

# The Grand Canyon, The Great Lakes, US National Parks

## ■ The Grand Canyon

Attracting millions of visitors every year, the Grand Canyon is one of the great tourist attractions in the United States.

Located in northern Arizona, this massive natural wonder was carved by the Colorado River over a period of several million years and now measures 446 km long, over 1.6 km deep and up to 29 km wide. It is not the deepest or the longest canyon in the world but the overwhelming size and colorful landscape offers visitor vistas that are hard to match.

Managed and protected by the Grand Canyon National Park, the Grand Canyon is contained within the national park as well as within the Hualapai and Havasupai Indian Reservations. Awe-inspiring landscapes, wildlife viewing, historic sites and adventurous activities are just a few of the reasons that make the Grand Canyon one of the world's most famous natural wonders.

The Canyon is divided into two main sections, the popular South Rim and the remote North Rim. One of the most popular attractions in the Canyon is Havasu Falls, a spectacular waterfall that plummets 37 meters into a natural swimming pool of turquoise water. Other sights and experiences opportunities in the Canyon include numerous hiking trails, wildlife viewing, whitewater rafting, mule rides, jeep tours, helicopter rides and the Skywalk, a glass sightseeing structure extending 1,200 metres over the rim of the Grand Canyon.



## ■ Great Lakes

The Great Lakes – Superior, Huron, Michigan, Ontario and Erie – make up the largest body of fresh water on Earth, accounting for one-fifth of the freshwater surface on the planet. The area of all the Great Lakes is 246,463 square kilometers. About 14,000 years ago, the Great Lakes area was covered with a glacier that was more than 1 km thick. As the glacier melted, it slowly moved toward Canada and left behind a series of large depressions that filled with water. These formed the basic shape of the Great Lakes that is familiar today.



The lakes are on the US-Canadian border, touching Ontario in Canada and Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York in the United States. About 34 million people in the United States and Canada live in the Great Lakes basin. More than 3,500 species of plants and animals inhabit the Great Lakes basin, including over 170 species of fish.

Today, the Great Lakes are popular recreation spots for boating, fishing and other recreational activities and still serve as an important mode of goods transportation. Some of the activities that you can do are canoeing, sailing, swimming, surfing, mountain climbing, camping, hiking, etc.

## ■ US National Parks

Here are some of the best US National Parks.

### 1. Yosemite, California

Yosemite sparkles as a crown jewel of the national parks, showcasing not just glacier-carved beauty, but North America's highest waterfall (Yosemite Falls), the world's tallest uninterrupted granite monolith (El Capitan) and



mountains that Ralph Waldo Emerson dubbed "unmatched on the globe". Glacier Point Road leads to perhaps the most spectacular vista in any national park, looking down on Yosemite Valley. Wawona, near the southern entrance, where the famous Mariposa Grove of sky-scraping sequoias begins. There's hiking, rafting, fishing, big-wall rock climbing, camping or simply lounging at the Ahwahnee Hotel, a valley-floor mainstay since 1927.

### 2. Acadia, Maine

From its ragged shoreline and sheltered coves, to offshore rocky isles, to the serrated mountains of Mount Desert lording over swaths of pines and marshy meadows, there is much to applaud at this nearly 50,000-acre park. Be sure to hike or bike along the park's 57 miles of serene carriage roads. Then, come back by the sea, take a boat cruise or, even better, rent a kayak, to

see seals sunning themselves on rocks and, if you're lucky, whales.

### 3. Channel Islands, California

Channel Islands lie just 11 miles off the southern California coast, less than an hour away by boat, and make up an eight-island chain. What makes Channel Islands very special are its plants and animals – more than 150 endemic or unique species have earned it the nickname "North American Galapagos". This is the only place in the world where you'll see, for example, island fox, island deer mouse and yellow-blooming coreopsis clinging to exposed cliffs. The largest aggregation of blue whales in the world convenes here every summer. So, you can imagine the silver platter of outdoor activities available – kayaking through sea caves, camping on lonely bluffs, hiking to a pinniped rookery, diving to explore giant kelp beds.

### 4. Hawaii Volcanoes, Hawaii

Watch land being born before your very eyes at Hawaii Volcanoes, one of the world's most volcanically active spots. Made up of two active volcanoes, Kīlauea and Mauna Loa, the park stretches from the palm-fringed coastline south of Hilo to Mauna Loa's steaming summit.





### 5. Yellowstone, Wyoming

A vast volcanic playground in northwest Wyoming, Yellowstone flaunts the world's most amazing concentration of thermal features – more than 10,000 – including mud pots, hot springs, fumaroles and, of course, geysers. Iconic Old Faithful is the most famous landmark, a cone geyser that's actually not so faithful; it spouts every 35 to 120 minutes. However, there's more than volcanic wonder here – which is probably why in 1872 Yellowstone became the first national park, not just in the United States but in the world.

The magnificent V-shaped Canyon of the Yellowstone; the grandiose peaks of the Rockies; Yellowstone Lake, North America's highest altitude lake; and vast forests, including one of the world's largest petrified forests, all add up to its singular majesty. Then there's the wildlife.

Nicknamed the American Serengeti, Yellowstone has the largest concentration of mammals in the continental US, with excellent chances to see them all: grizzly and black bears, mule deer, moose, elk, bison, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn, to name some of the 67 species.

### 6. Rocky Mountain, Colorado

Rocky Mountain showcases 72 named peaks higher than 3,500 m. No wonder they call it the “roof of the world.” Indeed, nowhere else in the United States can you access such gorgeous alpine scenery so easily. Wildlife watching is primo as well – keep your eyes out for moose, bighorn sheep, and elk (famed for their fall rutting, when the valleys fill with their bugling cry).

You probably won't see black bear, mountain lions, or bobcats, but they're around as well. An absolute must is a drive along 48-mile Trail Ridge Road, a twisty, winding, vertiginous route across the Continental Divide.



### 7. Great Smoky Mountains, North Carolina/Tennessee

Great Smoky Mountains is the nation's most popular national park.

It offers one of the world's finest examples of deciduous forest (simply shimmering in autumn), any number of wooded coves or burbling streams, and more than 1600 species of flowering plants, more than any other North American national park, beginning with trillium and lady's slipper orchid in early spring and ending in fall with goldenrod, wide-leafed sunflower, and coneflower.

### 8. Everglades, Florida

This subtropical land has several different ecosystems (sawgrass prairie, junglelike hammock and mangrove swamp). Indeed, these million-plus acres of wetlands have 200 types of fish, 350 species of birds, 120 different kinds of trees and more than 1,000 kinds of plants – and that's just for starters.

