

Five Top Reasons to Visit a National Park

We're lucky. Americans are lucky. When you think about some of the most amazing geography, geology, and wildlife, it exists within our borders. No passport required! From our historic east coast sites (albeit young by world standards) to the vastness of the American west, we've got countless opportunities for great travel experiences brought to you by the Dept. of the Interior.



Number 1:

Admission prices are ridiculously low. Compared to any other tourist destination, you far exceed bang for your buck. In the realm of the old Disney pricing structure, our parks are E-ticket rides for A-ticket prices. Guaranteed you'll see at least one thing worth the price of admission. As for the amenities, you'll find those are competitively priced as well. But plan in advance: lodging inside the parks is not much of a secret and rooms can be scarce. Is it worth it? Absolutely. Especially if the idea of leaving your room and walking a hundred yards to watch an incredible sunrise (or sunset) has appeal to you. Or dining in an historic inn like Old Faithful Lodge.

Number 2:

You'll learn something. Maybe education isn't high on your "reasons to travel list" unless, of course, you're a parent and need a kid-friendly and cool destination. Your kids will remember and talk about it for years. Sure, you can see similar stuff at Disney since they incorporate ideas from the natural



world all the time, and in some instances flat out replicate what's in our parks. But do yourself a favor and see it live. And you might also have a lesson in patience while waiting to see a moose saunter out of the woods to feed on the willows, but when it happens right in front of you, it's far greater than any simulated experience in the world.

History can be deadly dull to some, but when you can re-live it at any of our countless historic sites, it makes it less text-bookish and more memorable. If you can tie in a visit that corresponds to your kids' school curriculum, all the better. It makes the story pop off the page and become a tactile experience.

It's one thing to read about Gettysburg's Battle of Little Round Top, but quite another to actually walk among the rocks and envision how it played out.

Number 3:

Be surrounded by incredible beauty in some of our most pristine places. Whether or not you appreciate it through a viewfinder or just with your own eyes, there are photographic vistas at nearly every turn in many parks. Whether or not you press the shutter or just soak it in is up to you. Early park pioneers figured out where the best views are, and many of them are now accessible without a lot of strenuous effort. Sometimes you don't even have to leave your car and the action comes to you. Granted, there's luck and patience involved, but nothing beats seeing it unfold right in front of you.



Number 4:

Get some exercise. There are well-developed trail systems and maps in the parks, and they all offer a wide range of options. Need a path that's wheelchair- and stroller-friendly? You'll find one. Looking for something that will offer a middle-aged set of legs a challenging but not-so-much-that-it-ruins-the-rest-of-your-vacation trail? You'll find one. Maybe you're an adrenaline addict and are anxious for something more death-defying. Pick the right park, and you'll find one of those too.



Number 5:

It's never the same place twice. Maybe you've got a favorite park: One that you've been to and keep talking about. You know, the one of which you have hundreds of photos. Rather than having it simply as a wonderful memory, go back again. You'll see something different and probably something new. Or go in a different season. Been to Yellowstone? Try it in the winter and you may not even recognize it.



And spend a few days in the park. Seeing its features at different times of

day and in changing weather conditions can be as varying as visiting in a different season.

So think about what you enjoy and then peruse a list of our parks to determine where to next. Start planning and pack your bags. Or plan to see them all: Start at Acadia and keep traveling until you've seen Zion.