



gimme shelter

Kelly Smith Trimble writes about design, gardening, and travel — especially national parks — from her home in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her favorite park shelter is LeConte Lodge in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, where she's stayed at least one night a year for the past decade. But don't ask her which trail to the lodge is her favorite, because she can't decide either.



What's your heart's desire — a luxurious romantic weekend in a remote island inn, a room with a view into a still-active Hawaiian volcano, or a secluded campsite more than five miles from civilization that's perfectly sited to capture a view of the highest mountain on the continent? You'll find them all, and much more, in national parks. While parks offer incredible opportunities to explore by land or water, they also provide places to dine and doze, rest and recharge. Discover some of the best here.

Design aficionados will enjoy learning about the most unique park lodges and inns. Early examples like luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite and stalwart Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone became the archetypes of the National Park Service's own architectural style. Known as Parkitecture, the style celebrates nature and a building's surroundings with simple lines and local materials. Not that park structures are shy or subdued — some represent great feats of American ingenuity in construction. Imagine the process of building chalets from native stone in the wilderness of Glacier National Park, many miles above Lake McDonald, in the early 1900s.

While the parks' famed lodges and inns take advantage of some prime views, park campgrounds and backcountry sites hold their own allure and give literal steps-away access to the best adventures the parks can offer. We've included favorite campgrounds, backcountry sites, and hike-in lodges in addition to easily accessible lodges, hotels, inns, and bed-and-breakfasts — all within the national parks.



Big Meadows Lodge

WHEN TO GO The lodge opens each year in mid-May and closes for winter according to driving conditions.

WHY TO STAY Pull up a rocking chair and get ready for a view. Nestled on 10 acres around milepost 51, Big Meadows Lodge offers a comfortable rest stop along the park's famed Skyline Drive for those seeking fall color, spring wildflowers, or an escape from summer's heat.

Built in the late 1930s, the lodge exudes the natural charm of days past in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Original interior paneling made from chestnut trees (now nearly extinct) sets the tone throughout the main lodge, where travelers congregate to sit by the fire, play checkers, chat, and soak in the sunset.



Choose from 25 rooms inside the lodge or opt for one of five two-room cabins on the property, each with its own fireplace. If those spots are all booked, don't fret. Six adjacent buildings have perfectly pleasant rooms. This breadth of sleeping options is one of many reasons Big Meadows has become a favorite wedding destination.

Big Meadows Lodge is the keystone destination for the Big Meadows area of the park, which also includes Byrd Visitor Center, a campground, gas station, picnic area, and amphitheater. Leaving from the lodge, you can take a loop hike to 81-foot Lewis Falls and to Observation Point, returning via the Appalachian Trail, which runs directly past the lodge.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Rates vary and promotional packages are often available. Compared to other large park lodges, Big Meadows is very affordable, with rooms starting at around \$100 per night. Call or check the website for special packages and availability. www.goshenandoah.com



Crater Lake Lodge

WHEN TO GO Like the park, the lodge is only accessible for a short, glorious window each year. Plan to visit between late May to mid-October and make reservations early.

WHY TO STAY Though it originally opened for business in 1915, the story of Crater Lake Lodge involved missed deadlines, neglect, funding dilemmas, and threat of demolition until 1988, when it was saved by an effort of the people of Oregon and the National Park Service. In what was essentially a tear-down and rebuild, the new architect painstakingly retained the defining characteristics of the original plan — as an example, stones from the fireplace and great hall were removed, labeled, and put back exactly as they had been — and renovations on the historic structure were completed in 1995.

The lodge today looks just like the original from the outside, but is a first-rate modern hotel on the inside. Enjoy complimentary Wi-Fi, bell service, and meals in the lodge dining room, featuring local Oregon-grown mushrooms, berries, wine, and cheese. But the real luxury is right outside the lodge doorstep. Early park promoters sited Crater Lake Lodge right on the caldera's edge, giving visitors a prime view of the stunningly crystal-blue lake filling the huge crater (technically called a caldera) left by a massive volcano.

From this home base, you can explore the park on foot or by boat or trolley. A popular 1.5-hour boat tour traverses the lake to Wizard Island, a cinder cone volcano. Or you can just enjoy the lodge's terrace balcony facing the rim, where you can watch the sun set or rise and consider the vast history of this landscape.



WHAT YOU'LL PAY Room rates vary from about \$165 per night to \$225 or more for additional space and a lake view. Call or check online for the latest rates. If the lodge is full, try the cabins at Mazama Village instead. www.craterlakelodges.com



Volcano House

WHEN TO GO The park and hotel are open and accessible year-round. Hurricane season in Hawai'i is June 1 to November 30, so take that into consideration if you're not up for a gamble.

WHY TO STAY Where a simple grass hut once stood, Volcano House — now the oldest hotel in Hawai'i — was first constructed in 1877. The original building now serves as the Volcano Arts Center, and the structure today known as Volcano House came to being in 1941. It has, without argument, the best room-with-a-view in the park, as the lodge stands sentinel over Halema'uma'u Crater at the summit of Kīlauea Volcano. When you make reservations, ask for a room on the hotel's caldera side, which has a view of the summit.

Fire is a running theme at the hotel. Above the fireplace looms an image of Pele, mythological protector of the fire itself. And the fireplace comes in handy at an elevation of 4,000 feet in a tropical rainforest, where days can be chillier and rainier than many visitors expect for a Hawaiian vacation. Volcano House also showcases art that celebrates the park and its natural features, including fire, throughout the property.



Located along Crater Rim Drive in the Crater Rim Historic District, the lodge serves as a starting point for experiencing the park's natural and cultural stories via the loop road. Stop in the Jaggar Museum, Volcano Observatory, and Kīlauea Military Camp, and then descend into the caldera, where you'll see remnants of volcanic action as recent as the 1930s. More adventurous travelers can hike the 14-mile round-trip Nāpau Trail, beginning near the lodge, to see the steaming and fuming of the Pu'u 'Ō'ō vent, more recent lava flows, and lush rainforest. Be sure to find out if there are trail closures, as Nāpau is a fragile and sometimes instable landscape.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Room rates start around \$200 and go up. Check online for the latest rates and special promotions. www.hawaiivolcanohouse.com



Old Faithful Inn

WHEN TO GO The lodge opens in May, closes in October. Call or check the website for exact dates, as they change annually. This is one of the most popular park lodges nationwide, so make reservations early. If the historic lodge is booked, you can still find shelter at one of the many other well-appointed lodges and cabins available in Yellowstone.

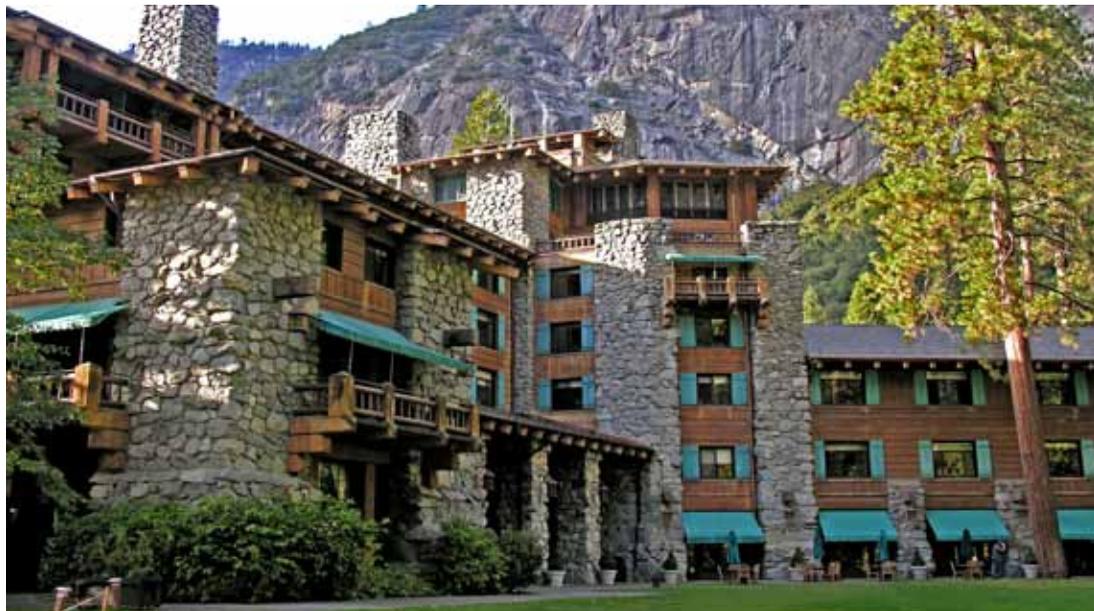
WHY TO STAY Home to most of the world's geysers, Yellowstone is the world's first national park and the Old Faithful Inn is your outpost for enjoying it in luxury. Named for the park's most famous geyser and deemed the largest log structure in the world, Old Faithful Inn achieved historic landmark status due to its significance in park history. It was built in 1903-1904 with local materials, including stones stacked to create the massive lobby fireplace.



When it opened in 1904, Old Faithful Inn became a benchmark for national park architecture in the West. Architect Robert Reimer thought that the lodge should blend into the wilderness, a new idea at the time. He oriented the massive timber-frame building — which is asymmetrical on purpose, like a tree — toward Old Faithful geyser, making the geyser the focal point. Inside the lobby, use of hundreds of native lodgepole pines and rhyolite, a local volcanic rock, gives the effect of being within the Yellowstone landscape. These material choices, while central to the design aesthetic, led to some structural problems over time, but in the 1970s, Old Faithful Inn underwent a major remodel that retained all the character but shored up the structure for decades to come.

Yellowstone offers no shortage of activities to try. In the summer months, choose your adventures by land or water: hiking, biking, horseback riding, boating, and fishing. Whatever you do, be sure to make time to visit this prized example of Parkitecture — visitation is not limited to guests, so drop in, take a tour, grab a nook in the lobby, and soak it all in.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Room rates match the high demand for them. A decked-out, two-bedroom suite can run more than \$500 per night, but more rustic spaces in the old house section can be rented in the low \$100s (if you're willing to share a bath). Thankfully, with 327 rooms available, there are plenty of options in-between. www.yellowstonenationalparklodges.com



The Ahwahnee Hotel

WHEN TO GO Yosemite and The Ahwahnee Hotel are open year-round, and you get different experiences depending on the season. Spring is all about waterfalls, summer is the busy season with lots of outdoor activity, fall brings opportunities to enjoy the park without crowds, and winter brings snow, quiet, and holiday cheer.

WHY TO STAY When entering Yosemite Valley, The Ahwahnee Hotel welcomes you like an old friend, even if it's your first visit to the park. Put simply, it looks like it belongs. Perhaps the grandest park lodge, its architect, Gilbert Stanley Underwood, proved that over-the-top style would blend right into Yosemite's grand landscape. Smartly constructed of granite (with the weathered side always facing out), concrete and steel for fireproofing, the building has siding that looks like wood but is actually concrete — an acid stain gives it that redwood finish. Tons of windows grant a view for every room, and green trim and accents mimic the color of evergreen trees.



Opened in 1927 as an exclusive country estate for the powerful and wealthy, The Ahwahnee (a local American Indian name for Yosemite) now welcomes anyone to visit, dine, or stay, though it still has an elegant air. When you first step into the lobby, decorated with American Indian baskets and rugs, you realize this place is special. Park history buffs will love knowing that Ansel Adams used to play piano here while guests drank tea, and afternoon tea is still a daily time-honored tradition. Another Ahwahnee tradition occurs every Christmas, when the Bracebridge Dinner takes holiday guests to another place and time as actors and locals put on a grand medieval feast and play.

From here, you can bike the 12 miles of trail around Yosemite Valley, and then plan your mountain escape on the park's many trails. Or you can take a shuttle bus to the park's various landmarks. Photography buffs will soon discover why Ansel Adams spent so much time here — there's a picture at every turn.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Remember how The Ahwahnee was designed for luxury? A night or two here is a wonderful splurge. Rates vary by season and will run \$400 and above per night. www.yosemitepark.com



Glacier Bay Lodge

WHEN TO GO Plan your visit between May and September; in winter, access and services are limited. May and June, when flowers and wildlife reappear, are prime months. Rain becomes a daily occurrence starting in late July through September.

The only way to reach the park is by air or water. Alaska Airlines has daily service from Juneau to Gustavus in the summer, and smaller charters and air taxis fly the route year-round. Cruise ships, tour boats, and charter or private vessels are another option.

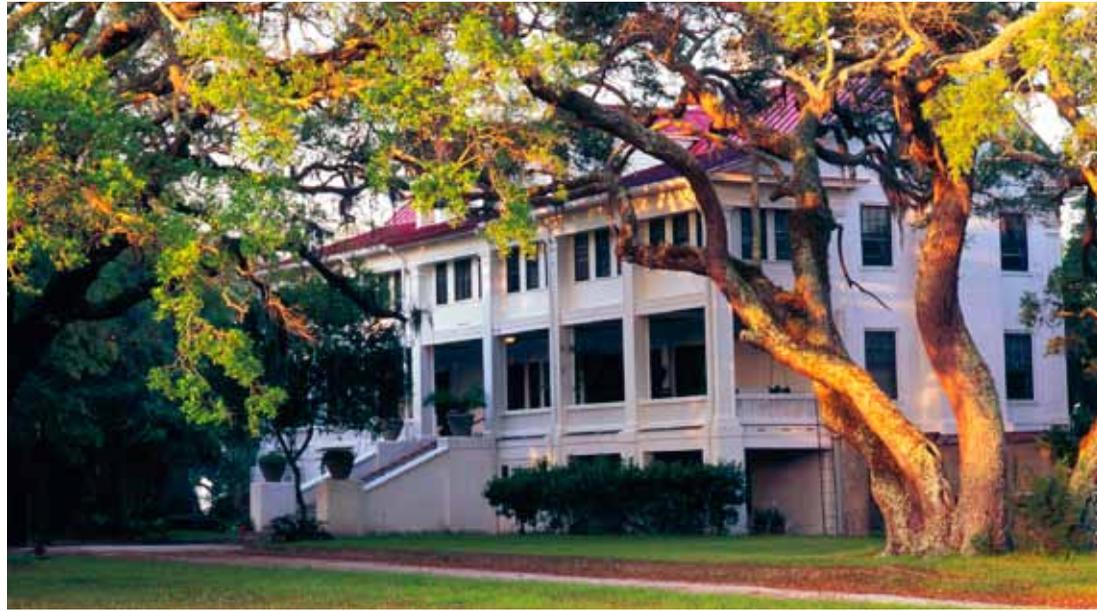
WHY TO STAY The great naturalist John Muir promoted the preservation of Glacier Bay after visiting here in 1890, when he wrote "Travels in Alaska" and ignited the American imagination for Alaskan wilderness and wonder. Today, that imagination lives on, and it becomes a reality at Glacier Bay Lodge.

Facing the water and embraced by the forest, the lodge and its hometown, Gustavus, are an enclave surrounded by the park. Accessible only by air or sea, they're part of the second largest wilderness area in the world and the lodge is the only accommodations inside the park. Built in 1966, the mid-century modern style main lodge looks out on Bartlett Cove, once the home of a 100-mile-long glacier. Guests take boardwalks to their rooms in cabins distributed throughout the property. Some rooms have bay views while some are nestled in the Sitka spruce forest — either way, you can't go wrong.

The best way to explore the park is on the water. Be sure to take a bay tour, where you'll see glaciers up close and might also spot whales and black or brown bears. Park naturalists on board will explain the natural history of the area and the processes that still shape the park on land and sea. You can also stretch your legs on one of a few relatively short trails, or get closer to the water while fishing or sea kayaking. Don't forget to explore the tiny town of Gustavus, a true slice of Alaskan life. Back at the lodge, watch the sunset with a cocktail in hand and Dungeness crab on your plate.



WHAT YOU'LL PAY Rooms alone start around \$250 per night (including breakfast), but most guests opt for a bed-and-boat package that includes a bay tour. Check online for information about special packages and promotions. www.visitglacierbay.com



Greyfield Inn

WHEN TO GO Spring and summer (March 1 to September 30) are the busiest seasons in the park, but fall and winter offer their own magic, when the island becomes a cool escape from the mainland hustle and bustle. The inn is open year-round and popular for major holidays, when a 3-night minimum stay is required.

WHY TO STAY Hidden among dense palmetto and Spanish moss-draped live oak trees, resides a seaside retreat where wild horses roam. Cumberland Island National Seashore is an amazing mix of natural wonder, with 9,800 acres of unspoiled coastal wilderness, and historical interest. The island was the 19th century retreat of Thomas and Lucy Carnegie, who built Greyfield Inn in 1900 for their daughter Margaret. Margaret's daughter, Lucy, converted the home to an inn in 1962, and descendants of the Carnegies still operate the 200-acre oceanfront property.



This is rustic luxury. The inn includes a garden, where heirloom vegetables and fruits are grown for the chefs, who focus on upscale Southern cuisine. You'll enjoy a full breakfast, picnic lunch to take along during your daily jaunts, cocktail hour back at the inn, and dinner by candlelight. You can see why Greyfield Inn is consistently ranked one of the most romantic hotels in the country.

Take a tour of historic locations on the island, including ill-fated Dungeness, which was originally built in 1783 by a Revolutionary War hero and rebuilt on the original foundation by the Carnegies

in 1884. The mansion burned in 1959, and you can tour the sea salt-aged ruins. Visit another restored home, Plum Orchard mansion, built two years before Greyfield by Lucy Carnegie for her son, George. And don't miss the historic First African Baptist Church, where John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette married in 1996 in a secret ceremony revealed to guests only a few days before.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Most visitors get to Cumberland Island via ferry from St. Marys, Georgia, but Greyfield Inn guests use a private ferry that leaves from Fernandina Beach, Florida, and arrives at Greyfield's private dock. The ferry is included in your room rate, but be sure to reserve it when you reserve your room. Rooms start at \$475 per night. www.greyfieldinn.com

GREYFIELD INN

XANTERRA PARKS & RESORTS, INC.



Zion Lodge

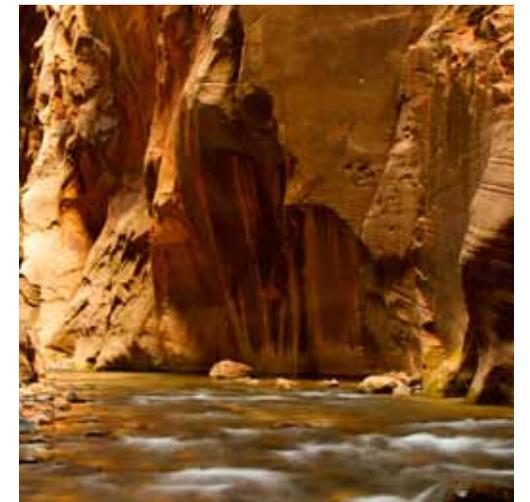
WHEN TO GO The park and lodge are open year-round. Summer is the busiest season, but increased shuttle service (the only way to travel in the canyon) in summer helps keep wait times to a minimum.

WHY TO STAY The story of Zion National Park (the first in Utah) and its lodge starts with the Union Pacific Railroad, which came up with the ingenious idea of marketing three parks in one: Zion, Bryce Canyon, and the north rim of the Grand Canyon. Union Pacific created a spur line from Cedar City, Utah, and built lodges in all three parks, promoting a grand tour called the Loop Tour. Though they rarely come by train, park travelers today often still use this three-park itinerary.

Originally built in 1924 at the bottom of Zion Canyon, Zion Lodge has a more intimate, community-oriented feeling than many other park lodges. The central lodge with lobby, restaurant, and hotel rooms is surrounded by small log cabins for guests. The idea, insisted on by Stephen Mather (the first director of the National Park Service), was to make the lodge and cabins look like they were growing out of the land. When fire destroyed the original Zion Lodge in 1966, it was rebuilt to keep some of the original elements, like the exterior stone pillars, but largely designed for function and that community atmosphere. Only the auditorium fireplace survives from the former structure, though the restored cabins use much of their original materials.

You can choose from rooms or suites within the main lodge or from the 28 adjacent cabins, which each have a private fireplace and front porch. The lodge lawn is where all visitors gather — whether they're staying the night or not — to take in the immensity of the canyon, gather information for their journey, and catch a shuttle to one of the many trailheads, or to simply sit, play, and take a breather from everyday life.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY A two-bed hotel room or cabin runs about the same price, a little less than \$200 per night. Lodge suites with king-size beds are about \$220. Zion's shuttle buses are free. www.zionlodge.com





The Inn at Brandywine Falls

WHEN TO GO Cuyahoga is known best for fall color, but spring brings its own treasures as well; in winter, the falls turn to ice. The park truly offers a great spot to experience nature not far from major cities in the Midwest; it's less than a two-hour drive from Akron, Cleveland, Columbus, and Pittsburgh.

WHY TO STAY A lovely example of Greek Revival architecture, the inn overlooks 65-foot Brandywine Falls, one of the park's most treasured vistas. Central to the recent history of the Cuyahoga Valley, the home was built in 1848 by James Wallace, son of George Wallace, who constructed a sawmill at the top of the falls in 1814, followed by a grist mill and woolen mill. The village of Brandywine Falls grew around the Wallace mills.



Today, James' house remains and welcomes guests as the Inn at Brandywine Falls. Quaint, charming, and run by innkeepers Katie and George Hoy, who live in the house, it's like a home away from home. More like a bed-and-breakfast than a hotel, the inn includes just six visitor rooms, four in the main house, as well as two suites, The Granary and The Loft. Each space is decorated in heritage Ohio style, and a hearty breakfast is served daily. Those in suites get private breakfast in their rooms, or can join the rest of the house if they like.

Cuyahoga means crooked river, and experiencing the river should definitely be on your list of must-dos here. The 1.5-mile Brandywine Gorge Trail starts near the bed-and-breakfast and follows the gorge, taking you down to the creek. At the falls, you can walk the boardwalk and the stairs to get face-to-face with the falls.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY An affordable park experience, room rates at the inn are as low as \$145 per night. The Inn at Brandywine Falls is also a popular wedding location; call for information about wedding rentals. www.theinnatbrandywine.com

JIM MANIKA



LeConte Lodge

WHEN TO GO The season runs from the end of March to end of November; check for specific dates by year. Requests via online, email, and snail mail are accepted starting each August and picked via lottery on October 1; request specific dates, one request per party.

WHY TO STAY LeConte Lodge offers an opportunity to escape high-traffic areas of the park and experience the landscape in its natural, secluded state. Located near the summit of Mount LeConte, the third highest peak in the park, you'll come to truly know what "smoky" means as you look down on the clouds from above. The area started as a tent camp in 1925 and in 1926 Jack Huff, a local mountaineer from Gatlinburg, took over and began building LeConte Lodge, which his family operated until 1960.

Today, the crew lives onsite from March to November, and supplies are brought in three times a week by llamas on Trillium Gap Trail. You can choose from trails of varying distances and difficulties. Popular Alum Cave Bluffs is the shortest but steepest; there's also Rainbow Falls, Bullhead (longest but perhaps easiest), Trillium Gap (watch for llama droppings), and the Boulevard.

LeConte Lodge consists of a communal lodge and dining hall, plus seven rough-hewn cabins and three multi-room lodges where visitors sleep. Rooms have kerosene lanterns, propane heaters, linens, bunk beds and single beds, but no electricity. Walk from your room to flush toilets on site.

Get up early to see the sunrise at Myrtle Point; watch the sunset at Cliff Tops. Or just sit on one of the lodge's many rocking chairs and watch night fall over Gatlinburg below. You'll savor the endless cups of hot chocolate and the hot meals. Wine is even available for a little extra cash (so be sure to bring a few bucks).

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Rates start at \$132 per night for adults, \$85 for children, for a cabin, dinner and breakfast. Rates for larger dwellings are by the space, not the person, and can be split among the group; check the website for more details. www.lecontelodge.com



LECONTE LODGE

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, MONTANA



Sperry Chalet and Granite Park Chalet

WHEN TO GO The backcountry chalets open their doors each summer, July through September. The park is open year-round but less accessible fall through spring, when many facilities are closed.

WHY TO STAY Of nine original hike-in chalets, only two remain in Glacier National Park, a destination known as much for its natural treasures as its many amazing lodges. The Swiss-inspired architecture is thanks to Louis Hill, who was commissioned by the Great Northern Railroad to create amazing vacation experiences for its travelers. Hill paid attention to every detail, down to the plants in the chalets' original gardens. Using materials from the sites, Italian stonemasons and contractors built the backcountry outposts in two years from 1913 to 1915, a quick turnaround considering the short building season.



Visitors reach Sperry and Granite Park Chalets through a network of trails accessible on foot or horseback. No roads or helicopters are allowed here, so pack mules bring in supplies like propane, groceries, and linens twice a week, as they have for more than 80 years. As in most areas of the park, you can expect to see mountain goats often.

Sperry, on the west side of the park, offers 22 guest rooms and three full-course meals a day. The main trail begins at Lake McDonald; hike 6.7 miles up the chalet, which looks down on the lake below. Granite Park, north of Going

to the Sun Road, contains 12 rooms of varying occupancy levels. Several trails, ranging from 4 to 24 miles long, lead to Granite Park Chalet, though the 7.6-mile Highline Trail along the Continental Divide is the most popular; it leaves from near Logan Pass Visitor Center.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Rates (as of 2014) at Sperry Chalet are \$201 for the first person, \$141 for each additional person. Granite Park Chalet is a little less expensive at \$97 for the first person, \$78 for each additional person. www.sperrychalet.com / www.graniteparkchalet.com

**2014 marks the 100th anniversary celebration for Sperry Chalet and Granite Park Chalet!*

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, ARIZONA



Phantom Ranch

WHEN TO GO Open year-round, dorms and cabins are heated in winter and cooled in summer. Be advised that temperatures at the bottom of the canyon exceed 100 degrees in summer. In winter, when the South Rim may be covered with snow, the inner canyon will be around 20 degrees warmer. In spring and fall, be prepared for weather variations as well as glorious color in trees and wildflowers. Ranger service and trail maintenance are year-round inside the canyon.

WHY TO STAY Phantom Ranch offers the only lodging below the canyon rim — more than a vertical mile below, where rock was laid down 2 billion years ago. It's a surprisingly lush habitat in the middle of desert, a literal oasis where Ancestral Pueblo people lived for hundreds of years before the start of tourism in the canyon began with the coming of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1901.

Soon after, the idea for a luxury ranch at the bottom of the canyon developed, and Phantom Ranch was designed by famed Grand Canyon architect Mary Colter (who also designed Hopi House, Hermit's Rest, the Lookout Studio, and Desert View Watchtower on the South Rim). It opened by 1922, with four cabins and what's now the north half of the lodge, all made of native wood and stone. Within 10 years, additional cabins, another wing of the lodge, a recreation center (now the employee lodging) and a shower house were added. Trails developed in the 1930s, electricity came in 1966, drinking water in 1970, and a sewage treatment plant as well as new hiker dormitories and a canteen in the early 1980s. While it takes fortitude to get there and back, Phantom Ranch is plusher and more developed than many people imagine.

To get there, cross the Colorado River via the Kaibab Suspension Bridge directly off the South Kaibab Trail or follow along the River Trail and cross at Bright Angel Suspension Bridge. Follow the path along Bright Angel Creek to Phantom Ranch. Bright Angel Campground, for those not able to secure a spot in the ranch, requires a backcountry permit, but the dorms and cabins (available for hikers only) don't.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Room reservation opens 13 months before arrival date on the first day of each month; you must reserve far in advance. Dorm rooms are open to hikers only at \$46.33 per person. Cabins are \$148.66 for four people. Breakfast, sack lunch, and steak, stew, or veggie dinners are available. www.grandcanyonlodges.com





Assateague Island Oceanside

WHEN TO GO Winter is harsh and wind patterns reduce the beach width, depositing the sand in outlying sandbars; in summer, the pattern reverses and beaches beckon to be explored.

WHY TO STAY Assateague Island is best known for its herds of wild horses (called Chincoteague ponies on the Virginia side of the park), thought by some to be descended from horses that survived a shipwreck off the coast of Virginia (though more likely, they were brought here by owners from the mainland). The strong, wild horses have learned to love this harsh, windswept, remote island, and so will you.

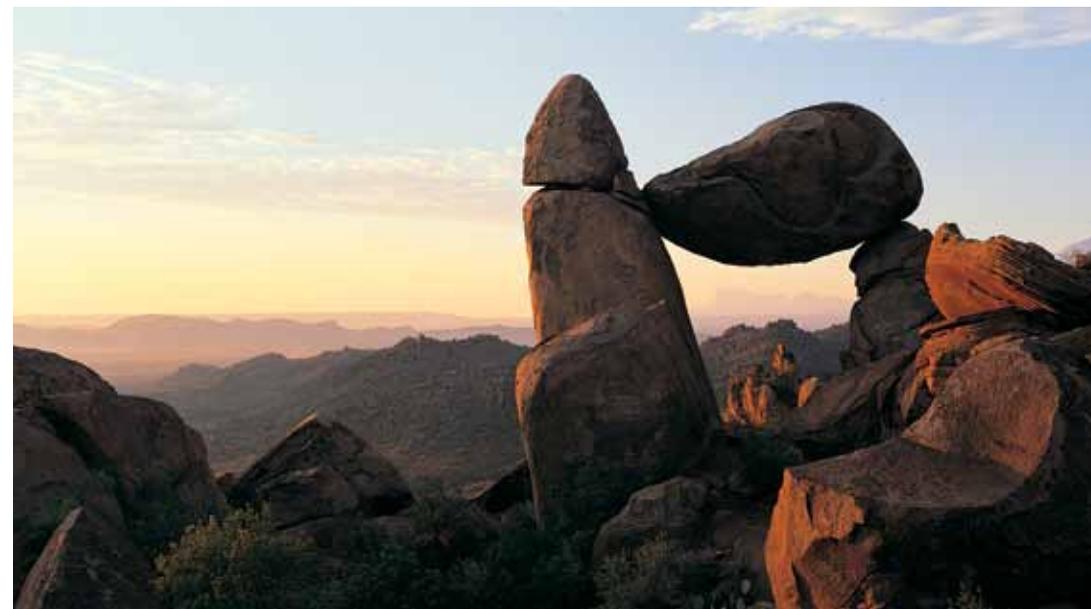


There's more to see beyond ponies on this 18,000-acre island park. The sandy beaches spanning the 37-mile length of the island's oceanside are a dramatic and constantly changing landscape. You can also explore marshes, freshwater pools, coastal forests, grasslands, and dunes.

Camping is available only on the Maryland side of the park, either bayside or oceanside using the Maryland entrance 8 miles south of Ocean City. Oceanside has both drive-in and walk-in options, with tent sites located 100 to 200 feet from parking. This barrier island habitat can be harsh, so

come prepared; bring firewood, mosquito repellent, and long tent stakes for staking into sand in windy conditions. A few backcountry spots are also available on the Maryland side.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY The campground is open October 16 to April 14, first-come, first-served, but reservations are required April 15 to October 15. Check the website for specific instructions about making reservations. All campsites are \$20. www.nps.gov/asis



Chisos Basin Campground

WHEN TO GO When many other large parks are inaccessible due to snow, Big Bend is at its peak. From November to April (especially Thanksgiving, Christmas, and spring break), plan ahead for reservations at campgrounds or rooms within the park, or plan for alternatives. Chisos Basin Campground is open year-round and is pleasant even in summer because of its high elevation (5,401 feet).

WHY TO STAY Known as the best camping spot in Big Bend, Chisos Basin is surrounded by massive cliffs and close to the park's most popular trails and landmarks. Tent campers may like hearing that RVs and trailers are discouraged, as campsites are small with no hook-ups and the road to the campsite is narrow and windy. Some campsites boast beautiful examples of Parkitecture in their own right: mid-century modern covered picnic areas constructed of wood and stone. Don't be surprised if you get help setting up camp from a javelina or two.

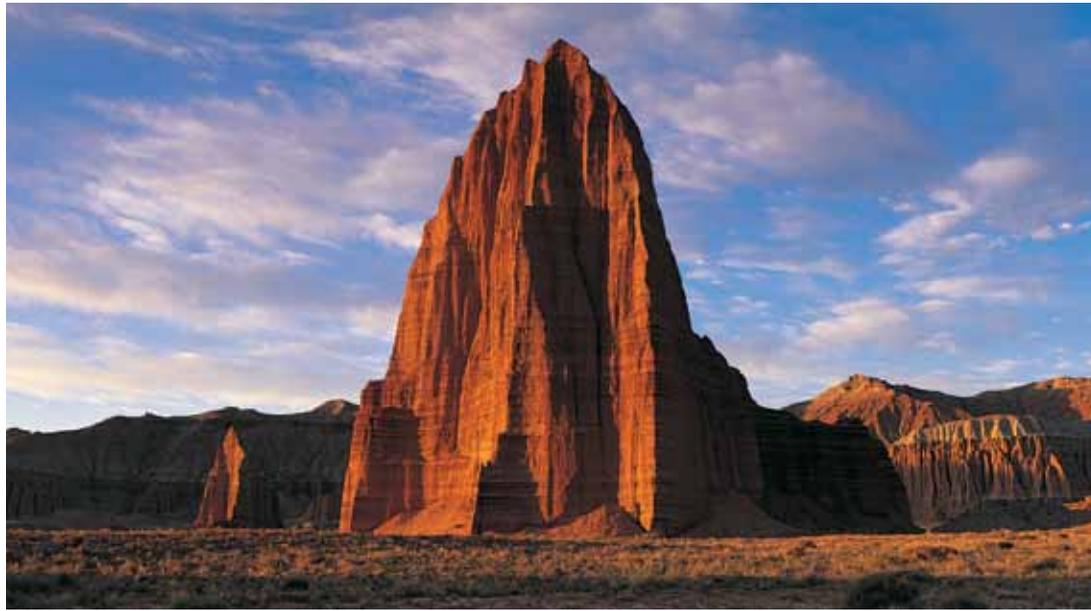
Access 5.6-mile Window Trail from the campground and hike into Oak Creek Canyon for panoramic desert vistas. In wet seasons, prepare for some stream crossings, and know that the hike back is uphill. You can also take .3-mile paved Window View Trail, a good spot for those seeking a less strenuous option with equal views or a short walk to watch the sunset before dinner.

The campground is in the same developed area as the visitor center, lodge, restaurants, and amphitheater, where you can stop in for ranger-led programs.

Prepare for stargazing — what the area surrounding Big Bend lacks in human population, it makes up for in celestial numbers. On the clearest nights, an overwhelming 2,000 or more stars can be viewed from your campsite.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY The campground includes 60 sites at \$14 per night, but only 26 can be reserved during the busy season, November 15 to April 15; seven group campsites are also available by reservation only. www.nps.gov/bibe





Fruita Campground

WHEN TO GO Peak season is spring to fall. With ample water and some shade, Fruita is a literal desert oasis in the summer heat.

WHY TO STAY Fruita Campground provides a splash of vibrant life in an otherwise desolate, but beautiful, landscape. This location near the Fremont River has long given respite to weary desert dwellers, who planted orchards here starting in the 1880s.



The campground gives access to an intriguing frontier story. The 200-acre settlement of Fruita was formed along the banks of the Fremont River and Sulphur Creek by Mormon pioneers, who saw the oasis' potential for agricultural production and planted orchards here. The campground is surrounded by this history in the form of barns, houses, irrigation systems, a schoolhouse, and a restored orchard planted with various fruits and nuts.

Venture beyond the comforts of Fruita to experience the breadth of the park in what geologists call a Waterpocket Fold, or wrinkle on the earth, that extends nearly 100 miles.

Popular sites include Capitol Reef, a great mountain of Navajo sandstone, and Cathedral Valley, filled with freestanding stone temples. Explore via hiking trails and scenic drives. The park also welcomes experienced rock climbers, who tend to focus on the Capitol Reef area. While climbing permits aren't required, be sure to review park climbing restrictions and safety information.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY At the only developed campground in the park, you'll find 71 RV and tent sites available for \$10 each. The campground is open year-round, no reservations; come early, as sites often fill up by noon in peak seasons. www.nps.gov/care



Manzanita Lake Campground

WHEN TO GO Summer is the best time to enjoy this park without having to wear snowshoes. The campground is open late May until the park closes for snow, though water becomes unavailable after October 14. Check for road conditions and closures within the park October through June.

WHY TO STAY Get to this great campground for families about a mile beyond the Manzanita Lake Entrance to the park, near the Loomis Museum. Here, 179 sites offer access to swimming, fishing, kayaking, and hiking, and to a camper store, gift shop, and laundromat. At the camper store, shop for basic supplies, as well as ingredients for s'mores, hot meals, and canoe and kayak rentals. You can also fill up here at the only gas station within the park.

To explore the area, take 1.5-mile Manzanita Lake Trail from the Loomis Museum, where you'll learn about the natural and cultural history of the park, and follow around the lake to catch views of glacier-covered Lassen Peak, Chaos Crags and Eagle Peak. A rock avalanche of Chaos Crags actually dammed the creek and created Manzanita Lake, which remains relatively quiet due to boating being limited to non-motorized vessels. Go for a paddle and fish for rainbow, brook, and brown trout, or join one of many scheduled ranger-led programs.



Be sure to venture out into the greater park as well. Lassen tells stories in stone, stories of various types of volcanoes and how they've shaped the land. Visit the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center to gain a better understanding of the volcanic types and most recent eruptions.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY The site fee is \$18 during the peak season, \$10 if you try your luck after October 14. Make reservations at least 4 days, and as early as 6 months, before arrival. Five group sites are also available for \$50 each. Also, be prepared to spend a little cash in the camper store for gifts and s'mores. www.nps.gov/lavo

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY, VIRGINIA



Rocky Knob Campground

WHEN TO GO Experience the parkway in spring through fall; the campground opens in early May and closes when winter weather arrives.

WHY TO STAY Nice campgrounds dot the drive along the 469-mile beloved Blue Ridge Parkway from the entrance to Shenandoah National Park (milepost 0) in Virginia, to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. One of the most popular is Rocky Knob at milepost 167, with more than 100 sites for both tents and RVs.



The Rocky Knob recreational area covers 4,000 acres, and ranger-led interpretive talks and hikes bring the area to life in summer months. From your campsite, explore Rock Castle Gorge, the site of beautiful quartz rock formations and once home to mountain families whose apple orchards and stone chimneys remain. Leaving from the campground, the 10.8-mile Rock Castle Gorge Trail descends 3 miles into the gorge, where, in the spring, you can find nearly 200 varieties of wildflowers blooming. Ascending, the trail loops back 7.3 miles through rhododendron thicket, past mountain streams, and along open highland meadows.

At the campground, you're just a few miles away from iconic and historic Mabry Mill, where you can learn a little about life in rural Appalachia and partake in some of its tastiest fare, like buckwheat cakes and country ham. Also down the road is Chateau Morrisette Winery, where you can taste locally-made Virginia wines. The campground is in popular Floyd, Virginia, well known for its popular Floydfest Music Festival.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Campsite fee is \$16 per night. Sites do not have water, electrical, sewer, or shower hook-ups. www.nps.gov/blri

DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE, ALASKA



Wonder Lake Campground

WHEN TO GO The park is accessible only in summer, early June to mid-September.

WHY TO STAY Located at the foot of Mount McKinley — the highest mountain in North America with its summit at 20,320 feet — Wonder Lake Campground is best known for its awe-inspiring views and its vicious mosquitoes, though most campers agree that the former outweigh the latter. The campground offers 28 tent-only sites, just 26 miles from McKinley. Figure out how to shoot panoramas on your camera or phone — this place is best captured with a wide angle.

Be sure to bring heavy-duty mosquito repellent and gear, including a head-net. Expect to see waterfowl and beavers on the lakes and ponds in the area, and possibly traveling moose and grizzly bears. Fish for trout and grayling in Wonder Lake, a five-minute walk from the campground.

Denali offers 6 million acres of wilderness, with only one road. The only vehicle access to Wonder Lake is via a green camper bus, which runs June 1 to early September, weather permitting. Be prepared for a long ride — it's 11 hours round-trip from the Wilderness Access Center (one mile into the park) to Wonder Lake, but along the way, you'll catch views of the Alaska Range, cross through mountain passes, and glide through wetland tundra.



WHAT YOU'LL PAY The bus trip costs \$47.25 for adults and is free for children age 15 and under. Make reservations for summer trips as early as December 1 the year before. Sites are \$16 per night, plus a one-time \$5 reservation fee. www.nps.gov/dena

DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK, FLORIDA



Garden Key Campground

WHEN TO GO The campground is open year-round. In winter, it's a warm escape from chilly life on the continent; summer is as hot and humid as you'd expect.

WHY TO STAY Less than 1% of Dry Tortugas is actually dry ground, so plan to experience the park on the water. Seven keys make up the collection known as Dry Tortugas. Explore the natural and cultural treasures, including remnants of hundreds of shipwrecks, while snorkeling, diving, or kayaking, but bring your own gear. You can also fish from various spots on Garden Key with a valid Florida saltwater fishing license. And make Garden Key Campground your starting point for adventures.



Travel to Dry Tortugas via public ferry, seaplane, or charter, or private boat from Key West, located 70 miles east. There are no services on Garden Key, so be sure to bring everything you'll need for your stay. Check with your mode of transport to see whether fuel is allowed on board.

Garden Key Campground offers just eight primitive sites with picnic tables and grills. Bring your own water, fuel, ice, and food; you can use carts available at the dockhouse to transport your gear. In the small, tight-knit campground, you're sure to get to know your neighbors. Sites are located near Fort Jefferson, which was built in the

mid-1800s to protect the country's gateway to the Gulf of Mexico, an invaluable shipping channel. Tour the fort and watch the sunset from the terreplein, its prime vantage point.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY The park charges a \$5 entrance fee for those 16 years and older. Limited sites are available first-come, first-served for \$3 per night. But the real cost is getting there: the public ferry ride for an overnight stay costs nearly \$200 per adult (though that includes your \$5 entrance fee). Seaplanes and private modes of transportation increase from there. www.nps.gov/drto

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK, COLORADO



Moraine Park Campground

WHEN TO GO Summer and fall are peak seasons, with good reason; summer is mild and fall offers amazing colors.

WHY TO STAY At 8,160 feet, a ponderosa pine forest shelters Moraine Park Campground above the meadows of Moraine Park, 2.5 miles south of the Beaver Meadows Entrance near Estes Park, Colorado. Sites have incredible mountain views and they're close to some of the best hiking in the park.



Use the campground as your outpost for exploring the park. From the campground, catch the Fern Lake shuttle to trailheads that lead to pristine mountain lakes that are celebrated worldwide. At popular Fern Lake, see cascading Fern Falls and catch a glimpse of the Continental Divide.

Or, from the nearby Moraine Park Visitor Center and Museum, explore the natural history of the area, catch a shuttle to Bear Lake, and experience one of the Rocky Mountains' most famous and picturesque spots, set in a spruce-fir forest. Travel a little further to Bierstadt Lake where you can marvel at golden Aspen trees in fall. Note: Some trail and road closures may still be in effect due to flooding in 2013. Call ahead or check online to review statuses when planning your trip.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Make reservations for summer, when the 244 available spots (for both tents and RVs) fill up fast at \$20 a piece. Only 77 of those sites are accessible in winter, when it's first-come, first-served and only \$14 per night, without water. In summer, purchase local firewood from the campground firewood sales shed. www.nps.gov/romo



Gros Ventre Campground

WHEN TO GO The campground is open early May through early October; check for specific dates by year.

WHY TO STAY While summer in the Tetons is an alluring escape from lower-elevation heat, fall presents amazing beauty in the form of deciduous forest color, peaking around mid-September. Fall is when deer, elk, and male (bull) moose make their presence known. It's also when cottonwoods along the riverbank and hillside aspens give the landscape a yellow-orange glow.



A great place to witness all this magic is from a campground sited on the Gros Ventre River, across the water from the National Elk Refuge. While none of the sites are directly on the river — most are in sagebrush or cottonwood stands — all are just a short walking distance away. The campground is located 11.5 miles south of Moose Junction.

From here, explore the southern end of the park, including the Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center, where you can watch an introductory documentary about the park, and Menor's Ferry Historic District, where an altar window at the Chapel of the Transfiguration frames Teton's tallest peaks. Take a ranger-led hike around

Taggart Lake, available daily in the summer. Venture further north to famed Jenny Lake and Jackson Lake. This is also the closest campground to Jackson, where campers might enjoy a night out for a great meal and a dose of what city life looks like in Wyoming.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY The campground includes 350 sites and 5 group sites (by reservation only). Individual sites are first-come, first-served at \$22 per night, but the campground rarely fills up completely before late afternoon, if at all. www.nps.gov/grte



Sunset Campground

WHEN TO GO Visit spring through fall; the campground is closed in winter.

WHY TO STAY For those looking for a little less luxury than historic Bryce Canyon Lodge affords, the park offers two large campgrounds: North and Sunset. Staying in Sunset Campground gets you closest to Sunset Point, the start and end of the best hiking trails in Bryce Canyon, including popular Navajo Trail that loops through Bryce's natural Amphitheater, where the best hoodoos are on display. Just south of the campground, you can reach Inspiration, Bryce, and Rainbow Points.

Bryce Canyon is best known for its vast terrain of hoodoos, great pillars of rock carved into vertical spires by erosion. But astronomy buffs will be equally enamored with the night sky in Bryce, where distance from light pollution reveals up to 7,500 stars on a clear night. The night life here is so renowned that an Annual Astronomy Festival comes to the park each summer. Look for the latest festival info on the website. Even if you're not there for the festival, you can revel at the night sky on full-moon ranger-led hikes, when moonlit hoodoos take on spooky personalities. You can also attend one of many presentations offered by so-called Dark Rangers who interpret the night sky and facilitate telescope viewings.



Travelers often combine a visit to Bryce Canyon with stops at Zion and the north rim of the Grand Canyon, too. Consider making that loop part of your itinerary to experience three amazing parks in one trip.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY There are 100 individual sites at \$15 each, and only 20 tent sites are available for reservation from 6 months to 2 days in advance, with all the rest being first-come, first-served. Group sites can also be reserved in advance. A major renovation of the campground in early 2014 will make restrooms nicer and more plentiful. www.nps.gov/bzca



Kabetogama Houseboat Site

WHEN TO GO In late May, the ice melts and Voyageurs' flowing highways open for travel, making summer the prime time to explore. Kabetogama Visitor Center is closed from late September to late May.

WHY TO STAY Voyageurs National Park offers a glimpse into early life in the North Woods, and there's no better way to experience that rugged lifestyle than on the water. Here, interconnected waterways traverse the heart of the North American continent on the dividing line between the United States and Canada.

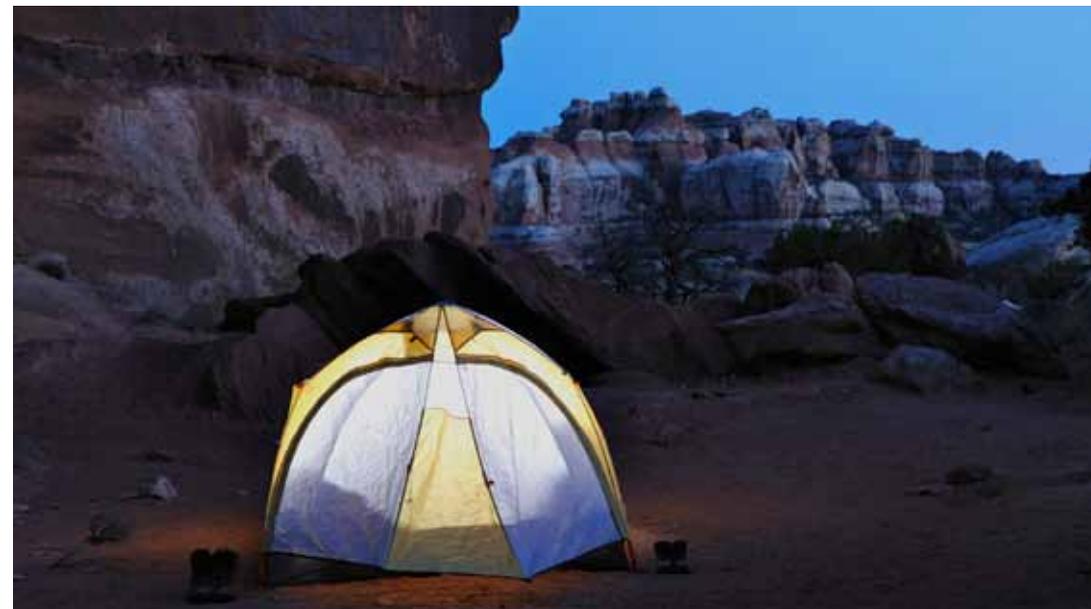


The deep history in Voyageurs' waters can be felt with each paddle stroke or lapping wave. With evidence of more than 10,000 years of human use, the area became well-known to Europeans when French travelers, called voyageurs, began journeying here more than 250 years ago in search of animals valuable in the fur trade. Today, you can see some of those natural inhabitants, including beavers and foxes, as well as deer, songbirds, eagles, black bears, and otters. Fish, such as yellow pike and northern perch, are also abundant.

While drive-to camping is available, consider a campsite reachable by boat only. Check online or with the park office for reservations at one

of several boat-in campsites. Among the most unique is a houseboat site designed for a maximum of two vessels on Kabetogama Lake. Private companies near the park offer houseboat rentals, and free boat ramps and parking are available at the park's visitor centers, including Kabetogama Visitor Center.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Starting in April 2015, reservations will be required for all camping and houseboating in the park with associated fees. Call or check online for the latest information. www.nps.gov/voya



Chesler Park/Joint Trail

WHEN TO GO Spring and fall offer the best conditions for exploring, and the Needles Visitor Center keeps extended hours in these seasons.

WHY TO STAY While most visitors experience this park's vast vistas of canyons and buttes in the more easily accessible Island in the Sky District, the more remote Needles District offers landscape immersion for experienced hikers in search of a challenge. The Needles includes more than 60 miles of interconnected trails that pass over slickrock, through narrow spots, and up steep ladders and small climbs. In many places, the trail over slickrock is marked only by a series of cairns.

The 11-mile Chesler Park Loop, including the Joint Trail, is one such journey, and for those up for the challenge, it's a pleasure worth the effort. In scenic Chesler Park, an expanse of desert trees and shrubs surrounded by needle rock formations, the path is level and open. The ease of that section is countered by the short Joint Trail, on which hikers squeeze through a series of deep, narrow slot canyons. In spring, look for yucca and cactus in bloom along the trail — these few signs of life won't be hard to miss.



Backpackers can set up camp on one of the five backpacking sites available along the loop. All of Canyonlands is considered primitive. Wear sunscreen and protective gear, pack ample water (none is available at the sites or along the trails) and food and be prepared for the predicted drop in temperature at night.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY The required backcountry permit fee is \$30 for a group of 7 or fewer in the Needles. While reservations aren't required, they're recommended to secure these few spots, especially for spring. Make reservations as much as four months, to as few as two days, in advance. www.nps.gov/cany

CHARLOTTE RAYL, SHARE THE EXPERIENCE PHOTO CONTEST



Hoh River to Third Beach Trail

WHEN TO GO Try spring, summer, and fall, as many park facilities close in winter. Hikers used to hotter summers will revel in the mildness of the mid-year Washington coast.

WHY TO STAY Olympic National Park is considered three parks in one, with distinct landscapes, from mountains, to meadows, to tides. While there are posh places to rest your head, like gorgeous and historic Lake Crescent Lodge and Lake Quinault Lodge, those looking for a little more adventure have plentiful options from which to choose.



The 16-mile Hoh River to Third Beach trail takes you over massive boulders, along moss-covered wood ladders, across streams, up ropes that scale a 60-foot cliff, and along the rocky to sandy beach, giving a full picture of the rugged Washington coastline. Best attempted by experienced hikers, the trek has been compared to an obstacle course, but who doesn't love a challenge? Plus, on this trail, you can set up camp on a bluff overlooking the beautiful Pacific Ocean.

Several campsites are available along the trail, including Mosquito Creek, Toleak Point, Strawberry Point, Scott Creek, and near the trailhead at Third Beach, each with its own personality and view. Do your research and pack accordingly. As with any activity in Olympic, proper rain gear is a must.

WHAT YOU'LL PAY Wilderness camping permits are required for overnight stays in the park, and reservations are also needed for some areas. The permit fee is \$5 per group, plus \$2 a person per night. www.nps.gov/olym

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

Berlin, MD | 410-641-1441 | www.nps.gov/asis

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Big Bend National Park, TX | 432-477-2251
www.nps.gov/bibe

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

Asheville, NC | 828-271-4779 | www.nps.gov/blri

BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Bryce Canyon, UT | 435-834-5322
www.nps.gov/brca

CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Moab, UT | 435-719-2100 | www.nps.gov/cany

CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL PARK

Torrey, UT | 435-425-3791 ext. 4111
www.nps.gov/care

CRATER LAKE NATIONAL PARK

Crater Lake, OR | 541-594-3000
www.nps.gov/crla

CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

St. Marys, GA | 912-882-4335 | www.nps.gov/cuis

CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

Peninsula, OH | 330-657-2752 | www.nps.gov/cuva

DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

Denali Park, AK | 904-683-9532
www.nps.gov/dena

DRY TORTUGAS NATIONAL PARK

Key West, FL | 305-242-7700 | www.nps.gov/drto

GLACIER BAY NATIONAL PARK

Gustavus, AK | 907-697-2230 | www.nps.gov/glba

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

West Glacier, MT | 406-888-7800
www.nps.gov/glac

GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Grand Canyon, AZ | 928-638-7888
www.nps.gov/grca

GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

Moose, WY | 307-739-3300 | www.nps.gov/grte

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Gatlinburg, TN | 865-436-1200
www.nps.gov/grsm

HAWAI'I VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK

Hawaii National Park, HI | 808-985-6000
www.nps.gov/havo

LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK

Mineral, CA | 530-595-4480 | www.nps.gov/lavo

OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

Port Angeles, WA | 565-3130 | www.nps.gov/olym

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

Estes Park, CO | 970-586-1206
www.nps.gov/romo

SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK

Luray, VA | 540-999-3601 | www.nps.gov/shen

VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

International Falls, MN | 218-283-6600
www.nps.gov/voya

YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

Yellowstone National Park, WY | 307-344-7381
www.nps.gov/yell

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Yosemite, CA | 209-372-0200 | www.nps.gov/yose

ZION NATIONAL PARK

Springdale, UT | 435-772-3256 | www.nps.gov/zion

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