Introduction

I got lucky the first time that I visited an American national park. I was in Utah and with a few days free before my flight out of the state, and a pair of hiking boots in my luggage, I headed for the closest national park, not knowing what I’d find. That park was Bryce Canyon (see p48). It was October and there had already been some flurries of snow. When I arrived at a viewpoint overlooking a vast bowl – that I later discovered was called ‘Silent City’ – snow remained in the sun’s shadow, highlighting every ridge and feature. But glowing red, yellow and orange under the blue sky were row upon row of Bryce Canyon’s extraordinary hoodoos, narrow spires of rock formed as fins created by water erode into columns. It was an epiphany.

America’s national parks are full of such marvels: the world’s largest trees in Sequoia; its most spectacular geothermal site in Yellowstone; the grandest canyon. It’s around these world-famous places that the story of the National Parks Service is woven. President Woodrow Wilson created the National Parks Service on August 25, 1916, but the drive to protect some of America’s most remarkable wild spaces, to be ‘used and preserved for the benefit of mankind’, began in the 1860s.

Perhaps the movement’s most eloquent advocate was Scottish-born writer John Muir. He had worked in the Yosemite Valley in the 1860s and later, in 1903, camped there under the stars with President Theodore Roosevelt, who created five national parks during his administration. ‘Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people,’ Muir wrote in Our National Parks, ‘are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wilderness is a necessity...’

This book is intended to be a practical introduction to each of America’s 59 national parks, distilled by Lonely Planet’s expert authors. We highlight the best activities and trails, explain how to get there and where to stay, show you the wildlife to watch out for, and suggest ideal itineraries. Whether you’re lucky enough to have a park on your doorstep or need to travel further, we hope that the following pages inspire you to explore what Stephen Mather, the first director of the NPS, described as America’s ‘national properties.’
Glacier National Park

Everything in Glacier is larger than life, from the ancient snowy mountains and the deep navy lakes to the fearless mountain goats.
Driving along Glacier National Park’s famed Going-to-the-Sun Rd feels rather ordinary at first. You drive through pine forest. You pass a lake. Then— whoa! — you turn a bend and you’re 1000ft (305m) above the valley floor, surrounded by prehistoric granite peaks straining towards the clouds. You turn your head to see a wall of waterfalls streaming down an ancient rock face. Turn again, and spot mountain goats leaping along flower-fringed crags so high they seem to touch the sun. This is Glacier National Park. Words like ‘pretty’ don’t apply. Words like ‘massive,’ ‘electrifying,’ and ‘fierce,’ however, do.

Signed into existence by William Howard Taft in 1910, Glacier didn’t become a major tourist destination until two years later, when the Great Northern Railway began shipping magnificently hiked and adventuring the region as America’s ‘Switzerland.’ WWII brought activity in the park to a screeching halt, and many of the chalets fell into disrepair. Today, nine of the original thirteen have been revived.

The 53-mile-long (85.3km) Going-to-the-Sun Rd was finished in 1932, ushering in the era of automobile travel. Traversing some of the park’s most spectacular terrain via switchbacks and hairpin turns, it’s considered by many to be one of the finest scenic drives in America. It’s named for Going-to-the-Sun Mountain, which the local Blackfeet tribe considered a sacred spot. Today, it’s closed for much of the year due to snow, sometimes not opening until as late as July.

In 1932, Glacier joined with Waterton Lakes National Park across the border in Alberta, Canada, to create the world’s first International Peace Park, a symbol of the friendship between the US and Canada. Today visitors can hike or take a boat ride across the US–Canada border. In fact, this is the only place you can cross the border without clearing customs, but do bring your passport— hikers crossing the border by foot will get a unique mountain goat stamp.

Park in numbers

| 1583 | Area covered (sq miles) |
| 6646 | Highest point on Going-to-the-Sun Rd: Logan’s Pass (ft) |
| 1500 | Number of mountain goats in the park |

Getting there

Glacier is in northern Montana, on the Canadian border. Glacier Park International Airport is in Kalispell, about 50 miles (80km) west. A public bus plies the park’s main areas, but it’s hard to get here without your own car.

When to go

As you might expect with a name like ‘Glacier,’ this park is freezing most of the year. Many facilities don’t even open until July, and roads are often closed after the snow comes in early fall. Visit the park in late August or early September for the best combination of warm weather and solitude.
Many Glacier Hotel

Everything about this nickel-and-tail style chalet charms, from the oldest lodge in the region to the...ashes of the Sun to the quiet moon in mid-July. Rooms are basic but comfy. In the evening, roll on a sweater for drinks overlooking Bowman Lake.

Many Glacier Campground

First-come, first-served sites at Many Glacier Campground fill up fast, and wonder – this is one of Glacier's busiest campgrounds. Arrive early to snag a spot with good views.

Do this!

Sciatic-driving Driving the park diagonally from south to northeast, the engineering marvel that is Going-to-the-Sun Road gives drivers dizzy views across the range until the valley. Rose for bar. Drive your own car. Take the park shuttle – or – fun! Jam on in one of Glacier's vintage red buses, complete with a guide.

Horseback riding See Glacier from the back of a horse. Swan Mountain Outfitters has corrals throughout the park, where cowboys and cowgirls will lead you on a half- or whole-day ride through the pine forests to mountains and streams. You'll learn neat facts about the park's flora and fauna (sometimes because your horse is passing by a pinhead of a boulder).

Glacier-viewing Glacier counts about 35 glaciers within its boundaries, back in 1910, there were 150. Many experts think the existing glacers' style are vanishing. So when's the best place to spot an endangered glacier? Some glaciers can be seen from Going-to-the-Sun Road, including blue-gray Jackson Glacier in the Many Glacier area, Grimmed Glacier is a bucket-list classic. Slide to the right for a view of glistening in the Montana sun.

What to spot?

Glaciers teems with wildlife, especially when the summer thaws mean hibernating mammoths come out to play. Chubby yellow-bellied marmots scurry across rocky pinnacles, majestic moose graze peacefully on the upper slopes of mountains, lumbering grizzlies forage for huckleberries in the lush meadows. The eastern side of the park is blown by dry chinook winds, making it drier and browner. The west side is wetter and more primeval, home to dark, down-dripping cedar and hemlock forests.

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Itineraries

Glacier National Park in Montana is a treasure trove of natural beauty and outdoor adventure. Whether you’re a seasoned hiker or a first-time visitor, you’ll find a variety of ways to explore the park’s stunning vistas and wildlife. Here are three itineraries to suit different interests and travel durations:

1. **The Highline**
   - **01** The park's most iconic hike cuts a narrow path along the famed Garden Wall (handholds included) before winding 7.5 miles (12km) into the mountains toward the rustic Granite Park Chalet.
   - **02** Avalanche Lake
     - Popular with families, this steady 4-mile (6.4km) trail traverses dense forest to the banks of a pretty blue alpine lake.
   - **03** Iceberg Lake
     - Hike steeply along a ridge 0.9 mile (1.5km) to an overlook where the clear green water of a lake glistens beneath the Garden Wall.

2. **The Highline**
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**Two days**
- Wake early on your first day and inhale the piney air as you embark on the length of Going-to-the-Sun Rd. Heading southwest to northeast, stop first at Lake McDonald for a photo session and a peek at the timber lobby of iconic 1913 Lake McDonald Lodge. Ascend the hairpin turns of The Loop, where the road cuts across the continent-dividing Garden Wall. Keep your eyes open for the cascades at Bird Woman Falls and the Weeping Wall, then stop at Logan Pass Visitor Center to stretch your legs and gaze down across the valley from 6646ft (2026m). Descend to the viewpoint of Jackson Glacier Overlook, then stop for more pies by the way-side of the Many Glacier Hotel. Finish up with a beer and a bite at the Ptarmigan Dining Room in Many Glacier Hotel before embarking on the 9-mile (14.5km) hike to impressive Iceberg Lake.

**Four days**
- On day one, drive Going-to-the-Sun Rd as described in the two-day itinerary, but this time park at Logan Pass for the life-changing hike along the Highline Trail. You almost certainly spot a mountain goat or three along the trail; in spring and summer they sometimes have their fluffy white kids in tow.
- On day two, hit the Many Glacier area for a plunge into the park’s wilder side. Fortify yourself with lunch at the Ptarmigan Dining Room in Many Glacier Hotel before embarking on the 9-mile (14.5km) hike to impressive Iceberg Lake.

**One week**
- On day one, get a feel for the park and its history with a day-long tour in one of the photogenic jammer buses; it’ll give you the lay of the land for further adventures. On day two, hit the southwest portion of Going-to-the-Sun Rd, stopping for a warm-up hike at Avalanche Lake. Bring a picnic to eat on the sandy shores. On day three, proceed to Logan Pass for the Highline Trail, again bringing lunch to eat at Granite Park Chalet while taking in the sweeping views of encircling mountains.

**Stand-up paddle-boarding on Hidden Lake.**
**Backcountry cooking in Glacier National Park.**

**Hike this...**

**Itineraries**

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**On day four, paddle St Mary Lake, watching for osprey, hawks and peregrine falcons.**
Redwood National & State Parks

In foggy forests among emerald fern groves, some of the world’s tallest trees have been shooting skyward for 2000 years.
I imagine how peacefull it is to walk among a forest of silent sentinels, these coastal redwood trees over nine times taller and hundreds of years older than you are. The millions of stars you can see on a clear night will keep you from the high and grand city celebrations,  turn your pain and clear your mind. Despite its name, it’s not just redwoods that this national park protects. It is also a safe haven for other threatened species, such as Chinook salmon that spawn in freshwater streams, stellar (northern) sea lions who haul out on coastal rocks, and California spotted owls, those great bastions who perch in the branches of mature conifers. 

Tragically, only 4% of California’s old-growth redwood forests have never been logged. Almost half of what remains lies inside this web of federal and state parks, stretching from the edge of the Pacific Ocean to inland forests and prairies where elk, grass, and wild rivers where Native American tribes traditionally hunt and fish. In 1918, citizens united in the Save the Redwoods League to rescue this primeval forest from destruction by loggers. Their political activism was rewarded when Redwood National Park was established on July 1, 1918, and again in 1978, when citizens declared this region a World Heritage site and part of the California Coast Range Biosphere Reserve.

Redwood National Park and its three neighboring state parks – Prairie Creek Redwoods, Del Norte Coast Redwoods and Jedediah Smith Redwoods – together protect more than 70 miles (113 km) of land and almost 40 miles (64 km) of rugged, undevolved Pacific coastline. Lashed in a temperate rainforest climate, the parks receive up to 100 inches (250 cm) of rain every year. This cool, misty climate, along with rich forest-floor soil and the trees’ ability to sprout new buds in frost, allow these coastal redwoods to reach lofty heights and survive old age.

### Toolbox

**When to go**

The parks are open year-round. The summer months from May through October, when most visitor facilities are open, can be hot and rainy.

**Getting there**

San Francisco is the nearest major international airport. From there, it’s more than a five-hour drive to any national park visitor center. Over the next six miles (10 km), you’ll pass three more state parks on the way northward along the Oregon border via Crescent City.

### Park in numbers

| Area covered (sq miles) | Height of Hyperion (ft) | 2017
|-------------------------|------------------------|------|
| 217                     | 379                    | 45%

California’s remaining old-growth redwood trees are protected here.

### Stay here...

**Gold Bluffs Beach Campground**

Just when you think you’ve seen it all, that’s when the fun begins. Coastal redwoods and nearby hiking trails feature in this coastal preserve, with soft sand only a short walk away. Reservecampuses in advance during summer.

** Jedediah Smith Campground**

The northernmost state park has the best drive-up campground for families, who picnic and swim in the Smith River. Pick your tent in the shade of sweet-smelling spruce, juniper and fir trees – ah, and the giant green anemone, and beaches where pinnipeds bark and bask. In misty forests, where the tallest trees grow, listen for owls and marbled murrelets on their nightly rounds. Scenic driving or around Gentle Praries. A network of easy, level trails and steep climbs keep things interesting.

**Kaying**

In summer, paddle a kayak down the placid Smith River, the largest free-flowing river in California. Rentals are available in Klamath. For range-guided kayak tours, sign up in person in advance at the Smith River Information Center, or fly fish around Jedediah Smith Campground.

### Do this!

**Scenic driving**

If you’re impressed by the scenery driving here, you just wait until you motor down the paved Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway, bordered by awe-inspiring stands of tall trees – or take bunny ears (wheelchair) out to Gold Bluffs Beach and backpack-inclusive trail to the Stout Grove of old-growth redwoods.

**Cycling**

This national and state parks don’t allow mountain biking, but they do allow cycling along old logging roads and specially designed trails. Cycle among the ancient trees, eat at coastal bluffs or around gentle prairies. A mixed terrain of easy, level trails and steep climbs keep things interesting.

**Marbled murrelet**

An ancient giant, the redwood tree flourishes far too long, much longer than the age of the dinosaur, far too old for man.

### What to spot...

On the coast you’ll find tidepools rich in marine life, such as the giant green anemone, and beaches where pinnipeds brew and look for mates.

ROSEVILLE ELK North America’s largest elk grazes on grasses, plants and berries. In autumn, the antelopes make for water. CA. MARBLE MURRELET Unusually, this black-and-white penguin flies like a bird, not a fish. It nests high in the branches of old-growth conifers.