

Best National Parks to Visit in the US



The United States is home to [63 official national parks](#) and over 400 protected sites, each showcasing a different side of America's natural beauty. From the geothermal wonders of Yellowstone to the towering granite walls of Yosemite, these parks tell stories of ancient geology, wildlife, and adventure.

National parks attract over 300 million visitors every year, offering everything from scenic drives and hiking trails to camping under star-filled skies. Whether you're chasing waterfalls, exploring canyons, or standing before glaciers, every park promises a unique experience.

This guide highlights the best national parks to visit in the U.S., helping you plan your next unforgettable outdoor journey, no matter the season or region you explore.

Top National Parks to Visit in the U.S.

Explore the most iconic, loved, and traveler-favorite national parks across America:

Yellowstone National Park



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- **Location:** Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho
 - **Opening Hours:** Open 24 hours year-round (some roads close in winter)
 - **Best For:** Geysers, wildlife watching, and thermal wonders
 - **Best Time to Visit:** Late April to early October

Park Detail:

Yellowstone is America's first national park and one of the world's greatest natural treasures. The park is home to over 10,000 geothermal features, including the iconic Old Faithful geyser and colorful Grand Prismatic Spring. Wildlife thrives here — from bison herds roaming the valleys to grizzly bears and wolves in the wild. Its vast landscape includes canyons, alpine rivers, and sprawling meadows that change dramatically with each season. With nearly 3,500 square miles of unspoiled wilderness, Yellowstone promises an unforgettable outdoor experience blending natural wonder, history, and adventure.

Grand Canyon National Park



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- **Location:** Arizona
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round; North Rim closed in winter
 - **Best For:** Scenic viewpoints, hiking, and photography
 - **Best Time to Visit:** March to May or September to November

Park Detail:

The Grand Canyon's vastness and beauty leave every visitor awestruck. Carved over millions of years by the Colorado River, it stretches 277 miles long and up to a mile deep. Visitors can explore panoramic vistas from the South Rim or take a quieter journey to the remote North Rim. Popular trails like Bright Angel and Rim-to-Rim offer unmatched hiking experiences. Sunrises and sunsets here are world-famous, painting the canyon in vibrant hues. Whether you're rafting the Colorado River or simply gazing from the rim, the Grand Canyon is an unmissable natural masterpiece.

Yosemite National Park



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- **Location:** California
 - **Opening Hours:** Open 24 hours daily, year-round
 - **Best For:** Waterfalls, granite cliffs, and outdoor adventure
 - **Best Time to Visit:** May to September

Park Detail:

Yosemite National Park is a symbol of America's wild beauty. Famous for landmarks like Half Dome, El Capitan, and Yosemite Falls, it attracts rock climbers, hikers, and nature lovers alike. Spring brings powerful waterfalls, while summer showcases the park's meadows and hiking trails. Visitors can explore the scenic Yosemite Valley, photograph Mirror Lake, or stargaze under pristine skies. Beyond the crowds, Tuolumne Meadows and Glacier Point offer serenity and striking alpine views. This UNESCO World Heritage Site remains one of the most inspiring landscapes on Earth.

Zion National Park



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- **Location:** Utah
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Canyoneering, scenic drives, and hiking
 - **Best Time to Visit:** March to May and September to November

Park Detail:

Zion's dramatic red cliffs and narrow slot canyons make it one of the Southwest's most photographed parks. Its centerpiece, Zion Canyon, reveals layers of ancient sandstone sculpted by the Virgin River. Adventurers flock here for The Narrows and Angels Landing, two of the most thrilling hikes in the U.S. Spring and fall bring ideal temperatures, while summer draws visitors to wade through cool canyon waters. Zion seamlessly blends adventure with serenity, where every trail leads to jaw-dropping views and unforgettable moments in nature.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park



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- **Location:** North Carolina and Tennessee
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Fall foliage, wildlife, and scenic drives
 - **Best Time to Visit:** September to early November

Park Detail:

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is America's most visited park, celebrated for its misty peaks, lush forests, and historic Appalachian charm. With more than 800 miles of trails, it's a paradise for hikers and photographers. Wildlife enthusiasts can spot black bears, deer, and wild turkeys roaming freely. The park also preserves a rich cultural history, with old homesteads and mills scattered throughout Cades Cove. Each season transforms the Smokies, from spring wildflowers to vibrant autumn leaves, offering endless beauty and peace.

Glacier National Park



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- **Location:** Montana
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round (limited winter access)
 - **Best For:** Mountain scenery, lakes, and hiking
 - **[Best Time to Visit the Glacier National Park:](#)** June to September

Park Detail:

Glacier National Park, known as the “Crown of the Continent,” features over 700 miles of hiking trails through breathtaking alpine landscapes. Visitors can drive along the iconic Going-to-the-Sun Road or explore turquoise lakes like Lake McDonald and St. Mary. The park’s glaciers, though shrinking, still carve dramatic peaks and valleys that showcase nature’s power. Wildlife such as mountain goats and grizzly bears add to its wilderness appeal. Glacier is ideal for those seeking solitude, scenic drives, and a deep connection with raw, untouched beauty.

Rocky Mountain National Park



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- **Location:** Colorado
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round (some areas close in winter)
 - **Best For:** Alpine scenery, hiking, and wildlife viewing
 - **Best Time to Visit:** June to September

Park Detail:

Rocky Mountain National Park is a Colorado gem filled with rugged peaks, clear lakes, and abundant wildlife. The park's Trail Ridge Road climbs above 12,000 feet, offering panoramic views that stretch for miles. More than 300 miles of trails invite exploration, from easy lake walks to challenging summits. Elk and moose are often spotted grazing in meadows, while wildflowers blanket the hillsides in summer. It is the perfect destination for high-altitude adventure and peaceful mountain escapes.

Grand Teton National Park



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- **Location:** Wyoming
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Photography, hiking, and mountain landscapes
 - **Best Time to Visit:** June to early October

Park Detail:

Grand Teton National Park boasts some of the most dramatic mountain scenery in the United States. The jagged Teton Range rises abruptly above Jackson Hole, creating postcard-perfect views from every angle. The park's pristine lakes, including Jenny and Jackson Lake, mirror the towering peaks above. Visitors can enjoy world-class hiking, kayaking, and wildlife spotting, from moose to bald eagles. Whether you're exploring by trail or scenic drive, Grand Teton promises serenity, adventure, and unmatched natural grandeur.

Arches National Park



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- **Location:** Utah
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Rock formations, photography, and stargazing
 - **Best Time to Visit:** April to May and September to October

Park Detail:

Arches National Park showcases over 2,000 natural stone arches formed by centuries of erosion. The iconic Delicate Arch stands as a symbol of Utah's rugged beauty. Visitors can explore dramatic landscapes filled with red rock towers, balanced stones, and deep canyons. The park's golden sunsets and clear night skies create an otherworldly atmosphere perfect for photography. Easy trails and scenic drives make it accessible for all travelers looking to witness one of nature's most extraordinary sculptures.

Acadia National Park



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- **Location:** Maine
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round (limited winter access)
 - **Best For:** Coastal scenery, hiking, and sunrise views
 - **Best Time to Visit:** May to October

Park Detail:

Acadia National Park, located on Maine's Mount Desert Island, blends rugged coastlines with dense forests and granite peaks. Cadillac Mountain, the park's crown jewel, offers the first sunrise in the United States. Visitors can enjoy scenic drives along Park Loop Road, explore charming Bar Harbor, or hike the Beehive Trail for panoramic ocean views. Acadia combines New England's maritime charm with wild beauty, making it one of the most unique and beloved national parks in America.

Bryce Canyon National Park



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- **Location:** Southern Utah
 - **Opening Hours:** Open 24 hours a day, year-round
 - **Best For:** Hoodoos, scenic viewpoints, and stargazing
 - **Best Time to Visit:** May to September

Park Detail:

Bryce Canyon National Park is famous for its otherworldly rock formations called *hoodoos*, tall, thin spires carved by centuries of erosion. The park's natural amphitheaters glow in hues of orange, red, and pink, especially at sunrise and sunset. Popular spots like Sunrise Point, Sunset Point, and Bryce Amphitheater showcase the canyon's best views. Visitors can hike the Navajo Loop Trail or take a scenic drive along the rim to admire the surreal landscape. At night, the park transforms into one of America's top stargazing destinations, thanks to its certified dark skies.

Olympic National Park



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- **Location:** Washington State
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Rainforests, coastline, and mountain scenery
 - **Best Time to Visit:** June to September

Park Detail:

Olympic National Park is a land of contrasts, from lush rainforests dripping with moss to rugged Pacific coastlines and snow-covered peaks. You can walk beneath towering trees in the Hoh Rain Forest, watch waves crash at Ruby Beach, or hike to Hurricane Ridge for sweeping mountain views. The park's vast biodiversity makes it a paradise for nature lovers. Because of its range of ecosystems, the Olympics feels like visiting three national parks in one, rainforest, mountains, and coast, all within a few hours' drive.

Everglades National Park



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- **Location:** Southern Florida
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Wildlife viewing and airboat tours
 - **Best Time to Visit:** December to April (dry season)

Park Detail:

Everglades National Park protects one of the most unique ecosystems in the world — a subtropical wilderness of slow-moving water, sawgrass marshes, and mangrove forests. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to alligators, manatees, and rare birds like the roseate spoonbill. Visitors can explore via airboat rides, kayak trails, or elevated boardwalks like the Anhinga Trail. The dry season offers fewer mosquitoes and better visibility for wildlife. As one of the largest wetlands in the world, the Everglades are essential for both ecological balance and adventure travel in South Florida.

Sequoia National Park



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- **Location:** California's Sierra Nevada Mountains
 - **Opening Hours:** Open 24 hours a day, year-round
 - **Best For:** Giant trees and scenic mountain drives
 - **Best Time to Visit:** June to September

Park Detail:

Sequoia National Park is home to the world's largest trees, massive sequoias that have stood for thousands of years. The most famous, General Sherman Tree, is the largest tree on Earth by volume. Walking among these giants in the Giant Forest feels humbling and surreal. The park also offers alpine lakes, marble caves, and stunning mountain vistas. Combined with neighboring Kings Canyon National Park, it's an incredible destination for scenic drives, hiking, and photography. In winter, the snow-covered groves create a fairytale landscape.

Haleakalā National Park



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- **Location:** Maui, Hawaii
 - **Opening Hours:** Open 24 hours a day
 - **Best For:** Sunrise views and volcanic landscapes
 - **Best Time to Visit:** April to October

Park Detail:

Haleakalā National Park rises above the clouds on the island of Maui, offering one of the most spectacular sunrise experiences in the U.S. The summit area sits above 10,000 feet, where visitors can watch the sun break through the horizon over a vast volcanic crater. The park's landscapes range from barren lava fields to tropical bamboo forests. Adventurous travelers can hike through the Haleakalā Crater or explore the lush Kipahulu District with waterfalls and coastal views. Remember to reserve a sunrise spot in advance, it is one of the most unforgettable sights in Hawaii.

Canyonlands National Park



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- **Location:** Southeastern Utah
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Desert landscapes and off-road adventures
 - **Best Time to Visit:** April to May and September to October

Park Detail:

Just a short drive from Arches, Canyonlands National Park offers a more rugged and remote desert experience. Carved by the Colorado and Green Rivers, the park's vast canyons and mesas showcase the power of erosion. Visitors can explore four distinct districts, including Island in the Sky, The Needles, The Maze, and the rivers themselves. Each district offers a unique adventure. Jeep tours, river rafting, and sunrise photography at Mesa Arch are must-dos. Canyonlands remains less crowded than its Utah neighbors, making it perfect for solitude seekers.

Joshua Tree National Park



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- **Location:** Southern California
 - **Opening Hours:** Open year-round
 - **Best For:** Desert landscapes and rock climbing
 - **Best Time to Visit:** March to May and October to November

Park Detail:

Joshua Tree National Park is where the Mojave and Colorado Deserts meet, creating a surreal landscape filled with spiky Joshua trees, giant boulders, and endless sky. The park is a favorite for rock climbers, stargazers, and photographers. Popular spots like Hidden Valley and Keys View showcase the park's beauty, while Skull Rock and Cholla Cactus Garden offer easy exploration. Its proximity to Palm Springs and Los Angeles makes it an accessible desert escape. The quiet evenings under the Milky Way make Joshua Tree a must for anyone craving peace and nature.

Best Time to Visit U.S. National Parks



The best time to visit national parks in the U.S. depends on the kind of experience you are after, wildflowers, fall colors, snow-dusted peaks, or summer adventures. Each season offers something unique across the country's diverse landscapes.

Spring (March to May)

Spring is one of the most rewarding times to visit many national parks. Snow begins to melt, waterfalls roar back to life, and wildflowers bloom across valleys and meadows. Parks like Great Smoky Mountains, Zion, and Joshua Tree are especially stunning during this season. The weather is mild, and the crowds are smaller compared to summer, making it ideal for hiking and photography. Desert parks are also at their best before the summer heat arrives.

Summer (June to August)

Summer is peak season for most parks, offering the widest access to trails, visitor centers, and high-elevation areas that remain snow-covered in spring. This is the time to explore

northern and alpine destinations like Glacier National Park, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, and Denali. Expect longer daylight hours but also larger crowds and higher lodging prices. Booking accommodations and entry passes early is essential during this time.

Fall (September to November)

Autumn transforms national parks into vibrant landscapes of gold, red, and orange. Parks like Acadia, Shenandoah, and Great Smoky Mountains are famous for their fall foliage. The temperatures are cooler, making hiking more comfortable, and summer crowds start to thin. It's also a great time for wildlife viewing, especially in western parks where animals are more active before winter sets in.

Winter (December to February)

Winter brings a peaceful beauty to many parks, especially those in the western and northern regions. Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Bryce Canyon turn into snow-covered wonderlands, offering opportunities for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Meanwhile, southern parks like Everglades, Death Valley, and Saguaro are ideal during winter months when temperatures are pleasant. It's the perfect season for travelers seeking solitude and unique photographic moments.

Tips for Visiting National Parks in the USA



Visiting America's national parks can be one of the most rewarding travel experiences. Whether you are chasing waterfalls, hiking mountain trails, or exploring red rock canyons, a few smart tips can help you stay safe, save time, and enjoy every moment.

- **Plan and Book Early:** Many national parks, especially popular ones like Yellowstone and Yosemite, have limited lodging and require timed-entry reservations. Book your campsites, lodges, and entry passes months in advance. Check the National Park Service website for seasonal availability and permit requirements.
- **Visit During Off-Peak Hours or Seasons:** If possible, visit on weekdays or during the shoulder seasons, spring and fall, to avoid crowds. Early mornings and late afternoons are usually quieter and also offer better lighting for photography.
- **Respect Wildlife and Keep a Safe Distance:** Never feed or approach animals, no matter how calm they seem. Maintain at least 25 yards from most wildlife and 100 yards from bears or wolves. Bring binoculars or a zoom lens for a closer look without disturbing them.
- **Pack Smart and Travel Light:** Bring plenty of water, snacks, sunscreen, and layers. Conditions can change quickly, especially in mountain parks. Lightweight rain gear, a reusable water bottle, and a basic first-aid kit are must-haves.

- **Leave No Trace:** Stay on marked trails, carry out all trash, and avoid picking flowers or disturbing natural features. Following Leave No Trace principles helps protect fragile ecosystems for future visitors.
 - **Prepare for Limited Connectivity:** Many parks have little or no cell service. Download offline maps, trail guides, and emergency contacts before entering. Carry a paper map or GPS device as a backup.
 - **Dress for the Climate:** National parks vary widely in temperature and elevation. Desert parks can be extremely hot during the day and cold at night, while mountain parks can bring sudden snow or rain. Always pack accordingly.
 - **Stay Hydrated and Pace Yourself:** Dehydration is common, especially at high elevations. Drink water regularly and take breaks during long hikes. Listen to your body and avoid pushing too hard in hot or thin-air environments.
 - **Support Local Communities:** Many gateway towns around national parks depend on tourism. Stay in locally owned lodges, eat at local restaurants, and purchase souvenirs from community artisans to support sustainable tourism.
 - **Capture Memories Responsibly:** Photography is one of the best ways to remember your trip, but always be mindful of your surroundings. Avoid standing on fragile rock formations or venturing off-trail for the perfect shot.
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Conclusion

From the towering granite walls of Yosemite to the coral reefs of the Florida Keys, each U.S. national park tells its own story, one of nature, time, and wonder. Visiting these parks isn't just about seeing breathtaking views; it's about connecting with the wild landscapes that define America.

No matter when or where you go, take time to slow down, listen to the wind, and appreciate what these protected lands offer. Each visit leaves you with something unforgettable, whether it is a sunrise over the Grand Canyon or a quiet trail through ancient forests.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the best time to visit national parks in the U.S.?

It depends on the park and your preferences. Spring (April-June) and fall (September-October) are ideal for most parks due to mild weather and fewer crowds. However, winter is best for desert parks like Death Valley, while summer is perfect for mountain destinations such as Glacier or Yellowstone.

Which U.S. national park is the most visited?

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, located between North Carolina and Tennessee, is the most visited park in the U.S., attracting over 12 million visitors each year thanks to its easy access and stunning mountain views.

How many national parks are there in the U.S.?

As of 2025, there are 63 official national parks managed by the National Park Service, along with hundreds of other protected sites such as monuments, preserves, and recreation areas.

Which national park is best for first-time visitors?

Yellowstone National Park is often recommended for first-time visitors. It offers iconic landmarks like Old Faithful, the Grand Prismatic Spring, and abundant wildlife — a true introduction to the American wilderness.

What are the least crowded national parks to visit?

Parks such as North Cascades (Washington), Great Basin (Nevada), and Congaree (South Carolina) offer breathtaking scenery with fewer visitors, ideal for travelers seeking solitude and tranquility.

What should I pack for a national park trip?

Pack layers of clothing, sturdy hiking shoes, reusable water bottles, sunscreen, maps, and safety gear. Always prepare for variable weather, especially in mountain or desert parks, and follow Leave No Trace principles.

Do I need reservations to enter national parks?

Some popular parks like Yosemite, Arches, and Glacier require entry reservations during peak seasons. It's best to check the official NPS website for current entry requirements before planning your trip.

Which national park has the best hiking trails?

Zion, Yosemite, and Rocky Mountain National Parks are favorites among hikers. Each offers a mix of challenging climbs, scenic overlooks, and beginner-friendly trails surrounded by stunning natural beauty.

Can I bring pets to national parks?

Most national parks allow pets in designated areas, such as campgrounds and roads, but not on hiking trails. Always review park-specific pet policies before traveling.

What's the best way to visit multiple parks in one trip?

Consider road trip routes like the Utah Mighty Five (Arches, Canyonlands, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, and Zion) or the Southwest Grand Circle. These scenic routes connect several parks, offering incredible variety in one journey.