT
RI
NJ
MD
DE
WEST VIRGINIA
VIRGINIA
KENTUCKY
TENNESSEE
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
GEORGIA
FLORIDA
ALABAMA
MISSISSIPPI
LOUISIANA
ARKANSAS
MISSOURI
Acadia
Indiana Dunes
Cuyahoga Valley
Shenandoah
Gateway Arch
New River Gorge NP
Mammoth Cave
Great Smoky Mountains
Hot Springs
Congaree
Biscayne
Everglades
Dry Tortugas
EAST
ATLANTIC OCEAN
GULF OF AMERICA
North
Scale for all areas except Alaska
0 100 200 300 400 Kilometers
0 100 200 300 400 Miles
REMOTE ISLANDS
AMERICAN SAMOA (Washington, DC, minus 5 hours; minus 6 hours during daylight saving time)
American Samoa
TUTUILA
OFU
TA'Ū
AMERICAN SAMOA
PACIFIC OCEAN
REMOTE ISLANDS
PUERTO RICO and VIRGIN ISLANDS (Washington, DC, plus 1 hour; same time during daylight saving time)
VIRGIN ISLANDS
PUERTO RICO
Virgin Islands



Plan Your Trip

Timed-Entry Permits (Reservations)

COVID-19 and increased interest in the American outdoors resulted in more negative visitor experiences (waiting in traffic at park entrances, not finding parking at popular trailheads and viewpoints, inability to secure first-come, first-served camping spaces, etc.). Almost all of these problems occur in the busy summer vacation season. Your best bet for a more enjoyable national park experience is getting an early start or traveling ever-so-slightly in the offseason. Several parks have implemented timed-entry pilot programs (which are reevaluated each year) to limit how many motorists can enter the park during certain windows. When we went to print, Glacier, Carlsbad Caverns, Rocky Mountain, Arches, Yosemite, and Mount Rainier required visitors to secure a permit to enter the park during peak visitation periods. Permits are available through recreation.gov. If you have a reservation (camping, lodging, boat tour, horseback ride, etc.), that counts as your timed-entry permit. While details are provided in each park section, they tend to change every year, so be sure to check the park website and recreation.gov for current timed-entry status when you begin your trip planning. So that you know, a timed-entry permit does not guarantee a parking space. It simply allows you to enter the park at the time and location of your permit. In fact, they exacerbate that problem, as many visitors enter before timed entry to get to the most desirable trailheads. This isn't an easy problem to solve. Gateway towns continue to grow and want more visitors (especially in summer when staff are easier to hire). Parks want people to have a good time, and be able to drive and park wherever, whenever they want. Still, if anyone proposes additional development to their park, (often litigious) conservationists will be in an uproar about it (even though less than 0.02% of all national park land is paved roads and trails).

Popular Attraction Permits

Additionally, a few attractions are so popular they require a permit. They include driving Cadillac Mountain Summit Road (Acadia), hiking Old Rag (Shenandoah), trams at Gateway Arch, hiking Angel's Landing (Zion), hiking Half Dome (Yosemite), and catching the sunrise at Haleakala Summit (Haleakala). Permits are secured at recreation.gov. More details are available in the individual park sections.

Parking Permit

When we went to print, one park required a permit to park. That's Great Smoky Mountains, the only park that receives more than ten million visitors each year. Permits are obtained at recreation.gov.

Crowds & Popularity

Heavy traffic and overwhelming crowds are becoming more common. The two best ways to avoid them are to wake up early and/or go for a long hike! The other option is to travel in the offseason. I've included a visitation chart for each park, so you'll have a good idea when things slow down. If a park has a free shuttle or timed-entry permit system, expect it to be crowded in most developed areas. Expect all but the desert parks to be busy in summer. If you really dislike crowds, consider looking into national forests (193 million acres) and the Bureau of Land Management (247 million acres). They manage plenty of land for all of us. The National Park Service manages 85 million acres, most of which is in Alaska.

Popularity makes booking campsites (and lodges and tours) extremely competitive. Pay attention to when reservation windows open on recreation.gov. Use notifications. If you'd rather not deal with it, write to me (mike@stoneroadpress.com) and ask for a National

Forest campground map I made. There are about 5,000 National Forest campgrounds (compared to nearly 200 National Park Service ones), where you can often pull up and grab a spot.

National Park Stamps/Passport

After "what's your favorite park?" and "who took the pictures?", the number three thing people talk to me about is their park passport. Since you bought this book, you're likely considering visiting several national parks. You should consider getting a park passport for you and/or your kids. Each park has a unique stamp (or stamps), most at visitor centers and ranger stations, but you'll find them at other locations as well. Several websites provide a complete list of all the passport cancellation locations (and new ones are added each year!).

Park Passes

Most parks have an entrance fee. Fees vary from park to park, and rates may be per individual, per vehicle, and a few are even charged per day. If you plan on visiting several national parks in a year or visiting the same (fee-required) public site several times, an America the Beautiful Pass will save you money. They're good for one vehicle (4 passengers). Passes also provide access to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites including national monuments (e.g., Devil's Tower), national memorials, national recreation areas, even some Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Forest (USFS), Bureau of Reclamation, and Army Corps of Engineers land (but most of those sites do not charge a fee).

Annual Pass • $80: This pass is valid for one year, beginning from the month of purchase. It is available to the general public and provides access to, and use of, federal recreation sites that charge an entrance fee or standard amenity fee. It does not provide discounted camping or program/tour rates. The pass can be purchased in person or online at store.usgs.gov (and many online and brick-and-mortar retailers).

Don't automatically purchase an annual pass if you plan a multi-park vacation. No entrance fee is charged at the following national parks: Cuyahoga Valley, New River Gorge, Mammoth Cave, Great Smoky Mountains, Congaree, Biscayne, Gateway Arch, Voyageurs, Wind Cave, Hot Springs, Great Basin, Channel Islands, Redwood, North Cascades, Glacier Bay, Wrangell–St. Elias, Kenai Fjords, Lake Clark, Katmai, Gates of the Arctic, Kobuk Valley, U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.


Gateway Arch from Mississippi Overlook

4th Grade Pass • Free: Have a 4th grader in the family? Let your son or daughter take care of the entrance fees. Get your child's pass at everykidoutdoors.gov. It can be exchanged for the Annual 4th Grade Pass at any federal recreation site with an entrance or standard amenity fee.

Senior Pass • $80 (Lifetime)/$20 (Annual): U.S. citizens or permanent residents 62 and older can choose from a lifetime ($80) or annual ($20) pass. Annual Senior Passes can be upgraded to a lifetime pass. Each pass provides access to and use of federal recreation sites that charge an entrance fee. It also may provide a 50% discount on camping fees and certain park tours. Purchase passes in person or online at store.usgs.gov.

Access Pass • Free: This is a lifetime pass for U.S. citizens or permanent residents with permanent disabilities (documentation required). It provides access to and use of federal recreation sites that charge an entrance fee. It also may provide a 50% discount on camping fees and some park tours. It can be purchased in person or online at store.usgs.gov ($10 fee; proof of permanent disability is required).

Military Pass • Free: This pass is available to all current U.S. military members and their dependents. It provides access to and use of federal recreation sites that charge an entrance fee. It can be obtained in person or online (store.usgs.gov) with a Common Access Card (CAC) or a Military ID.

Volunteer Pass • Free: This pass is given to volunteers who accumulate 250 service hours cumulatively. The pass/decal provides access to and use of federal recreation sites that charge an entrance fee for a year, beginning from the date of award. The volunteer pass does not provide discounted camping or tour/program rates.

What to Pack

Making packing lists (for each family member) and packing a few days before your trip is always a good idea (although I don't practice it all that often). Everyone knows to pack the essentials like cell chargers, money, hygiene products, and clothes, but here are a few suggestions you might forget.

For Any Trip

Garbage/Small Resealable Bags: Bags are incredibly useful storage devices and also add a bit of water resistance. I still use a small resealable bag as my wallet. Its combination of transparency, durability, and low cost-to-quantity ratio cannot be beat!

Duct Tape: I always have a roll of duct tape in my car. It's also a good practice to wrap the base of a water bottle or hiking pole with duct tape before venturing into the wilderness.

Headlamp: Whether reading in your tent or searching under a car seat for the park pass you dropped, a headlamp is always useful. And kids love them.

For the National Parks

Binoculars, clothes that layer, rain gear (temperature and wind can change dramatically), insect repellent, sunscreen, snacks and water, first-aid kit, pocketknife, journal or sketchpad, good book, and camera (plus extra batteries and memory cards).

For Road Trips

Atlas, toll transponder (although I'd recommend staying off interstates as much as possible), download playlists/podcasts, travel games, pocketknife, spoon, headlamp, battery-powered fan (if sleeping in car).

For Hiking

Backpack/daypack, hydration system/water bottle, map and/or GPS (know how to use them), hiking stick/poles, bug spray, sunscreen, pocketknife, snacks, traction devices for your boots, whistle, monopod, water filter, water shoes and towel (for creek/river crossings).

For Camping

Camp stove with fuel, toilet paper, rope, clothes pins, flashlight(s), folding chairs, hammock, water jug, tarp, earplugs, hard-sided/scent-proof container for food and scented items (in bear/rodent territory), and cards.

For Biking

Water, spare tube, patch kit, lights, high-visibility clothing, pump, tire irons, multi-tool, and bike shorts.

For Paddling

Bilge pump, rescue bag, knife, booties, gloves, helmet, and whistle.

Electric Charging Stations

The East and West Coasts are ahead of the charging station curve, but with careful planning you should be able to reach remote parks like Big Bend or Voyageurs. You'll also find charging stations inside huge parks like Yellowstone, Death Valley, and Everglades. And if charging stations aren't available, you can always reserve an RV campsite with suitable electric hookups (but that sounds like a real pain). I've seen a few EVs having fun on unpaved roads. I've also seen a few bricked, waiting to be picked up after running out of charge. Public land out West isn't particularly EV-friendly today, but it's (almost) inevitable.

Leave No Trace

Remember, national parks are for everyone. Whether you're an avid outdoorsman or just passing through, all visitors should practice Leave No Trace principles.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Travel/Camp on Durable Surfaces
3. Dispose of Waste Properly
4. Leave What You Find
5. Minimize Campfire Impacts
6. Respect Wildlife
7. Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Proper waste disposal is commonly called "Pack It In, Pack It Out" or "Leave Only Footprints, Take Only Photographs." That includes human and pet waste. If "nature calls" and you don't have access to a designated restroom, get off trail (and away from any freshwater source), dig a hole, and take care of your business. If it's a popular destination without backcountry toilets or anywhere without enough soil to properly bury your waste, you should bring a packable disposable toilet bag system. It's not a bad idea to put one in your pack just in case. Practice these simple and sensible principles and our most remarkable and irreplaceable treasures will remain enjoyable for future generations. I've been to quite a few backcountry sites that reeked of human waste.

Vandalism

I highly doubt I need to mention to you that you should not vandalize your public land (even carving a name in a tree), but vandalism in our public spaces dramatically increased in 2020. If you see any vandalism, please report it.

Economical Travel

Vacations get expensive. A National Park trip is often seen as an affordable adventure, but the costs of lodging, camping, dining, tours, entrance fees, tolls, and gas add up quickly. Some expenses are unavoidable; others can be minimized using these practical tips.

Lodging: Park lodges are beautiful but expensive. Discounts are rarely available during peak season (although large concessioners like Xanterra regularly offer Black Friday/holiday discounts for early birds). Book early or travel during the offseason (when the weather is often better than summer) for slightly lower rates.

If you aren't a camper and are willing to splurge in one area, make it lodging. Especially at large, remote parks like Yellowstone, Yosemite, Death Valley, Grand Canyon, etc. With that said, pricing has increased dramatically over the last decade and has widely become demand-based (with psychological games mixed in). There's no question most people are priced out of lodges (and some campgrounds aren't far behind).

Less expensive lodging is often found beyond park boundaries, but many also take advantage of summer vacationers with fairly sophisticated dynamic pricing. Most gateway cities offer everything from chain hotels to B&Bs. Before making reservations, price check your options using online tools (don't forget about Airbnb and Couchsurfing). It's usually best to make reservations a few weeks in advance. Book too early and you'll pay the standard rate. Book too late and you might pay standard or more (depending on supply and demand). Regardless of location, a vacation rental (Airbnb) is usually most cost-effective for families and groups. Hotels and motels are best for solo travelers and couples. If you're making an unplanned stop at a hotel and cannot check pricing online, the best way to receive a discount is to ask. Occasionally, they'll have a room not up to their typical standards (e.g., no air conditioning) that they may offer at a deep discount. The hotel will not mind checking you in if you don't mind the room's defect.

Another option is to take the money you would have spent on a hotel room and use it on a tent, sleeping bag, and mat. Camping isn't for everyone, but it's worth a try. Unfortunately, camping fees in national parks—while still mostly reasonable—continue to increase (up to 2.5x what they cost just ten years ago). If you're willing to put on a few more miles, you can almost always find smaller, less-crowded, lower-cost camping at nearby National Forests (especially at the Western parks). The country has about 5,000 national forest campgrounds (compared to roughly 200 national park campgrounds). I made a map with each campground pinned. I'm happy to share it. Just write to mike@stoneroadpress.com.

Another option is to camp in the park's backcountry. Most require a backcountry permit (usually through recreation.gov) for a reasonable fee. Permit details are provided in the individual park sections. By no means must you be a seasoned backpacker to enjoy backpacking. Some sites are within a mile or two of the trailhead. However, it's always a good idea to consult with a park ranger to discuss your chosen itinerary and outdoor experience, and receive a brief overview of backcountry regulations. Most parks require setting up camp at designated sites or a minimum distance from roads, trails, and water sources. You must also practice Leave No Trace principles. If it's your first time, do a test trip at home, even if that means camping in your backyard. It's best to learn by doing. See what works for you. You'll quickly learn, most of backpacking is carefully choosing what not to bring. It's pretty darn fun and a fantastic way to see parts of this country that very few see. Suppose you are or can become comfortable being uncomfortable. In that case, I'm confident you'll be a lifelong backpacker, spreading the joy of seeing our wild lands with your family and/or friends. Don't let the outdoors fearmongers scare you with stories of bears, rattlesnakes, bad weather, and mosquitoes. While they are legitimate concerns, those things are far less dangerous than your drive to the park.

If "free" is the price you're looking for, you can often find free dispersed camping on federal land (typically National Forest or BLM) nearby (especially for western parks). Travelers and truckers are often permitted to sleep in Walmart parking lots. Walmart intends to provide a safe location for weary travelers and truck drivers, so they don't endanger other motorists. Do not take advantage of this benefit by camping in the parking lot for an extended period. And buy your groceries while you're there. Truck stops and designated rest areas are also okay. (I take many showers at truck stops, but that will get expensive if you aren't alone.) You must have a good setup (van, truck camper, etc.) for all of these options. I've spent 100s of nights sleeping in the back of a truck, and for me, the key is a good storage system and a comfortable mattress. There are obvious pros (cheap, efficient) and cons (uncomfortable), but the nicest thing to me is that it kind of forces you to maximize your time exploring this incredible country of ours.


Thar she blows! Anacapa Island (Channel Islands)

Dining: Packing a cooler is the best way to minimize dining expenses. Bringing a loaf of bread, jam or honey, and peanut butter can prevent a few trips to the nearest town for a snack or meal. My preferred low-maintenance/high-energy backpacking/traveling meal is salami, tortillas, and a few candy (or protein) bars (and plenty of fruit and veggies). Of course, many vacationers like to treat themselves to more sophisticated meals. There are many ways to do that, too (even at a campground).

Activities: Discounts are more difficult to come by for activities. Asking is the place to start, especially if your group is large. Outfitters would rather get your business than see you walk out the door. Many outfitters offer "early-bird" discounts or "online only" specials. It's also a good idea to browse their website and/or social media accounts for coupons.

Entrance Fees: These are non-negotiable, but the National Parks Service offers a few free entrance days (search nps.gov for a list of fee-free dates). If you plan on visiting several federal fee areas in the same year, consider buying an annual pass (page 5).

Gas: Most national parks are vast regions located in extremely remote sections of the U.S. It will take a lot of gas to get to the park, much less around it. Remember to top off your tank before entering. A few parks have gas stations, but expect to pay a premium.

Acadia, Glacier, Rocky Mountain, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Grand Canyon, Pinnacles, Sequoia, Yosemite, and Denali offer free shuttle services during peak tourism season. Take advantage of these shuttles. Not only are they free, but they also give you the chance to enjoy the magnificent vistas along the way without the added stress of driving your car.

Showers

What do you do about showering? This question comes up a lot. My hygiene probably isn't the model you want to follow, but I jump in a lot of lakes and streams. I also like to leave a jug of water on the dashboard of my car while out hiking. When I return, it's warm and perfect for cleaning up. There is a wide variety of portable showers (solar or built-in heater) on the market. Truck stops have showers, but they'd get expensive if you aren't traveling solo. The best option is to have showers at your campground. That information is listed in each park's camping section.

Camping Regulations

Camping is a national park staple. Children and adults alike love the freedom of spending a night under the stars. To do so, campers must adhere to a few basic regulations that help protect park resources and ensure an enjoyable stay for all campground patrons and fellow park visitors.

1. Camp only in designated sites.
2. Leave something of little value to indicate occupancy (important for vans and RVs).
3. Store all food and cooking equipment in an enclosed vehicle or hard-sided food locker (particularly in parks with healthy bear, raccoon, or rodent populations).
4. Do not leave fires unattended.
5. Observe quiet hours and generator hours.
6. Check out on time.
7. Lock valuables in your vehicle and out of sight.

Regulations regarding maximum length of stay, speed limits, gathering wood, and pets change from campground to campground. Specific rules should be posted at self-check-in stations or handed out when you register for your campsite upon arrival, or they can be found at each park's website.

Road Construction

All the most popular parks are developed with the modern motorist in mind. Paved roadways venture across regions once declared impassable on foot. Ingenuity, perseverance, hard work, and thousands of miles of concrete and asphalt allow automobiles to twist and turn along rugged mountain slopes and craggy coastlines through some of the most beautiful scenery you'll find anywhere in the world. Roads were built to increase tourism and accessibility. But also carefully designed to retain aesthetic beauty. You won't find a bridge across the Grand Canyon or a parking lot next to Half Dome, but roads lead to stunning viewpoints of these iconic settings.

Park roads require regular maintenance. Repairing roads in these remote and rugged regions can be difficult, a task made more challenging since construction and tourism seasons coincide. You'll want to know what's under construction to make the most out of your vacation. Current and upcoming construction plans are typically listed on park websites (or check stoneroadpress.com/updates). I've found construction information is often misleading. If you have any doubts, a friendly park ranger is just a phone call away. All phone numbers are listed in the individual park sections.

Safety

It is important that park visitors follow safety precautions and park regulations to enjoy a safe visit and prevent injuries. In the unlikely event someone is injured, know where to go to receive proper medical treatment. A few parks have medical facilities on-site, but most do not. Carry a cell phone, but do not rely on it; cell coverage is spotty (at best) in most parks.

Accidents happen. And occasionally, an accident results in death. Fatality statistics vary from park to park, but there are three common causes: drowning, falling, and car accidents. Out of more than 300 million annual guests, about three hundred die each year (on average). Literally one-in-a-million. Bears, rattlesnakes, and mosquitoes don't kill (or even bother) as many visitors as influential outdoors insiders would like you to believe. And all of the instances I've heard about first-hand, it was humans behaving irresponsibly in the animal's territory, not the other way around. Come prepared, act responsibly, and you shouldn't have any problems. With that said, it's still a good idea to know about the inherent risks.

Drowning: Use extreme caution near water. River crossings can be challenging due to uneven footing, moss-covered rocks, and slippery logs. One misstep could lead to being swept down river or over a waterfall. Be especially careful in slot canyons and during spring when creeks and streams swell with snowmelt/rain. Do not mix intoxicants and water activities.

Falling: Falls are common, especially at parks like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon, where the terrain is very rugged and people push themselves near their limits. Know where you're going. Ask about trail conditions. Wear proper footwear. Watch your step. And do not take unnecessary risks to get that enviable Instagram image. Have someone else take your photo when you're on ridgelines or near a cliff edge.

Car Accidents: Driving is the most dangerous activity. Drive with awareness (there are many distracted drivers in the parks). Obey the rules of the road. Speed limits continue to increase out West, and most drivers push them to the max. Drive at your own pace. Pull to the side of the road if you're holding up traffic. And take advantage of the park's free shuttles when you can.

Hypothermia: Rivers and lakes. High elevation. Alaska. These places have one thing in common: they're cold. Extended exposure to any cold environment (especially water) can lead to hypothermia, the progressive degradation, both physically and mentally, caused by chilling your body's core. To help prevent hypothermia, wear water-resistant clothing or clothing that wicks away moisture. Packing a sweater, warm hat, rain gear, headlamp, fire starter, and emergency blanket for long hikes is also a good idea, just in case you get lost and have an unexpected night in the wilderness.

Altitude: The highest point in North America (McKinley) and the highest point in the Lower 48 (Mount Whitney) reside in national parks. Rocky Mountain National Park's Trail Ridge Road reaches more than 11,000 feet in elevation. At Death Valley, you can go from the lowest point in the Americas (Badwater) to more than 11,000 feet elevation at Telescope Peak in hours, not days. If you aren't used to elevation, it's imperative you take your time to acclimate, especially if you plan on exerting yourself. I've had altitude sickness. It is painful.

Dehydration: It's important to stay hydrated. Remember to carry a day pack with water and snacks. If you're going on a long hike with available water sources, carry a filter (or something to treat water).

Giardia: Giardia is caused by a parasite found in lakes and streams. If consumed, it causes persistent, severe

diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and nausea. To prevent Giardia, use an approved filter, boil water, or drink from sources labeled "potable" (e.g., water fountains). Filters should be capable of removing particles as small as one micron.

Falling Trees/Rocks: Parks do their best to proactively close trails that pose a significant threat due to falling rocks or trees, but hikers must always be aware of their surroundings. Also, don't kick or throw rocks off cliffs or ledges. There may be hikers below. They may be rare, but these things do happen. I've witnessed three trees fall. They do make a sound, and they're dangerous. Be extra cautious in burn zones.

Wildlife: Do not approach wildlife. This is particularly true of bears. Know the differences between grizzly and black bears. Grizzlies are blond to nearly black and sometimes have silver-tipped guard hairs. They have a dished-in face and a large hump of heavy muscle above the shoulders. Their claws are around four inches long. Black bears also range from blond to black. They are typically smaller with a straighter face from the tip of the nose to the ears. They do not have a prominent hump above their shoulders and their claws are about 1.5 inches long. Most bear–human encounters occur when hikers startle, provoke, or pursue the animal. My last grizzly encounter was at Glacier. I told a group of hikers there was a grizzly around the corner. One kid went running *toward* it. Everyone else was more responsible. Visitors wear bells to scare away bears. But your best bet is to hike with a group and talk as you go. Carrying bear spray, a non-lethal pepper spray dilution, is becoming increasingly popular in grizzly territory. I've seen it used once. It was effective. The bear was probably a little aggressive, but the person was also exactly where he shouldn't have been. For what it's worth, I've hiked in a lot of grizzly country, almost exclusively on my own, without a bear deterrent. I've met quite a few bears. Nothing bad has happened.

Firearms: People who can legally possess firearms under applicable federal, state, and local laws, can carry firearms in the national parks.

Wildlife Viewing

Wildlife is transient. The best way to pinpoint your desired animal is to ask a park ranger about current activity and feeding areas. Dawn and dusk are typically prime viewing times for large mammal species.

When you do spot wildlife, remember that these are not tame animals and should not be approached. Visitors are often injured when they get too close. Stay at least 100 yards away from bears and wolves and 25 yards away from all other animals (like bison, elk, bighorn sheep, moose, deer, and coyotes). Absolutely do not feed wildlife. It's illegal for good reason. There are a lot of people on this planet whose only animal interactions up until a park trip are with pets or zoo animals. If you see one of these people doing something dangerous, kindly ask them to increase their distance.

Photography Tips

With over 200,000, I might have the world's largest collection of mediocre national park photos. It also suggests I'm not a great source for photography tips, but I've learned a lot since this all began.

Every year smartphone cameras become better. Current phones are more than good enough to capture high-quality photos for social media. They nail exposure and focus almost every single shot, and software balances out most scene's dynamic range. There's no shame in relying on your phone for photos.

If you choose to use a DSLR or mirrorless camera, spend time using it. Read the manual. Experiment with the settings. Figure out what works for you. While operating on "auto" is fine, you won't get the most out of it that way. I've learned this one the hard way. Photos from my first trip around the country are awful.

Photography is all about light. You have three ways to control exposure. They are aperture, shutter speed, and ISO. Aperture is the opening in the lens. A low f-stop (f1.4) means a large aperture (and a lot of light is let in). There is a tradeoff. When you shoot at a f1.4, 2.8, etc., you have minimal depth of field (good for portraits to focus on the subject and create bokeh effects). A high f-stop (f22) means a small aperture (and little light is let in). When you shoot at a high f-stop, you'll have maximum depth of field (good when you have interesting subjects in the foreground and background, but photos tend to get soft due to diffraction). For landscapes, you're generally best off shooting in the middle of your lens's aperture range, where it's sharpest (test it to find out!). Shutter speed is what it sounds like. It's how long the shutter is open. Shutter speed is often adjusted when you're dealing with motion. If you want to freeze a subject (or you're in a moving vehicle), you want a fast shutter speed. You want a long shutter speed if you'd like to introduce blurred motion or turn a waterfall into a glossy ribbon. ISO is more abstract. Increasing it increases brightness electronically at the expense of noise. It does not affect

the creative aspects of your photography. Increasing ISO increases noise. It's also dependent on camera and processing, but you can usually increase ISO to 1600 and get acceptable results (especially for social media). That's photography in a nutshell. Cameras allow you to shoot full manual (you set the aperture, shutter speed, and ISO), aperture priority (you choose the aperture, your camera chooses ISO and shutter speed for a proper exposure), or shutter priority (you select the shutter speed, your camera chooses aperture and ISO). For sharp hand-held images, you want low ISO and fast shutter speed, which requires a bright scene and/or low aperture. And the required shutter speed depends on the length of your lens. The rule of thumb is to set your shutter speed at twice the lens length. Wide angle (16mm), shoot at 1/30 second or faster. 200mm, shoot at 1/500 second or faster. If you have a camera with Auto ISO minimum shutter speed (adjusts ISO to maintain minimum shutter speed), use it.

The next logical question is, what is a proper exposure? Your camera figures that out too. It reads the available light based on a selected metering mode. It's important to understand your camera's metering modes. Most offer multi-metering (full screen but weighing areas differently), center-metering (full screen but emphasizing the central region), and spot-metering (measures light in a spot you control). So, taking a photo using spot-metering, you move the "spot" to where you'd like light to be metered. Your camera selects the ISO and shutter speed for a proper exposure. There's usually a wide range of light values in any given landscape, ranging from direct sunlight to shadows (or complete darkness). You can adjust the exposure to your liking with the exposure compensation dial (hopefully your exposure compensation dial has a lock, but it's always a good idea to check your camera's settings before you start shooting, just in case they changed from the last time you were out). If a scene's too bright, dial exposure back a few stops. Too dark? Increase the exposure. That, combined with a what-you-see-is-what-you-get viewfinder (as you'll find on mirrorless cameras), is extremely useful. If this doesn't make sense, reread your manual and fool around with your camera some more. Books, videos, and podcasts can all be helpful, but, in my opinion, nothing's more beneficial than experience.

Photos typically aren't very interesting if they aren't in focus. Your camera will have at least three focus modes. Manual allows you to manually adjust the focus using the focus ring on your lens. Single-shot


Bear family portrait :)

autofocus locks focus on a subject. Use single-shot AF when your subject is motionless. Continuous autofocus continues to focus while the shutter button is pressed halfway down. Use continuous when your subject is in motion. I'm in single-shot autofocus for 95% of my images. Those are the modes. You also need to pay attention to where you're focusing. For landscapes, where everything interesting is in the distance, focus on that distant landscape. If you have a subject in the foreground and a beautiful landscape in the background you'd like to have in sharp focus, you have a few options:

1). Focus at the lens's hyperfocal distance. There are many hyperfocal distance calculators online, but most people simply focus one-third of the way into the scene and then review the image to see if it's satisfactory. If you've ever wondered why action cameras are always in focus, they take advantage of hyperfocal distance.
2). Create a composite. Take a photo with the foreground subject in focus and another with the background in focus, and then merge them with software (in Adobe Photoshop, you'd open the images as separate layers, and then use the auto-align and auto-blend functions). While software is extremely good at aligning images too, I'd recommend using a tripod for this option.
3). Buy a camera that does focus-stacking in-camera. A few manufacturers offer this today. Cameras also do focus bracketing (typically used for product photography), which is probably overkill, but another option.

When I'm at a beautiful spot, I'll usually take a photo focused on the foreground, another focused a third of the way into the shot, and one more focused on the background. With 61MP cameras, I end up with a lot of SD cards full of images, but it's worth it if there's a chance I might make a composite later. That said, only a few of the images in here are composites.

Keep interesting subject matter away from the edges of your image, especially when using a wide-angle lens. Most wide-angle lenses introduce distortion around the frame's perimeter. It's fun to place a subject in a


White Sands

corner, but place that subject a third of the way into the frame and crop it later. You'll get better results. When shooting landscapes with subjects in them, it's often best to keep the people out of the center of the frame as well. Many photographers follow the Rule of Thirds, dividing the frame into a 3x3 grid, placing subjects at any of the four intersections (as illustrated in the photo below of Cirque of the Towers, a Patagonia-esque destination in this hemisphere in Wyoming's Wind River Range, Bridger-Teton National Forest).



Zoom lenses are your friends. People love to use prime lenses because they take the sharpest images and offer the widest apertures (plus we have legs to move around). This is true, but zoom allows you to adjust the framing on the fly. And that extra focal length can bring in the background, making shots more interesting (not to mention, changing lenses outside sucks, mirrorless cameras are well known for getting dust on the sensor). Take photos at different focal lengths and see what you like. I typically walk around with a 16-35mm and a 70-200mm. Almost all my most interesting shots are with the 70-200 (but it's big and fairly heavy).

Many professionals like to say they don't even think about picking up their cameras outside the golden hours (an hour before sunset and an hour after sunrise). Let them stay home! The easiest time to take sharp photos is in the middle of the day with blue skies and a radiant sun. You'll be shooting at ISO 100 with plenty of speed to get tack-sharp shots from even the least steady set of hands. Mix in some cool clouds and you'll be in heaven. Overcast days are when you might want to forget about your camera. However, that is a good time to take portraits (excluding the sky), thanks to soft, even lighting (clouds are a natural diffuser).

Golden hour photography takes some practice. So does Blue Hour (the hour before sunrise/after sunset). While cameras continue to improve in low-light situations, using a tripod (or monopod) is a good idea. During these periods, you'll have long shadows, often creating a scene with large lit and unlit areas. This is one instance where your camera's light metering mode is important. If it's evaluating the entire screen, it will average things out, and you'll have underexposed lit areas and overexposed dark areas. Taking two shots allows you to have the shadows and light exposed properly, but it requires some work to make a good image out of it. A tripod will make it easier to align your images if you decide to make a composite with them later (and to shoot at ISO 100 if there's limited light). Some photographers use bracketing for scenes with high dynamic range. I goofed around with it and decided it wasn't for me. Software is awfully good these days, so I simply take one picture exposed for the light I care more about (light or shadows), and then I'll clean it up in Lightroom. More often than not, you're exposing for the lit area and working in the shadows later.

Speaking of processing. It's a must for RAW images. Use Lightroom. Use Photoshop. Find a program you like and get to know it. I used very few of my own photos for the first edition because, quite frankly, they weren't any good. The vast majority of the second edition's


Garfield Peak (Crater Lake)

photos were mine, but I did very little processing and the quality was still subpar. This time, almost all the images are mine, and I spent a considerable amount of time making them look better (and closer to reality) thanks to Lightroom. It's impressive software!

Don't carry a tripod with you wherever you go because you have it. Almost every time I've brought a tripod on a backpacking trip or long hike, I've regretted it. Now I leave the tripod in my car and get creative with rocks or logs to find a stable surface to set my camera. Sure, your perspective will be limited, but you cut weight and free up valuable space. If there's space and I'm left to choose between packing a long lens or a tripod, I'm taking the lens 99 times out of 100.

Pay attention to the light. Today, when I visit a park, I think about where I'm headed, what I'd like to shoot, from what angle, and what time of day I should be there to have desirable lighting. It's also important to check the weather. Many professionals also like to say to get out and shoot on overcast days, as you'll have soft, even light. Overcast days are blah and depressing. Give me interesting clouds or blue skies. Now I wouldn't stay in your tent on an overcast day because your photos aren't going to pop. But, if you have a couple of days with variable cloud cover, I'd go to your least exciting destinations on the overcast day(s). Generally speaking, you want the sun at your back for properly exposed images (especially when you're taking a picture of yourself or others), but it can be fun to play around shooting into the sun, too. You'll typically get sun stars at a smaller aperture (f11 and up). The points on your sun stars depend on the number of aperture blades in your lens. An even number of blades results in sun stars with that number of points. An odd number of blades results in 2x that number of points. My 16-35mm lens has 11 aperture blades and produces pleasing sun stars with 22 points.

That's the basics. This is what works for me. I'm usually shooting landscapes, so most of my time is in aperture priority at f/9 or f/11 (where the lenses I have are sharpest), with spot metering (focus point linked), and single-shot autofocus. I'd guess 90% of my current photos are taken with these settings. The other 10% are wildlife or waterfalls. For wildlife, I switch to continuous autofocus (and the focus area and mode changes depending on the situation), but I'm still in aperture priority. Waterfalls are shot in shutter priority. It may take some time if you're a slow learner like me, but hopefully this information helps you avoid a few of my early mistakes. I was a clueless photographer for quite some time. Photos for my first national park circuit were shot almost entirely in full auto, and I wasn't thinking about the composition all that much. My second tour, I shot almost everything in aperture priority at f22 because a fellow traveler said I was wasting my camera's capability (and a popular landscape photography book corroborated that info). That isn't a good strategy either. While you may want more depth of field (higher f-stop), using f22 requires slower shutter speeds to shoot at ISO 100 (less noise), ,and it tends to produce soft images due to diffraction. For sharp handheld shots, you probably want to be shooting at 1/60 of a second or faster. When looking at pictures at home, I scroll right past almost every photo taken at f22. They just aren't sharp. Photography is not extremely complicated. If you know how ISO, aperture, and shutter speed are related, and spend some time practicing, you'll figure out what you like a few hundred photos into it (not 100,000 like me!).

Social Media

NPS sites have social media accounts. Follow them or at least check posts prior to arriving for potential travel complications (wildfires or road construction) and interesting special events. Facebook tends to be the most useful platform, but it varies for each park.



Best of the Parks

Pear Lake (Sequoia)

Best Parks

Tier 1 – Superlative

Yellowstone (page 230)
Glacier (page 256)
Yosemite (page 544)

Tier 2 – The next best
Parks you can't wait to get back to.

Acadia (page 34)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 96)
Grand Teton (page 216)
Big Bend (page 288)
Rocky Mountain (page 344)
Canyonlands (page 396)
Capitol Reef (page 410)
Zion (page 430)
Grand Canyon (page 442)
Joshua Tree (page 482)
Death Valley (page 514)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 530)
Mount Rainier (page 594)

Tier 3 – Amazing but…
They're missing something. Maybe that "wow" factor. Or they're too big. Too small. Too seasonal …

Shenandoah (page 62)
New River Gorge (page 74)
Badlands (page 186)
White Sands (page 316)
Great Sand Dunes (page 360)
Black Canyon of the Gunnison (page 368)
Arches (page 386)
Bryce Canyon (page 420)
Great Basin (page 470)
Channel Islands (page 494)
Lassen Volcanic (page 566)
Redwood (page 576)
Crater Lake (page 586)
Olympic (page 608)
North Cascades (page 624)
Glacier Bay (page 638)
Wrangell-St. Elias (page 648)
Denali (page 656)
Kenai Fjords (page 668)
Lake Clark (page 676)
Katmai (page 682)
Haleakala (page 714)
Hawaii Volcanoes (page 724)

Tier 4 – Still Amazing but…
they're either hard/expensive to visit or a relatively quick stop.

Everglades (page 126)
Dry Tortugas (page 136)
Isle Royale (page 164)
Voyageurs (page 176)
Wind Cave (page 196)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 204)
Guadalupe Mountains (page 298)
Carlsbad Caverns (page 306)
Petrified Forest (page 324)
Pinnacles (page 504)
Gates of the Arctic (page 690)
Virgin Islands (page 704)

Tier 5 – Still great but…
not as strikingly beautiful. This shows our country's embarrassment of geographical riches, and we're only talking about National Parks so far.

Cuyahoga Valley (page 52)
Mammoth Cave (page 86)
Congaree (page 110)
Biscayne (page 118)
Indiana Dunes (page 146)
Saguaro (page 332)
Mesa Verde (page 376)
Kobuk Valley (page 696)
American Samoa (page 738)

Tier 6 – Good but…
I'm not sure they meet the stereotypical idea of a "national park."

Gateway Arch (page 156)
Hot Springs (page 280)


Lower Falls (Lookout Point, Yellowstone)

Top Attractions
Some of the best easily-accessible attractions (sites you can basically drive your car or boat right up to).

Cadillac Mountain (Acadia)
Skyline Drive (Shenandoah)
Grandview (New River Gorge)
New River Gorge Bridge
Mammoth Cave (Mammoth Cave)
Kuwohi (formerly Clingman's Dome, Great Smoky Mountains)
Synchronous Fireflies (" ")
Fort Jefferson (boat, Dry Tortugas)
Gateway Arch (Gateway Arch)
Grassy Bay Cliff (boat, Voyageurs)
The Wall (Badlands)
Wind Cave (Wind Cave)
Jenny Lake Overlook (Grand Teton)
Schwabacher Landing (Grand Teton)
Moulton Barns (Grand Teton)
Teton Point Overlook (Grand Teton)
Grand Prismatic Spring (Yellowstone)
Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone
Old Faithful/Upper Geyser Basin
Goat Haunt (boat, Glacier)
Many Glacier (Glacier)
Apgar (Glacier)
Two Medicine (Glacier)
Chisos Mountains (Big Bend)
Santa Elena Canyon (Big Bend)
White Sands (White Sands)
Rock Cut (Rocky Mountain)
Great Sand Dunes
Painted Wall (Black Canyon)
The Narrows (" ")
Kneeling Camel (" ")
Cliff Palace (Mesa Verde)
The Windows (Arches)
Park Avenue Viewpoint (Arches)
Grand View Point (Canyonlands)
Shafer Canyon Overlook (" ")
Green River Overlook (" ")
Gooseneck Overlook (4x4, " ")
Grand Wash (Capitol Reef)
Temple of the Sun/Moon (4x4, " ")
Inspiration Point (Bryce Canyon)
Bryce Point (Bryce Canyon)
Sunset Point (Bryce Canyon)
Zion Canyon (Zion)
Toroweap (4x4, Grand Canyon)
Lipan Point (Grand Canyon)
Desert View (Grand Canyon)
Cape Royal (Grand Canyon)
Keys Ranch (ranger-led, Joshua Tree)
Badwater Basin (Death Valley)
Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes (" ")
Titus Canyon (4x4, Death Valley)
Racetrack (4x4, Death Valley)
Mineral King (Sequoia)
Moro Rock (Sequoia)
Sentinel/Giant Forest (Sequoia)
General Sherman (Sequoia)
Roads End (Kings Canyon)
General Grant (Kings Canyon)
Glacier Point (Yosemite)
Tunnel View (Yosemite)
Valley View (Yosemite)
Yosemite Falls (Yosemite)
Tenaya Lake (Yosemite)
Watchman Overlook (Crater Lake)
Sinnott Memorial Overlook (" ")
Paradise (Mount Rainier)
Sunrise (Mount Rainier)
Second Beach (Olympic)
Hurricane Ridge (Olympic)
Stehekin (boat, North Cascades)
Johns Hopkins Inlet (boat, Glacier Bay)
Root Glacier (Wrangell–St. Elias)
McCarthy (Wrangell–St. Elias)
Stony Hill Overlook (Denali)
Reflection Pond (Denali)
Exit Glacier (Kenai Fjords)
Trunk Bay (U.S. Virgin Islands)
Haleakala Summit (Haleakala)
Kilauea Volcano (Hawaii Volcanoes) – check eruption status, it's started and stopped several times in the last couple of years)
Ofu (boat/plane, American Samoa)


Swiftcurrent Lookout (Glacier)

More Top Attractions
The parks offer attractions galore, so here are more favorites. (Listed in order of appearance.)

Sand Beach (Acadia)
Jordan Pond (Acadia)
Thunder Hole (Acadia)
Brandywine Falls (Cuyahoga Valley)
Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad
Big Meadows (Shenandoah)
Sandstone Falls (New River Gorge)
Thurmond (New River Gorge)
Green River Ferry (Mammoth Cave)
Cades Cove (Great Smoky Mtns)
Cataloochee (Great Smoky Mtns)
Newfound Gap (" ")
Heintooga Overlook (" ")
Stiltsville (Biscayne)
West Beach (Indiana Dunes)
Chellberg Farm (Indiana Dunes)
Old Courthouse (Gateway Arch)
Kettle Falls Hotel (boat, Voyageurs)
Sheep Mtn Table (4x4, Badlands)
Red Shirt Table Overlook (Badlands)
River Bend Overlook (T. Roosevelt)
Painted Canyon (" ")
Oxbow Overlook (" ")
Beef Corral Bottom (" ")
Snake River Overlook (Grand Teton)
Jackson Lake (Grand Teton)
Mammoth Terrace (Yellowstone)
Hayden Valley (Yellowstone)
Lamar Valley (Yellowstone)
Great Fountain Geyser (Yellowstone)
Gibbon Falls (Yellowstone)
Bowman Lake (Glacier)
Wild Goose Island Overlook (Glacier)
Bathhouse Row (Hot Springs)
Boquillas Canyon (Big Bend)
River Road (4x4, Big Bend)
Fossil Discovery Exhibit (Big Bend)
Sam Nail Ranch (Big Bend)
Williams Ranch (4x4, Guadalupe Mtns)
Chinde Point (Petrified Forest)
Giant Logs (Petrified Forest)
Red Hills Visitor Center (Saguaro)
EZ-Kim-In-Zin Picnic Area (" ")
Forest Canyon (Rocky Mountain)
Rainbow Curve (Rocky Mountain)
Sprague Lake (Rocky Mountain)
Medano Pass (4x4, Great Sand Dunes)
Chasm View (Black Canyon of the Gunnison, North Rim)
Balcony House (Mesa Verde)
Long House (Mesa Verde)
Spruce Tree House (Mesa Verde)
Park Point Overlook (Mesa Verde)
Balanced Rock (Arches)
Skyline Arch (Arches)
Buck Canyon Overlook (Canyonlands)
Horseshoe Canyon (4x4, " ")
Capitol Gorge (Capitol Reef)
Burr Trail Switchbacks (4x4, " ")
Fairyland Point (Bryce Canyon)
Sunset Point (Bryce Canyon)
Lava Point Overlook (Zion)
Mather Point (Grand Canyon)
Point Imperial (Grand Canyon)
Lehman Caves (Great Basin)
Mather Overlook (Great Basin)
Keys View (Joshua Tree)
Indian Cove (Joshua Tree)
Hidden Valley (Joshua Tree)
Painted Cave (boat, Channel Islands)
Arch Rock (boat, Channel Islands)
Rainbow Canyon (Death Valley)
Aguereberry Point (Death Valley)
Eureka Dunes (4x4, Death Valley)
Artist's Palette (Death Valley)
Crystal Cave (Sequoia)
Roaring River Falls (Kings Canyon)
Hetch Hetchy (Yosemite)
Lake Helen (Lassen Volcanic)
Manzanita Lake (Lassen Volcanic)
Hat Lake (Lassen Volcanic)
Butte Lake (Lassen Volcanic)
Gold Bluffs Beach (Redwood)
Klamath River Overlook (Redwood)
Crescent Beach Overlook (" ")
Discovery Point (Crater Lake)
Phantom Ship Overlook (" ")
Pinnacles Overlook (Crater Lake)
Mowich Lake (Mount Rainier)
Obstruction Point Road (Olympic)
Lake Crescent (Olympic)
Hoh Rain Forest (Olympic)
Rialto Beach (Olympic)
Ruby Beach (Olympic)
Diablo Lake Overlook (N Cascades)
Copper Center (Wrangell–St. Elias)
Wonder Lake (Denali)
Dog Sled Demo (Denali)
Aialik Bay (boat, Kenai Fjords)
Arrigetch Peaks (Gates of the Arctic)
Maho Bay (U.S. Virgin Islands)
'Ohe'o Gulch (Haleakala)
Vatia Bay (American Samoa)


Sheep Mountain Table (Badlands)

Best Scenic Drives

National parks have become motorists' favorite travel destinations. This book would not be complete without a list of my absolute favorite roadways they have to offer.

Park Loop Road • Acadia (page 41): 27 miles of pure bliss as it loops around the eastern half of Mount Desert Island with a spur road to Cadillac Mountain, the tallest peak in the park.

Skyline Drive • Shenandoah (page 67): The 105-mile highway is Shenandoah's main attraction.

Badlands Loop Road • Badlands (page 190): A severely underrated detour from I-90.

Teton Park Road • Grand Teton (page 221): It offers so many dramatic Teton views.

Going-to-the-Sun Road • Glacier (page 266): Layer after layer of spectacular mountains, waterfalls, and jaw-dropping scenery!

Trail Ridge Road • Rocky Mountain (page 351): It travels above 11,000 feet elevation for 8 miles, with unreal mountain views.

Glacier Point/Wawona Road • Yosemite (page 556): Any road to Yosemite Valley is a good one, but the view from Glacier Point is truly spectacular.

US-101 • Redwood (page 584): For my gallons of gas, there are more scenic stretches of the Pacific Coast along CA-1 and US-101, but the park's towering redwoods add contrast to California's rocky and rugged coast.

Rim Drive • Crater Lake (page 590): I absolutely love everything about this lake. In summer, you can drive around the caldera filled with the bluest water you'll ever see.

McCarthy Road • Wrangell–St. Elias (page 651): A long, gravel road leads to America's Alps. Treat yourself and stay at one of the lodges at the end of the road.

Denali Park Road • Denali (page 661): Only accessible via shuttle/tour bus from late May through mid-September (most years) or in your private vehicle if you win a "Road Lottery" for late September.

Best Lodges

Most lodges in the parks were built not just to serve a purpose, but to complement the environment. These lodging facilities are works of architecture worthy of the landscapes they accent.

Skyland Resort • Shenandoah
Le Conte Lodge • Great Smoky Mtns
Rock Harbor Lodge • Isle Royale
Jenny Lake Lodge • Grand Teton
Old Faithful Snow Lodge • Yellowstone
Many Glacier Hotel • Glacier
Glacier Park Lodge • Glacier
Chisos Mtns Lodge • Big Bend
Zion Lodge • Zion
El Tovar • Grand Canyon
Ahwahnee • Yosemite
Crater Lake Lodge • Crater Lake
Paradise Inn • Mount Rainier
Glacier Bay Lodge • Glacier Bay
Denali Backcountry Lodge • Denali


Pitamakan-Dawson Pass (Glacier)

Best Trails

It's nice to see the parks from the comfort of your vehicle or lodge, but to really explore the wilderness, you need to hit the trails. (Ratings: E = Easy, M = Moderate, S = Strenuous, X = Extreme)

Tier 1

Unfortunately, many of the national parks' most wondrous trails skew toward the strenuous side.

Precipice (Acadia, X)
Old Rag (Shenandoah, X)
Boulevard/Alum Cave to Mount LeConte (Great Smoky Mtns, S)
Castle (Badlands, M)
Table Mountain (Grand Teton, S)
Delta Lake (Grand Teton, X)
Lake Solitude (Grand Teton, S)
Amphitheater Lake ("", S)
Hidden Lake (Glacier, M)
Swiftcurrent Lookout (Glacier, S)
Pitamakan-Dawson (Glacier, S)
Grinnell Glacier (Glacier, M)
South Rim (Big Bend, S)
Sky Pond (Rocky Mountain, S)
Chasm Lake (Rocky Mountain, S)
Black Lake/Mills Lake (Rocky Mtn, S)
High Dune (Great Sand Dunes, S)
Delicate Arch (Arches, M)
Queen's/Navajo Loop (Bryce Canyon, M)
Fairyland Loop (Bryce Canyon, S)
Peekaboo Loop (Bryce Canyon, S)
Observation Point (Zion, S)
The Narrows (Zion, S)
Angel's Landing (Zion, X)
Cape Royal (Grand Canyon, E)
High Peaks Loop (Pinnacles, S)
Lakes (Sequoia, S)
Moro Rock (Sequoia, M)
Mount Whitney (Sequoia, X)
Mist/John Muir/Vernal Falls (Yosemite, S)
Half Dome (Yosemite, X)
Tall Trees (Redwood, M)
Garfield Peak (Crater Lake, S)
Skyline Loop (Mount Rainier, S)
Burroughs (Mount Rainier, S)
Pinnacle Peak (Mount Rainier, M)
High Divide (Olympic, S)
Cascade Pass/Sahale Arm (N Cascades, S)
Harding Icefield (Kenai Fjords, S)
Sliding Sands (Haleakala, S)

Tier 2

Time on the trails is time well spent, but not all trails are created equal. You'll like these too.

Beehive (Acadia, X)
Dorr (Acadia, X)
Giant Slide (Acadia, S)
Ledges (Cuyahoga Valley, M)
Blue Hen/Buttermilk Falls (Cuyahoga Valley, M)
Passamaquoddy (Shenandoah, M)
Long Point (New River Gorge, M)
Endless Wall (New River Gorge, M)
Castle Rock (New River Gorge, M)
Charlie's Bunion (Great Smoky Mountains, M)
Dune Succession (Indiana Dunes, M)
Cowle's Bog (Indiana Dunes, S)
Anderson Bay (Voyageurs, S)
Notch (Badlands, M)
Death Canyon (Grand Teton, S)
Taggart Lake (Grand Teton, E)
Avalanche Peak (Yellowstone, S)
Electric Peak (Yellowstone, X)
Cracker Lake (Glacier, M)
Iceberg Lake (Glacier, S)
Highline (Glacier, S)
Avalanche Lake (Glacier, M)
Sperry (Glacier, S)
Ptarmigan Tunnel (Glacier, S)
Lake Francis (Glacier, M)
Santa Elena Canyon (Big Bend, E)
Ward Spring (Big Bend, E)
Mariscal Canyon (Big Bend, S)
Devil's Hall (Guadalupe Mountains, M)
Guadalupe Peak ("", S)
Alkali Flat (White Sands, M)
Blue Mesa (Petrified Forest, M)
Wilderness Access (Petrified Forest, S)
Hugh Norris (Saguaro, S)


Table Mountain (Grand Teton)

Longs Peak (Rocky Mountain, X)
Dream Lake (Rocky Mountain, E)
Hallet Peak (Rocky Mountain, S)
Grand View Point (Canyonlands, E)
Druid Arch (Canyonlands, S)
Peekaboo (Canyonlands, S)
Chesler Park/Joint (Canyonlands, S)
White Rim Overlook (Canyonlands, E)
Lower Cathedral Valley (Capitol Reef, M)
Cassidy Arch (Capitol Reef, M)
Spring/Chimney Rock Canyon ("")
Left Fork/Subway (Zion, M)
Rim (Grand Canyon, E)
Bristlecone (Great Basin, M)
Wheeler Peak (Great Basin, S)
Boy Scout (Joshua Tree, M)
Bear Gulch Cave (Pinnacles, M)
Juniper Canyon (Pinnacles, S)
Golden Canyon (Death Valley, E)
Mosquito Lakes (Sequoia, S)
General Sherman (Sequoia, M)
Sentinel Dome (Yosemite, M)
Cathedral Lakes (Yosemite, M)
Cinder Cone (Lassen Volcanic, M)
Lassen Peak (Lassen Volcanic, S)
Shriner Peak (Mount Rainier, S)
Tolmie Peak (Mount Rainier, S)
Gobbler's Knob (Mount Rainier, S)
Grand Lake (Olympic, S)
Second Beach (Olympic, E)
Thornton Lakes (North Cascades, M)
Exit Glacier (Kenai Fjords, M)
Pipiwai (Haleakala, M)
Mauna Loa (Hawaii Volcanoes, S)

Tier 3
There's more. Much more.

Gorham Mountain (Acadia, M)
Bar Island (Acadia, E)
Little Devil's Stairs (Shenandoah, S)
Tunnel (New River Gorge, E)
Kaymoor (New River Gorge, M)
Chimney Tops (Smokies, S)
Indian Creek (Great Smoky Mtn, E)
Big Plateau (T. Roosevelt, S)
Petrified Forest ("", S)
Jenny Lake Loop (Grand Teton, E)
Phelps Lake Loop (Grand Teton, M)
Bunsen Peak (Yellowstone, S)
Dunanda Falls (Yellowstone, M)
Union Falls (Yellowstone, M)
Warner Point (Black Canyon, M)
Long Draw ("", S)
Chasm View ("", E)
Petroglyph Point (Mesa Verde, M)
Devil's Garden (Arches, S)
Murphy Point (Canyonlands, E)
Mosaic Canyon (Death Valley, M)
Badwater Flat (Death Valley, E)
Telescope Peak (Death Valley, S)
Monarch Lakes (Sequoia, M)
Eagle Lake (Sequoia, M)
Boy Scout Tree (Redwood, M)
Fern Canyon (Redwood, E)
Watchman Peak (Crater Lake, M)
Mount Storm King (Olympic, X)
Lind Point (U.S. Virgin Islands, E)
Kilauea Iki (Hawaii Volcanoes, M)

Best for Hiking
Try one of these parks if you're looking to hit the trails. About 70% of all the national park hiking trails are in just eleven parks (Yellowstone, Great Smoky Mountains, Sequoia-Kings Canyon, Yosemite, Glacier, Olympic, Grand Canyon, Shenandoah, North Cascades, and Rocky Mountain).

Acadia (page 41)
New River Gorge (page 81)
Shenandoah (page 62)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 103)
Grand Teton (page 221)
Yellowstone (page 242)
Glacier (page 266)
Big Bend (page 293)
Rocky Mountain (page 351)
Canyonlands (page 405)
Capitol Reef (page 415)
Zion (page 435)
Grand Canyon (page 460)
Joshua Tree (page 487)
Pinnacles (page 509)
Death Valley (page 525)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 537)
Yosemite (page 558)
Redwood (page 576)
Mount Rainier (page 601)
Olympic (page 615)
North Cascades (page 630)
Haleakala (page 720)



Having a paddle (Kenai Fjords)

Best for Backpacking

Big, beautiful backcountries. A few standouts are marked with an *

Shenandoah (page 67)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 103)
Isle Royale (page 171)
Grand Teton* (page 223)
Yellowstone (page 247)
Glacier* (page 271)
Big Bend (page 293)
Rocky Mountain* (page 353)
Zion (page 438)
Grand Canyon (page 453)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon* (page 537)
Yosemite* (page 560)
Mount Rainier (page 603)
Olympic (page 608)
North Cascades* (page 630)
Denali (page 661)

Intro to Backpacking

Smaller parks. Difficult to get lost. Few dangerous animals. Backpacking training wheels!

New River Gorge (page 81)
Mammoth Cave (page 92)
Isle Royale (page 171)
Wind Cave (page 201)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 211)
Guadalupe Mountains (page 302)
Bryce Canyon (page 425)
Channel Islands (page 501)
Redwood (page 582)

Best for Paddling/Boating

Watery wonderlands.

Acadia (page 44)
Congaree (page 114)
Biscayne (page 122)
Everglades (page 130)
Dry Tortugas (page 140)
Isle Royale (page 172)
Voyageurs (page 182)
Grand Teton (page 224)
Yellowstone (page 248)
Glacier (page 272)
Big Bend (page 294)
Channel Islands (page 499)
Lassen Volcanic (page 573)
Olympic (page 617)
Glacier Bay (page 643)
Kenai Fjords (page 673)

Best for Whitewater

Parks with commercial trips (in or nearby).

New River Gorge (page 79)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 104)
Yellowstone (Yellowstone River)
Glacier (page 272)
Rocky Mountain (La Poudre River)
Great Sand Dunes (Arkansas River)
Canyonlands (page 406)
Grand Canyon (page 451)
Crater Lake (Rogue River)
North Cascades (page 632)
Glacier Bay (page 644)
Wrangell–St. Elias (page 653)
Denali (page 662)

Best for Biking

Pedaling is a great way to explore these parks. Biking is more of a shoulder season activity.

Acadia (page 45)
Cuyahoga Valley (page 57)
Shenandoah (page 69)
New River Gorge (page 82)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 104)
Everglades (page 131)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 212)
Grand Teton (page 225)
Yellowstone (page 249)
Glacier (page 273)
Saguaro (page 338)
Zion (page 438)
Grand Canyon (page 460)
Death Valley (page 526)
Mount Rainier (page 603)
Denali (page 663)

Best for Horseback Riding

Check out the parks like the earliest explorers, on horseback.

Commercial

Acadia (carriage) (page 45)
Shenandoah (page 70)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 105)
Grand Teton (page 225)
Yellowstone (page 248)


White Rim Road (Canyonlands)

Glacier (page 273)
Saguaro (page 338)
Rocky Mountain (page 355)
Bryce Canyon (page 426)
Zion (page 438)
Grand Canyon (mule) (page 459)
Death Valley (page 526)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 540)
Yosemite (page 561)

Bring Your Own Horse
Mammoth Cave (page 93)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 212)
White Sands (page 321)
Great Sand Dunes (page 365)
Capitol Reef (page 417)
Joshua Tree (page 489)

Best for Fishing
Anglers will find plenty of fish here.

Shenandoah (page 70)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 105)
Biscayne (page 123)
Everglades (page 131)
Isle Royale (page 173)
Voyageurs (page 183)
Grand Teton (page 226)
Yellowstone (page 249)
Rocky Mountain (page 356)
Yosemite (page 560)
North Cascades (page 632)
Alaska Parks (page 636)
Virgin Islands (page 711)

Best for Rock Climbing
Take the direct (and much more difficult) way up rock faces.

Acadia (page 43)
New River Gorge (page 81)
Grand Teton (page 225)
Rocky Mountain (page 355)
Black Canyon of the Gunnison (page 374)
Arches (page 393)
Canyonlands (page 406)
Capitol Reef (page 417)
Zion (page 438)
Joshua Tree (page 489)
Pinnacles (page 510)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 539)
Yosemite (page 560)

Best for Mountain Climbing
Summits at these parks range from multi-day treks requiring specialized equipment to dayhikes.

Grand Teton (page 225)
Yellowstone (page 242)
Glacier (page 266)
Rocky Mountain (page 351)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 537)
Yosemite (page 559)
Mount Rainier (page 603)
Olympic (page 608)
North Cascades (page 632)
Wrangell–St. Elias (page 651)
Denali (page 662)
Lake Clark (page 677)

Best for Stargazing
Stargazing is so underrated. Most parks offer plenty of stars on a clear night; these feature especially dark (often clear) skies and camping.

Isle Royale (page 164)
Voyageurs (page 176)
Big Bend (page 294)
Utah Parks (page 386–434)
Grand Canyon (page 442)
Great Basin (page 476)
Joshua Tree (page 490)
Death Valley (page 514)
Haleakala (page 720)

Best Off-Roading
A high-clearance 4x4 unlocks some pretty interesting roads at these parks.

Big Bend (page 293)
Great Sand Dunes (page 362)
Arches (page 386)
Canyonlands (page 403)
Capitol Reef (page 415)
Grand Canyon (page 442)
Great Basin (page 474)
Joshua Tree (page 486)
Death Valley (page 523)


Maho Bay (U.S. Virgin Islands)

Best for SCUBA
Spend some time underwater at any of these parks.

Biscayne (page 122)
Dry Tortugas (page 140)
Isle Royale (page 172)
Channel Islands (page 499)
Virgin Islands (page 710)
American Samoa (page 742)

Best for Beaches
National parks aren't known for their beaches, but there are a few exceptions.

Acadia (page 46)
Biscayne (page 118)
Dry Tortugas (page 136)
Indiana Dunes (page 150)
Great Sand Dunes (page 365)
Channel Islands (page 499)
Redwood (page 576)
Olympic (page 620)
Virgin Islands (page 704)
Hawaii Volcanoes (page 724)
American Samoa (page 742)

Best for Waterfalls
Visit these for the soothing sight and sound of plummeting water.

Cuyahoga Valley (page 52)
Shenandoah (page 62)
New River Gorge (page 74)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 96)
Yellowstone (page 230)
Glacier (page 256)
Rocky Mountain (page 344)
Sequoia–Kings Canyon (page 530)
Yosemite (page 544)
Lassen Volcanic (page 571)
Mount Rainier (page 594)
Olympic (page 608)
North Cascades (page 624)
Haleakala (page 714)

Best for Caves
Children love the dark, mysterious passages and ornate rock formations found at these parks.

Mammoth Cave (page 91)
Wind Cave (page 200)
Carlsbad Caverns (page 311)
Great Basin (page 476)
Channel Islands (page 499)
Pinnacles (page 509)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 537)
Hawai'i Volcanoes (page 732)

Best for Culture
These parks have a variety of cultural and/or archaeological sites.

Shenandoah (page 62)
New River Gorge (page 74)
Great Smoky Mtns (page 96)
Indiana Dunes (page 146)
Badlands (page 186)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 204)
Big Bend (page 288)
Guadalupe Mountains (page 298)
White Sands (page 316)
Mesa Verde (page 376)
Channel Islands (page 494)
Kobuk Valley (page 696)
Hawai'i Volcanoes (page 724)

Best for Winter
Summer isn't the only time for a national park trip. Many are just as wonderful in winter.

Warm Winters
Biscayne (page 118)
Everglades (page 126)
Dry Tortugas (page 136)
Hot Springs (page 280)
Big Bend (page 288)
Saguaro (page 332)
Joshua Tree (page 482)
Channel Islands (page 494)
Death Valley (page 514)
Virgin Islands (page 704)
Haleakala (page 714)
Hawai'i Volcanoes (page 724)
American Samoa (page 738)

Cold Winters
Cuyahoga Valley (page 52)
Voyageurs (page 176)
Yellowstone (page 230)
Rocky Mountain (page 344)
Utah (pages 386–434)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 530)
Yosemite (page 544)
Crater Lake (page 586)
Mount Rainier (page 594)
Olympic (page 608)


Zabriskie Point (Death Valley)

Best for Birdwatching
A few parks are well-known for the diversity and abundance of our flying friends.

Acadia (page 46)
Congaree (page 115)
Everglades (page 133)
Dry Tortugas (page 141)
Big Bend (page 294)
Channel Islands (page 501)
Pinnacles (page 510)
Haleakala (page 720)

Best for Wildlife
Fishing bears. Migrating caribou. Grazing bison. Feeding whales. Plenty of wildlife in the wilderness.

Great Smoky Mtns (page 96)
Everglades (page 126)
Isle Royale (page 164)
Badlands (page 186)
Wind Cave (page 196)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 204)
Grand Teton (page 216)
Yellowstone (page 230)
Glacier (page 256)
Rocky Mountain (page 344)
Channel Islands (page 494)
Glacier Bay (page 638)
Denali (page 656)
Lake Clark (page 676)
Katmai (page 682)
Kobuk Valley (page 696)
Haleakala (page 714)

Best for Photography
Some parks are simply more photogenic than others.

Grand Teton (page 216)
Yellowstone (page 250)
Big Bend (page 288)
White Sands (page 321)
Arches (page 393)
Canyonlands (page 396)
Capitol Reef (page 410)
Bryce Canyon (page 420)
Zion (page 430)
Grand Canyon (page 442)
Joshua Tree (page 482)
Death Valley (page 514)
Yosemite (page 561)
Mount Rainier (page 594)
Glacier Bay (page 638)
Denali (page 656)

Best Sunrise Spots
Wake up with the sun at these sites.

Cadillac Mountain • Acadia
Ocean Path • Acadia
Clingman's Dome • Great Smoky Mtns
John Moulton Barn • Grand Teton
T.A. Moulton Barn • Grand Teton
Schwabacher Landing • Grand Teton
Teton Point Turnout • Grand Teton
Delicate Arch • Arches
The Windows • Arches
Mesa Arch • Canyonlands
White Rim Overlook • Canyonlands
Bryce/Inspiration Pt • Bryce Canyon
Jumbo Rocks • Joshua Tree
Zabriskie Point • Death Valley
Watchman Overlook • Crater Lake
Haleakala Summit • Haleakala

Best Sunset Spots
Bring a chair and watch the sun set.

Hawksbill Mountain • Shenandoah
Kuwohi (Clingman's Dome) • Smoky Mtns
Lake View • Indiana Dunes
Teton Point Turnout • Grand Teton
Crystal Point • Glacier
The Window • Big Bend
Hot Springs • Big Bend
West Filming Area • White Sands
Gates Pass Road • near Saguaro
Delicate Arch • Arches
Grand View Point • Canyonlands
Green River Overlook • Canyonlands
Murphy Point • Canyonlands
Cape Royal • Grand Canyon
Hopi Point • Grand Canyon
Shoshone Point • Grand Canyon
Yavapai Point • Grand Canyon
Queen Valley Road • Joshua Tree
Dante's View • Death Valley
Glacier Point • Yosemite
Shi Shi and Rialto Beaches • Olympic

Best for Couples
Couples will find these parks exciting, adventurous, and romantic.

Acadia (page 34)
New River Gorge (page 74)


Dunbar Beach (Indiana Dunes)

Great Smoky Mtns (page 96)
Indiana Dunes (page 146)
Grand Teton (page 216)
Yellowstone (page 230)
Glacier (page 256)
White Sands (page 316)
Rocky Mountain (page 344)
Mount Rainier (page 594)
Virgin Islands (page 704)
Haleakala (page 714)
Hawai'i Volcanoes (page 724)

Best for Families

Some parks are more family-friendly than others thanks to easy accessibility, short trails, and sights and sounds guaranteed to spark your child's imagination.

Cuyahoga Valley (page 52)
New River Gorge (page 74)
Mammoth Cave (page 86)
Everglades (page 126)
Indiana Dunes (page 146)
Gateway Arch (page 156)
Badlands (page 186)
Wind Cave (page 196)
Theodore Roosevelt (page 204)
Grand Teton (page 216)
Yellowstone (page 230)
Glacier (page 256)
Carlsbad Caverns (page 306)
White Sands (page 316)
Great Sand Dunes (page 360)
Pinnacles (page 504)
Sequoia & Kings Canyon (page 530)
Yosemite (page 544)
Mount Rainier (page 594)
Olympic (page 608)
Hawai'i Volcanoes (page 724)

Best for Daytrips

Located near major metropolitan areas, it isn't too difficult to pop into these parks for a nice hike.

Cuyahoga Valley • Cleveland/Akron
New River Gorge • PA/VA/OH
Shenandoah • Washington, D.C.
Congaree • Columbia
Everglades • Miami
Indiana Dunes • Chicago/Gary
Gateway Arch • St. Louis
Saguaro • Tucson
Rocky Mountain • Denver
Joshua Tree • Los Angeles
Channel Islands • Los Angeles
Pinnacles • San Francisco
Mount Rainier • Seattle
Olympic • Seattle

Best for Train Travel

Railroads played an important role in establishing parks. They still play an important role at a few.

Cuyahoga Valley (page 56)
New River Gorge (page 74)
Indiana Dunes (page 146)
Glacier (page 256)
Grand Canyon (page 442)
Denali (page 656)

Best Ranger Programs

All ranger programs are great, but these are a few favorites. Good, clean, reasonably priced (if not free) fun!

Junior Ranger Program • All Parks!
Wild Cave Tours (fee) • Mammoth Cave, Wind Cave
Slough Slog • Everglades
Ranger III (fee) • Isle Royale
North Canoe Voyage • Voyageurs
Adventure Hikes • Yellowstone
Grinnell Glacier • Glacier (fee for ferry)
Slaughter Canyon Cave • Carlsbad
Bat Flight Program • Carlsbad Caverns
Lake Lucero • White Sands
Cliff Palace (fee) • Mesa Verde
Balcony House (fee) • Mesa Verde
Sled Dog Demonstration • Denali
Discovery Hikes (fee) • Denali

Best Concessioner Tours

Even though they cost some money, concessioner tours are incredibly good ways to explore our parks.

Dive-In Theater • Acadia
Carriage Rides • Acadia
Top of the Arch • Gateway Arch
Captain's Cruise • Isle Royale
Snowcoach Tours • Yellowstone
Red Jammer Tours • Glacier
Canyon Raft Trip • Grand Canyon
Mule Ride • Grand Canyon
Crater Lake Boat Tour


High Skyline (Mount Rainier)

Most Underrated

A handful of parks hog most of the park love. These deserve a bit more.

Isle Royale (page 164)
Voyageurs (page 176)
Big Bend (page 288)
Great Sand Dunes (page 360)
Black Canyon of the Gunnison (page 368)
Capitol Reef (page 410)
Great Basin (page 470)
Joshua Tree (page 482)
Channel Islands (page 494)
Death Valley (page 514)
Lassen Volcanic (page 566)
North Cascades (page 624)

Worst for Crowds

Other parks get very busy. We're talking full parking lots & bumper-to-bumper traffic. Avoid peak season or make arrangements early.

Acadia: Summer
Shenandoah: October
Great Smoky Mtns: Summer & Oct
Grand Teton: Summer
Yellowstone: Summer
Glacier: Summer
Rocky Mtn: Summer + Fall Weekends
Arches: Spring–Fall
Canyonlands (Island in the Sky): ""
Bryce Canyon: Spring–Fall
Zion: Spring–Fall
Grand Canyon: Spring–Fall
Yosemite: Spring–Fall
Mount Rainier: Summer

Worst for Bugs

Warm, wet, fertile environments breed bugs. Pack your bug spray when visiting these parks.

Acadia: mid-May–mid-June
Everglades: Summer
Sequoia & Kings Canyon: Summer
Yosemite: early Summer
Isle Royale: late June–late July
Voyageurs: late June–late July
Alaska Parks: June–mid-July

Backcountry Cabins

Several parks have primitive backcountry cabins only accessible on foot (or by boat). You can't reserve fire lookouts in the national parks, but you can at other public land. Go to recreation.gov and search "lookout." You'll find some!

Le Conte Lodge • Great Smoky Mtns
Sperry/Granite Park Chalet • Glacier
Phantom Ranch • Grand Canyon
High Sierra Camps • Yosemite and Sequoia & Kings Canyon
Drakesbad Ranch • Lassen Volcanic
Glacier Bay
Wrangell–St. Elias
Denali
Kenai Fjords
Lake Clark
Katmai
Holua, Kapalaua, and Paliku Cabins • Haleakala
Mauna Loa, Pu'u'ula'ula, & Red Hill • Hawai'i Volcanoes


Grant Grove (Kings Canyon)

Best Campgrounds

Many of the parks' campgrounds are nondescript accommodations lacking scenic views and privacy. Others are exceptional with stunning vistas, access to great hiking trails, and well-equipped facilities. These are some of the best.

Isle au Haut • Acadia
Isle Royale
Voyageurs
Cottonwood • Theodore Roosevelt
Jenny Lake • Grand Teton
Many Glacier • Glacier
Devil's Garden • Arches
Needles (Squaw Flats) • Canyonlands
Jumbo Rocks • Joshua Tree
Hidden Valley • Joshua Tree
Indian Cove • Joshua Tree
Paddle-in Sites • North Cascades
Wonder Lake • Denali

Best Oddities

Many weird and unexplainable oddities exist within the parks.

Synchronous Fireflies • Great Smoky Mtns
Triple Divide • Glacier
Waterpocket Fold • Capitol Reef
Arches/Canyonlands
The Racetrack • Death Valley
Badwater Basin • Death Valley

Best Superlatives

National parks are brimming with superlatives. These are some of the most impressive.

Mammoth Cave (page 86): With more than 426 miles of passageways, it's the world's longest known cave system.

Yellowstone (page 230): The world's largest concentration of geysers.

Kolob Arch • Zion (page 430): The largest free-standing arch in the park system.

Bristlecone Pines • Great Basin (page 470): Some of the world's oldest living organisms grow here.

Badwater Basin • Death Valley (page 514): Lowest point in North America at 282 feet below sea level.

General Sherman • Sequoia (page 530): The largest known tree by volume at 52,600 ft^3 (roughly the size of 16 blue whales).

Mount Whitney • Sequoia (page 530): Highest mountain peak in the contiguous U.S. with an elevation of 14,505 ft.

Yosemite Falls • Yosemite (page 544): At 2,423 feet, it's one of the tallest waterfalls in North America. Sentinel Falls, is also in Yosemite and more than 2,000 feet tall.

Hyperion • Redwood (page 576): The tallest known tree at 379.3 ft.

Crater Lake (page 586): Deepest lake in the U.S., with a 1,943-ft maximum depth and average depth of 1,148 ft. It's also one of the purest lakes in North America.

Mount Rainier (page 594): The tallest (14,410 ft) volcano in the contiguous United States.

Wrangell–St. Elias (page 648): The largest unit in the national park system and the continent's largest quantity of glaciers.

McKinley/Denali (page 656): The highest mountain in North America, with a summit elevation of 20,320 ft.

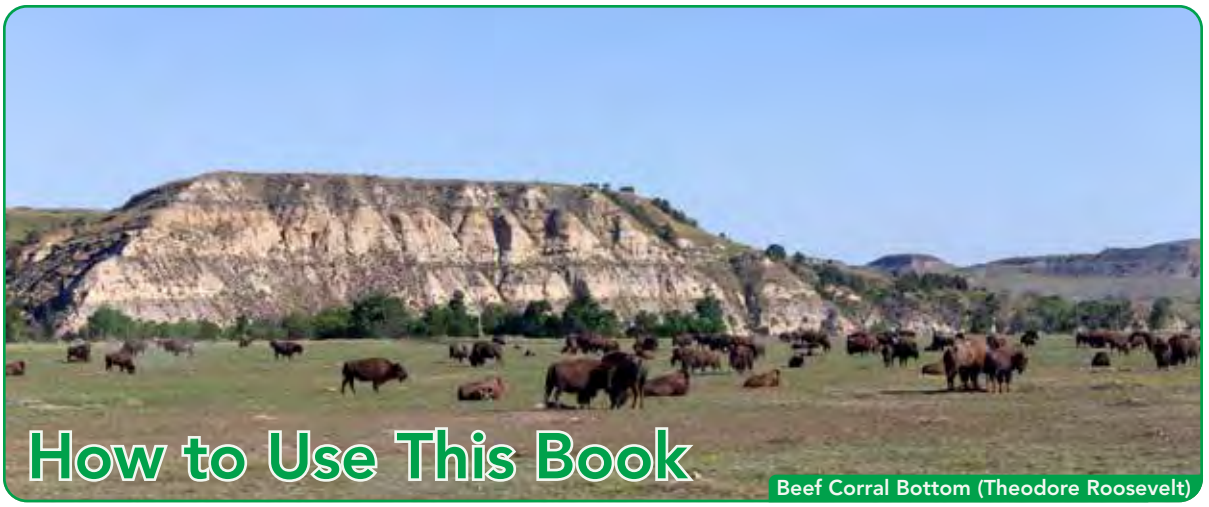
Harding Icefield • Kenai Fjords (page 668): The largest icefield contained entirely in the U.S.


Island Lake (San Juan National Forest)

Best Beyond the Parks

United States wonders don't begin and end with the national parks. (NM = National Monument, NME = National Memorial, NR = National River, NRA = National Recreation Area, NL = National Lakeshore, NS = National Seashore, NVM = National Volcanic Monument, NCA = National Conservation Area, NF = National Forest, SP = State Parks)

Baxter SP (Maine)
Hocking Hills SP (Ohio)
Nelson-Kennedy Ledges SP (Ohio)
Washington Mall (Lincoln Mem, Washington Mon, etc.)
Gauley River NRA (West Virginia)
Daniel Boone NF (Red River Gorge)
Blue Ridge Pkwy (North Carolina)
Pilot Mountain SP (North Carolina)
Nantahala NF (North Carolina)
Bill Baggs Cape Florida (Florida)
Bahia Honda SP (Florida)
Indiana Dunes SP (Indiana)
Starved Rock SP (Illinois)
Shawnee NF (Illinois)
Pictured Rocks NL (Michigan)
Sleeping Bear Dunes NL (Michigan)
Temperance River SP (Minnesota)
Mt Rushmore NME (South Dakota)
Custer State Park (South Dakota)
Jewel Cave NM (South Dakota)
Devils Tower NM (Wyoming)
Makoshika SP (Montana)
Bridger–Teton NF (Green River Lakes & Cirque of the Towers, WY)
Craters of the Moon NM (Idaho)
Bighorn NF (Wyoming)
Sawtooth NF (Idaho)
Lewis and Clark Caverns (Montana)
Buffalo NR (Arkansas)
Mount Magazine (Arkansas)
Hawksbill Crag/Whitaker Point (AR)
Big Bend Ranch SP (Texas)
Franklin Mountains SP (Texas)
Gila Cliff Dwellings NM (New Mexico)
Bandelier NM (New Mexico)
Canyon de Chelly NM (Arizona)
Sunset Crater NM (Arizona)
Wupatki NM (Arizona)
Navajo NM (Arizona)
Rainbow Bridge NM (Arizona)
El Morro NM (Arizona)
Tonto NF/Superstition Mtns (Arizona)
Chiricahua NM (Arizona)
Lost Dutchman SP (Arizona)
Organ Pipe Cactus NM (Arizona)
Arapaho NF (Colorado)
San Juan National Forest (Colorado)
Dinosaur NM (Colorado)
Colorado NM (Colorado)
Curecanti NRA (Colorado)
Hovenweep NM (Utah)
Unita Mountain Range (Utah)
Goblin Valley SP (Utah)
Bear Ears NM (Utah)
Natural Bridges NM (Utah)
Goosenecks SP (Utah)
Dead Horse Point SP (Utah)
Kodachrome Basin SP (Utah)
Grand Staircase–Escalante NM (Utah)
Cedar Breaks NM (Utah)
Kanarra Falls (Utah)
Buckskin Gulch/Wire Pass (Utah)
The Wave (Utah)
Coral Pink Sand Dunes (Utah)
Monument Valley (Arizona)
Havasu Falls (Arizona)
Glen Canyon NRA (Arizona)
Horseshoe Bend (Arizona)
Cathedral Gorge SP (Nevada)
Anzo-Borrego Desert (California)
Julia Pfeiffer Burns SP (California)
Red Rock Canyon NCA (Nevada)
Valley of Fire SP (Nevada)
Alabama Hills (California)
Devil's Postpile NM (California)
Inyo NF: Whitney Portal, Convict Lake, Hot Creek, June Lake, Parker Lake, etc. (California)
Lake Tahoe (California)
McArthur-Burney Falls (California)
Shasta-Trinity NF (California)
Castle Crags SP (California)
Humboldt Redwoods SP (California)
Point Reyes NS (California)
Leslie Gulch (Oregon)
Lake Owyhee SP (Oregon)
Umpqua NF (Oregon)
Silver Falls SP (Oregon)
Smith Rock SP (Oregon)
Oregon Caves NM (Oregon)
Gifford Pinchot NF (Oregon)
Mount St. Helens NVM (Washington)
Columbia River Gorge (Oregon)
Mount Hood (Oregon)
Alpine Lakes Wilderness (Washington)
Palouse Falls SP (Washington)
Mt Baker-Snoqualmie NF (Washington)
Mendenhall Glacier (Alaska)
Buck Island Reef NM (U.S. Virgin Islands)
Maui (Hawaii)
The Big Island (Hawaii)



How to Use This Book

Beef Corral Bottom (Theodore Roosevelt)

About the Guide

The United States has 63 national parks. Each one is uniquely beautiful, brimming with life, adventure, and fun. Activities and attractions differ from park to park and season to season, and the possibilities are nearly limitless. But most visitors only have a few days to explore these vast expanses of unspoiled wilderness. To make those days count, plan your trip wisely with the help of a guide familiar with the park's trails and history.

This is *Your Guide to the National Parks*. The 63 national parks are broken into seven regions: East, North, South, Southwest, West, Alaska, and Remote Islands. Within these sections, the parks are included in geographical order (not alphabetical), allowing parks that are commonly visited together to be positioned adjacent to one another. Each park section includes an introduction, logistical information, maps, popular activities, the basics (accessibility, pets, and weather and visitation data), a few tips and recommendations, and a note that you'll find more useful information (with nearby attractions) online at stoneroadpress.com/more. There's much more than parks. It's an online supplement, so I can do some things that are not possible in print and have the ability to update them on the fly. All information has been researched and assembled with as much attention to detail as reasonably possible, so each park's most interesting facts and exciting activities are right here at your fingertips.

Introductions

"There is nothing more practical than the preservation of beauty, than the preservation of anything that appeals to the higher emotions of mankind."

– Theodore Roosevelt

President Theodore Roosevelt was a practical man who liked big things, so it comes as no surprise that he was one of the most influential individuals in the history of public land (particularly national forests, but he also impacted national parks). Each introduction tells stories about men and women like President Roosevelt and events—both natural and historic—that helped shape the parks as we know them today.

Logistics

Logistical data like contact information, accommodations, operating hours, and entrance fees are listed right up front alongside the introduction. Close by, you'll find a "When to Go" section. It includes practical information about peak visitation, seasonal changes, and closures. A "Transportation & Airports" section covers pertinent information about how to travel to and around each park. Basics about park shuttles, airports, and Amtrak are found here. Driving directions are typically provided to the park's most popular entrance(s) and are often accompanied by a regional map displaying major highways and interstates. If a park has multiple units or popular developed regions, you can expect to find a "Regions" section describing each one. Names, locations, dates, and rates of campgrounds and lodges found within the park are often listed in an easy-to-read table.

Maps

Large, legible maps are included to aid in planning your trip. Markers help pinpoint trailheads and popular attractions.

Even though the most popular trailheads are marked, and trails are depicted for many of the parks, maps in this book are not intended for hiking. Getting lost while hiking in a national park is not a huge concern. Most trails are well-marked, intuitive, and you'll usually have company. However, a high-quality topographic map and GPS are always a good idea for long day-hikes and backpacking trips. For in your car, download maps to your phone or travel with a navigation system or better yet, a high-quality atlas (my favorite road trip accessory—I've learned more by scouring atlases than anything!).

Activities

The activity most often associated with a trip to one of our national parks is hiking. (Don't forget to pack your hiking shoes.) This guidebook chronicles hiking in great detail. Most park sections include a hiking table with essential information like trailhead location, distance, and difficulty. Favorites get a thumbs up. More often than not, trailheads are assigned a number corresponding to a marker on the park map at the trailhead location. Hiking is often the main attraction, but there's much more to do. You can do everything from SCUBA diving to flightseeing, mule rides to train excursions, biking to snowmobiling. All the most popular activities are discussed, and outfitter information (including pricing) is included whenever applicable.

The Basics

Visitor Centers: Whether it's your first visit or your 40th, every national park trip should include stopping at a visitor center (even if it's just to get your passport stamped). This section provides basic information like location, operating hours, and a short description of what you can expect to find at each facility. You'll also find details on museums and cultural exhibits here.

Ranger Programs & For Kids: Ranger Programs vary from park to park, but expect a variety of walks, talks, and evening programs to be offered, especially if you're traveling during peak tourism season. Park rangers often live in the parks, and they love to show off their homes. Ranger programs are highly recommended. They provide a chance to learn more about these special places and share the enthusiasm, knowledge, and humor of friendly park rangers. Most of the programs are free. Ranger program schedules change from week to week and year to year. For a current schedule of events, check the park's website, free newspaper, or bulletin boards conveniently located at campgrounds, visitor centers, and sometimes along roadways.

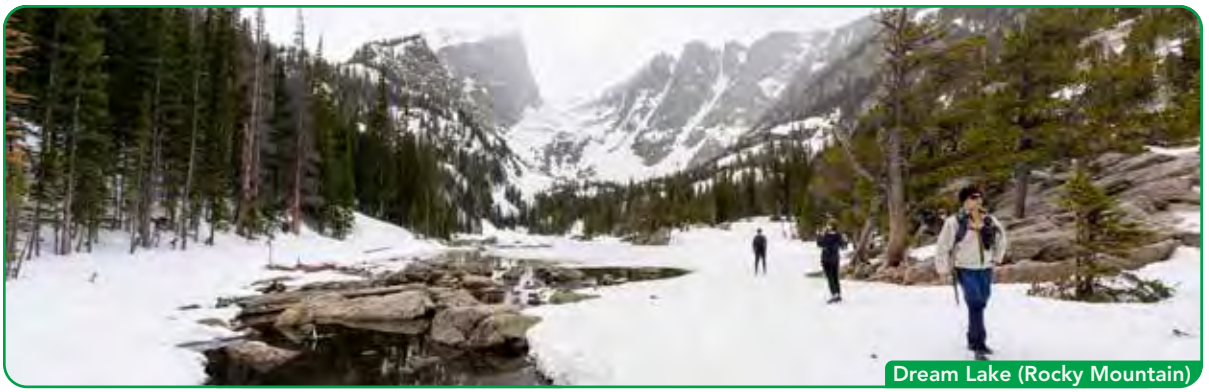
Kids of all ages are invited to participate in each park's Junior Ranger Program. Activity booklets are typically free. These hard copies allow families to complete the Junior Ranger activities on their own terms. Activities may direct children to places especially interesting to younger visitors, or other ranger-guided programs. After completing a specific number of activities for the child's age, participants return the booklet to a visitor center, and they are awarded a patch/badge and certificate. While these activities are designed specifically for kids, your entire family may discover the importance of the park and gain a more intimate connection with these natural wonderlands.

Flora & Fauna: A brief discussion of plants and animals you're likely to encounter, including invasive, endangered, and reintroduced species found within park boundaries. This is one area I wish I was more knowledgeable in. My brain is too limited, and there are so many other things I need to know to make books and run a business. But hopefully in the future, I'll be able to discuss nature a little more competently.

Pets & Accessibility: Next up are the animals we bring with us, our pets. I love pets and can understand why you'd want to bring them, but I'd explore every avenue available to leave them at home for your national park vacation. Simply put, they will limit what you can do. In general, pets are only allowed where your car can go, but each year, a few more trails welcome well-behaved pups. Most buildings and the backcountry are off limits. All pets must be kept on a leash (less than six feet). A few parks offer boarding facilities for a nominal fee. Or you can usually find one or two in the nearest town. You'll find all that information here. If traveling with your pet is important to you and you like to leave the road behind, national forests and Bureau of Land Management land are the places for you. They have fewer restrictions. Wherever you go, please dispose of your pet's waste properly.

The parks are constantly working to increase accessibility of trails, attractions, and facilities. If you or someone you are traveling with has any special needs, it is always best to discuss them with a park employee at least a week before arriving. I provide a brief overview of accessible facilities and trails.

Weather: A small graph of average temperatures and precipitation provides a quick glimpse of what you can expect weather-wise throughout the year. The weather is difficult to predict, so these averages only provide a baseline for planning. Whether you're departing


Dream Lake (Rocky Mountain)

on a 2-hour hike or a multi-day trek, make a habit of checking the local forecast before setting off. This is another area where a handheld GPS is useful. It can provide real-time weather forecasts wherever you are. But one thing is for sure … these places—even the mountains—are great beyond the busy summer season. And remember, temperature decreases by about 3–5°F with every 1,000 feet of elevation gain. You can go from 282 feet below sea level at Badwater Basin in Death Valley National Park to 14,505 feet above atop Mount Whitney in Sequoia National Park (and they're less than 90 miles away from one another as the crow flies). I've included the elevation of the weather station reporting the data. Temperature changes can be dramatic in mountain, canyon, and desert parks.

Visitation: In 2024, visitation for all 400+ National Park Service sites surpassed the high watermark set during the department's 100th anniversary in 2016! Several parks experience pretty extreme congestion, primarily in summer and on a few holidays. Charts display four years of data to give you a better idea of what to expect crowd-wise or perhaps help you decide when to go. In short, parks with free shuttles or timed-entry permits are the most congested. Parks with the smallest crowds tend to have a natural barrier (AKA no road access). There are trade-offs. Look at the weather and visitation charts together, and it becomes fairly clear you can experience comfortable daytime weather and small crowds at even the most popular parks. You just need to know when to go. Even then, visit mid-week for any park near large population centers (basically all Eastern parks, Indiana Dunes, Gateway Arch, Rocky Mountain, Hot Springs, Saguaro, and the California and Washington parks). Unfortunately, school dictates when families and kids can travel. If you end up visiting when it's busy, get an early start and remember you usually only need to hike a mile or two to leave the crowd behind. I know it can be aggravating waiting in line at the park entrance or crossing your fingers for a parking space at your desired trailhead. Be patient. Better yet, wake up early. I also know how annoying it can be to be told to do more. But if you feel like there isn't enough public land for all of us, contact your politicians. Lobby for CCC-level investment in our public land. It was seen as a good thing in the 1930s. It should be seen as a good thing today. Or become an advocate for year-round school. The other option is to start looking beyond the parks. National Forests and the Bureau of Land Management manage more than five times the amount of land the National Park Service manages. National Parks are the meme of the outdoor world, and that comes with certain pros and cons. Regardless of what you do, remember we can enjoy an arch, canyon, or mountain while someone else is looking at it! Find joy in enjoying these places with other people just like us. This is public land after all.

Tips & Recommendations

Each park section closes with a bit of subjectivity about how to visit each park, including favorite lists.

Want More?

My first time traveling from park to park, I was constantly craning my neck, thinking "whoa, that looks cool!" but I stayed focused on a singular park-to-park mission. The 63 National Parks cover about 62 million acres, 42 of which are in Alaska. When you add up National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Forest land, there's more than 500 million acres of public land (roughly a quarter of the U.S.!!!). I'm trying to help out. Visit stoneroadpress.com/more for suggestions on how to spend your time in the parks, sample road trips, non-National-Park public land destinations, and a few useful tools I couldn't provide in print.



Welcome to Your National Parks



EAST

Acadia (Maine).....34
Cuyahoga Valley (Ohio).....52
Shenandoah (Virginia).....62
New River Gorge (West Virginia).....74
Mammoth Cave (Kentucky).....86
Great Smoky Mtns (Tennessee).....96
Congaree (South Carolina).....110
Biscayne (Florida).....118
Everglades (Florida).....126
Dry Tortugas (Florida).....136


EASTERN (Washington, DC)
Isle Royale NP
LAKE SUPERIOR
Grand Portage NM
Apostle Islands NL
Keweenaw NHP
Pictured Rocks NL
LAKE HURON
Saint Croix NSR
Sleeping Bear Dunes NL
WISCONSIN
Ice Age NST
MICHIGAN
LAKE MICHIGAN
MILWAUKEE
MADISON
LANSING
DETROIT
Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley NM
Pullman NHP
CHICAGO
Indiana Dunes NP
River Raisin NBP
Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial
James A. Garfield NHS
LAKE ERIE
TOLEDO
CLEVELAND
Cuyahoga Valley NP
AKRON
First Ladies NHS
PENNSYLVANIA
Johnstown Flood N MEM
Allegheny Portage Railroad NHS
HARRISBURG
PHILADELPHIA
Carlisle Fenderal Indian Boarding School NM
PITTSBURGH
Flight 93 N MEM
Gettysburg NMP
First State NHP
Great Egg Harbor SRR
OHIO
Friendship Hill NHS
Fort Necessity NB
Eisenhower NHS
MD
BALTIMORE
DOVER
Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP
COLUMBUS
Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers NM
Harpers Ferry NHP
WASHINGTON, D.C.
INDIANA
INDIANAPOLIS
Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP
Thomas Stone NHS
Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad NHP
Assateague Island NS
Hopewell Culture NHP
Shenandoah NP
George Washington Birthplace NM
CINCINNATI
William Howard Taft NHS
WEST VIRGINIA
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Co. Battlefields Mem. NMP
RICHMOND
Richmond NBP
Maggie L. Walker NHS
CHARLESTON
Gauley River NRA
New River Gorge NP
VIRGINIA
Colonial NHP
Fort Monroe NM
FRANKFORT
LOUISVILLE
Camp Nelson NM
Appomattox Court House NHP
Petersburg NB
Bluestone NSR
Abraham Lincoln Birthplace NHP
Booker T. Washington NM
KENTUCKY
Mammoth Cave NP
Mill Springs Battlefield NM
Cumberland Gap NHP
Wright Brothers N MEM
Fort Raleigh NHS
Andrew Johnson NHS
Blue Ridge PKWY
Guilford Courthouse NMP
Cape Hatteras NS
Big South Fork NRRA
Manhattan Project NHP
RALEIGH
Fort Donelson NB
NASHVILLE
Obed WSR
NORTH CAROLINA
Carl Sandburg Home NHS
CHARLOTTE
Cape Lookout NS
Stones River NB
Great Smoky Mountains NP
Cowpens NB
Kings Mountain NMP
Moores Creek NB
TENNESSEE
Chickamauga and Chattanooga NMP
Shiloh NMP
MEMPHIS
Russell Cave NM
Appalachian NST
SOUTH CAROLINA
COLUMBIA
Little River Canyon N PRES
Ninety Six NHS
Congaree NP
Brices Cross Roads NBS
Tupelo NB
Kennesaw Mountain NBP
Chattahoochee River NRA
ATLANTA
Martin Luther King, Jr., NHP
Natchez Trace PKWY & NST
Freedom Riders NM
CHARLESTON
Charles Pinckney NHS
Fort Sumter NPP
BIRMINGHAM
Birmingham Civil Rights NM
Horseshoe Bend NMP
Reconstruction Era NHP
Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley NM
Ocmulgee NHP
MISSISSIPPI
ALABAMA
GEORGIA
Tuskegee Airmen NHS
Fort Pulaski NM
MONTGOMERY
Andersonville NHS
Tuskegee Institute NHS
Jimmy Carter NHP
Vicksburg NMP
JACKSON
Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home NM
EAST
Fort Frederica NM
Cumberland Island NS
Natchez NHP
Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve
Fort Caroline N MEM
TALLAHASSEE
JACKSONVILLE
Castillo de San Marcos NM
Fort Matanzas NM
LOUISIANA
BATON ROUGE
Gulf Islands NS
NEW ORLEANS
New Orleans Jazz NHP
Jean Lafitte NHP & PRES
Canaveral NS
FLORIDA
TAMPA
ST. PETERSBURG
De Soto N MEM
GULF OF AMERICA
Big Cypress N PRES
MIAMI
Everglades NP
Biscayne NP
Dry Tortugas NP
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Katahdin Woods and Waters NM
Appalachian NST
Saint Croix Island IHS
MAINE
Acadia NP
AUGUSTA
Frances Perkins NM
BURLINGTON
MONTPELIER
VT
Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller NHP
Saint-Gaudens NHP
NH
CONCORD
Lowell NHP
BOSTON
Cape Cod NS
Springfield Armory NHS
Blackstone River Valley NHP
PROVIDENCE
Roger Williams N MEM
MA
RI
CT
HARTFORD
New Bedford Whaling NHP
New England NST
Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt NHS
Weir Farm NHP
Upper Delaware SRR
Middle Delaware NSR
Steamtown NHS
Paterson Great Falls NHP
Sagamore Hill NHS
Delaware Water Gap NRA
Fire Island NS
NEW YORK CITY
Morristown NHP
Thomas Edison NHP
NJ
Vanderbilt Mansion NHS
Eleanor Roosevelt NHS
Saratoga NHP
Harriet Tubman NHP
SYRACUSE
ALBANY
Martin Van Buren NHS
NEW YORK
ROCHESTER
Women's Rights NHP
BUFFALO
Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural NHS
LAKE ONTARIO
Fort Stanwix NM
NORTHEAST
BOSTON AREA
Adams NHP
Boston African American NHS
Boston Harbor Islands NRA
Boston NHP
Frederick Law Olmsted NHS
John Fitzgerald Kennedy NHS
Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters NHS
Minute Man NHP
Salem Maritime NHS
Saugus Iron Works NHS
NEW YORK CITY AREA
African Burial Ground NM
Castle Clinton NM
Federal Hall N MEM
Gateway NRA (also NJ)
General Grant N MEM
Governors Island NM
Hamilton Grange N MEM
Saint Paul's Church NHS
Statue of Liberty NM
Stonewall NM
Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace NHS
PHILADELPHIA AREA
Edgar Allan Poe NHS
Hopewell Furnace NHS
Independence NHP
Thaddeus Kosciuszko N MEM
Valley Forge NHP
BALTIMORE AREA
Fort McHenry NM and Historic Shrine
Hampton NHS
NATIONAL CAPITAL
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Belmont-Paul Women's Equality NM
Carter G. Woodson Home NHS
Constitution Gardens
Ford's Theatre NHS
Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial
Frederick Douglass NHS
Korean War Veterans Memorial
Lincoln Memorial
Lyndon Baines Johnson Memorial Grove
Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
Mary McLeod Bethune Council House NHS
National Capital Parks
National Mall
Pennsylvania Avenue NHS
Rock Creek Park
Theodore Roosevelt Island
Thomas Jefferson Memorial
Vietnam Veterans Memorial
Washington Monument
White House
World War I Memorial
World War II Memorial
MARYLAND
Antietam NB
Catoctin Mountain Park
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal NHP (also DC and WV)
Clara Barton NHS
Fort Washington Park
Greenbelt Park
Monocacy NB
Piscataway Park
Potomac Heritage NST (also PA, VA, and DC)
VIRGINIA
Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial
George Washington Memorial PKWY (also MD)
Manassas NBP
Prince William Forest Park
Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts
North
0 100 200 300 400 Kilometers
0 100 200 300 400 Miles

Vehicle Reservation required for Cadillac Summit Road for 2025 (during peak visitation). See page 39 for details. Confirm details at nps.gov/acad and/or recreation.gov. They're likely to change.
Cashless Park. Cash is not accepted for entrance fees.



Acadia

On The Precipice

Size (acres)	Visitation (2024)	Trails (miles)
49K (50 of 63)	4.0M (7 of 63)	150+ (18 of 63)

(207) 288-3338 | nps.gov/acad

Established: February 26, 1919
July 8, 1916 (National Monument)
Peak Season: July–September
Carriage Trails: 45 Miles

Activities: Hiking, Rock Climbing, Paddling, Boat & Carriage Tours, Biking, Flightseeing, Swimming, Fishing, Birdwatching

Campgrounds: Blackwoods and Seawall (Mount Desert Island, $22–30/night), Schoodic Woods (Schoodic Peninsula, $22–40), Duck Harbor (Isle au Haut, $20)
Backcountry Camping: None

Park Hours: All day, every day
Entrance Fee (May–October): $35/30/20 (car/motorcycle/individual)

The coast of Maine and Mount Desert Island (MDI) has an allure, a gravity that draws people away from their big city lives and frenetic lifestyles. Here, time slows down; visitors are given the chance to enjoy the little things that often go unnoticed. Nature is heard. Waves crashing against granite cliffs. A bullfrog's guttural croak. The rat-a-tat-tat of a woodpecker. A choir of singing sparrows. While it can feel like your first time truly experiencing nature, today's tourists are far from the first to enjoy the beauty of Maine's Atlantic Coast. The deep blue lakes, bald granite mountaintops, and surf-splashed cliffs of Acadia National Park have been treasured for more than a century.

About 25,000 years ago, MDI wasn't even an island. It was part of the continental mainland, occupied by a massive sheet of ice. The ice receded, but not without leaving a number of visible scars. Slow-moving glacial ice carved Somes Sound, the only fjord along the U.S. Atlantic Coast. And then, when the glacier melted, Somes Sound filled with water. Glaciers also carried Bubble Rock, a 14-ton glacial erratic, 19 miles from its original resting place, depositing it precariously near the top of South Bubble. As the ice melted, water poured down the slopes of the recently shaved mountaintops; lakebeds filled, seas rose, and as the coast drowned in meltwater, an island appeared.

Long after glaciers covered the coast, the Abenaki people used the island as their seasonal home. A home they called "Pemetic" or "the sloping land." Food was abundant. Fishing and hunting were relatively simple. Shellfish, plants, and berries were easily gathered. For

the Abenaki people, life was good along the coast of Maine. It was also an appropriate home for them. Abenaki translates to "People of the Dawn," and MDI's Cadillac Mountain, the tallest peak along the U.S. Atlantic Coast, is the first place in the continental U.S. to experience dawn.

In 1604, Samuel de Champlain spotted the barren peak of Cadillac Mountain from his ship. Not noticing the forested hills around it, he declared the island "l'Isle des Monts Déserts" or "island of bare mountains." Barren or not, nations quarreled over the region for the next 150 years, with these islands changing hands between Natives, French, English, and Americans, but they were never permanently occupied and seldom visited.

Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, painters from the Hudson River School, helped rediscover MDI in the mid-19th century. And their work brought public attention. At first, artists, professors, and other intellectuals known as "rusticators" made the multi-day journey. Travelers required little in terms of accommodations, hiking from place to place, enjoying the area's simple lifestyle and sublime beauty.

Not long after the rusticators exposed MDI's beauty, developers were clamoring to increase island access. Direct steamboat service from Boston arrived in the 1860s. Construction of a new rail line was completed in the 1880s. By this time, MDI was the place to be for the East Coast's elite. Some of the wealthiest visitors, known locally as "cottagers," purchased large tracts of land and built lavish summer homes they ironically called "cottages." "Millionaires' Row," a stretch of "cottages" near Bar Harbor, burned to the ground during the great fire of 1947. Before blowing into the Atlantic, the blaze razed more than 17,000 acres, including 10,000 acres of parkland.

Still, development was MDI's main threat, not nature. Residents believed its scenic beauty needed to be protected. Fortunately, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and George B. Dorr, both cottagers-turned-conservationists, became two of the park's greatest advocates. Rockefeller built 57 miles of carriage roads, donated thousands of acres of land, and spent $3.5 million on the potential park. Dorr blazed trails, donated land, and became the park's first superintendent. Acadia National Park was eventually created, cobbled together entirely from private donations, successfully protecting some of the area's most rugged shorelines and beautiful landscapes for the enjoyment of the people.



Bubble Rock

When to Go

Acadia is open all year. Expect heavy traffic and crowds in July and August, especially 4th of July. June and September are only slightly quieter. Things start to slow down around mid-October once the leaves drop. March and November are your best chances for small crowds and pleasant weather, but even in winter, daytime highs below freezing are uncommon. **Hulls Cove Visitor Center** is closed from November through mid-April. Most of Park Loop Road is closed from December through mid-April.

Transportation & Airports

Help reduce traffic congestion and air pollution by riding the free **Island Explorer Shuttle**. The main routes run from late June through mid-October. Eleven regularly scheduled routes link hotels, inns, campgrounds, and Bar Harbor Airport with popular park destinations (but not Cadillac Mountain). Maps and timetables are available at the visitor center and Island Explorer's website (exploreacadia.com).

Bar Harbor Airport (BHB) is 10 miles from Hulls Cove Visitor Center. Bangor International (BGR) is 49 miles away. Portland International (PWM) is about 3 hours away. Logan International (BOS) in Boston is 5–6 hours away.

Directions

To arrive at **Mount Desert Island** from the south, take I-95 north to Augusta, then Route 3 east through Ellsworth and on to Mount Desert Island.

To arrive at **Schoodic Peninsula** from Ellsworth, take Route 3 south and turn left onto US Hwy 1. Continue east to West Gouldsboro. Go south on Route 186 to Winter Harbor, and then follow signs to the park.

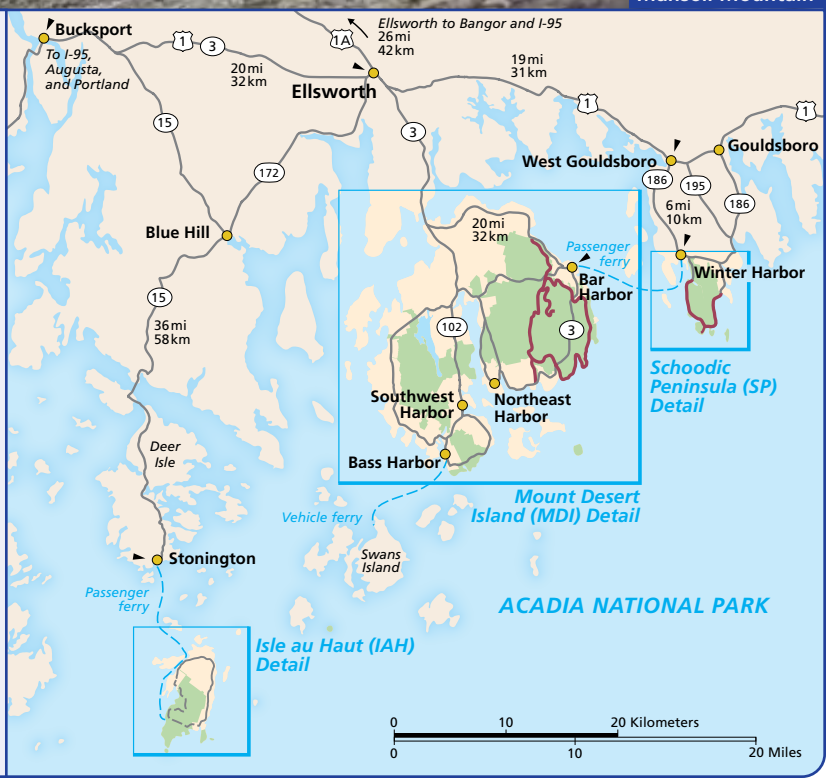
Isle au Haut is accessible via the Mail Boat from Stonington. Take Route 172 south from Ellsworth to Route 15 and on to Stonington (and the Mail Boat).



Mansell Mountain

Regions of Acadia

There are three distinct regions: Mount Desert Island (MDI), Schoodic Peninsula (SP), and Isle au Haut (IAH). Each region offers camping, but MDI is the park's centerpiece, where you'll find the vast majority of attractions, restaurants, lodging, and visitors. Somes Sound breaks this large island into east (busy) and west (quiet) sides. The free Island Explorer Shuttle connects many of MDI's most popular sites and SP. SP possesses views similar to those found at MDI but slightly less spectacular and with considerably smaller crowds (it's also much smaller). Located east of MDI, across Frenchman Bay, it's the only park territory on the mainland. MDI and SP are accessible by car. Seven smaller islands, including IAH, are preserved by the park, but can only be reached by boat. Make camping reservations early for IAH.





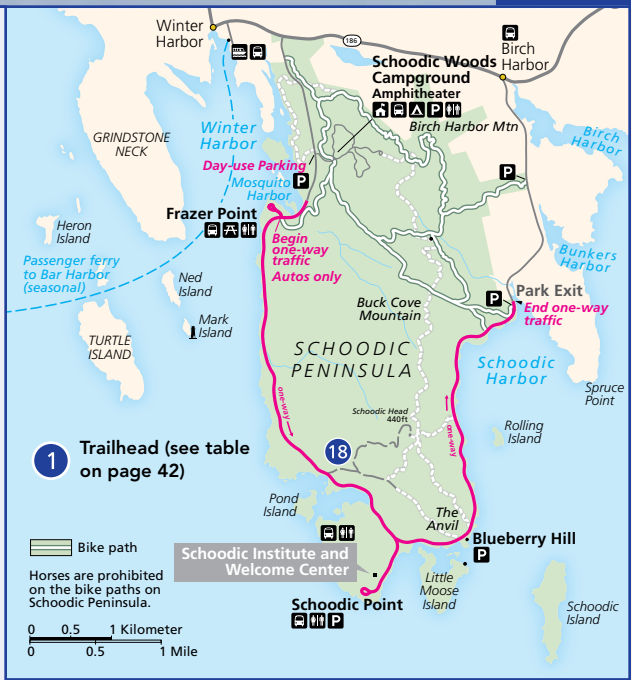
Mark Island

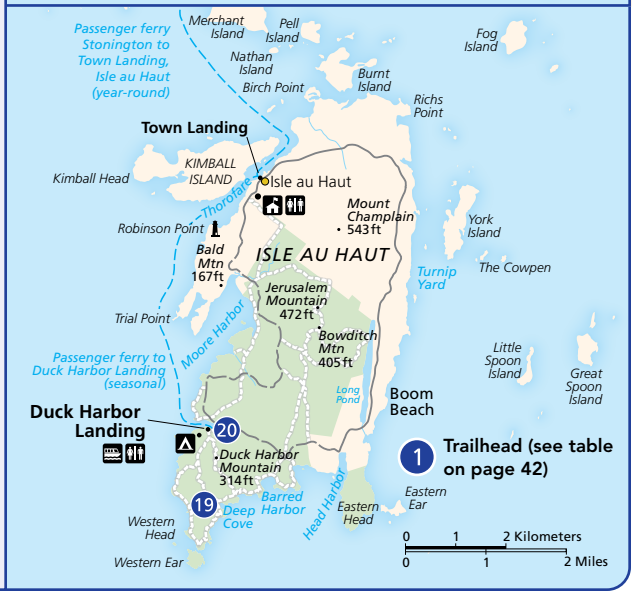
Schoodic Peninsula

Roughly one of every ten Acadia visitors goes to Schoodic Peninsula, where you'll find a peaceful experience. Less visitation also means fewer facilities. There are four restrooms, one picnic area, and **Schoodic Woods Campground**. The campground, located 3 miles southeast of Winter Harbor, offers tent and RV sites from $22 (primitive, walk-in) to $40 (electric and H_2O hookups) per night. It is open from late May until Columbus Day. In summer, **Downeast Windjammer Cruises** (207.288.4585, downeastwindjammer.com) operates a passenger ferry between Bar Harbor and Winter Harbor (one hour each way). **Island Explorer Shuttle** stops at the ferry terminals. By car, the 45-mile route around Frenchman Bay from Bar Harbor also takes about an hour. After reaching the peninsula, a six-mile, one-way loop road offers stunning views of the dramatic Maine coastline. You'll immediately be treated to views of **Winter Harbor Lighthouse** and **Cadillac Mountain** across the bay. A narrow gravel road weaves up toward the highest point on the peninsula, **Schoodic Head** (you can also hike to it).

Isle au Haut

Named by Samuel de Champlain in 1604, Isle au Haut or "High Island" is a rugged and relatively remote island five miles south of Stonington. Today, a few thousand day-trippers and some 500 campers travel aboard the **Mail Boat** (207.367.5193, isleauhaut.com) from Stonington each year. It's about $50/adult for a roundtrip ticket, and another $12 for parking. You can bring kayaks (fee), bikes (fee), and/or pets (no fee). Reservations are not available. About half the island is parkland; the rest is owned and occupied by summer residents and a year-round fishing community. At times, the relationship between visitors and residents has been contentious, forcing the adoption of a visitor capacity limit. Isle au Haut visitors should exit the Mail Boat at **Duck Harbor Landing**, stay within park boundaries, and camp at one of five designated sites (each with its own lean-to). Camping costs $20/night with a 3-night maximum stay. You can disembark at Town Landing and walk 1,500 feet (uphill) to the park Ranger Station, but Duck Harbor Landing is the better option.







Do not use this map for hiking or carriage road navigation. Buy maps at visitor center.

Some lands within and adjoining the park remain private property; respect the owners' rights and posted regulations.

Warning: Low-clearance bridges (*see map*) make advance route planning necessary for RVs and tall vehicles.



Bald Peak

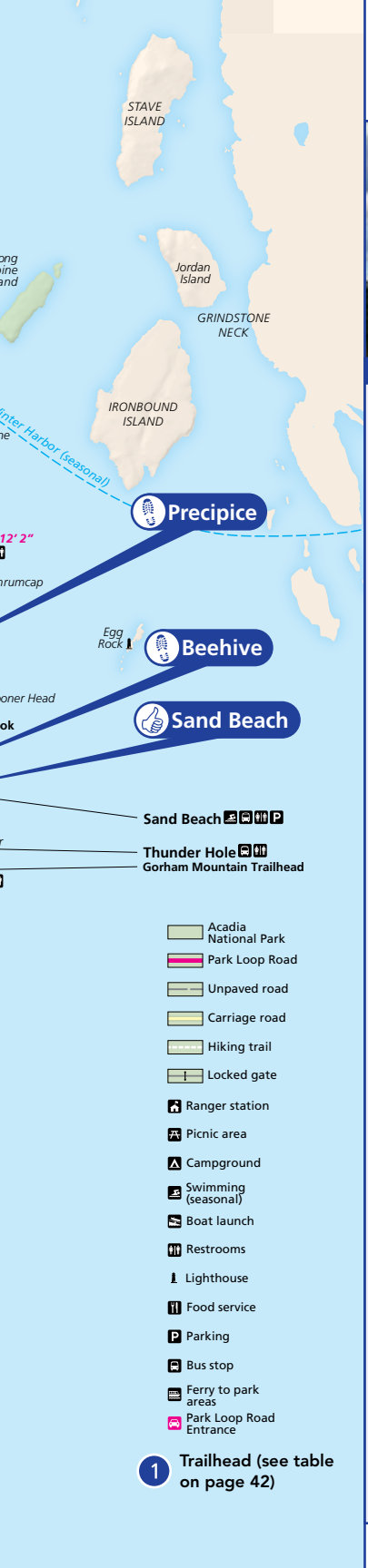
Mount Desert Island (MDI)

To many visitors, MDI and Acadia National Park are synonymous. Almost two-thirds of the park is on MDI and it is the only destination for most of the 4+ million people who flock here each year. About half of the island is protected under park ownership. The boundary raggedly weaves its way around private property and the Atlantic seashore. The park and island are nearly split in half by a natural, glacially-carved barrier, Somes Sound, the only fjord on the U.S. Atlantic Coast.

Acadia is an enchanting place where granite cliffs and angry seas, mountaintops and clear blue skies, people and wildlife converge. Eight mountains exceed 1,000 feet. Diminutive in stature compared to their western counterparts, they still find a way to take your breath away. Hiking from sea level to a summit can leave avid hikers gasping for air, especially on **ladder trails,** which are more vertical than horizontal. And if that doesn't do it, panoramic views from these barren mountaintops surely will. Should you only go to one mountaintop, make it the **Cadillac**. Its summit can be reached by car, bike, or on foot. Many visitors drive here to bask in the first rays of light as they peek over the Atlantic Ocean. Don't worry if you aren't a morning person; the views overlooking Bar Harbor, Frenchman Bay, and the Porcupine Islands are spectacular rain or shine, sun or fog, morning until night. On a clear day, you can see Mount Katahdin, Maine's tallest mountain, standing some 100 miles away. **Vehicle reservations are required to drive up Cadillac Mountain Road from late May through October.** Reservations cost $6/car at recreation.gov. 30% are available 90 days in advance. The other 70% are released two days in advance. Thrill-seekers unafraid of heights and searching for adventure should scale Champlain Mountain via **Precipice Trail**. Steel rungs, ladders, and railings aid hikers along the harrowing journey. The Trail is often closed during winter, and it closes once more from late spring through summer when peregrine falcons nest on the precipitous mountain's face (it's also considerably less safe when crowded).

Twenty-six freshwater lakes and ponds are found on MDI, providing a wide variety of activities. You can swim in the Atlantic at **Sand Beach** or the much warmer and fresher water of **Echo Lake**. **Long Pond** is a great place for a quiet paddle. **Jordan Pond** offers stunning views of the **Bubble Mountains** (South and North Bubble). View the bubbles from **Jordan Pond House** while enjoying one of their famous pastries, a popover, or just down the road at the boat landing.

A trip to Acadia is not complete without touring its 27-mile **Park Loop Road**, but if you'd like to escape the hum of automobiles, go out and explore the **carriage roads**. These crushed stone paths are enjoyed by bikers, hikers, and horse-drawn carriages. A carriage road map is available at Hulls Cove Visitor Center, located just north of Bar Harbor on Route 3. You'll find most park facilities on MDI, but you won't find any lodging within park boundaries. Bar Harbor, the island's largest city, is the most popular destination for dining, lodging, shopping, and nightlife. Additional accommodations are available in Northeast Harbor and Southwest Harbor.




Park Loop Road (near Champlain Mountain)

Acadia Camping (Fees are per night)

Name	Location	Open	Fee	Sites	Notes
Blackwoods*	Mount Desert Island (MDI) Route 3, 5 miles south of Bar Harbor	April–November (peak) Winter (closed)	$30	281 (60 RV) 6 people, 2 tents, 1 car limit per site	No hookups/Flush toilets Showers 0.5 mile away 35-ft max RV (32 sites) 29 Pullthrough sites Reservation Only
Seawall*	MDI, Route 102A, 4 miles south of Southwest Harbor	late May–mid-October	$30 (drive-in) $22 (walk-in)	202 (59 RV) 6 people, 2 tents, 1 car limit per site	No hookups/Flush toilets Showers 1 mile away 35-ft max RV (19 sites) 31 Pullthrough sites Reservation Only
Schoodic Woods*	SP, 3 miles southeast of Winter Harbor	late May–mid-October	$30–40 (drive-in) $22 (walk-in)	90 (65 RV)	50 w/ electric hookups ($36), 33 w/ electric & water ($40), 30 Pullthrough (Loop B), Reservations Only
Duck Harbor**	Isle au Haut, take boat from Stonington	mid-May–mid-October	$20	5 6 people/site	Primitive, 3-night max, Reservation required, access via boat

Backcountry Camping is prohibited at Acadia National Park

*Reservations are required and can be made up to two months in advance at 877-444-6777 or recreation.gov

**Reservations are required and can be made up to seven months in advance at 877-444-6777 or recreation.gov

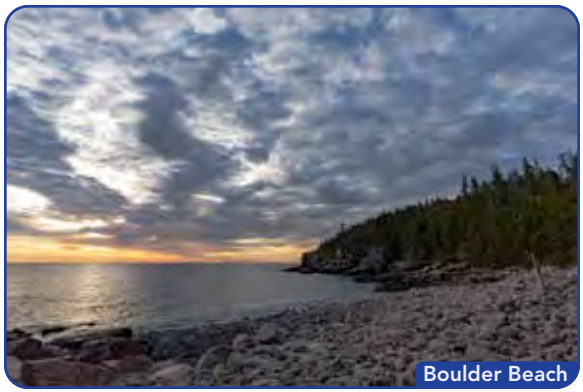
Camping & Lodging

The park has four campgrounds. **Blackwoods**, located on MDI near Otter Creek at the foot of Cadillac Mountain, is closest to Bar Harbor. Showers are located near the Blackwoods entrance, a short walk from the far end of B-Loop (sites B124, B126). Blackwoods is busy because its location is exceptional. **Seawall Campground** is on MDI's quietside, but it fills up in summer. Across Frenchman's Bay is **Schoodic Woods**, a relatively new campground. It's more peaceful yet, and the best destination for RVers. The **Island Explorer Shuttle** (exploreacadia.com) stops at all three of these campgrounds from June through mid-October, which is a great service to park guests. But to reach Schoodic Woods from MDI, or vice versa, using the Island Explorer Shuttle, you'll have to use the Bar Harbor-Winter Harbor ferry. Finally, the most peaceful option is to spend a few nights on Isle au Haut at **Duck Harbor**. There are only five sites, each has a lean-to shelter. Most people reach the isle using the Mail Boat (isleauhaut.com) out of Stonington. But remember, it isn't car camping. You'll have to pack everything you need with you. Camping at Isle au Haut is popular. All campsites require reservations through recreation.gov. Duck Harbor can be reserved up to seven months in advance. The other three can be reserved two months in advance. All campgrounds close for winter.

You won't find any lodging within the park, but there's plenty nearby in Bar Harbor (on Mount Desert Island) or Ellsworth (back on the mainland, roughly 30 minutes from the visitor center).

Driving

MDI's 27-mile **Park Loop Road** is a must-see for first-time visitors. There are a number of turnouts, and parking and picnic areas where you can stop and enjoy the scenery. Parking is also allowed along the road's right-hand side wherever it's one-way (unless signs state otherwise). Watch for evidence of the great fire of 1947 as you drive. Thick evergreen forests give way to sun-loving deciduous trees that replaced thousands of acres of pine lost in the flames. One of the most popular Park Loop Road experiences is to drive up **Cadillac Summit Road** for sunrise. Map it out and set your alarm to arrive at least 30 minutes early. Grab a blanket, coffee, and a loved one, and wait atop the barren peak for the first rays of light. Testament to its popularity, you must reserve a ticket online ($6, recreation.gov) to drive to Cadillac's summit during peak season. 30% are available 90 days in advance. 70% are released two days in advance. If you missed out on a permit, there are many great locations to watch the sunrise along Ocean Path. Regardless, waking with the sun is a good idea. An early start allows you to visit popular destinations like Jordan Pond, Otter Cliffs, and Sand Beach before the afternoon crowds. Traffic typically peaks between 10am and 3pm.


Boulder Beach

Be sure to plan ahead if you will be arriving in an RV or tall vehicle, as there are four low-clearance bridges (the lowest is 10' 4"). If you'd like to escape Park Loop Road gridlock, drive over to **Schoodic Peninsula**. Here you'll find a 6-mile, one-way coastal loop featuring scenery that's nearly as dramatic as MDI. You'll also find campsites with ample space and hookups (electric and water) for RVs.

Anyone visiting during the busy season (late June through mid-October) should consider parking your car and hopping aboard the **Island Explorer Shuttles** (exploreacadia.com). They're free, frequent, and connect just about everything a visitor could possibly want to check out (except Cadillac Mountain's summit).

Acadia is more than manageable on your own, but if you'd like to be in the company of a knowledgeable guide, narrated tours are available. **Acadia National Park Tours** (207.288.0300, acadiatours.com) offers tours of Park Loop Road (stopping at Sieur de Monts Spring, Thunder Hole, Cadillac Mountain) from $60 (2.5 hours, bus) to $85 (3.5 hours, smaller coach) per person. **Oli's Trolley** (207.288.9899, olistrolley.com) runs a similar route, adding a stop at Jordan Pond for $63 (2.5 hours) to $93 (4 hours).

Hiking

Acadia is truly a dayhiker's paradise, featuring some of the best-maintained trails of all the national parks. Thanks to a dense network of more than 120 miles of short trails and the **Island Explorer Shuttle**

Acadia Hiking Trails (Distances are roundtrip unless noted otherwise)

	Name	Location (# on map)	Length	Difficulty Rating & Notes
Mount Desert Island	Bar Island - 👍	Bar Harbor, located at the end of Bridge Street (1)	2.0 miles	E – A sandbar to Bar Island appears at low tide, be sure to check tide tables
	Great Meadow	Bar Harbor, located off Cromwell Harbor Road (2)	2.0 miles	E – A loop trail across private land connecting Bar Harbor to Acadia
	Cadillac North Ridge	Park Loop Road, 3.2 miles from the start of Park Loop Road (2)	4.4 miles	M – Views of Bar Harbor • Shorter and steeper than South Ridge Trail
	Tarn	Sieur de Monts Spring, Tarn Parking Lot off Route 3 (3)	2.4 miles	M – Hike through woods along Otter Creek and by beaver ponds
	Precipice - 👍	Park Loop Road, 1.75 miles past Sieur de Monts Spring entrance (4)	2.2 miles	X – Iron rungs and ladders • Not for children or anyone afraid of heights
	Beehive - 👍	Sand Beach Area, across Park Loop Road from Sand Beach parking lot (5)	1.6 miles	X – Iron rungs and ladders • Not for children or anyone afraid of heights
	Great Head	East end of Sand Beach (5)	1.5 miles	M – Loop trail with cliff and beach views
	Ocean Path - 👍	Sand Beach Upper Lot (5, 6, 7)	4.4 miles	E – Passes Thunder Hole and Otter Cliffs
	Gorham Mtn - 👍	Gorham Mtn Lot, 1 mile past Sand Beach on Park Loop Road (6)	1.8 miles	M – Wide open views of the ocean • Connects to The Bowl, Beehive, and Cadillac Cliffs
	Cadillac South Ridge	Route 3, about 100 feet south of Blackwoods Campground (7)	7.0 miles	S – Hike to Cadillac from Blackwoods Campground on one of the park's longer trails
	Jordan Pond - 👍	Jordan Pond Boat Ramp (8)	3.2 miles	M – Loop along the edge of Jordan Pond
	Jordan Cliff/ Penobscot Mtn	Behind Jordan Pond Gift Shop (8)	3.1+ miles	X – Ascend Jordan Cliff (ladder) or Jordan Pond/Deer Brook, descend Penobscot Mtn
	Sargent Mtn	Many Options (8, 9, 11, 12)	Varies	S – 2nd tallest park summit, long, difficult hike (regardless of route) by Acadia standards
	Bubble Rock - 👍	Park Loop Road, Bubble Rock Parking Lot (9)	1.0 mile	M – Steep, short hike up South Bubble to a peculiar glacial erratic (big rock)
	Summit Path	Cadillac Mtn Summit Parking Lot (10)	0.3 mile	E – A paved path around the summit
	Giant Slide - 👍	1.1 mile from the junction of Route 198 and 233 (11)	4.6 miles	S – Challenging trail along Sargent Brook to Sargent Mtn (via Grandgent) or Gilmore Peak
	Acadia Mtn - 👍	Acadia Mountain Parking Lot, west side of Route 102 (13)	2.5 miles	S – Best views of Somes Sound in the park, return via fire road
	Beech Cliff - 👍	Beech Mtn Parking Lot, off Beech Hill Road (14)	2.1 miles	M – Alternate from Long Pond Road: ascend West Ridge, return via Valley (~3 miles)
	Flying Mtn	Fernald Cove Parking Area, Fernald Point Rd (15)	1.2 miles	M – Explore tide pools at Valley Cove
	Wonderland	Seawall Campground, off Route 102A, 0.9 miles from Seawall (16)	1.4 miles	E – Rocky shoreline, cobble beach, and spruce forests
	Ship Harbor	Rte 102A, 2 miles from Seawall (17)	1.2 miles	E – A good spot for blueberries and birds
SP	Schoodic Head - 👍	Schoodic Peninsula, Blueberry Hill Parking Lot (18)	2.5 miles	M – Combine Alder, Schoodic Head, and Anvil Trails for a loop to Schoodic Head
IAH	Goat Trail	Isle au Haut, via Western Head Road and Duck Harbor Mountain Trail (19)	2.1 miles (one-way)	M – Rugged and rocky hike with spectacular coastal vistas
	Duck Harbor Mountain	Isle au Haut, accessible from Western Head Road (20)	2.4 miles	S – Panoramic views of Isle au Haut • Most strenuous hike on the isle

Difficulty Ratings: E = Easy, M = Moderate, S = Strenuous, X = Extreme

(exploreacadia.com), creative hikers can come up with all sorts of fun one-way hiking itineraries. Backcountry camping is not permitted within park boundaries. Trails—many of which were trod by Native Americans or the park's first superintendent, George Dorr—are well marked with cairns (small, pyramid-like rock piles) and blue blazes courtesy of Acadia Trails Forever (please don't build or alter cairns).

One of the ways Dorr is remembered is by a mountaintop: **Dorr Mountain**, the third-tallest peak in the park. Four trails lead to its summit, including the short and steep **Ladder Trail**. The ascent is aided by three sets of steel ladders and numerous granite steps that were carved and placed in 1893 and restored by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. The trailhead is found just south of **Sieur de Monts Spring**. To complete the 3.3-mile journey to Dorr Mountain summit, take Ladder Trail to Schiff Path (East Face Dorr Trail) and return via South Ridge Dorr Trail and Canon Brook Trail. I like going up Ladder and then returning to Sieur de Monts via Homan's Path, and then you'll walk right past more parking spaces and a shuttle stop.

There are more ladder trails. **Precipice Trail** is the most fun ladder trail (or terrifying for anyone with a fear of heights/exposure). It begins 7.3 miles from Hulls Cove Visitor Center on Park Loop Road. It quickly climbs the steep east face of Champlain Mountain. Ascend 0.9 mile along Precipice Trail and return via Champlain Mountain North Ridge Trail and Orange & Black Path, making a 2.2-mile loop. The trail closes from mid-March to mid-August to protect nesting peregrine falcons. During this time, you'll often find a park ranger conducting Peregrine Watch in the Precipice Trail parking area. Continuing along Park Loop Road, you will arrive at another popular ladder trail climbing up **The Beehive**. It begins across the road from Sand Beach Parking Area. Follow Beehive Trail 0.8 mile to its summit, and then take Bowl Trail back to Park Loop Road, completing a 1.6-mile loop. Feel free to continue on to Gorham Mountain/Cadillac Cliffs and return via Ocean Path. That's a fantastic loop and still less than 4 miles. **Jordan Cliff Trailhead** is found behind Jordan Pond Gift Shop at Carriage Road junction #15. This hike begins with excellent views of Jordan Pond as you start the 3.1-mile (loop) ascent to the top of Penobscot Mountain. Take in the 360° panoramic views at the summit before heading back down Penobscot Mountain Trail, which loops back to Jordan Pond Gift Shop. (Northwest Pemetic is another great Jordan Pond area hike.) The 2.2-mile **Perpendicular (Mansell Mountain) Trail** begins at the south end of Long Pond


Beehive Trail

near Southwest Harbor. It's more of a granite staircase, but there is a ladder, and the views are nice. The sixth and final ladder trail, 0.5-mile **Beech Cliff Trail**, begins behind the ranger house at Echo Lake Parking Area. These are some of the park's most challenging trails and should not be attempted by small children, anyone afraid of heights, or pets. Hike something else if conditions are unsafe.

Most trails don't require climbing ladders, but that doesn't mean they aren't unique. **Bar Island** can be reached at low tide by crossing a sand bar right from downtown Bar Harbor. Have your kids pose next to a precariously-positioned 14-ton boulder at the steep but short, 1.0-mile **Bubble Rock Trail**. About two or three hours before high tide, you may want to head down **Ocean Path** to listen to waves explode at **Thunder Hole**. And **Giant Slide** is a riot as you follow Sargent Brook up to Gilmore Peak and/or Sargent Mountain (via Grandgent Trail). (You can easily reach Parkman and Bald Mountains from here, too, and Penobscot and Cedar Swamp Mountains aren't out of the question if you like to get after it!) Giant Slide begins on private property. Respect it just the same as you should respect all public land. See the hiking table for the location and difficulty of these and many other trails. **Carriage roads** provide much more relaxed hiking possibilities. Concentrated around the Jordan Pond Area, 45 miles of crushed stone roads stretch from Hulls Cove to Seal Harbor.

Rock Climbing

Acadia's mountains may not be big, but they are steep. Sheer granite walls offer some of the most unique rock climbing opportunities in the United States. **Otter Cliffs** is a popular climbing spot. Anemone Cave is another hot rock spot, but you need to know the tides. The South Wall of Champlain Mountain, Central Slabs,


Docking at Isle au Haut

South Bubble, and Great Head are also serviceable climbing destinations. Climbers at Otter Cliffs, Canada Cliffs, and South Wall should sign in at daily use logs, available at the climbing areas, park headquarters, visitor center, and campgrounds. With a wide variety of climbing routes, Acadia is a wonderful destination for beginners to learn how to rock climb. Give it a try by contacting an outfitter: Atlantic Climbing School (207.288.2521, climbacadia.com) or Acadia Mountain Guides (207.288.8186, acadiamountainguides.com). Both have similar offerings and rates. Expect a family of four to pay about $350 for a half-day course.

Paddling

Acadia National Park has paddling in spades for people of all experience levels. Inexperienced paddlers are sure to enjoy the glacially-carved lakes and ponds or perhaps a guided tour with a local outfitter. Eagle Lake, Long Pond, Jordan Pond, and Echo Lake are a few of the most popular freshwater paddle spots, with at least one boat launch at each.

Experienced paddlers can take to the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean, where you are free to explore Acadia's islands, inlets, and coves. Somes Sound and the entire eastern coast (from Mount Desert Narrows to Moose Island) are good ideas. Isle au Haut campers may want to consider paddling the five miles of water separating it from Stonington.

Paddling allows visitors to see the park from a different perspective and gain new appreciation for this scenic land. It's also an excellent way to view the park's wildlife. Enjoy the tranquility of these majestic waters, but remember to use caution, especially when paddling alone. Cold water, swift currents, erratic weather, and dense fog can make paddling challenging. Check the weather and tide tables before heading out. If you plan to explore any of Acadia's smaller, remote islands, be sure to discuss your itinerary with a park ranger, because birds may be nesting on the shorelines.

A number of places offer kayak rentals. National Park Canoe & Kayak Rental (207.244.5854, nationalparkcanoerental.com) has the perfect quiet-side location on Pretty Marsh Road at the northern tip of Long Pond, with reasonable (3-hour) rates: canoe ($38), solo kayak ($36), tandem kayak ($42), paddleboard ($39). You can save a few bucks by getting out there early (8am–11am), which is a good idea. Another option is to have Acadia 1 Watersports drop off a kayak, canoe, or SUP for you. It'll cost anywhere from $24–65/day, depending on type and duration (3-day minimum).

Similarly, if you'd like to take a kayak tour, Coastal Kayaking Tours (800.526.8615, acadiafun.com, 4-hour, $62/person) is a good choice to paddle about Frenchman Bay from Bar Harbor. Maine State Kayak (207.244.9500, mainestatekayak.com, 4-hour aqua safari, $129) and Acadia Outfitters (207.288.8118, acadiaoutfitters.com) offer rentals (e-bikes and kayaks) and tours.

Boat Tours

Baker Island Cruise (5 hours, $66/adult) explores the island's unique natural and cultural history with the help of a park ranger. You'll have the chance to see marine life before spending an hour on the island on a one-mile walking tour. Reservations and additional information are available at barharborwhales.com or (207) 288-2386. **Bar Harbor Whale Watching** also offers a variety of cruises, including wildlife (whales, puffins, etc.), lighthouses, and lobstering.

Dive-In Theater Boat Cruise (2 hours, $60/adult) searches for underwater life. Passengers scour the surface of Frenchman Bay for seals, porpoises, and seabirds, while a diver hunts for marine life on the ocean floor. Occasionally, the diver returns with live specimens for a real hands-on experience. It's an excellent choice for anyone with kids (or anyone who remains a kid at heart). Reservations and additional information are available at divered.com or (207) 288-3483.

Downeast Windjammer offers Frenchman Bay cruises aboard a four-mast schooner. You'll search for wildlife and enjoy the views of the surrounding islands. Tours last about two hours and cost $45–55/adult. Reservations and additional information are available at downeastwindjammer.com or (207) 288-4585. Downeast Windjammer also runs passenger ferries and offers private charters and fishing excursions.

Discover Acadia's past on the **Islesford Historic and Scenic Cruise** (2.75 hours, $39/adult), which takes you to Little Cranberry Island's Islesford Historical Museum. This tour is provided by Sea Princess Scenic Nature Cruises. They offer a few other cruises in and around the park, starting at $33/person. Reservations and additional information are available at cruiseacadia.com or (207) 276-5352.

Bass Harbor Cruises (207.244.5785, bassharborcruises.com) offers a variety of wildlife and historical cruises (2–3.5 hours, $40/adult), as well as sailboat, fishing, and sightseeing charters. **Sail Acadia** (207.266.5210, sailacadia.com) will take you lobstering aboard the oldest working friendship sloop with Downeast Friendship Sloop Charters or a more modern vessel, you choose. **Acadian Boat Tours** (207.801.2300, acadianboattours.com) offers sunset, sightseeing, fishing, lighthouse, and wildlife tours starting at $42/adult. You can also learn about lobstering with **Lulu Lobster Boat** (207.288.3136, lululobsterboat.com). Tours last two hours and cost $43/adult.

Reservations are recommended for all cruises. Schedules and fees vary. All tours are seasonal.

Biking

Eastern **MDI's carriage roads** are your best bet for a relaxing bike ride. The 45-mile network of broken-stone roads extends from Hulls Cove Visitor Center to Seal Harbor, including 17 carefully-crafted stone-faced bridges. Some of the most scenic stretches skirt Jordan Pond and Eagle Lake. The 8-mile circuit (roundtrip) to Day Mountain, the only summit reached by carriage road, begins at Jordan Pond Gatehouse. No matter where you go, be sure to carry a map of the carriage roads (available at Hulls Cove Visitor Center or the park's website), because you'll encounter several junctions even on short rides. Also note that the 12 miles of carriage roads south of Jordan Pond are on private property and off-limits to cyclists. (However, horseback riders and walkers are allowed on these gravel roadways.)

The quieter western side of MDI has two gravel roads. **Seal Cove Road** (4 miles) connects Southwest Harbor and Seal Cove. **Hio Road** (2.5 miles) connects Seawall Campground with Highway 102 at Bass Harbor Marsh.

The 27-mile **Park Loop Road** offers scenic and hilly terrain for road cyclists. If you feel like challenging yourself, take the 3.5-mile Cadillac Summit Road to the top of Cadillac Mountain. It's seriously tough


Sand Beach

pedaling going up, but the return trip downhill is a breeze (make sure your brakes work well). Due to Park Loop Road's steep grades, tight turns, and abundance of tourist traffic during the summer, offseason pedaling is best. For less congested biking, try the loop around Schoodic Peninsula's scenic coastline or Route 102/102A on MDI's western side. The Mail Boat offers bike rentals to take with you to Isle au Haut. Biking is not allowed on hiking trails, and you won't find singletrack within park boundaries. Bike (and e-bike) rental is available in Bar Harbor at Bar Harbor Bicycle Shop (207.288.3886, barharborbike.com, $40+/day) and Acadia Bike (800.526.8615, acadiabike.com, $36+/day), in Southwest Harbor at Southwest Cycle (207.244.5856, southwestcycle.com, $35+/day), and in Northeast Harbor at Island Bike Rental (207.276.5611), which is closest to the carriage roads. Acadia Bike also offers ranger-guided bike tours (2.5 hours, $69/person).

Carriage Tours

Wildwood Stables (877.276.3622, acadiabycarriage.com) offers carriage tours along the park's crushed stone carriage roads. They offer a Day Mountain Summit Tour (1 hour, $48/adult; 2 hours, $72) and a tour of Mr. Rockefeller's Bridges (2 hours, $72/adult). Wild Iris Horse Farm (207.288.5234, wildirishorsefarm.com) offers carriage tours, as well as farm tours and driving lessons.

Flightseeing

Acadia is filled with dramatic contours and sharp transitions that are incredibly difficult to appreciate from up close. Well, there's a solution for that. Take to the air! Scenic Flights of Acadia (207.667.6527, scenicflightsofacadia.com) offers flights starting at $114 per person for 25 minutes. Acadia Air Tours (207.288.0703, acadiaairtours.com) offers biplane rides starting at $349 per flight (20–25 minutes). Planes fly out of Bar Harbor Airport.


Jordan Pond

Swimming

On hot summer days, many of Acadia's guests migrate to the beaches. Echo Lake Beach is usually staffed with a lifeguard in summer. The 55°F water found at Sand Beach might be refreshing to some, but it's downright frigid to others. The freshwater of Echo Lake is considerably warmer, especially near the end of summer. For more secluded swimming, head to the park's western side where you can paddle yourself to swimming holes in Seal Cove, and Round and Hodgdon Ponds. Lake Wood, on the north end of the island, also has a small beach with vehicle access.

Swimming is prohibited at all lakes used for drinking water. These include Upper and Lower Hadlock Ponds, Bubble and Jordan Ponds, Eagle Lake, and the southern half of Long Pond.

Fishing

To fish any of the freshwater lakes in Acadia, you'll need a freshwater fishing license. Children under 16 do not require a license. Licenses are available at Walmart in Ellsworth or online (maine.gov/ifw). Freshwater fishing season is generally from April until September. Trout, salmon, perch, and bass are commonly caught in freshwater lakes and ponds.

A license is not required for saltwater fishing, but you may need to register with the state. Sargent Drive (Somes Sound) and Frazer Point (Schoodic Peninsula) are two saltwater fishing areas within the park. Mackerel typically run from mid-July to September at these locations.

Be sure to respect private property and follow all watercraft and fishing regulations.

Birdwatching

Acadia is a premier birdwatching destination. More than 300 bird species have been identified on MDI and the surrounding waters.

Reintroduced in the 1980s, peregrine falcons have been nesting on the cliffs of Champlain Mountain since 1991. If you'd like to observe these magnificent birds, join a park ranger or volunteer for Peregrine Watch. The program takes place at Precipice Trail Parking Area and is offered intermittently from mid-May through mid-August, weather permitting, when nesting falcons have been identified. Other popular nesting locations include Beech Cliffs (above Echo Lake) and Jordan Cliffs (above Jordan Pond).

Birds are everywhere, but a few locations are better than others. Sieur de Monts Spring is an excellent choice if you're looking to spot cedar waxwings, pileated woodpeckers, and the minuscule ruby-throated hummingbird. Beaver Brook and Beaver Dam Pond are popular habitats for herons, ducks, and bald eagles.

Birdwatchers will definitely want to walk around the Otter Cliffs area. Here you might find any number of seabirds, including double-breasted cormorant, black guillemot, and northern gannet. Schoodic Peninsula, Wonderland, Ship Harbor, and Seawall provide bird enthusiasts with promising chances of seeing seabirds. Songbirds serenade cyclists, carriage riders, and hikers along the many miles of carriage roads.

Cadillac Mountain's wide-open summit offers an excellent vantage point to see bald eagles and peregrine falcons as they patrol the sky high above the park's granite peaks. In fact, birdwatching is so good here,

the park may have a Hawk Watch station at Cadillac's summit between late August and mid-October. Park rangers or volunteers aid visitors in spotting raptors as they make their winter migration from Maine and Canada to warmer locales down south.

Birdwatchers on a trip to Acadia will not want to forget their binoculars and bird book. Also, be sure to stop at Hulls Cove Visitor Center to get the latest information on migratory birds, peregrine falcons, and ranger-led bird watch programs.

Winter Activities

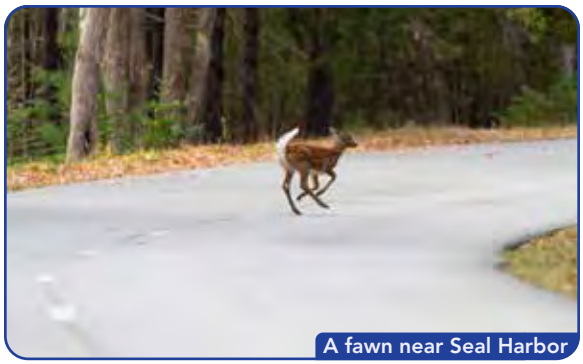
Winter activities at Acadia are hit or miss. The park averages about five feet of snow each year, but rain is just as likely during the winter months. January and February are the most reliable months for winter weather. When there is snow, Acadia becomes a winter wonderland with plenty to do. Two short sections of Park Loop Road remain open through winter for motorists. Snowmobiles are allowed on Park Loop Road and most fire roads. However, the maximum speed is 35 mph on Park Loop Road and 25 mph on all unpaved roads. Snowmobilers must follow all state snowmobile laws. Ice fishing is popular. Carriage roads are good for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Winter hiking is an option. Microspikes and hiking poles are good ideas. Stay away from rocky, vertical trails when they're slippery. Rental equipment is available in Bar Harbor at Cadillac Mountain Sports (207.288.0682, cadillacsports.com, skis: $30/day, snowshoes: $20/day, ice skates: $15/day).

Lighthouses

There are five lighthouses near MDI. Of these, Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse is the easiest to access. It marks the entrance into Blue Hill Bay and is located at the end of Route 102A on the western half of MDI near Bass Harbor. Egg Rock Lighthouse is located at the mouth of Frenchman Bay. It can be seen from Park Loop Road. Baker Island is the oldest lighthouse in the area. It's located seven miles from MDI, and can be accessed by kayak or boat. Bear Island Lighthouse is closed to the public, but it can be viewed on boat cruises departing from Northeast Harbor. Mark Island's Winter Harbor Lighthouse comes into view from the west side of Schoodic Peninsula. Cadillac Mountain looms behind it.

Visitor Centers & Museums

Thompson Island Information Center resides on the tiny island just north of MDI, along with a picturesque picnic area. It's open from mid-May to mid-October and serves as a good place to orient yourself to the region (and learn about any upcoming events) as the building is shared with chambers of commerce.


A fawn near Seal Harbor

Hulls Cove Visitor Center (207.288.3338), located on Route 3 just south of Hulls Cove, should be your first stop upon arriving at the park on Mount Desert Island. Its standard hours are from 8am–4:30pm, with extended hours in summer (July–August). The visitor center closes for winter (November–April). A long staircase leads up to its entrance. There is an alternate parking area for individuals with disabilities. Look for the access road near the south end of the main lot.

In **Sieur de Monts Spring,** you'll find the privately-run **Abbe Museum** (abbemuseum.org), the community-cared-for **Wild Gardens of Acadia**, and the park's **Nature Center**. Abbe Museum is a small building, housing a collection of Native American artifacts. There's a nominal fee to enter, but it was temporarily closed when we went to print. They have a larger museum in downtown Bar Harbor (26 Mt Desert Street) that costs $12/adult. Wild Gardens of Acadia displays hundreds of native plant species, and it's complemented quite nicely by the park's Nature Center. Even if none of these attractions interest you, Sieur de Monts Spring is worth visiting, as it provides access to several excellent hiking trails. You can also walk here from Bar Harbor via Great Meadows/Jesup Trails.

Jordan Pond House (207.813.4342, jordanpondhouse.com) is an Acadia institution. And for good reason, it's located at the nexus of carriage roads and several popular hiking trails. The setting, at the south end of Jordan Pond, is delightful. And, most importantly, tea and popovers ($13) on the Pond House lawn is an Acadia tradition! Shortest waits are usually before 11:30am or after 4pm.


Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse

Schoodic Institute (schoodicinstitute.org) has a beautiful campus near the tip of Schoodic Peninsula. This non-profit's primary purpose is research, but you'll find a welcome center and bookstore at Rockefeller Hall, and they routinely offer public programs and events.

Islesford Historical Museum (207.288.3338, islesfordhistoricalmuseum.org), located on Little Cranberry Island, explores the history of island life. The island is accessible via ferry out of Northeast or Southwest Harbor.

Park Headquarters, located on Route 233 near Eagle Lake, isn't something you need to know about, except that it serves as the park's visitor center in winter.

Ranger Programs & For Kids

Be sure to check online or at the visitor center to view the current schedule of ranger-led programs. You'll find a wide variety of regularly scheduled educational walks, bike rides, and even a photography tour. Most of the programs are free of charge. The knowledge and enthusiasm exhibited by park rangers make activities—from hiking to stargazing—more exciting and interesting. If you have an extra hour or two and aren't sure what to do, you cannot go wrong with a ranger program.

Kids of all ages are invited to become Junior Rangers. You can complete the booklet (available at the visitor center, nature center, or any campground) on your own or check the online park calendar to see if there will be a Junior Ranger Station during your visit. Acadia also offers numerous children's programs exploring the park's ecology, geography, and history. Families also enjoy playing at Sand Beach, picking blueberries, hiking, or taking a boat tour. I've seen kids on the ladder trails. I'd suggest starting with Mansell Mountain and see how that goes. There's a point of no return on these things, and you obviously don't want to have a panic attack (kids or adults). You also might want to check out the park's website to learn more about Acadia Quest, a new family-oriented program.

Flora & Fauna

Many of Acadia's picturesque attractions are named for their occupants: Seal Harbor, Beaver Pond, Eagle Lake, and Otter Cliffs. All these creatures reside in the park (although "otter" areas were named for river dwellers, not playful sea otters). Fortunate visitors might spot moose, black bear, red fox, porcupine, deer, whale, sea urchin, starfish, or lobster while exploring the park. Black flies and mosquitoes are two pests you'd rather not encounter on vacation, but if you plan on traveling between May and June, chances are you'll be greeted by these winged nuisances, so pack bug repellent.

Over 1,100 plant species live in Acadia, and 25 of these are state-listed rare plants. Walking about the park, you're sure to notice a wide variety of trees, wildflowers, ferns, shrubs, mosses, lichens, and freshwater plants. The favorite plant of many visitors is the wild blueberry bush. Maine is the country's number one producer of wild blueberries, and these delectable snacks can be found all over MDI. They are typically ready to pick in late summer.

Pets & Accessibility

Pets are permitted but must be kept on a leash (less than six feet). They are not allowed at Sand Beach (mid-June to mid-September), Echo Lake (mid-May to mid-September), in public buildings, at ranger-led programs, on ladder trails, at Wild Gardens of Acadia, or at Duck Harbor Campground. Pets (and humans) are not allowed to swim in any lakes used as a public water supply. They are allowed on all other trails and on the shuttles. Be sure to pick up after your pet.

Hulls Cove Visitor Center, some restrooms, carriage paths, and the Island Explorer Shuttle are wheelchair accessible. Blackwoods and Seawall Campgrounds



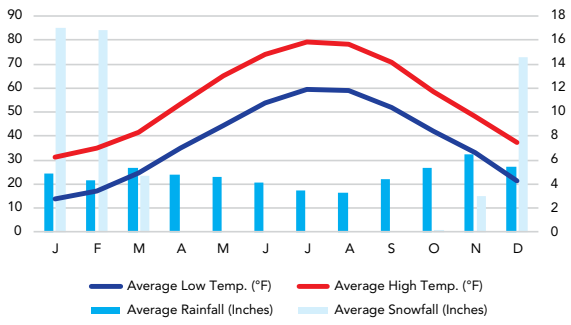
Eagle Lake in late October with no crowds

have a few accessible sites. The Wild Gardens of Acadia, Jesup Path, and carriage roads are accessible to wheelchair users, but may require some assistance. Wildwood Stables operates two wheelchair-accessible carriages. Please call the park information center at (207) 288-3338, ext. 0, if you have accessibility questions.

Weather

Acadia's weather is extremely unpredictable and can change without warning any day of the year, so come prepared. Rainfall is common every month. MDI is often shrouded in fog, particularly in summer when the variance between overnight lows and daytime highs is greatest.

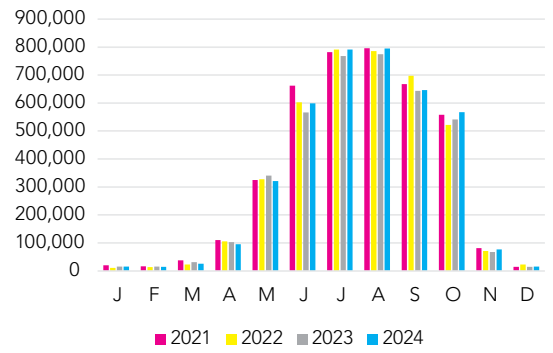
Acadia National Park: 470 ft Elevation



Visitation

Acadia in summer is about as crowded as a national park can get. The park is relatively small. Visitation is relatively high. A reliable source told me, "You do not want to come here for the 4th of July. It's nuts." Counter to that opinion, a whole lot of people want to be there for the 4th. It's The Place to be. Island Explorer Shuttle is great, but its entire purpose is to get more people to sites that are often already crowded. The "quietside" of the island is much less quiet in summer, but nothing compared to spots along Park Loop Road. Schoodic Peninsula is another nice, more peaceful alternative. Perhaps the best solution to summer crowds is bringing/renting bikes or kayaks. It's also a good idea to check the cruise ship schedule if crowds are a major concern. Shoulder seasons are another excellent alternative. I visited in late October, had lovely weather, and zero congestion.

Acadia National Park Visitation



Tips & Recommendations

About one-third of the park's visitors arrive in July or August. That's the peak rush, but it's busy from June until mid-October. Late October is cool, but crowds are sparse, trails are quiet, and trees are usually holding onto some color.

Use the Island Explorer Shuttle. You can get real-time shuttle location by using the myStop Mobile app.

It's completely understandable if you'd like to drive Park Loop Road in your own car, but if you're going to be driving around during midday, peak season, be sure to have a backup activity plan. Parking can be difficult to find, especially at popular spots like Sand Beach (found on a one-way stretch of Park Loop Road). Don't get discouraged. For this specific instance, there are several locations further down the road, where you can park and walk back to Sand Beach/Beehive Trail via Ocean Path or Gorham Mountain/Bowl Trail. And you can always park and hop on the Island Explorer Shuttle.

It isn't a guarantee, but if you want to see "thunder" at Thunder Hole, arrive in between high and low tides.

Cadillac Mountain (reservation required during peak visitation from recreation.gov) is everyone's favorite sunrise (and sunset) spot, but Ocean Path also provides many excellent sunrise viewing locations (including Thunder Hole). Or bring a headlamp and hike up Gorham Mountain.

Speaking of Gorham Mountain, if you have your heart set on hiking The Beehive or Precipice but aren't sure you can overcome the inherent fear factor, start by hiking Cadillac Cliffs (a short spur running parallel to Gorham Mountain Trail) or a less ladder-y ladder trail like Mansell Mountain or Beech Cliff.

Weather can be temperamental, but it's often short-lived, so don't let rain get you down. Come prepared, but also, if it's raining, go in the park, drive Park Loop Road, go up Cadillac Mountain (as of 2021, you'll need a reservation during the peak summer season). Views of the Acadia Coast can be more interesting in less-than-ideal weather. Plus, you never know when those clouds are going to break, allowing you to get back out there for some enjoyable hiking/exploring. But remain vigilant and watch the weather. You don't want to be up on a bald mountaintop in a thunderstorm or hiking any of the ladder trails (they're much more dangerous when wet or icy).

Check with the park about trail closures (there are routine closures for maintenance and nesting birds).

I love Acadia! It's a great big playground, filled with low-mileage, high-reward hikes that are easy to bundle thanks to a well-designed trail network and the Island Explorer Shuttle. Before going into a list of favorites, I want to let you know how I'd spend three days (strictly visiting for fun). I'd climb mountains. They're relatively small, so you can climb a few hills in a couple of days (without wearing yourself out). Maybe start with Dorr Mountain and The Beehive. Drive up Cadillac or watch the sunset over Eagle Lake from Park Loop Road. Wake up in time to catch sunrise along the coast or up Gorham Mountain, then climb Jordan Cliffs (and maybe add Sargent Mountain) before the crowds roll in. Next, head to the quietside. Hike (there are plenty of good trails over here too!), relax at Echo Lake, or poke around the coast, looking for a good place to


Giant Slide

watch the sunset. Save the best for last, hiking Precipice (if it's open) before returning home. Squeeze in Giant Slide if you have the time and energy. Or maybe Pemetic Mountain (the mountain just east of Jordan Pond). It's the next trail on my hiking list. With that said, whether you're paddling, biking, or hiking, Acadia is sure to impress.

Three days is enough time to start thinking about the one-hour drive (or ferry ride) to Schoodic Peninsula or hopping aboard the Mail Boat to get a taste of Isle au Haut, but I'd suggest sticking to Mount Desert Island for your first visit. Here's a broader menu of activities and attractions to jump-start your planning.

Easy Hikes: Bar Island (2.0 miles), Ocean Path (4.4), Summit Path (0.3)
Moderate Hikes: Gorham Mountain (2.8 miles), Bubble Rock (1.0)
Strenuous Hikes: Giant Slide (4.6 miles), Sargent Mountain (many routes), Penobscot (3.7),
Extreme Hikes: Precipice (2.1 miles), Beehive (1.6), Ladder/Dorr (3.3+), Jordan Cliffs/Penobscot (3.1+)
Family Activities: Become Junior Rangers, ride the ferries, hike to Bar Island, play at Sand Beach, watch the waves at Thunder Hole, climb to Bubble Rock, bike the carriage roads, play at Echo Lake Beach, paddle one of the inland lakes or ponds
Guided Tours: Say Kayak (acadiafun.com), Bike Tour (acadiabike.com), Trolley Tour (olistrolley.com), Rock Climbing Class (climbacadia.com)
Rainy Day Activities: Drive Park Loop Road, stop at the visitor center, explore Abbe Museum, Drive to Schoodic Peninsula (and Schoodic Institute), explore Bar Harbor, dine at Jordan Pond
History Enthusiasts: Sieur de Monts Spring, Baker Island Cruise (207.288.2386), Isleford Historical Cruise (barharborcruises.com or take the ferry)
Sunset Spots: Cadillac Mountain, Park Loop Road pullout above Eagle Lake, Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse, Indian Point
Sunrise Spots: Cadillac Mountain, Ocean Path (Sand Beach, Thunder Hole, Boulder Beach, Otter Cliff), Gorham Mountain, Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse
Wildlife: Dive-In Theater Boat Cruise (divered.com), Bar Harbor Whale Watching (barharborwhales.com), Frenchman Bay Cruise (downeastwindjammer.com)

Want More?

Check out stoneroadpress.com/more for suggestions on how to spend your time in the parks, sample road trips, non-National-Park public land destinations, and a few useful tools I couldn't provide in print.



Your Guide to the National Parks is...

Your dashboard companion • featuring large maps with all the highlights, favorite lists for each park, and hiking tables

Your family vacation planner • including helpful tips and recommendations, kid-friendly activities, and ranger programs

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"Your Guide to the National Parks is quite frankly, amazing."

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