



# 102 National Park Attractions

America's Most Awe-Inspiring Natural  
Wonders and Historic Monuments

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# 102 National Park Attractions

This content is designed for information purposes only. Consult a AAA Travel counselor at 800-847-8091 before you schedule a park visit or check the [National Park Service website](#) for the latest information, hours and dates of operation, tour availability and more.

## America's Most Awe-Inspiring Natural Wonders and Historic Monuments

It's called America the Beautiful for a reason. From sea to shining sea, our nation is packed with majestic mountains, great lakes and other geological wonders. The glaciers of Alaska are a truly unbelievable sight, rivaled only by the great redwoods of California and the mammoth cave systems of Kentucky. In 1916, then President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill to establish the National Park Service, a federal agency tasked with the preservation

of the natural and historic objects and wildlife in America's most impressive lands. Today, the National Park Service oversees the use and conservation of 417 sites on 84 million acres of land, including 129 historical parks, 87 national monuments and 59 national parks for recreation. In honor of the National Park Service's 102nd year in operation, Your AAA brings you 102 of the most jaw-dropping and celebrated arenas throughout its seven beautiful regions.

## 102 National Park Attractions

### Alaska Region

By Tara Baukus Mello

Alaska has certainly earned its nickname as the Last Frontier. The largest state – at more than nine times the size of New England – has eight national parks. Of the eight, four (Gates of the Arctic, Lake Clark, Katmai and Kobuk Valley) have no inroads and are accessible only by bush plane, while one – Glacier Bay – can only be reached by boat and is a common cruise ship stop. For those who wish to see Alaska on their own by flying into Anchorage and renting a car, three national parks are easily accessible and should be stops on any Alaska road trip.

#### Denali National Park

Seeing Denali, the tallest mountain in North

America at 20,310 feet, on a single trip to Alaska is truly a roll of the dice, as it's shrouded in clouds about two-thirds of the time. But when you do see it, it is beyond spectacular. On a clear day, you can see this massive mountain from Anchorage, 130 miles south. To really get a feel for its size, **book a flightseeing trip** out of Anchorage or the eclectic town of Talkeetna. For the ultimate experience, choose a trip that circles Denali and lands on a glacier within the park.

The 92-mile-long **Denali Park Road** is the only road among the 6 million acres that comprise this park. Private vehicles can only drive the first 15 miles, which is paved with numerous turn-

outs for scenic photos. To go further, increasing your chances of seeing wildlife and the Denali peak, take a park bus. The five-hour tour takes visitors to mile 27, while the eight-hour tour goes to mile 62, weather permitting. Traveling the full 92 miles with all stops is a 12-hour tour, which includes lunch as well as time in Kantishna, an old gold-mining town.

### Kenai Fjords National Park

Nearly 40 glaciers flow into the massive Harding Icefield, creating a spectacular landscape where mountains, ice and ocean meet. The only part of the park accessible by road is **Exit Glacier**, located near the scenic town of Seward. Take the mile-long paved trail loop from the parking area to view the glacier and the riverlike outwash plain at its base. To see the deep blue glacier ice up close, traverse 1 mile on the Edge of the Glacier trail.

Much of Kenai Fjords is accessible by water, so **take a boat tour** from Seward harbor to get a different perspective, potentially seeing whales and other marine life. There are five fjord tours that range from 3 1/2 to 8 1/2 hours, but only six-hour or longer tours offer views of an active tidewater glacier. The daylong cruise will bring you up-close to three active glaciers, where you'll likely see ice chunks break away and have close encounters with whales and other wildlife.

### Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

With some of the largest volcanoes in North America, Wrangell-St. Elias is the largest of



*A Denali Air flight tour skirts Denali peaks.*

all 59 national parks – equal in size to six Yellowstones. It is in a rural part of Alaska, northeast of Anchorage. Travel about 200 miles from Anchorage to the park's main visitor center, Copper Center. Take in the special exhibits, including displays about the Ahtna Native people. Located nearby are longer day hikes that offer spectacular views of the **Wrangell mountain range**, the **Tonsina River** and the unique **Tolsona mud volcanoes**.

For the more adventurous, head deeper into the park on **McCarthy Road**, a 60-mile-long gravel route. At the end of the road is the Kennecott Visitor Center, located in the historic Blackburn School and a hub for ranger-led history talks and nature walks. From there, take the shuttle (summer only) the final 5 miles to the historic town of Kennecott, where workers mined copper in the early 1900s.

## Intermountain Region

By Pamela Hunt and Roberto X. Cruz

Home to the first U.S. national park – Yellowstone – the Intermountain Region of the U.S. National Park Service is loaded with mountain ranges and iconic parks like Grand Canyon, Glacier and more. There is no shortage of things to do in this vast, rocky landscape.

### Arizona

Grand Canyon National Park in northwest

Arizona needs no introduction. This 1.2-million acre park has been the subject of some of the most gorgeous photographs ever taken. In plain terms, it's huge; the villages at the North Rim and South Rim are 215 miles apart.

During your visit, **stand 4,000 feet over the Colorado River** on the Grand Canyon Skywalk, a horseshoe-shaped pedestrian bridge with a



*Horseshoe Bend at Grand Canyon National Park.*

glass walkway that juts 70 feet over the edge of the Grand Canyon's West Rim in Arizona. Afraid of heights? Don't sweat it. The 1.2 million-pound bridge can withstand the weight of 70 Boeing 747 airliners.

Located on the South Rim, the Grand Canyon Village is one of the more crowded places in the park because it's a main entrance and contains much of the lodging available in this area. It's also where you will find **Yavapai Point**, one of the most spectacular places to view the canyon. Museums, shops and tour companies can also be found here.

Twenty-five miles from the Grand Canyon Village, **Desert View Drive** offers amazing views of the canyon and Colorado River, as well as a watchtower designed by architect Mary Colter. It is said the views extend for 100 miles on a clear day.

Of course, Grand Canyon is not the only national park in Arizona, despite what the state's nickname – the Grand Canyon State – might lead you to believe. Petrified Forest National Park in northeast Arizona encompasses scrubland filled with petrified wood. The northern section extends into the colorful Painted Desert. Hike to newly opened areas like the **Red Basin** while you're there, but remember to bring plenty of water.

Located outside of the Tucson in southeast Arizona, Saguaro National Park is named after the giant saguaro cactus, which is found in abundance throughout the area. Several scenic trails, like the 8.3-mile **Cactus Forest Loop**, lead to spectacular views and sites where prehistoric rock carvings called petroglyphs can be found.

## Colorado

Gunnison National Park in western Colorado contains 12 miles of the Black Canyon, so named because parts of it receive only 33 minutes of sun each day. Visitors frequent the trails that run along the rims to see the canyon's dramatic sides, particularly the 2,250-foot-tall, striated **Painted Wall**, the tallest sheer cliff in Colorado.

Most people associate Colorado with top-notch skiing, but there are other ways to hit the slopes, too. Relive childhood memories – albeit in the sand, not snow – by **sandboarding or sand sledding** at Great Sand Dunes National Park in southern Colorado. The park is home to the largest dunes in North America, many of which tower over 700 feet high.

Mesa Verde National Park in southwest Colorado is best known for its well-preserved ancient Pueblo cliff dwellings. **Cliff Palace**, the largest known cliff dwelling in the United States, is a must-see attraction for visitors.

Rocky Mountain National Park is located in Northeast Colorado between Estes Park and Grand Lake. The massive mountainous region is 415 square miles in size. The 48-mile **Trail Ridge Road** between Estes Park and Grand Lake winds through the park's forests and tundra, with 11 miles of the road above tree line. Opportunities to view the park's wildlife – including bighorn sheep and mule deer – are abundant, and the scenic views are spectacular. Though it doesn't take long to drive the entire stretch, it is recommended that visitors allot at least a half-day to enjoy this road.



*Bear Lake at Rocky Mountain National Park.*

For those who don't find the Trail Ridge Road exhilarating enough, the 11-mile-long **Old Fall River Road** might do the trick. When opened in 1920, the road was the first to offer access to Rocky Mountain National Park's high country. The gravel surface, hairpin turns and steep grade make this a slow-going drive, but one worth the struggle due to the outstanding scenery and close-up wildlife viewing in the area.

## Montana

Another big boy is Glacier National Park in northwest Montana. The park, which features over a dozen active glaciers, covers more than 1 million acres. Many guests prefer **guided tours** of the park, allowing experts to share their knowledge. Whether by bus, boat, on foot or on horseback, guided tours can show visitors the best parts of Glacier National Park.

The 50-mile **Going-to-the-Sun Road** is perhaps the most popular destination in the park. To traverse the entire road takes approximately two hours, not accounting for photo stops. Though some of the road is open year-round, the alpine portion is closed in the wintertime and opens sometime in late spring when the snow has been removed. There are vehicle-size restrictions for this road; visitors are encouraged to check the park's website for information.

Visitors should also head to **Logan Pass**, which at 6,646 feet is the highest paved elevation in the park. It's well-known for its blanket of wildflowers that bloom each spring and summer.



Logan Pass in Glacier National Park.

## New Mexico

Though the mention of a scenic view usually brings to mind a vast, open landscape, the **Big Room** at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in southeastern New Mexico is an exception. This enormous 8.2-acre chamber is located 1 1/4 miles down the cave system's Natural Entrance Trail. Several features, such as the cave-popcorn-covered **Lion's Tail** and the dangling **Sword of Damocles** – two well-known stalactites – as well as numerous fossils and side caverns lend this underground treasure an otherworldly feel.

## Texas

Big Bend National Park in west Texas is the largest protected area of the Chihuahuan Desert. It has hundreds of species of plants, birds and reptiles. Visit the **Fossil Discovery Exhibit** to see some of the most impressive fossil finds in the park, including dinosaur skulls and sea creatures that date back 130 million years.

Another west Texas treasure, Guadalupe Mountains National Park, is home to the highest point in the Lone Star State, **Guadalupe Peak**. See the ruins of an old stagecoach station at the Pine Springs Visitor Center.

## Utah

Located in eastern Utah, about seven hours by car from Las Vegas and not far from the Colorado border, Arches National Park is famous for its more than 2,000 natural sandstone arches – the largest concentration in the world. Deep rusty red in color and formed in all shapes and sizes (the most famous are



Double Arch in Arches National Park.

the 305-foot **Landscape Arch** and the oft-photographed **Delicate Arch**), they are easily viewed on an 18-mile scenic road that takes about four hours to explore.

Bryce Canyon National Park in southwest Utah has a stunning array of natural **red rock amphitheaters** that will blow your mind. These natural structures, known as hoodoos, were formed by frost and stream erosion and sit almost 9,000 feet above sea level.

Near Moab, in southeast Utah, Canyonlands National Park features a desert landscape carved into canyons, mesas and buttes by the Colorado and Green rivers. Major sites include **Island in the Sky**, a massive mesa with amazing views, and **the Needles**, tall rock pinnacles that tower over the desert.

Capitol Reef National Park, in south-central Utah, is a long, narrow park known for the **Waterpocket Fold**, a rocky ridge that runs for nearly 100 miles. A line of cliffs with dome-shaped formations, much like those found on capitol buildings, gives the park its name.

Last but certainly not Utah's least, Zion National Park in the southwestern portion of the state is a 229-square-foot park popular from April to October. Free shuttle service is provided during these months to its most renowned attraction, the half-mile-deep **Zion Canyon**. Guided horse tours of the park are available and guests who prefer solitude can explore the Kolob Canyon, about 40 miles north of the namesake cliffs. It's quieter than other parts of the park, and with its soaring red sandstone cliffs and waterfalls providing a cooling mist, **Kolob Canyon**

provides visitors an astounding place to relax and take in the wilderness.

## Wyoming

Named America's first national park in 1872, Yellowstone National Park attracts over 4 million visitors every year. Spread across nearly 3,469 square miles in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, the park offers visitors a glimpse at some of the West's most famous fauna, such as grizzlies, buffalo and wolves.

Guests also marvel at evidence of the Earth's geothermal activity with the park's bubbling hot springs and gushing geysers. One major park attraction is the **Grand Prismatic Spring**. This enormous 160-degree hot spring emits a cornucopia of colors courtesy of the heat-loving bacteria that live in its waters. It's an incredible photo op, for sure, and only a 25-minute drive from the iconic geyser **Old Faithful**, which has erupted every 44 to 125 minutes since 2000.



*The Narrows gorge in Zion National Park.*

## Midwest Region

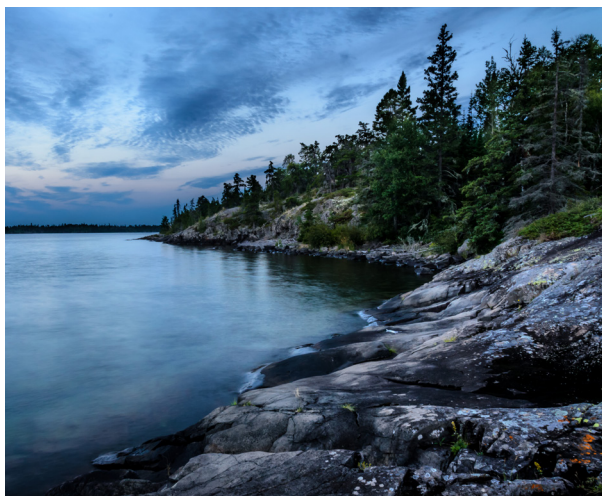
By Roberto X. Cruz and Pamela Hunt

With 57 National Park Service sites in 13 states, the Midwest Region is home to some of the most impressive natural and historic American wonders. Rock and roll at Badlands National Park, visit the home of the 16th president of the United States, and explore one of the most

intricate cave systems in the world in this region, which is far from flyover country.

## Arkansas

After hiking the trails in Hot Springs National Park or touring the National Historic Landmark



*Isle Royale National Park.*

District of Bathhouse Row, visitors can rejuvenate themselves with a spa day featuring the natural hot springs for which the town of Hot Springs is known. The curative properties of the mineral-rich, steaming-hot waters an hour southwest of Little Rock have been celebrated by Native Americans for centuries, and this geothermal wonder has been under the protection of the National Park Service since 1832, becoming an official park in 1921. **Buckstaff Bathhouse** is the park's oldest, having opened in 1912.

### Illinois

Head south from Chicago to Springfield to find the only **home former President Abraham Lincoln** ever owned. This slice of history is open to the public for tours and is popular among youth groups. Guests can learn about the lives of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln from the home he lived in until he led America through the trials of the Civil War.

### Indiana

With 15,000 acres of protected shoreline, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore in northwest Indiana is as beautiful as it is vast. **View the Chicago skyline** in the distance as you relax on the sandy beaches and then explore the surrounding marshlands and jack pine forests.

### Iowa

The **Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail**

commemorates the first expedition across the western portion of the United States. The trail, which begins in Illinois and ends in Oregon, passes through the great state of Iowa along its 3,700-mile path. The trail has hiking, boating and even horseback riding at various locations along the way.

### Kansas

The Sunflower State is home to several preserved military fortresses that date back to the mid-19th century. These include **Fort Larned National Historic Site**, with sandstone buildings that tell the story of the Indian Wars era, and **Fort Scott National Historic Site**, which protected what was the edge of the American settlement in 1850.

### Michigan

The remote wilderness at Isle Royale National Park is spread over a group of islands in Lake Superior, near the border between Michigan and Canada. Cars are not allowed, so many visitors use boats to get around. Wildlife includes moose and wolves. Guests can **cold-water dive** to explore more than 25 shipwrecks scattered through the area.

### Minnesota

The watery byways that render Voyageurs National Park in northern Minnesota inaccessible during the summer months become icy highways when the rivers and lakes freeze over. Visitors can **zip around on a snowmobile** or explore the tranquil forest trails on cross-country skis or snowshoes. Rainy Lake Visitors Center is open year-round and offers free Nordic ski rentals in both child and adult sizes.

### Missouri

Named the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial until 2018, the Gateway Arch National Park in St. Louis was established to celebrate the first government west of the Mississippi River and the fight against slavery that began with the landmark Dred Scott v. Sandford court case. Come to the 91-acre park to lay eyes on the famous **Gateway Arch**, a 630-foot-tall catenary that has become an icon of the Midwest.



## Nebraska

Along the grassy plains of Nebraska, visitors will find **Agate Fossil Beds National Monument**, where fossils that date back some 20 million years were found. At the dig sites at Carnegie Hill and University Hill, archaeologists have found fossils that belong to the ancestors of horses, rhinos and beavers.

## North Dakota

Theodore Roosevelt National Park, named for the former president who once resided on these lands, is located in western North Dakota. It constitutes three distinct and unconnected sections. Visit the park's **Elkhorn Ranch Unit** to see the solitude the former president enjoyed as a rancher in the Dakotas and check out the 36-mile **Scenic Loop Drive** for pullouts where visitors can see remarkable views and wildlife like bison, elk and prairie dogs.

## Ohio

Cuyahoga National Park follows the Cuyahoga River between Akron and Cleveland, offering miles of hiking trails, waterfalls, a scenic railroad and a restored section of the Erie Canal. Top attractions at the park – which is perfect for a fall getaway – include the 65-foot-high **Brandywine Falls** and the geological wonder that is the **Ritchie Ledges**.

## South Dakota

Badlands National Park is a massive 240,000-acre mountainscape in southwest South Dakota.

Many visitors drive cars or campers to the park, but guided bus tours are available. It is home to many animals, including bighorn sheep, bison, elk and mule deer. These creatures can be seen and **photographed** from roads and hiking trails throughout the park.

What's more, numerous fossilized remains of saber-toothed tigers, dinosaurs and other creatures from the past have been discovered in Badlands. Visitors can **watch as paleontologists work** to preserve and identify recently found items.

Because the park is far from cities and other forms of artificial lights, **stargazing** is particularly good here. In the summer, park rangers offer the Night Sky Program, pointing out constellations and making telescopes available so visitors can see the stars more closely.

If you make the trek into the Badlands, be sure to check out the **Badlands Wall**, a 100-mile-long ridge of rugged cliffs that cut through the park and contain many trails to explore.

Wind Cave National Park is another extraordinary area in South Dakota. One of the longest and most complex cave systems in the world – and one of America's oldest national parks – **Wind Cave** is 10 miles north of the town of Hot Springs in the southwest part of the state. This cavern features a type of calcite formation known as boxwork; approximately 95 percent of the known boxwork in the world is found here. These honeycomb-shaped rock formations are truly a sight to see.



*Badlands National Park.*

## Wisconsin

Another treasure in Lake Superior, the Apostle Islands are a group of more than 20 islands off the coast of the Bayfield Peninsula in northern Wisconsin. The 12 miles of mainland on the

so-called Jewels of Lake Superior are great for camping. Great Lakes **sea caves** can be found along the shorelines of the islands, and visitors can hike to them when they freeze in the winter for a truly astounding sight.

# National Capital Region

By Roberto X. Cruz

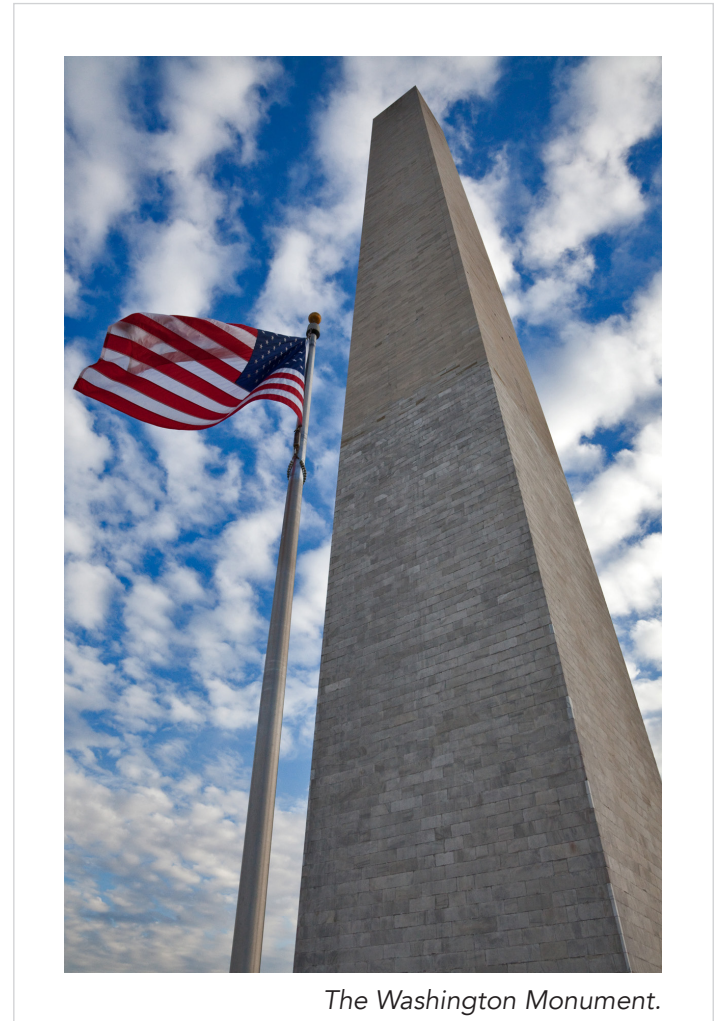
Our nation's capital is known for its historic landmarks that honor past presidents and war heroes. The monuments alone make a trip to the greater Washington, D.C., area a must for every American. Even if you've been there, done that, chances are you haven't seen all the region has to offer.

## District of Columbia

On the west end of the famed National Mall is the 30-foot-marble statue of the 16th president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. The **Lincoln Memorial** features inscriptions of two iconic speeches (the Gettysburg Address and Lincoln's second inaugural address) delivered by the man known as the "Savior of the Union." The statue and the Greek-style temple that surrounds it are certainly a must-see attraction for first-time visitors to the area.

Also on the National Mall, between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument, the **World War II Memorial** honors the over 16 million who served in the war. Visited by more than 4 million Americans each year, the memorial is comprised of 56 stone pillars, two arches, bronze sculptures and a fountain in the center. It's a beautiful sight that represents the fight against tyranny around the world.

East of the World War II Memorial, the 555-foot-tall **Washington Monument** is the world's tallest stone structure, dedicated to the first president of the United States and commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, George Washington. Completed in 1884, construction of the monument was halted during the Civil War, and visitors can see where construction stopped



*The Washington Monument.*

and picked up again based on the shading of the marble. The monument itself is closed until spring 2019 so repairs can be made to the elevator inside, but guests can still see the towering obelisk from the row of food trucks that line the neighboring streets.

Ever since John Adams moved there in 1800, every U.S. president has lived at 1600

Pennsylvania Ave., aka the **White House**. The home took eight years to build and has been renovated many times, including expansions of the West Wing, construction of the Oval Office and a rebuild after the British set the mansion on fire during the War of 1812. No matter your political leanings, the White House is an incredible piece of American architecture and a symbol of freedom everyone can get behind.

Last but not least, the **Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial** sits on 7.5 acres on the National Mall. It is designed to be accessible to those with disabilities, similar to the 32nd U.S. president, who suffered from and championed the fight against polio. The memorial is comprised of four outdoor rooms that chronicle Roosevelt's 12 years in office. It features sculptures of the former president with his dog Fala and a bronze statue of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt – the only first lady depicted in a presidential memorial.

### Maryland

Located in Dorchester County, on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the **Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park** is a 480-acre insight into the life of a former slave who risked her life to help countless others escape the horrors of slavery. At the heart of the site, surrounded by farms and marshes, a visitors center hosts exhibits, a research library and more to honor this noble abolitionist.

Three hours southeast of Washington, D.C., **Assateague Island National Seashore** is a 37-mile-long barrier island, primarily in Maryland but shared with Virginia. The island is on the eastern shore of the Delmarva Peninsula and is the largest natural barrier island in the Mid-Atlantic United States. Visitors can soak up the natural beauty of the island on a kayak, a 4-mile paved bike path or on a guided tour. Be on the lookout for wild horses, which make for a truly Instagram-worthy photo op.

### Virginia

There is arguably no place better for fall foliage than **Shenandoah National Park** in Virginia. The 105-mile Skyline Drive gives visitors the opportunity to drive the entire park through the

Blue Ridge Mountains. The road has several access points to the famed Appalachian Trail and 75 overlooks to stop and take in the impressive Shenandoah Valley to the west and the Piedmont to the east. The road also provides access to campgrounds, visitors centers and resorts.

**Colonial National Historical Park** protects several historic sites in what was the Colony of Virginia, including the first English settlement at Jamestown and the Yorktown Battlefield, where Washington and his army of American and French troops defeated Gen. Charles Lord Cornwallis' British forces in the autumn of 1781. The park, which attracts 3 million history buffs every year also includes the 23-mile Colonial Parkway, which runs through the historic Colonial Williamsburg district.

### West Virginia

While neighboring Virginia has the most mileage of the massive **Appalachian Trail** – which spans 14 states and runs from Georgia to Maine – West Virginia shares 20 miles with its eastern brethren along the Virginia border and has 4 more miles of its own. It is also home to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which has its headquarters in the historic town of Harpers Ferry. Those interested in hiking a small portion of the trail can hike the smaller stretch to and from this quiet little town.



*Shenandoah National Park.*

# Northeast Region

By Ashley Richardson

When it comes to U.S. national parks, most people tend to think of the big guys out West. The red dusty earth of the Grand Canyon, the sprawling acres of forests, lakes and mountains in Yellowstone – those are just a few that come to mind. But there are so many beautiful landscapes and spaces right here in our collective backyard.

## Acadia National Park

If you're looking for amazing coastal views and dramatic landscapes, it doesn't get much better than this. The first national park east of the Mississippi River, Acadia National Park remains one of the most breathtaking around. Steep slopes rise above the rocky Maine shore for unbelievable coastal highs, including **Cadillac Mountain**, which at 1,530 feet is the highest point on the U.S. Atlantic coast.

There are also more than 120 miles of hiking trails to explore by foot. You can spend the day

discovering the ocean shoreline or go camping and spend the weekend viewing other beautiful landscapes, like woodlands, lakes, ponds and granite-domed mountains. And when you're tired of walking, there's always the option to travel by bike and explore historic carriage roads with scenic stop-off points. No matter what you choose, taking in the jagged coastlines at Acadia will lift any spirit.

## Appalachian National Scenic Trail

Over 2,180 miles long, the Appalachian Trail runs from Maine to Georgia. There are few better-known – or longer – hikes on the planet. It takes hikers months to walk the entire network. But don't worry: For those with day jobs, there are shorter hikes along the trail that can be (almost) as rewarding.

New Yorkers can climb **Anthony's Nose** for a half-day scenic hike (approximately 2 1/2 hours round trip) with an overlook at Bear Mountain Bridge



*The Maine coastline at Acadia National Park.*

Image credit: Shutterstock



*The Delaware Water Gap.*

## Delaware Water Gap

There's so much more to the Garden State than the Jersey Shore – and the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is a prime example. Over 70,000 acres of waterfalls, streams and forests stretch across the Delaware River, making this national park perfect for New Jersey residents looking to explore the outdoors close to home.

Paddlers can coast down the river between low-forested mountains, while anglers can wade in the trout streams. And hikers can spend the day navigating the moderate climb up **Mount Minsi**, where the top yields panoramic views into the spectacular 1,000-foot-deep Delaware Water Gap. The area even has 28 miles of the aforementioned **Appalachian Trail**. No matter where you go, the mountaintops, hemlock forests, tumbling waters and fertile floodplains are all home to bountiful wildlife. So take the time to try and spot some of the beautiful creatures as you connect with nature away from phones, buildings and the bustle of New Jersey's cities.

## New England Trail

The 215-mile long **New England National Scenic Trail** runs through 41 communities in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Great for soaking up scenic views, this route highlights a range of diverse landscapes and ecosystems. Hikers can expect to traverse mountains and summits and wind through paths that navigate forests, steep river valleys, quiet streams, vernal pools, lakes and waterfalls. Travelers can get a feel for New England culture as the trail cuts through farmlands, scenic vistas and historic Colonial villages and landmarks.

## North Country Trail

New York is home to many national parks, historical sites and monuments – some of the most notable are Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. But if you're looking for a little less history and a little more nature, the Northeast is home to a stretch of a gorgeous scenic trail that spans seven states.

The New York region of the North Country Trail is breathtaking (especially in autumn with its endless hues of beautiful oranges, yellow and reds). But

with gorgeous views of the distant New York City skyline. And some of the most beautiful stretches of trail can be found in New Hampshire's **White Mountains**, where 161 miles of exposed terrain stand above tree line for uninterrupted views of surrounding mountain ranges.

## Blackstone River Valley

The **Blackstone River** powered America's first successful cotton mill in Pawtucket, R.I., initiating a chain reaction that spurred the Industrial Revolution. Guests are welcome to explore those very same waters by paddling, visiting museums, going on tours and walking around the small towns and villages of the valley. Stop by one of the town's farmers markets for fresh produce, hike peaceful trails or enjoy the outdoor recreation. And be sure to explore the history that shaped Blackstone Valley and the rest of the United States.

## Cape Cod National Seashore

From Provincetown to Chatham, the Cape Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts is where 40 miles of protected white beaches meet refreshing saltwater waves, and visitors and tourists can swim or go fishing for striped bass. Off the shore, wild cranberry bogs, marshes, ponds and uplands sprawl across the cape, ready to be explored. Hike, paddle and discover the terrain with a ranger. Or bike the trails in blissful solitude, where you'll likely stumble upon one of the many lighthouses scattered across the Cape. You can tour the **Highland Light** in North Truro, the Cape's oldest lighthouse, for \$6.

you can find great outdoor adventures at any time of the year. The 2.2-mile **Mitchellville Gorge** (on the Finger Lakes Trail portion) is just one of the trail's highlights. Visitors can hike along the rim of a small scenic gorge, walk through a vineyard or meander along old, rustic railroad tracks. If you're looking for a weekend hike, the **Onondaga**

**Trail** is a great choice. You'll walk through mixed hardwood and coniferous forests, waterfalls, streams and ponds, a 19th-century cemetery and more. As you stroll the trails, enjoy the beautiful wildflowers and stay quiet enough to catch glimpses of animals living in the forest, like deer, coyote, foxes and songbirds.

## Pacific-West Region

By Roberto X. Cruz, Pamela Hunt, Vanessa Young and Donna Heiderstadt

The Pacific-West Region is a truly diverse area of national parks. There are wondrous mountain ranges, tropical getaways, barren desert lands and so much more. The state of California alone is home to nine parks, each with its own unique landscapes and wildlife. Find out what some of the best attractions are in the parks out West.

### California

Channel Islands National Park is spread over five islands off the Southern California coast. Activities include hiking, visiting lighthouses, exploring sea caves and observing wildlife. While you're there, go seal watching on **San Miguel Island**, where seals and sea lions tend to hang out.

**See the stars** illuminate one of the darkest night skies in America at Death Valley National Park, on the border of California and Nevada. When temperatures cool in the winter and spring, park rangers guide visitors across moonlit sand dunes and various stargazing events are held at night. But beware: Death Valley, the driest and hottest national park, gets less than 2 1/2 inches of rain per year and once hit 134 degrees.

Named for the spiky trees with haphazard branches and dagger-like leaves that thrive in the Mojave Desert, Joshua Tree National Park is an arid wonderland of scraggly silhouettes (the tallest tree tops out at 40 feet) set against a vast and unforgiving landscape. The park prides itself on **world-class rock climbing**, with more than 8,000 climbing routes available.

In the southern Sierra Nevada, the Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks stand side by side.



Death Valley National Park at night.

Together, they form almost 1 million acres of unrivaled beauty. Attractions at these parks, jointly administered by the National Park Service, include the namesake **Kings Canyon glacier**, which is more than 1 mile deep. Redwood Mountain Grove in Kings Canyon is also home to world's largest grove of giant sequoia trees.

You don't need to hit Hawaii to see a volcano and Lassen Volcanic National Park is proof. The park, in northeast California, is known for Lassen Peak, the largest lava dome on Earth. Come in early spring to take photos of **snow-capped volcanoes** at this incredible park.

About 80 miles southeast of San Jose, Pinnacles National Park is broken up into two regions, which are not connected by any roads. Look for red-legged frogs as you explore **Bear Gulch Cave** or **Balconies Cave**, which are both seasonally open to the public.

You'll find some of the largest trees on Earth at

the Redwood National and State Parks on the coast of Northern California. Because this park contains both inland and seacoast areas, visitors can **discover a wide range of animals**, from the herds of elk in the meadows to the gray whales migrating off the Klamath River Overlook. Sea birds are also abundant near the water. The popular **Coastal Drive** weaves through towering redwoods, along the Klamath River, and follows the coastline. Landslides have closed all but an 8-mile stretch, but it's still an impressive stretch.

Perhaps the most well-known park in California, Yosemite National Park consists of 750,000 acres in the western Sierra Nevada. Consider **a guided tour** of Yosemite to see as much of its granite cliffs, waterfalls, sequoia groves and glaciers as possible. Just be ready to mingle – the park is visited by more than 4 million nature buffs every year.

## Hawaii

Located on Maui, Haleakala (meaning “house of the sun”) National Park has the world’s largest dormant volcano. Rich with cultural history and natural beauty, the 30,000-acre park offers travelers guided horseback rides, camping areas and the chance to see animal species found nowhere else. Winding roads lead to the 10,023-foot peak of Haleakala, giving you the choice of hiking, biking or driving up the mountain. Combine methods by taking a ride to the top and then biking down from the summit. Whichever option you choose, the view from the top into **Haleakala Crater** looks more like a vast moonscape than a tropical island and is best enjoyed at sunrise or sunset.

At once fascinating and terrifying, volcanoes



Crater Lake at Crater Lake National Park.

are spectacular displays of nature. The Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park is home to two of them, Mauna Loa and Kilauea, which is the world's most active. The dry lava lake of **Kilauea Iki** is safe to cross, but the steam that rises up from cracks remind you that a violent eruption once took place here. Begin at the Kilauea Overlook and follow the trail through rainforest. As you descend into the crater, imagine the lava flow that occurred only about 60 years ago.

## Nevada

On the eastern edge of Nevada, near the Utah border, Great Basin National Park is known for the **Lehman Caves** underneath the nearly 14,000-foot-tall Wheeler Peak. A tourist trail exists to help you explore these caves, but look out for living creatures inside, including chipmunks, spiders and some species of bats.

## Oregon

Located in the Cascade Mountains in southern Oregon, Crater Lake National Park is named after its most famous site, **Crater Lake**. This body of water was created by the collapse of the now-extinct volcano, Mount Mazama. The astounding lake is famous for its deep blue tint.

## Washington

The namesake Mount Rainier at Mount Rainier National Park is a glacier-capped stratovolcano. One of the glaciers on the mountain, **Carbon Glacier**, is the largest by volume in the lower 48 states, whereas the **Emmons Glacier** is the largest by area. Visitors can enjoy numerous trails in the park and many mountaineers attempt to summit Mount Rainier each year.

North Cascades National Park, found in northern Washington state, contains more than 300 glaciers amid its wilderness. The **North Cascades Highway** brings sightseers past many of its highlights, including the Ross Lake National Recreation Area.

Olympic National Park on Washington state's Olympic Peninsula is known for its diverse ecosystems, ranging from high peaks and lush rain forests to the Pacific coastline. With such variety, it's tough to pick one stop at this eastern Washington park, but the crystal-clear waters of **Lake Ozette** make for a fine starting point.

# Southeast Region

By Roberto X. Cruz and Pamela Hunt

The Southeast U.S. is recognized for some of the most magical theme parks in the world, but it has some of the planet's most unique landscapes. From the beaches of St. John to a massive Kentucky cave system, here are some of the best outdoor attractions in the region.

## Alabama

The Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument was established in 2017 to honor leaders of the civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King Jr. Covering about four blocks in downtown Birmingham, visitors can see the historic **A.G. Gaston Motel**, the headquarters of the campaign to integrate Birmingham and beyond.

## Florida

South of Miami, Biscayne National Park in the Florida Keys preserves Biscayne Bay and its underwater ecosystems. It also offers divers and snorkelers several places to explore along the underwater **Maritime Heritage Trail**. Though the reefs and islands are accessible only by boat, visitors can walk through the mangrove forests on the shore.

Spanglish for "Dry Turtles," Dry Tortugas National Park is 68 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico. This park offers magnificent diving, with its abundant marine life, coral reefs and shipwrecks. The main attraction on land is **Fort Jefferson**, an unfinished coastal fortress built in the 19th century. But plan ahead: This park is accessible only by seaplane.

Of course, you can't mention Florida parks without the Everglades. Everglades National Park is the largest tropical wilderness in the nation and home to some of the country's rarest animals, including the American crocodile and the Florida panther. **Look for wildlife** on a boat tour to the Ten Thousand Islands or rent a canoe or kayak to experience the verdant wetlands up close.

## Georgia

For 14 months at the end of the Civil War, the **Andersonville National Historic Site** was a



*Underwater snorkeling at Biscayne National Park.*

military prison for the Confederate Army. At one time, 45,000 Union soldiers were imprisoned here and 13,000 men died in the camp. Today, the site is the location of the National Prisoner of War Museum and is preserved to honor the memory of the fallen soldiers.

## Kentucky

Mammoth Cave National Park in central Kentucky is home to the world's longest known cave system. With more than 400 miles explored, the caves are open for **group tours** on electric-lit routes or dark routes where visitors light the way with wax-burning lanterns. "Wild" tours are available for those who like to get muddy and crawl through dusty tunnels.

## Tennessee

The most-visited park in the U.S. National Park Service, Great Smoky Mountains National Park straddles the border of Tennessee and North Carolina. The landscape includes both dense forest and meadows filled with wildflowers. Hiking, sightseeing and fly-fishing are popular activities within the park. While you're there, head to the historic **Cades Cove** district for spelunking in Gregory's Cave, the deepest cave in Tennessee.



## Virgin Islands

Virgin Islands National Park, which encompasses much of St. John as well as 5,500 acres of ocean, attracts many scuba divers and snorkelers. For land travelers, the park has miles of hiking trails

that lead through its tropical rainforest. When you're done exploring – here or anywhere – kick back and relax on **Trunk Bay Beach**, often named among the best and most beautiful beaches in the world.

# ...And More!

## Gearing up for a National Park Vacation

By Shantal Riley

America is rich in stunning, natural landscapes. For a front-row seat to an array of natural wonders, visit any one of the country's more than 400 National Park Service sites. Where you visit will determine your specific plan, but here is a quick checklist of preparations to make to ensure a smooth and safe trip.



### Stay hydrated

No matter your national park adventure, you are going to need to stay properly hydrated. Tip No. 1: Bring your own water. You don't want to be without it, and you never know how far the closest store will be. The U.S. Forest Service advises drinking water before you go hiking to stay hydrated and energized. Never drink all of your water between refills, in case of an emergency. Remember to carry empty water bottles out of the park when you leave.

Don't be fooled by the clean appearance of lakes and streams. They may contain waterborne parasites and microorganisms that can cause serious illness. You can treat stream water with chemical tablets, special filters and boiling, but none of these methods guarantee 100-percent purity.

### Plan for an emergency

The great outdoors can quickly turn into a nightmare if someone gets hurt or becomes ill. Bring a first aid kit packed with over-the-counter pain relievers, topical antibiotic cream or ointment, tweezers, antiseptics, poison-ivy soap and bandages for cuts and wounds.

### Cover your bases

Whether camping or hiking, you'll need a few basic tools. The Forest Service lists a map, compass, flashlight, knife, waterproof fire starter, whistle, warm clothes, hand sanitizer, bug

repellant and high-energy foods such as trail mix and energy bars as must-have items.

Having more than one source of light is preferable. Lanterns and headlights will come in handy. A note about flashlights: They need batteries, so bring them along.

You'll need to keep warm, too, so bring a lightweight blanket or two and a bivouac sack – or a similar, waterproof shelter – if you plan to sleep in the open air. Pack a tarp if you have a vehicle or expect rain during your stay.

### **Lather on the sunscreen**

Many national parks are located in warm weather states – think of the Grand Canyon, where temperatures can reach above 100 degrees in the summer months. The higher in altitude you go, the more you become exposed to the sun.

Young children are especially sensitive to the sun's damaging rays. Reapply kids' sunscreen every few hours. Wear a hat whenever possible, as the sun will penetrate straight through to an exposed head.

### **Dress appropriately**

National parks can produce weather extremes. Temperatures can drop to below freezing at night and turn scorching during the day. So dress appropriately. Bring a jacket, hat, gloves, a waterproof poncho or windbreaker and thermal undies. The National Park Service recommends packing an extra layer of clothing in case of extreme weather conditions.

A word to the wise: Pack a good pair of shoes. Ideally, they should be breathable, lightweight, waterproof and easy to get on.

### **Check the weather**

Check the local weather before you leave. Look ahead to the entire forecast covering your stay. Once you get to the park, make sure to stop by the visitors center. There, you'll find maps, safety tips and up-to-date information on the weather conditions.

### **Do your research**

Go to the park's website to check out the plan your visit or FAQ section. You'll learn out about fees, hours, activities, weather notices, park



terrain, wildlife, plants, local attractions and rules for pets, camping and fires. The website will also provide access to calendars and directions.

### **Make sure your gear works**

Make sure all your gear is in working order. Check batteries, flashlights, compasses and GPS devices before heading out. Bring a cellphone charger. Even if you want to unplug to be closer to nature, you'll want your cellphone charged in case you need to use it.

### **Get a decent tent**

By all means, bring a quality tent. You might need to spend a little extra money, but it will be worth it in the end when your tent doesn't blow away.

Check that you have all tent parts. Invest in a rain-fly, which will keep the tent dry from above; place a tarp or other waterproof layer underneath the tent to keep it dry from below. You can lay down another layer for cushioning. Bring the tent's set-up instructions with you.

### **Pay attention to medical conditions**

Consider who is in your travel party. Weigh their skills and fitness levels. If a certain activity might cause a condition to worsen, skip it. Bring along enough prescription medication to last through the trip. And don't forget to have fun!

# Book a National Park Trip

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Cross some breathtaking U.S. national parks off your list with the help of AAA Travel. Our experienced travel counselors can help you plan and book a visit to any and all of these natural wonders. They can also help you take advantage of amazing AAA member discounts on hotels, flights, rental cars, cruises and amazing vacation packages. Check out the links below to see all the ways AAA can help you save time, money and worry. Then call 800-847-8091 to talk to a AAA Travel counselor or visit [AAA.com/Travel](https://www.aaa.com/travel) to plan your next getaway.

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*Cathedral Lake in Yosemite National Park.*

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