

Guide to The National Parks



2023



"There is nothing so American as our national parks...The fundamental idea behind the parks...is that the country belongs to the people, that it is in process of making for the enrichment of the lives of all of us."

- Franklin D. Roosevelt
Radio Address from Two Medicine
Chalet, Glacier National Park
(August 5, 1934)

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, MONTANA



Planning Your National Park Adventure

Considered to be one of America’s greatest national treasures, the National Park system offers limitless opportunities to explore. Whether you’re interested in checking off every park or you want to view some of the world’s most impressive natural wonders with your own eyes, there’s something out there for everyone.

There are countless ways to explore the National Parks, leaving a lot to consider when planning your visit. With so much to know, this guide and the articles, information and tips within, aim to break each area down helping you make the best decision for your National Park adventure.

Featured

National Parks



Yellowstone

NATIONAL PARK

GEYSERS | HOT SPRINGS | WILDLIFE

The world's first National Park has 2.2 million acres for exploring

ABOUT YELLOWSTONE

America's first National Park is just as mesmerizing today as it was to the Lewis and Clark Expedition when they first brought back reports of it in 1807. Known as 'the land of the sacred and powerful waters' to the people of the Crow nation, Yellowstone remains a sacred land to the millions of visitors the park receives every year.

Encompassing the entire spectrum of an artist's palette of color, Yellowstone awes its visitors just as a great artisan does. There are four types of geothermal features that continue to draw visitors from around the world: hot springs, geysers, mud pots, and steam vents.

The park also includes canyons, mountains, rivers, and unforgettable viewpoints. Combined with hundreds of species of wildlife roaming the park, Yellowstone is often considered the crown jewel of the American National Park service.

BEST TIME TO VISIT YELLOWSTONE

The best time to visit Yellowstone is genuinely dependent upon the types of activities you're looking to participate in. From hiking and horseback riding to snowmobiling to snowshoeing, you can do it all in Yellowstone. We suggest you plan 3-4 days to see the park properly. Springtime and fall are fantastic times of year to visit Yellowstone National Park. You'll experience far fewer crowds, while still being able to take advantage of many activities like hiking and biking. The summer months are the most popular time to visit the park, so planning ahead is strongly advised.

THINGS TO DO IN YELLOWSTONE

The most famous of the features are the Old Faithful Geyser, the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone, Grand Prismatic Spring, the Fountain Paint Pots, the Norris Basin, and the Lamar Valley. There are plentiful opportunities for hiking, biking, rafting, horseback riding, zip-lining, fly fishing, skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, or just soaking in the hot springs.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

When it comes to visiting one of the most popular national parks in the United States, the key is to plan ahead and seek advice from the experts. Click the box below to see a few of the most popular Yellowstone itineraries to get inspired.

TAKE ME THERE

"The park is full of exciting wonders. The wildest geysers in the world, in bright, triumphant bands, are dancing and singing in it amid thousands of boiling springs...their basins arrayed in gorgeous colors like gigantic flowers" - John Muir

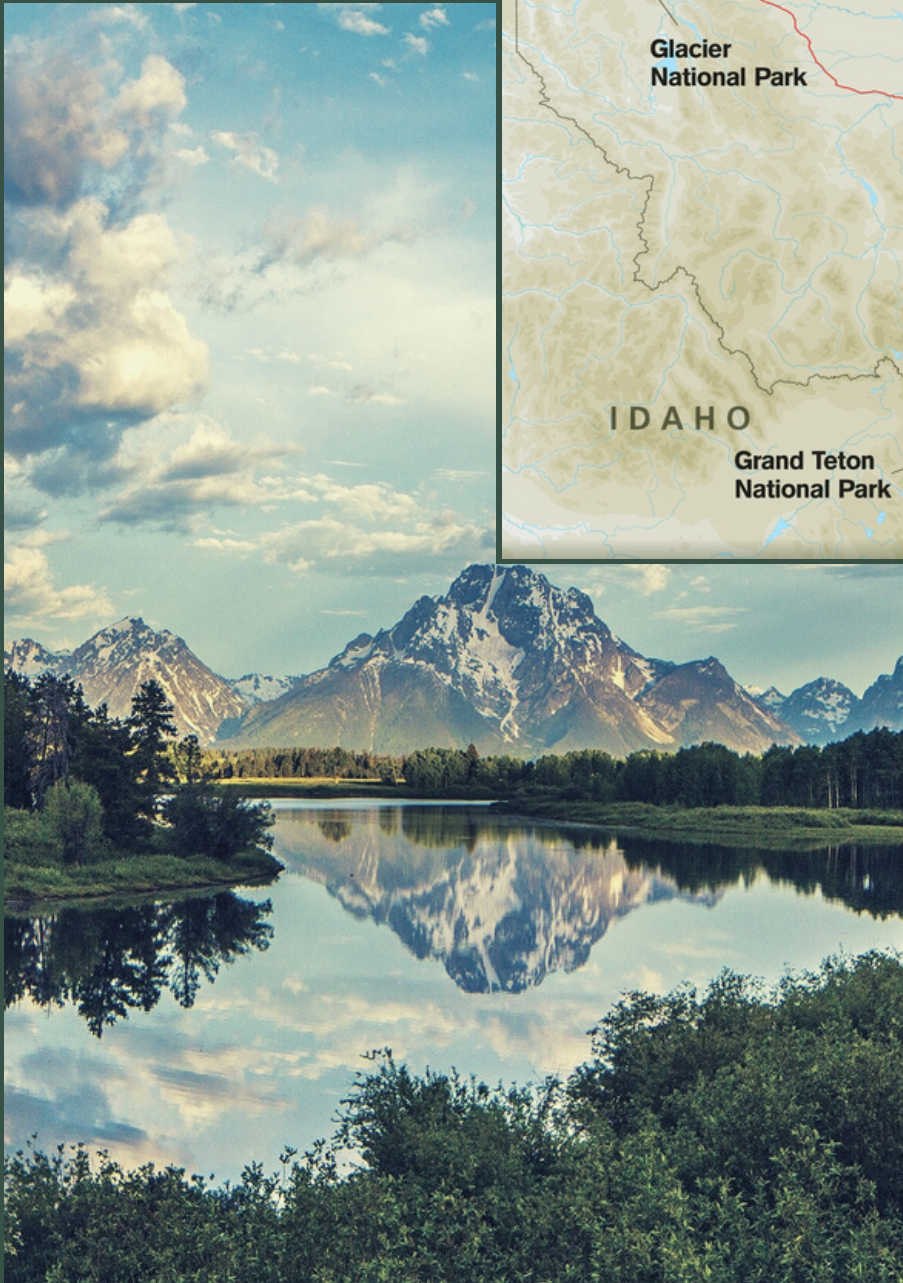
Grand Teton National Park

ABOUT GRAND TETON

With 12 stunning peaks standing higher than 12,000 feet tall, the Tetons are among the most photographed mountains in the world. The park's namesake, Grand Teton, is the tallest in the group standing at 13,770 feet above sea level. In this park, you'll find world-class skiing and mountaineering, along with some of the most photogenic hikes and bike rides in North America. Animal lovers will love the abundance of wildlife the region has to offer, including black bears, grizzly bears, moose, coyotes, and much more. If you're looking for a little excitement, then you won't want to miss [rafting the Snake River!](#)



[Click here to view trips and itineraries featuring Grand Teton National Park](#)



BEST TIME TO VISIT GRAND TETON

Grand Teton National Park is an adventurer's paradise year-round. Want to skip the crowds? Go in September or June. Want to see wildlife? Try May or September. Snow trip? Then December to February will be perfect!

WHERE TO STAY IN GRAND TETON

There are plenty of great accommodations no matter your budget or preference. Campers sleeping under the stars will be sung to sleep by coyotes howling at the moon; while guests of the Jackson Lake Lodge will be counting wandering elk and bison, instead of the sheep at night.



Glacier National Park

ABOUT GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Glacier National Park is pure, unspoiled nature at its finest with rugged mountain peaks, fresh alpine air, crystal blue lakes, gushing waterfalls, lush forests, vibrant meadows, and ancient glaciers. During the last Ice Age, glaciers slowly worked the landscape, carving deep valleys and sharp mountain ridges. The park exists thanks to the efforts of George Bird Grinnell, a magazine publisher, and the co-founder of the Audubon Society. His lobbying brought about the 8th National Park which encompasses more than one million acres. With so much land and many maintained trails (750 miles), Glacier is endlessly explorable.

BEST TIME TO VISIT GLACIER

There really isn't a bad time to visit Glacier. Like many of our beloved parks, the answer starts with what you want to see and experience. Across seasons, there seems to be no better spot on earth to teach us how shifting temperatures can completely reshape our natural environment.

WHAT TO DO IN GLACIER

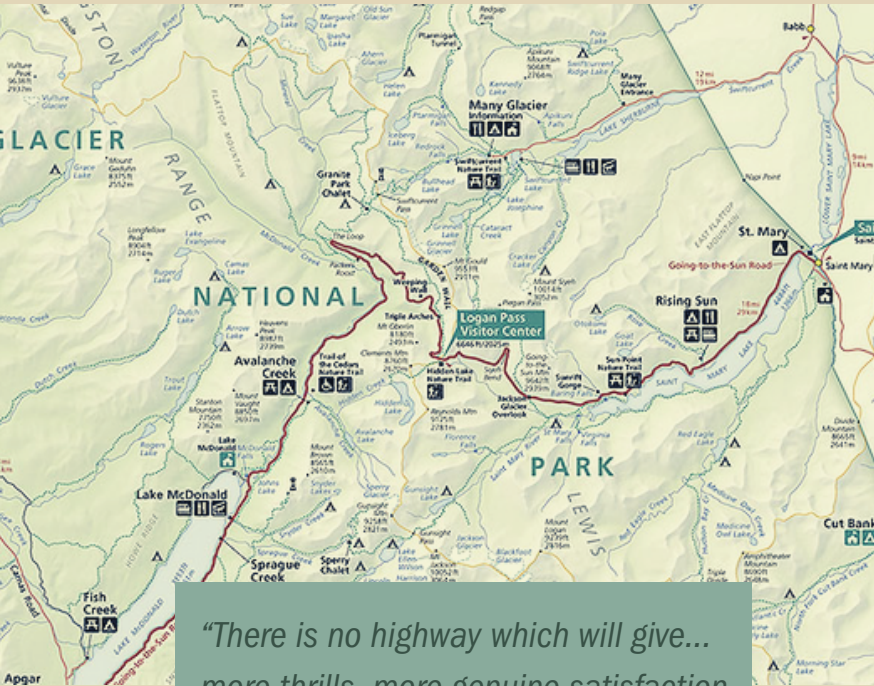
One of the major highlights while visiting Glacier National Park is a ride along the 50-mile route called the Going-to-the-Sun Road (see the full-page feature on the next page!). Wildlife lovers should be on the lookout for beavers, otters, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, elk, and grizzly bears. The grizzly bear is perhaps the park's most famous resident, roaming around in one of the last areas it calls home in the Continental U.S. Besides the great hiking and biking, you can also fish, kayak, raft, climb, ski, snowboard, and snowshoe.

TAKE ME THERE



Unmissable Experience

CYCLE THE GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD



“There is no highway which will give... more thrills, more genuine satisfaction deep in his being, than will a trip over this road.”

Governor Frank H. Cooney at the dedication of the road,1933

ABOUT GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD

Cutting from the West Entrance of Glacier National Park to the St. Mary Entrance, the road takes in several glaciers. Part of the road is carved into the vertical rock wall and on the other side has a 300-foot drop-off. The road is narrow, and some parts are steep. With seasonal road closures because of snow, the road generally opens for the summer in early June. The highest point of the road is the 6,646-ft. Logan Pass on the Continental Divide, which is a great spot for photographers.

LOCATION:
Glacier National Park

BEST TIME TO RIDE:
June to August

ACTIVITY LEVEL:
● ● ● ● ●

DISTANCE:
50 Miles



The road takes you past ancient glacial lakes, expansive alpine tundra, and through deep evergreen forests.



4 Reasons Why You Should Consider Group Travel for Your National Parks Vacation

We've all been there: you spend hours and hours planning a special vacation for yourself and your family, and yet when you get to your destination it's less than perfect.

Below we're sharing our top reasons you should consider traveling with a group instead of trying to do it all yourself. You'll save yourself time, money, and frustration, but most importantly, you'll experience the parks to their fullest.

#1 - You Don't Need to Worry About the Planning

Planning is the first step to a memorable vacation, but it can also be the most time-consuming and stressful. There are so many details to work out: transportation between cities and sights, accommodation that fits your needs, and activities that will delight everyone.

With a group, you'll have the experts handling every detail with your experience in mind. Nothing will be overlooked so you can enjoy the trip.

#2 - You Can Connect with Like-Minded Travelers

As you start out on your journey, you know that you have at least one thing in common with the others – a love of travel. Chances are, though, that you've got much more in common than that. With group travel, you can create shared experiences with family, friends, and of course, your new, soon-to-be friends. It's also a great way for solo travelers to set off on new adventures!

#3 - You Can Skip the Regrets

If you've ever been stuck behind a large crowd at a famous attraction, gotten lost for hours (and not in the fun way), or forgotten to research restaurants or activities, then you already know the sting of travel regrets.

When you go with a group, all the guesswork has been done for you. It's time to sit back and know the right decisions have been vetted and planned.

#4 - You Can Rely on the Experts to Guide Your Way

They say that experience is the best teacher; and for many guided group tour operators, that saying rings true. Guides know the lay of the land, how to avoid the crowds, know a surprise or two, and are people-focused. They'll cheer you on during tough hikes, dazzle you with their knowledge of local flora and fauna, and know all the best places for a bite to eat after a day of adventuring.

TO READ THE FULL ARTICLE, [CLICK HERE](#)

The Mighty Five

With wonders hundreds of millions of years old and landscapes that look straight from another world, Utah's five national parks top many a must-visit list. Each one is unique, yet all equally unforgettable.

ARCHES NATIONAL PARK

This national park's most iconic features are given away in its name. With more than 2,000 documented arches, plus soaring pinnacles, stacked rocks, massive fins, and other geological formations, Arches National Park is a land of marvels that seems frozen in time.

If you're up for a bit of a hike, consider the Devils Garden trail system to behold the park's most iconic sights like Landscape Arch and Double O Arch along nearly 8 miles of trail. You can also see the park's famed sights on a scenic drive. Don't forget Delicate Arch, one of the park's most photographed arches!

BRYCE CANYON NATIONAL PARK

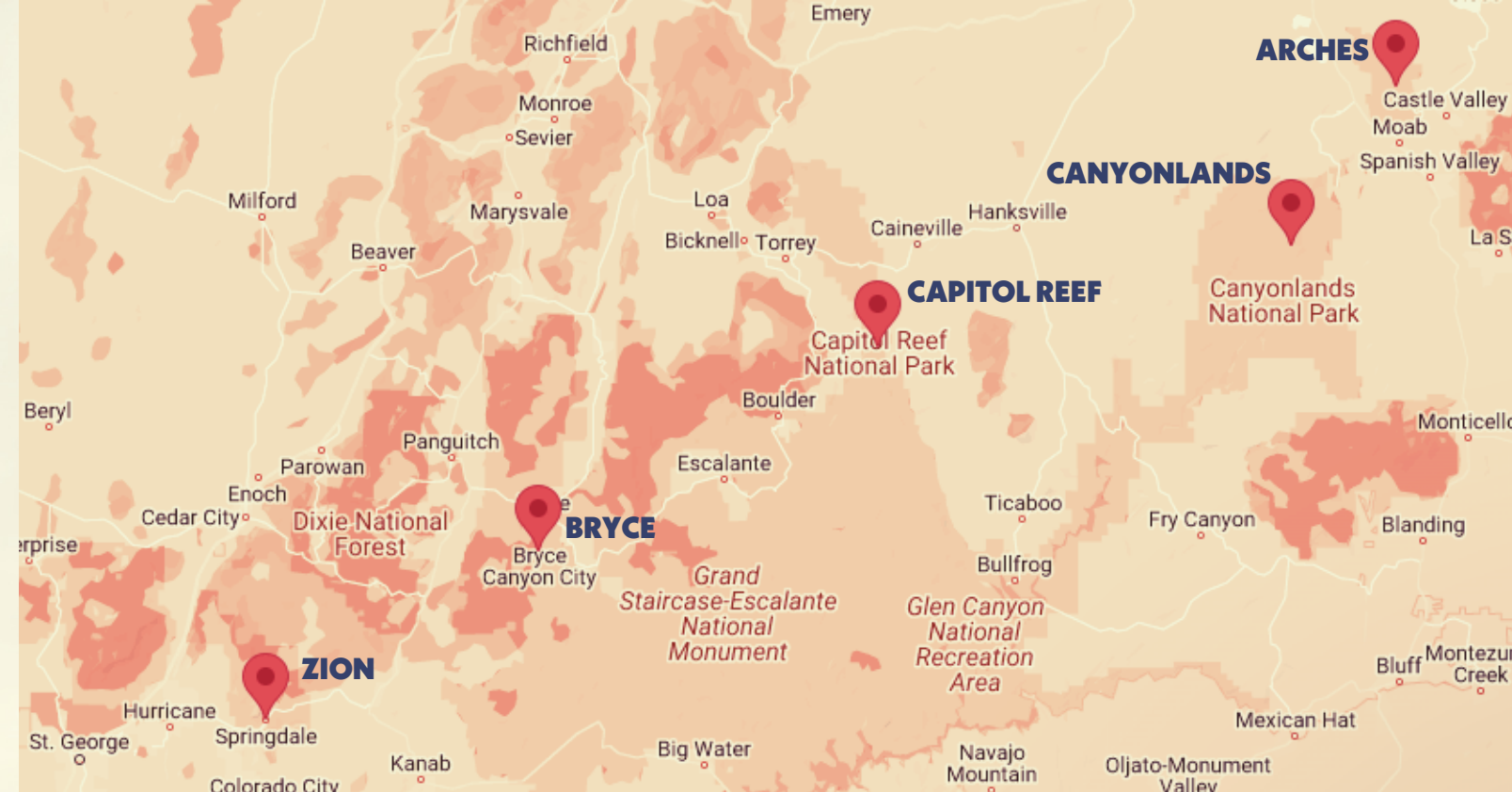
With an alpine environment and the largest collection of hoodoos (irregular columns of rock) on earth, it's easy to see why Bryce Canyon National Park welcomes millions of visitors each year. Bryce offers a range of activities for visitors including hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

In Bryce, wildlife lovers will have the chance to see Utah prairie dogs, mountain lions, elk, and mule deer, plus up to 175 species of birds depending on the time of year. When planning your trip, be sure to make time to stand before the Bryce Amphitheater to see the world's largest collection of hoodoos.

CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Canyonlands is divided by the Colorado and Green Rivers into three distinct sections: The Island in the Sky, the Needles, and The Maze. The Island in the Sky district is the most popular area of the park, sitting atop a massive 1,500-foot tall mesa. It's an easy drive from Moab and has the most accessible locations for hiking.

The Needles District is well-known for its sporadic outcroppings of rock spires. Needles is about a 2-hour drive from Island in the Sky, so it is worth your time to set aside at least a day for each district (or more if you can!). The Maze District is the remotest and most rugged of the three communities, only seeing about 3% of Canyonland's overall visitors!



CAPITOL REEF NATIONAL PARK

Fifty to seventy million years ago, a geological event helped create Capitol Reef's defining centerpiece - the Waterpocket Fold. Appearing as if the land was pinched up and tented for more than 100 miles, visitors of Capitol Reef can get up close and explore this incredible phenomenon.

What this park lacks in visitation numbers, it makes up for in grandeur. The expansive vistas are filled with sandstone domes, craggy cliffs, and vast canyons that give you an idea of what these lands must have looked like eons before humans. It's an otherworldly destination you don't want to miss!

ZION NATIONAL PARK

The park's diverse landscapes and unique geography have allowed for a variety of plant and animal diversity not found anywhere else. Zion National Park has it all with deserts, riparian-zones, mesas, rivers, canyons, arches, forests, mountains, and more.

Here, wildlife lovers can spy the park's 78 species of mammals (more than in wildlife hotspot Yellowstone National Park!) and active visitors can hike the famous Angels Landing or Emerald Pools trails, try out canyoneering in a narrow slot canyon, stargaze under the certified dark skies, and so much more.

Yes, you can visit the Mighty Five in one trip!

While you can easily spend days in each park, it's possible to see the best of all five parks in one trip. The key is planning and using expert guidance.

TAKE ME THERE

Utah's Dynamic Duo: Bryce & Zion

There's no doubt you'll be in awe of the strikingly different landscapes as you meander Utah's most famous national parks, Bryce Canyon and Zion. These two parks are only 90 minutes apart, yet they showcase an incredible range of landscapes. Explore Zion Canyon and the Virgin River, discover unique rock formations of Bryce's Peek-a-Boo and Queens Garden trails and jump into an adrenaline-inducing canyoneering adventure. Everywhere you look, new landscapes greet you. Everywhere you turn, a new adventure is waiting. Grab those hiking boots and a camera. Bryce and Zion should be on everyone's list to visit at least once. Maybe more!



ZION: A PHOTOGRAPHER'S HAVEN

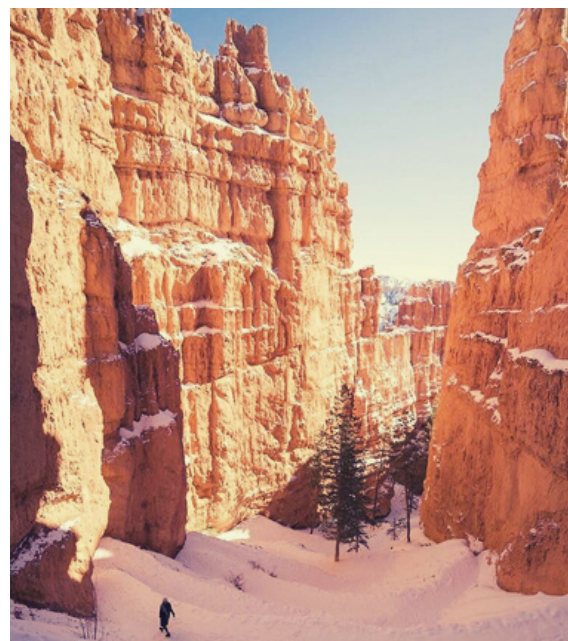
Visitors to Zion will want to make sure their camera (or at least their smartphone) is on hand to capture some of the indescribable sights. Summer visitors will see the sacred datura, a large funnel-shaped white flower which can be found along the canyons walls. Lush natural hanging gardens can be spotted along cliffs' edges. The sunrises and sunsets are noteworthy as well - making them something to prioritize your whole day around. Especially if you're an avid photographer or just appreciate a good moment of nature's stunning beauty.



THINGS TO DO IN BRYCE & ZION

- Hiking: With hundreds of miles of trails, you'll want to walk all over these stunning parks.
- Horseback Riding: You can experience the park as they did in the Old West!
- Biking: Take a different saddle and pedal through the parks. Or perhaps you prefer the saddle of a mountain bike to that of a horse.
- Night Activities: You won't forget a moonlight hike or the unrivaled stargazing you'll find in both parks.
- Wildlife Viewing: These parks offer an abundance of wildlife. Watch for mule deer, black bears, bighorn sheep, and for the chuckwalla - a lizard that can grow to 20 inches long.

TAKE ME THERE



BEST TIME TO VISIT BRYCE & ZION

The ideal time to visit Bryce and Zion is late May to early June; and then again in September and October. Summer temperatures can often reach over 100°F; and in winter, average temps are below freezing. Visits are still possible during these two extreme seasons, but you'll want to plan well ahead and seek expert guidance.

ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

There are multiple options to stay near Zion and Bryce. You'll find multiple lodges, hotels, B&B and campsites in Springdale, St. George, Cedar City, East Zion and Kanab, to name a few.

WHEN TO VISIT

Arches

Arches National Park holds incredible sights: fragile sandstone arches reaching high into the sky, expansive desert valleys, and wide-open blue skies among others. However, the park drastically changes over the seasons. Here's what you can expect across all four seasons in Arches National Park.

SPRING & FALL

Arches is picturesque in the spring and fall, with daytime highs ranging between 60-80 degrees Fahrenheit. The park receives a fair amount of sunshine, making sunscreen and proper headwear essential for a fun and safe experience. Visitors can expect Arches to be quite crowded during the spring and autumn months. The temperate climate, gorgeous sunsets, and many family-friendly attractions will draw locals and visitors alike to this natural wonder.

SUMMER

Summer is considered by some to be one of the best times to visit Arches. While temperatures can be above 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the afternoon, the mornings can be quite nice. The attractions are often less crowded due to heat, meaning a more private and serene experience in the park. Don't forget sun protection and water!

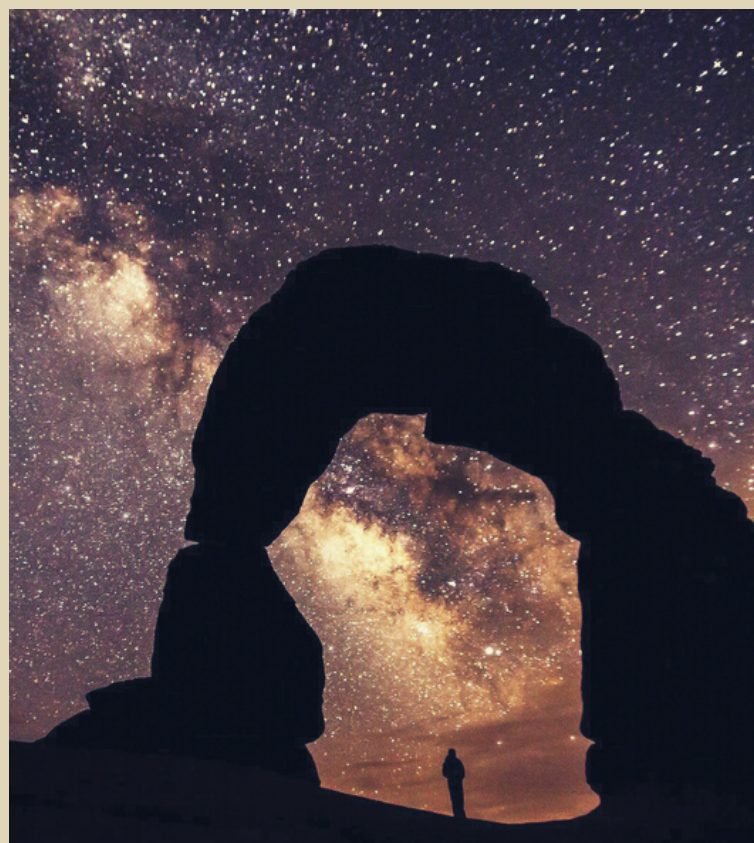


TAKE ME THERE



WINTER

Arches is gorgeous in the winter; the sight of red rocks and sandstone dusted with a layer of snow is strikingly beautiful and hard to forget. Temperatures will often range between 30-50 degrees Fahrenheit in the coldest months, often accompanied by wind, snow, and occasionally freezing rain. Trails may be closed due to weather during harsh winters, but for the most part, the park remains open for exploring.

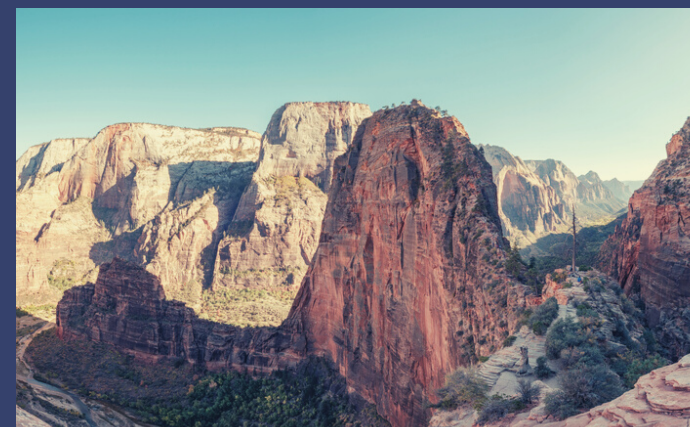


An Expert's Take on Hiking Zion's Angel's Landing

by Kasey Morrissey, former adventure guide and Head of Operations & President, USA for Austin Adventures

If you're looking for a thrilling hike with amazing views of the surrounding red cliffs and lush valleys, look no further than Angel's Landing in Zion National Park.

Formerly known as the Temple of Aeolous, this famous hike draws beginner and expert hikers for its challenging terrain, spectacular views, and ability to push hikers just a little bit above their normal comfort zone.



For sections along the narrow parts of the trail, support chains anchored to the rock will help with your balance. The view at the top is worth the work it takes to get up there! This exciting and demanding hike will leave you reeling with desire for more, and it won't be a hike you will soon forget!

The combination of remarkable views, impressive trail work, and the feeling that you're at the top of the world will make this hike an **unforgettable journey**.

Angel's Landing is a rock formation standing at 1,208 feet tall, and it resides in Zion National Park in Utah. A trail was cut into the solid rock in 1926, and leads to the top of Angel's Landing where jaw-dropping views await the hikers who take on its challenges.

You will encounter "Walter's Wiggles," a set of 21 steep switchbacks as well as narrow paths with sharp drop-offs on the last half of the trail.



It's worth noting that this hike is incredibly popular. As such, the park has created a lottery permit system. You **MUST** apply for a permit via the lottery to hike Angels Landing. You can learn everything about applying for the lottery (including a helpful video on how to apply) by [clicking here](#).



"Angel's Landing is so high, only an angel could land on it."

- Frederick Fisher on a 1915 Zion exploration (and how Angel's Landing got its name)



Unmissable Experience

CANYONEERING IN UTAH'S SLOT CANYONS



LOCATION:
Zion National Park
(and surrounding area)

BEST TIME TO VISIT:
May to September

ACTIVITY LEVEL:
● ● ●

RAPPEL HEIGHT
50 to 120 Feet

ABOUT CANYONEERING

The curvy, undulating canyon walls in and around Zion National Park are home to a heart-pumping thrill: canyoneering. Challenge yourself on this thrilling adventure where you can rappel down water-carved rocks in a sandstone slot canyon. This adrenaline-inducing activity is great for beginners and experienced adventurers alike.



With a canyoneering expert, this activity is great for beginners, including older children.



Tips for Photography in the Southwest

CAPTURE THE "GOLDEN HOUR"

The "golden hour" is the first and last light of the day, when the light is softer. This soft gold color can really make your images pop, as the sun gets higher or lower in the sky, the light becomes harsher and so do the shadows.

This hour varies by season and your latitude, so you'll want to look up when it occurs during your visit.

PACK YOUR PATIENCE

Like many things, photography is all about patience. Maybe the clouds look like you won't have a great sunset. But the clouds can change quickly in the Southwest and those same daunting clouds you thought would ruin your sunset end up making it better! While you don't need to camp out in one location for four hours, don't give up on a scene right away!

AVOID SHOOTING DIRECTLY AT THE SUN

Cameras have a hard time capturing "dynamic light range" (the light and dark parts of a scene). Shooting right at a sunset will likely either expose the photo for the foreground (which causes the sky to be blown out) or expose for the sky (the foreground ends up as a silhouette).

A good tip is to try shooting away from sunsets. You can catch the light from the setting sun, or you can catch the light bouncing off nearby clouds. Like all photography "rules," they can be broken. You can still create some great shots pointing right at a sunrise/sunset.

CAPTURE SOMETHING UNIQUE

The Southwest is incredibly photogenic, making it hard to take a bad photo but also difficult to take a unique photo. To create a unique image, try a totally different angle or time of day. Nighttime photos are among some of the more unique ways to make your photos stand out. Plus, the Southwest has some of the best star gazing in the country.

GO WITH GUIDES

Guides get you off the beaten path and can help you see sides of national parks that you might never find on your own. Which, of course, means more unique photos.

With a group, you feel more motivated to get out of bed and hit the trails early. You can see more, do more, learn more, and hopefully, end up with better photographs.

National Park Vacation Planning Tips

When it comes to planning any trip, how you like to travel and what you enjoy doing play a big factor in where you stay, what you do, and how much you spend. Planning a National Parks trip is no different. Each park is unique, as will be their accommodations, dining and lodging options, and activities. Read on to get a sense of what you can expect overall throughout the national parks.



CHOOSING YOUR PARK(S)

Your first (and possibly hardest) decision is choosing which national park you'll visit. Some parks, like Utah's Mighty Five and Montana's Glacier and Grand Teton are within hours of each other, making a multi-park trip an easier reality. Consider what you want to see and do and the time of year you can travel. A winter trip to Yellowstone is simply unforgettable, but it requires some planning ahead to truly enjoy it. Begin with a shortlist of options and whittle down using travel dates, activities, and proximity to find your ideal vacation spot.



GROUP TOUR VS. INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

There are a lot of advantages to traveling in a small group. By sharing fixed costs such as transportation and experienced guides, a group drastically reduces the per-person cost of a trip. In addition, tour operators have years worth of relationships that allow you access to high-demand accommodations. Expert guides help navigate you away from the crowds and into the park's hidden gems.

If you're looking to travel independently, it's easy to create a customized and flexible itinerary, but it takes work. For a successful National Parks vacation, you'll want to plan, plan, and plan some more. Accommodations fill up fast, especially in the busy seasons like summer. You'll also want to be prepared with how to handle parking, traffic, and inclement weather. The stronger your plan, the more enjoyment you'll get out of your vacation.

ACCOMMODATIONS

HIGH END

Accommodations in and around the national parks vary greatly. From fashionable rooms in rustic lodges to lavish and luxurious resorts and spas; to swanky and chic modern hotels that push the boundaries of design; and there's also full-service "glamping." There's nothing like having a relaxing place to unwind after a full day of adventuring. Make sure to book early (sometimes years in advance) as space is always limited for high-end accommodations in and around the parks.

MIDRANGE

The National Park system usually doesn't offer much in terms of the midrange budget. Generally, this type of accommodation can be found outside of the park boundaries. Make bookings well in advance to popular destinations during the busy summer months to save money.

BUDGET

Camping is the best way to stay on a budget. Sites fill up fast in the National Parks, and if you're backcountry camping, you'll generally have to reserve a permit from the Park Service to ensure a spot in a designated site.



DINING IN THE PARK

Finding a great meal in the National Park system can be a challenge. Many Parks are staffed with temporary workers that may not be specifically trained for the food service industry. That being said, there are some bright spots in the Park System, but it's generally good to have as many picnics or packed lunches as possible.

\$\$\$:

 There are plenty of expensive places to eat in the National Park System, but it doesn't necessarily mean high quality. There are some exceptions to this, but make sure to research dining options before your arrival if you're used to eating high-quality meals or have specific needs.

\$\$:

 Most of the midrange food options in the National Park system are served via a buffet-style setup or generic fast food. Alternatively, most parks have a variety of midrange restaurant options just outside the park.

\$:

 The cheapest way to eat at a national park is to prepare your own food and to have purchased it in advance to entering the park. There are always plenty of picnic sites available, but some parks offer more services than others. Be aware of different rules on food storage especially in parks where there are bears.

SOUTH DAKOTA'S

Wind Cave National Park

Wind Cave is one of the largest, oldest and most complex cave systems in the world. The total length of the cave system that has been discovered to date is over 80 miles, of which is located completely below the ground surface of only one square mile.

The caverns of Wind Cave National Park are different from most other known caves. Here you'll find very few stalactites or stalagmites; instead, the walls and ceilings are decorated with all sorts of otherworldly features known as speleothems, which include boxwork, frostwork, dripstone, and cave popcorn.



Above ground, the National Park Service has been working hard to reestablish the population of bison, elk, and pronghorn. The original donated population of 13 bison has now turned into a flourishing herd of over 400.

Around Wind Cave there are great opportunities to explore the Black Hills by bike, foot, or horseback. There are also ample opportunities for rock climbing and spelunking.



TAKE ME THERE

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATIONAL PARKS

SHOULD I GET A NATIONAL PARKS PASS?

An annual pass will set you back \$80 and gives you access to all National Parks and more than 2,000 National Recreation sites. Each park has a different entrance fee, but generally the pass is paid for after four national park visits. There are free passes for current active military members, and to U.S. citizens with permanent disabilities. There are also discounted passes for senior citizens.

HOW DO I MAKE RESERVATIONS FOR CAMPING/LODGING?

For campground reservations, visit Recreation.gov. Not all parks participate in this service; many campgrounds are first-come, first served. For more information on specific camping and lodging services offered at the park of your interest, please check specific park websites.

WILL I NEED A PERMIT FOR ACTIVITIES?

The answer is - it depends! Popular trails like Angel's Landing in Zion National Park requires permits to hike. Some parks require permits for backcountry camping or multi-day hikes, while others do not. Check the park's official website for details, or leave it to a tour operator to sort it out for you!

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO EXPLORE SAFELY?

Just like most things with visiting the national parks, planning goes a long way! Cell service is spotty at best in a lot of parks, so it's a good idea to download everything you need and have it on hand. If you're interested in exploring further but don't want to do it on your own, you can opt to travel with a tour operator who can handle all the details (like permits and reservations) as well as keep your safety and needs in mind while exploring the park. Most parks also have ranger-led activities like talks and hikes.

WHAT IS THE BEST RESOURCE FOR PARK INFORMATION?

The National Park Service has a robust website with pages of information on each park, including downloadable maps, trail information, things to do, events, and more. It's a great resource for both planning and inspiration. [Click here to go to the National Park Service](#). If you're looking for someone to handle it all for you, we recommend reaching out to a tour operator with experience in the national parks. They can direct you to specific resources and help take the planning off your plate.



Grand Canyon

NATIONAL PARK

GEOLOGY | GEOGRAPHY | WONDER

PLAN YOUR VISIT

Whether you're looking to take the kids to see one of the natural wonders of the world or you've always wanted to see the canyon dusted with snow, there's an itinerary out there just right for you. Click the button below to see a few itineraries to spark your inspiration.

TAKE ME THERE

Discover for yourself what nature has been working on for the past 6 million years

ABOUT GRAND CANYON

Millions of years in the making, the world-famous Grand Canyon is one of the original seven natural wonders of the world. Nearly one mile down from the rim, the Colorado River snakes its way along the canyon floor, slowly carving and creating the legendary canyon as we know it today. The canyon spans and fills the horizon, encompassing just over 1,900 square miles. The park is located on the ancestral homeland of 11 Associated Tribes, making the cultural heritage as strong as the geological formations.

ACCOMMODATION

The park is quite remote, so you'll want to book in advance. There are a few lodges along the South Rim, including Kachina Lodge (which has Canyon view rooms). The North Rim has only one option: Grand Canyon Lodge, with a panoramic terrace on the edge of the canyon.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

Weather in the Grand Canyon is complicated, with the Canyon itself often influencing the region's weather. In the winter, precipitation usually falls as snow on the rims but melts to rain before reaching the canyon floor. Late spring and early summer are the driest times of the year. With great weather and less crowds, our favorite time to visit the Grand Canyon is early fall.

THINGS TO DO

There are great opportunities for hiking, biking, and horseback riding on both sides of the Canyon. Also consider viewing the Grand Canyon by flying over in a helicopter, or perhaps from the comfort of a mule. Keep your eyes out for elk, skunks, mule deer, squirrels, pronghorn, and even mountain lions. In the high desert, you'll also see a variety of birds, including California condors and eagles.

"Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it."

- Theodore Roosevelt

California Desert Parks

Joshua Tree National Park

With dark skies primed for stargazing, rich biodiversity, and incredible geological features, Joshua Tree is an 800,000-acre desert wonderland prime for exploration.

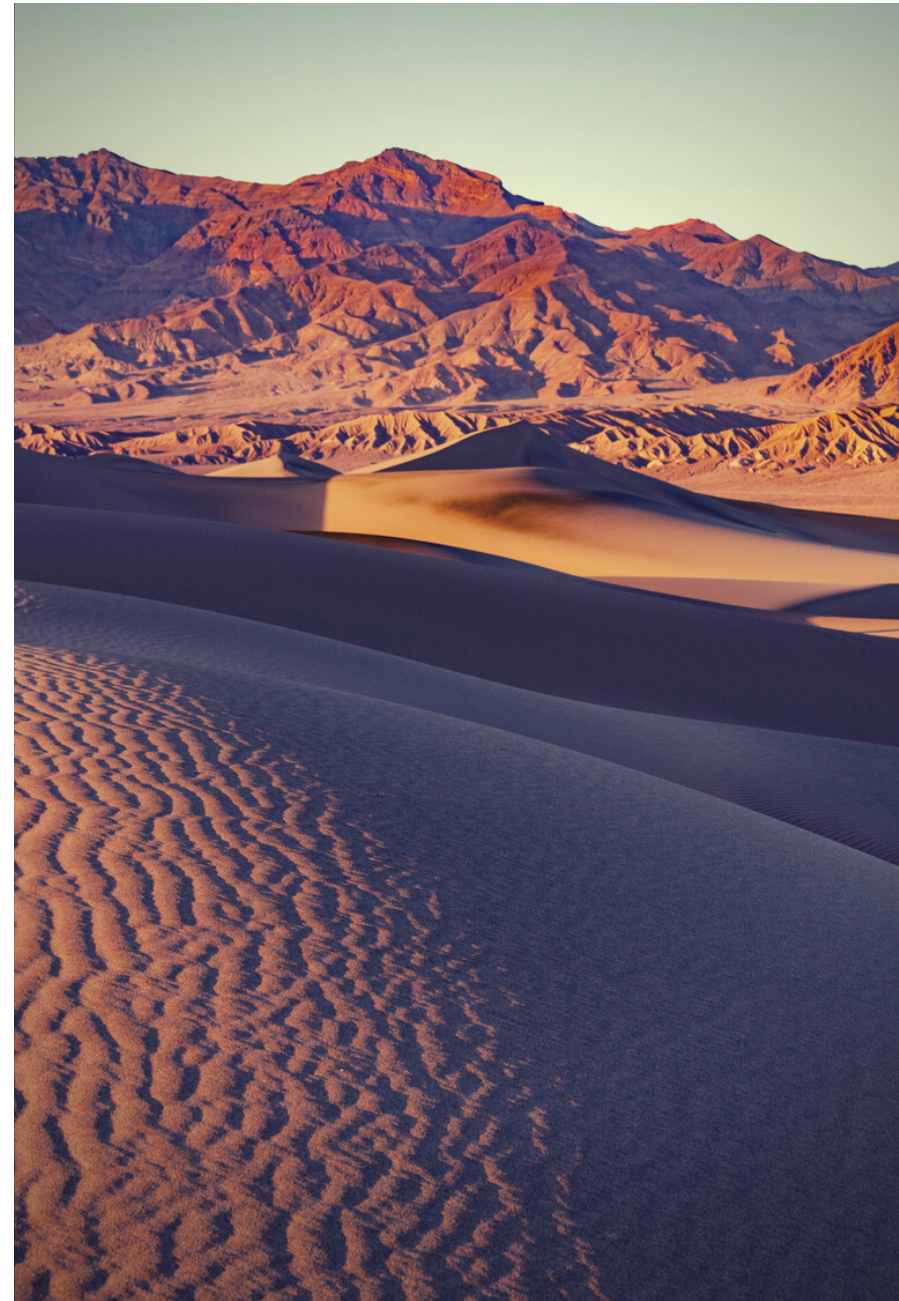
Despite extremely harsh conditions and lack of water, various plant and animal species can survive in the desert, including yucca, prickly pear cactus, creosote bush, and the trip's namesake, the Joshua Tree. Visitors can enjoy a variety of activities like hiking, biking, rock climbing, birding, photography, and relaxing among in the incredible natural scenery.



THE STARS COME OUT IN JOSHUA TREE

With some of the darkest skies in southern California, Joshua Tree National Park is a haven for stargazers. The park's relatively minimal light pollution gives you a whole new view of the Milky Way's majesty. Here are a few expert tips when setting out on an evening of stargazing:

- Layer up. The temperatures can drop quickly in the desert.
- Use red light instead of a traditional flashlight or your phone. Simply tape some red cellophane over it to tone the light down.
- It can take up to 30 minutes for your eyes to adjust, so be patient and get comfortable while you wait!



Death Valley National Park

Death Valley National Park spans 3.4 million miles, making it the largest national park in the lower 48. Despite its name and climate, life abounds in Death Valley. The Park is home to more than 1,000 species of plants (including 50 that are found nowhere else in the world), 300 species of birds, 51 species of mammals (including bighorn sheep and mountain lions), 36 species of reptiles and a handful of amphibian and fish species. It's also home to the lowest point in the United States, Badwater Basin. The otherworldly landscapes will bewitch and enchant you.

BEST TIME TO VISIT DEATH VALLEY

It's worth re-stating that Death Valley gets very hot. We recommend visiting during late fall when temperatures are milder. A spring visit during a rare super bloom would also be a great time to visit.



THINGS TO DO IN DEATH VALLEY

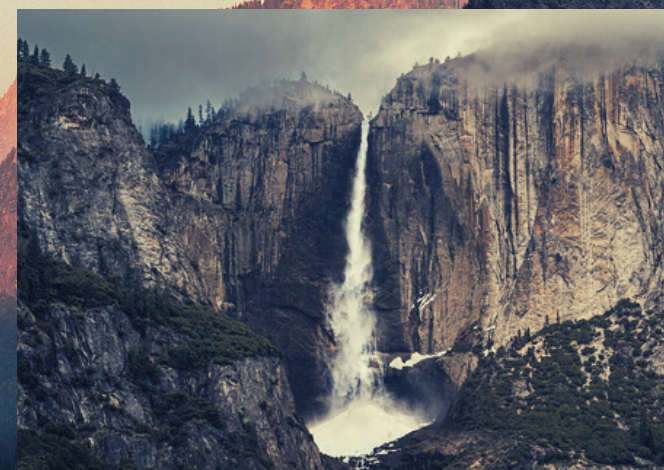
Adventurous types will find Death Valley alive with fantastic hikes and bike rides. The rich geological history of the park has left incredible rock formations around every corner. Mosaic Canyon is like a virtual Geology Museum carved from finely polished marble. Scattered throughout the park there are also over 100 abandoned mines and ghost towns worth rediscovering. Make sure to pack plenty of water, seemingly mild temperatures can be misleading due to the extremely dry desert air.

TAKE ME THERE

Yosemite

NATIONAL PARK

CLIFFS | WATERFALLS | FORESTS



QUICK FACTS:

- FIRST PROTECTED IN 1864
- SPANS 1,200 SQUARE MILES
- THERE ARE DOZENS OF WATERFALLS, INCLUDING THE 2,425-FOOT-TALL YOSEMITE FALLS

MUST SEES:

- HETCH HETCHY VALLEY
- YOSEMITE VALLEY TO SEE EL CAPITAN, HALF DOME, AND MORE
- MARIPOSA GROVE TO STAND AMONG GIANT SEQUOIAS

TAKE ME THERE

Yosemite Offers Adventure for Everyone

Yosemite is a hikers and climbers paradise. Giant glaciers once filled the valley cutting away a perfectly shaved basin, leaving us with such landmarks as Half Dome, El Capitan, and Yosemite Falls. The valley has long been a pilgrimage for climbers around the world looking to conquer the world's longest free climbs while pushing their vertical limits to new heights. The views are just as good from the safety of the many well-maintained paths that crisscross the Yosemite Valley. Hiking up Half Dome requires a hard-to-get permit, and most of the day to ascend and descend. The views from Glacier Point are almost unbeatable, and the hikes surrounding the point are all worthwhile. It's hard not to consider the valley one of the world's best natural playgrounds. Besides the vertical pursuits; the rafting, biking, and skiing are also top-notch.

Packing for an Active Day in a National Park

Backpack

After many years of trying out backpacks, [Osprey](#) comes Guide recommended for all sorts of features from fit to straps, hooks, pockets & colors. Bring a 26L for short hikes, or 36L for longer days.

Cell Phone

Many helpful apps now work without the need for internet. [NPS](#), [AllTrails](#) & [PictureThis](#) all feature great information for your day in the parks; from interactive maps to trail-finding to plant identification.

Snacks & Water

Bring snacks like apples, cheese, crackers, nuts & granola bars. A [Camelbak](#) reservoir or [Nalgene](#) bottle is perfect for carrying the water needed for your activities.

Insect Repellent

If there's one sure way to ruin your memories of a place, it's forgetting bug spray! [OFF! Deep Woods with Deet](#) is a great product that means you can enjoy your day bug-free.

Potty Pack

Best to prepare for the "loo with a view" to avoid getting caught out in the wilds. Pack out what you pack in with 6 sheets of toilet roll, 2 individually wrapped wet wipes, and a [Ziploc](#) bag.

Sunscreen & Hat

Guide Tip: Carry your sunscreen in a [Ziploc](#) bag in case it leaks! Consider your activities for the day: 50 SPF is best for longer activities, and not all sunscreen is water resistant. Crushable hats like [HeadSweats](#) are great for popping in the bag.

Rain Jacket

"If you don't bring it, it'll rain" . For warmer climates, bring a lightweight/packable like [Outdoor Research's Helium](#). For colder weather, [Arcteryx](#) are widely regarded for their shells to wear over layers.

First Aid Kit

An essential for any trip into the wilderness. [Adventure Medical Kits](#) are ultralight & watertight and have everything. Customize with [Compeed](#) for blisters and you're all set.

Trekking Poles

Don't knock them until you try them. If there is any up or downhill in your day, save your knees and help your balance with a pair of poles. [Leki Cressida Carbons](#) weigh little & pack right down.

Binoculars

Ideal for enjoying grizzly bears from a safe distance, or rock climbers way up on Half Dome, a small set such as by [Vortex Optics](#) are lightweight and provide crystal-clear viewing.

"There is no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing"

Alfred Wainwright in his book 'Coast to Coast'



COLORADO'S

Rocky Mountain National Park

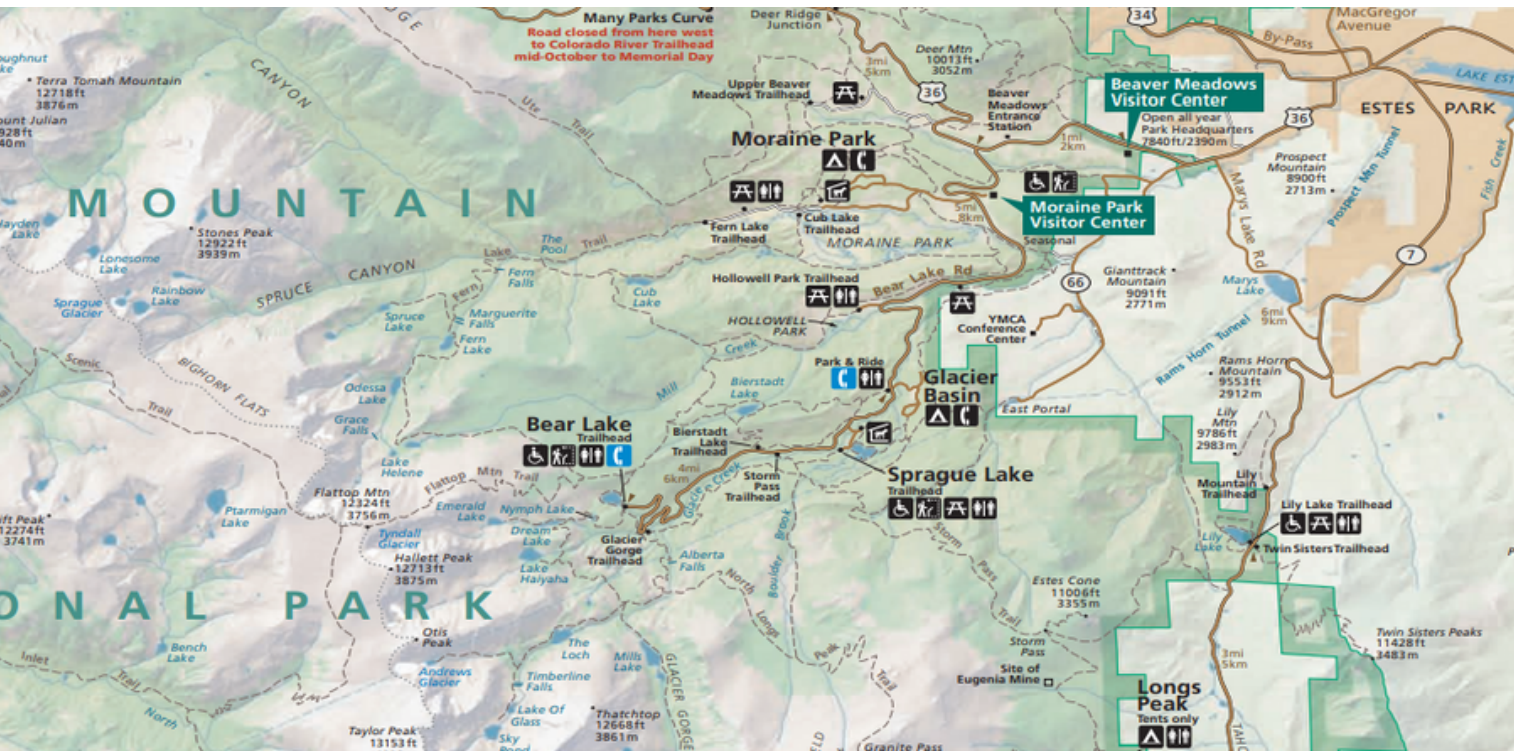
Located in the Colorado Rockies northwest of Boulder, Rocky Mountain became a national park in 1915. This park is a mountainous playground with 355 miles of hiking trails, 150 lakes, and more than 70 peaks taller than 12,000 feet just begging to be climbed.

The incredible Trail Ridge Road weaves through forests, meadows, and climbs to spectacular heights - to over 12,000 feet! Known upon completion in 1932 as one of the scenic wonders of the world, the 48 miles is one of Colorado's major attractions.



TAKE ME THERE

The park has more than just rugged mountains with placid lakes, meandering rivers, flower-filled meadows, and evergreen forests begging for exploration. The hiking and wildlife viewing are unparalleled.



Top Hikes in Rocky Mountain National Park

It's well known Rocky Mountain National Park offers incredible hiking options for every type of hiker. This (somewhat subjective) list is by no means comprehensive, but gives you an idea of the lake, waterfall, and summit hikes you can sink your boots into while in this park. Pro Tip: you'll want at least a few days to explore this park, with a day or so to acclimatize if you're not used to the elevation.

TWIN SISTERS PEAK

This 7-mile hike is challenging but offers rewarding views of the surrounding peaks. You'll hike through a forest, across the remnants of a landslide, and along steep switchbacks to reach the summit at just under 11,500 feet.

NOTE: Weather in the Rockies can change rapidly. You'll want to know the forecast, pack plenty of water and sun protection, and have a plan in the event of a thunderstorm. Lightning strikes are common in the park June through September.

EMERALD LAKE

Hike through the aspen and ponderosa pine groves, passing Nymph and Dream Lake through the Tyndall Gorge. You'll follow Tyndall Creek to reach Emerald Lake, a serene green-hued pool of water surrounded by mountains. Consider adding a bit to the return with a visit to Lake Haiyaha, which is named from an indigenous word that means "rock" or "lake of many rocks," or "big rocks," depending on the translation.



MOUNT IDA

The trail begins among interesting rock formations and a placid alpine lake before turning upwards through the forest with occasional views of Never Summer Mountains. The landscape quickly changes as you get above the tree line and enter the tundra where resident bighorn sheep and elk can often be seen. Upon reaching the base of Mt. Ida, you'll have a 1-mile ascent to the peak. At just under 13,000 feet, the summit offers stunning 360-degree views of mountain peaks, alpine lakes, and the continental divide.

ALBERTA FALLS

This fairly easy out-and-back trail brings you through aspen groves and pine forests to a thundering 30-foot waterfall. The 1.2 mile round-trip trail is a popular route, with rock slabs ideal for picnics and relaxing along the scenic path.

Kenai Fjords

NATIONAL PARK

GLACIERS | WILDLIFE | WOODLANDS

ABOUT KENAI FJORDS

Life thrives amid icy glacial waters and along the lush coastlines of Kenai Fjords National Park. The waters here are home to a variety of marine life including orcas, sea otters, sea lions, humpback whales, and harbor seals. From majestic waterfalls to grandiose glaciers, Kenai Fjords tends to leave a massive impression upon its visitors. Though most of Kenai Fjords is only accessible by boat travel, it's one of only three Alaskan national parks that can be reached by road. Another way to enter the park is by one of North America's most scenic railways, the famous Alaska Railroad. The park is "crowned" by Harding Icefield, a sprawling 700-square mile field of ice from which the park's 30+ glaciers flow. Those who are up for a bit of a challenge can hike up to view the Harding Icefield to behold its scale and see the source from which all life in the park seems to spring from.

THINGS TO DO IN KENAI FJORDS

Adventurers will love exploring this national park. Active travelers can hike to expansive viewpoints of sprawling ice fields, bike along fern-laden roads, or kayak the shorelines of quiet bays. To really see the full extent of the park, consider a cruise along the glacial water, listening for the sound of falling ice (calving). Wildlife lovers will no doubt enjoy keeping their eyes peeled for a huge variety of land mammals, marine animals, and birds alike. Bring your binoculars!

BEST TIME TO VISIT

While each of the four seasons offer their own special surprises (even the short "shoulder" seasons of spring and fall), we recommend traveling between May and September to take advantage of the longer daylight hours and warmer temperatures. Winter is a great for winter sports enthusiasts.

"To the lover of pure wildness Alaska is one of the most wonderful countries in the world."

- John Muir

PLAN YOUR VISIT

Explore the land of the midnight sun and one of the last great frontiers.

TAKE ME THERE

AN ADVENTURE GUIDE REVEALS: How to Tell the Difference Between a Black Bear and a Grizzly Bear

When encountering a bear on the trail, how you react is critical. How you handle a grizzly bear encounter is different from a black bear. This handling can be the difference between a peaceful encounter and a more unpleasant experience. Read on for a few tried-and-true tips that may help you when you're out exploring.



Grizzly Bears have a distinctive hump



Black Bears have no hump and a higher rump

DIFFERENCES TO LOOK FOR

- Grizzlies have a telltale hump between their shoulders. A black bear will not have that hump, but in comparison to a grizzly, it will appear to slump. A black bear's back end, or rump, will be higher than its front end. A fun way to remember this is, **Grizzly Bear = Hump, Black Bear = Rump**.
- When looking at the bear from the side, you will notice that a black bear has a straight-face profile while a grizzly has a dished-face profile.
- Grizzlies have short, round ears while a black bear has taller, longer ears.
- Grizzlies have long, light-colored claws ideal for digging while a black bear's short, dark claws are perfect for climbing trees.

HANDLING BEAR (AND WILDLIFE) ENCOUNTERS

- Always **stay at least 100 yards away (the length of a football field)** from any bear if you can help it.
- Use "The Thumb Rule." When you see a bear (or any wildlife), stick your arm straight out in front of you with your thumb up. **Your thumb should cover the entire animal**, meaning you're far enough away for safety. If the bear appears around the edges of your thumb, slowly back up to get to a safer distance.
- Where allowed, consider bringing **bear spray** with you. In many parks, you can even rent bear spray at a kiosk to bring along with you just in case.



Denali National Park & Preserve

While the crown jewel of this national park (and its namesake) is North America's tallest mountain, Denali National Park & Preserve offers more than six million acres of wild land to explore.

The entire park only has one road and one entrance, allowing it to stay true to its wild roots. Denali National Park & Preserve is also the only park in the United States that employs sled dogs. These working dogs help rangers reach various parts of the park via sled, keeping a long tradition of employing working dogs alive while also ensuring reliable transport in challenging weather. While in the park, you can visit their kennels and possibly see a demonstration.

In addition to the happy pups, you're sure to see tons of wildlife throughout the park like foxes, grizzly and black bears, wolves, caribou, moose, and Dall's sheep. Denali offers a few marked trails for hiking, but much of the available hiking is off trail, making for a once-in-a-lifetime experience among the untamed lands of Alaska.



TAKE ME THERE



Unmissable Experience

RAFTING SNAKE RIVER CANYON



This incredibly scenic area has some of Wyoming’s finest whitewater and plenty of opportunities to spy wildlife.

Location:
Northwestern Wyoming (near
Yellowstone & Grand Teton)

Best Time To Visit:
May to September

Activity Level:
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Rapid Class:
Class I-III



ABOUT RAFTING SNAKE RIVER CANYON

Boasting Class I-III rapids, the Snake River offers everything from a scenic float to heart-pumping whitewater rafting. Snake River Canyon is rich in flora and fauna, plus unique geological features that make for interesting viewing opportunities between rapids. Whitewater rafting can be enjoyed by anyone aged six and older, and scenic floats are suitable for children as young as four, making it an amazing family activity.

THE MOST SPECTACULAR DRIVE

Connecting Banff and Jasper National Parks, The Icefields Parkway is simply astounding. Glacier-fed lakes and alpine vistas appear around every curve.

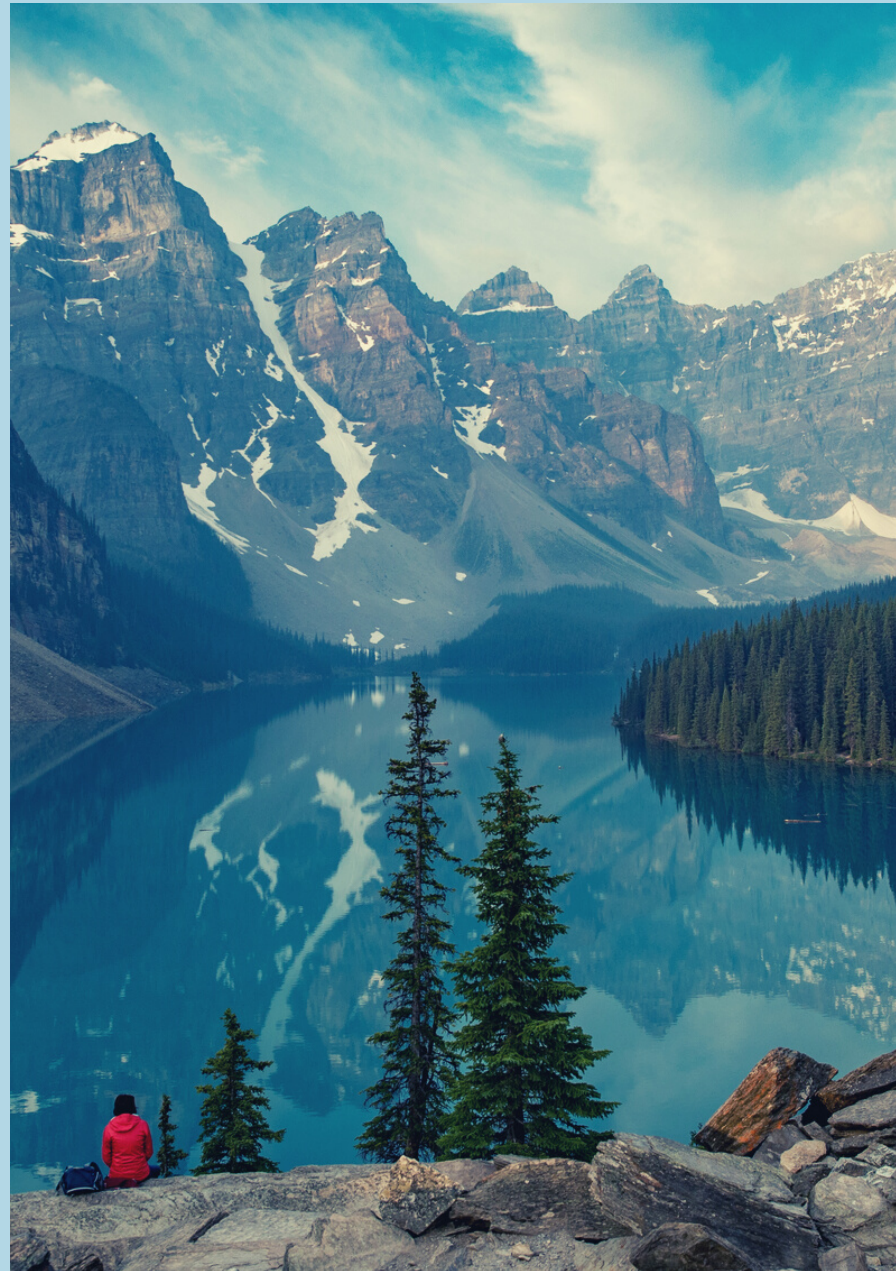


PEYTO LAKE, ALBERTA

Neighbors to the North

BANFF NATIONAL PARK

Banff National Park is Canada's oldest and most famous National Park and has been designated a World Heritage Site. The vast stretches of wilderness on display in Banff offer its visitors soul-refreshing scenery of glaciers, lakes, valleys, and snowcapped mountain peaks. There are active pursuits for everyone, including fishing, hiking, golfing, horseback riding, skiing, mountain biking, rafting, heli-skiing and more! Venturing further into the park, visitors will find the stunning Lake Louise. Biking the Vermillion Lake Trail, hiking Sentinel Pass, and rafting the Kananaskis River are amongst our favorite must-do activities in Banff National Park.



YOHO NATIONAL PARK

This park may be small, but it's mighty in its beauty. With less crowds than at Banff and Jasper, visitors will enjoy the solitude of nature with plenty of opportunities to spy wildlife like badger, black bear, cougar, coyote, elk, grizzly bear, lynx, marmot, moose, mountain goat, mule deer, and wolverine. Adding to Yoho's serenity are 60 lakes, including the turquoise Emerald Lake which has a lovely 3-mile hike around it. If waterfalls are your thing, Yoho has Canada's second-largest waterfall, the thundering Takakkaw Falls which you can hike or drive to.

JASPER NATIONAL PARK

Jasper National Park is part of a network of provincial parks (including Banff National Park) that make up the Canadian Rockies. The Rocky Mountains connect Jasper and Banff National Parks, making the drive between them one of the most scenic and famous drives in the world—known as the Icefields Parkway. Winding its way between the parks, over one hundred glaciers are visible from the road including the easily-accessible Athabasca Glacier. Turquoise lakes, thundering waterfalls, and a plethora of hiking trails, picnic spots and campgrounds make this park easy to enjoy. Visitors regularly spot elk, bighorn sheep, moose and mountain goats and active travelers enjoy rafting the whitewater rapids, trekking across Athabasca Glacier, and hiking along the shores of Moraine Lake to Consolation Lake, with the vivid scenery of the snow-capped Rocky Mountains in view.



BEST TIME TO VISIT BANFF, JASPER, AND YOHO

The parks can be enjoyed year round with activities like hiking and skiing throughout the parks. Summer is best for hiking and lovers of snow can head here between late fall all the way up to early April to enjoy some of the best conditions in the world!



TAKE ME THERE

National Park Trips from the National Park Experts



After all that inspiration, now it's time to find a trip!
The following pages are full of Austin Adventures' specialty - North America National Park trips. These trips have been planned and perfected for decades; reflecting years of exploration, relationship-building, and first-hand experience. We're confident these national parks trips will be an experience unlike any other.

Created by experts. Led by experts. Enjoyed by all.



Utah &

Arizona



Mighty Five National Parks

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Watchman's Trail in Zion National Park.
- Zion Canyon & Virgin River.
- Bryce Canyon's Queens Garden Trail.
- The Cohab Canyon (Capitol Reef).
- The Grand View Point trail (Canyonlands).
- Delicate Arch (Arches National Park).

PLUS

- Zion canyoneering adventure.



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY



Bryce Canyon & Zion National Parks

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Zion Canyon
- Hoodoos along Peek-a-Boo and Queens Garden trails
- Snow Canyon State Park

KAYAK

- Quail Creek State Park

EXPLORE

- Sculpted rock gardens seen from Rainbow Point
- A slot canyon in Zion on a canyoneering adventure



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY

FAMILY



Arches & Canyonlands Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Mesa Arch & Delicate Arch
- The Needles District
- Devil's Garden

BIKE

- Canyonlands National Park
- Potash Road along Colorado River

PLUS

- Paddle Black Granite Gorge
- Hummer Tour of Moab



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY



Grand Canyon Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Watson Lake and Montezuma Castle
- South Kaibab Trail

KAYAK

- The Salt River

PLUS

- Scenic train ride on the Colorado Plateau
- Jeep adventure in Sedona
- Wildlife Sanctuary



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY

FAMILY



Grand Canyon in Winter

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Along the South Rim of the Grand Canyon
- Watson Lake
- South Kaibab Trail

PLUS

- Enjoy a float down the Salt River
- Experience Sedona with fewer crowds and all of its allure
- Ride the Grand Canyon Railway
- Get your thrills in on a 2-hour jeep tour in red rock country

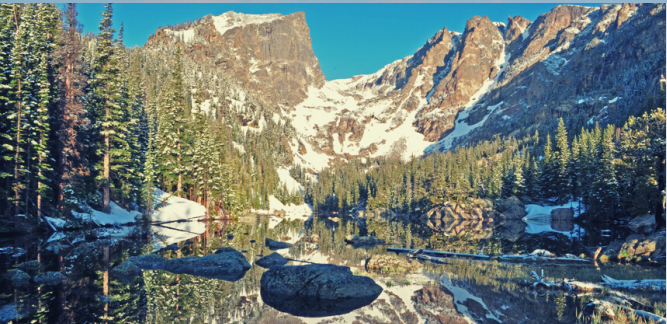


DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY

Colorado, South Dakota & California



Colorado Rockies Hiking Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- HIKE**
- Emerald and Haiyaha Lakes
 - Above 11,000 feet to the Twin Sisters
 - Along the Continental Divide, to the summit of Mt. Ida
- PLUS**
- Scenic drive on Trail Ridge Road
 - Estes Park

**DEPARTURE DATES**

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ADULT ONLY



Joshua Tree Vacation & Death Valley

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- HIKE**
- 29 Palms Oasis
 - Cholla Garden
 - Mastodon Peak Loop
 - Hidden Valley Loop
 - Badwater Basin
 - Ubehebe Crater and Mosaic Canyon
 - Mesquite Sand Dunes
 - Golden Canyon to Red Cathedral

**DEPARTURE DATES**

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ADULT ONLY



Mount Rushmore & Black Hills

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- BIKE**
- Spearfish Canyon
 - The Famed Mickelson Trail
- PLUS**
- Mount Rushmore
 - Scenic tour of the Needles Highway and Iron Mountain
 - Caving in Wind Cave National Park

**DEPARTURE DATES**

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ADULT ONLY

FAMILY



Yosemite Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- HIKE**
- Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias
 - Hetch Hetchy
 - Yosemite Valley Mist Trail to Vernal Fall
 - John Muir Trail, Taft Point and Sentinel Dome Hike
- CLIMB**
- Rock Climb (at your level) and learn rappelling
- PLUS**
- Tunnel View photo ops
 - Swimming in the Tuolumne River

**DEPARTURE DATES**

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ADULT ONLY

FAMILY

Alaska &

Canada



Kenai Fjords & Denali Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Exit Glacier Overlook Trail or Harding Icefield Trail
- Talkeetna Lake
- Triple Lakes Trail

RAFT

- Kanai River Canyon

PLUS

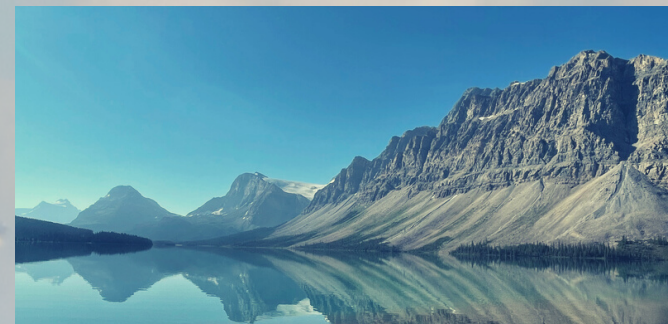
- Cruise Resurrection Bay, Gulf of Alaska and Aialik Bay
- Denali Backcountry Adventure
- Optional Denali Flightseeing



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY



Banff & Jasper Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Kananaskis Country
- Over Sentinel Pass, for views of Paradise Valley
- On the Athabasca Glacier

BIKE

- Bow Falls
- Bill Milne Bike Path

PLUS

- Raft the rapids of Kicking Horse River
- Explore Lake Louise



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY

FAMILY



Kenai Fjords Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Resurrection River Trail
- Harding Icefield Trail and Byron Glacier

KAYAK

- Resurrection Bay

BIKE

- Johnson Pass Trail

PLUS

- Kenai Fjords National Park Wilderness Cruise
- The Alaska Railroad on the Coastal Classic route



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY

FAMILY



Vancouver Island Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Goldstream Provincial Park and Cathedral Grove

BIKE

- Galloping Goose Trail
- Rainforest bike ride

KAYAK

- Marine wildlife spotting in Ucluelet Harbor

PLUS

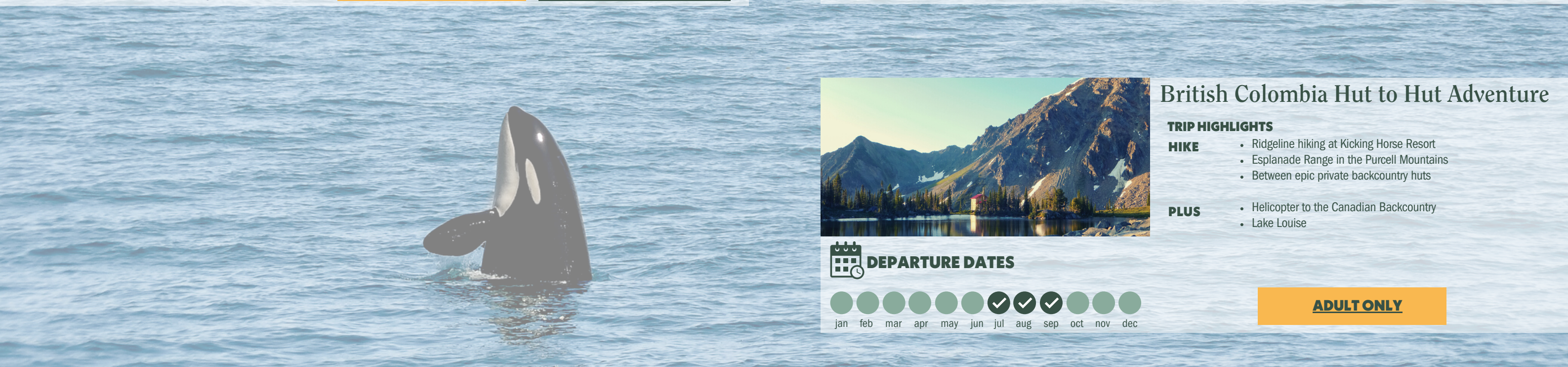
- Hot Springs Boat Tour
- Zipline through the rainforest



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY



British Colombia Hut to Hut Adventure

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

HIKE

- Ridgeline hiking at Kicking Horse Resort
- Esplanade Range in the Purcell Mountains
- Between epic private backcountry huts

PLUS

- Helicopter to the Canadian Backcountry
- Lake Louise



DEPARTURE DATES



ADULT ONLY

The Toughest Part Is Going Home

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2023