TRAVEL & ESCAPES



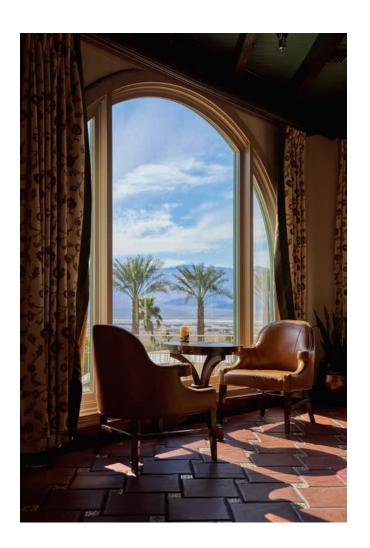
Find Your Oasis in Death Valley

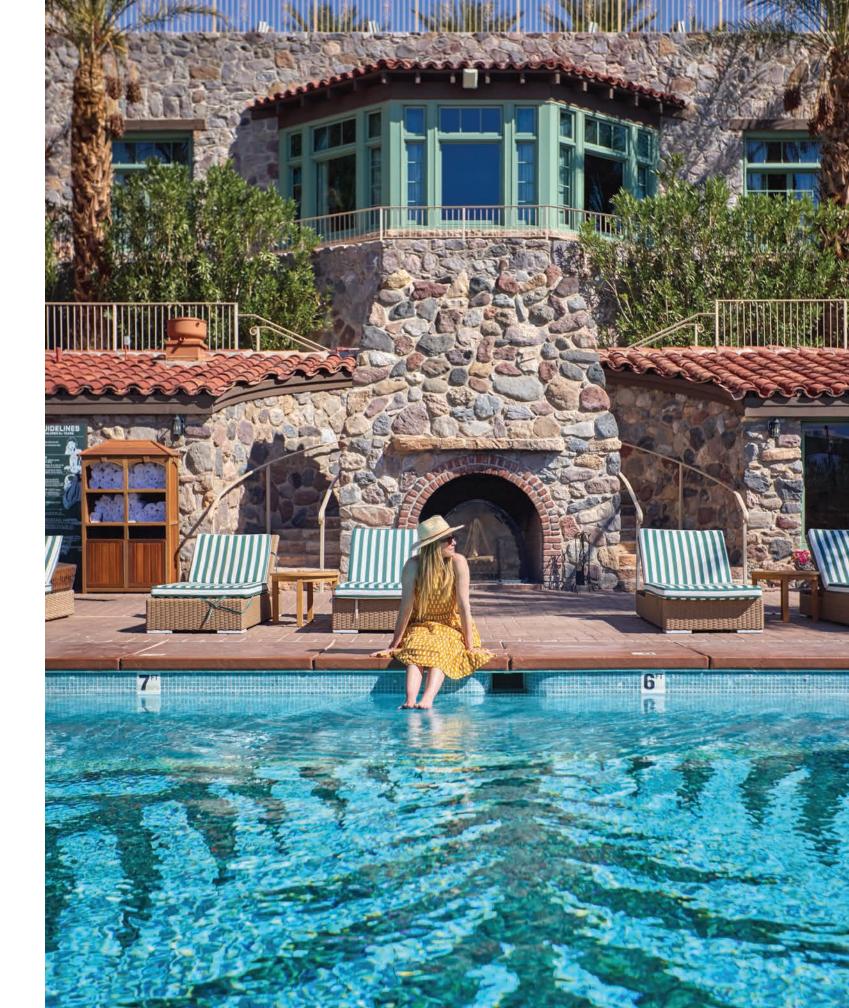
Historic charm and desert adventure converge at the newly restored Oasis at Death Valley.

Photographs by THOMAS J. STORY

Driving through the arid expanse of Death Valley, it's tough to imagine anyone choosing to venture West through this arid desert route. Imagining the fortitude it took for explorers to forge this journey, my mind starts to question my choice of doing the drive alone. But as soon as I start to question the accuracy of my GPS, there's a vision of lush, green palm trees in the distance. It's not a mirage; it's the Oasis at Death Valley, where underground springs supply 80,000 gallons of fresh water to

the surface, and guests can tuck into modern amenities while they explore the profoundly beautiful and world-famous national park at the top of every traveler's bucket list. The property has recently undergone a \$250 million renaissance, restoring this historic property to its former glory while updating for the discerning traveler who loves the idea of being luxuriously tucked within the sun-scorched expanse of Death Valley. This AAA 4-Diamond desert hideaway, operated by Xanterra Travel Collection, marries Old West history and storied Hollywood glamour, all against the cinematic backdrop of one of the









Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Surrounded by stone walls, the Instagram-perfect pool at the Inn was built in 1929 and boasts two built-in fireplaces; cool off with a cocktail at the Last Kind Words Saloon, the restaurant and bar that's equal parts Wild West museum and a top-shelf tavern; a superlative sundae at the old-time Ice Cream Parlor. This page: The beautiful Oasis with the park just beyond.

most extreme environments on Earth.

The property is divided into two distinct personalities: the storied Inn at Death Valley and the more casual, family-friendly Ranch at Death Valley. The Inn, originally opened in 1927 by the Pacific Coast Borax Company, has welcomed stars like Clark Gable and Marlon Brando over the years and you can still feel that Golden Era glow today. Perched atop a ridge with sweeping views of the desert basin and the Panamint Mountains beyond, the Inn's 66 rooms and elegant Spanish colonial revival architecture evoke a bygone era of travel.

Central to the Inn's appeal is its spring-fed pool, kept at a blissful 87 degrees year-round. Lined with swaying palms and flanked by cozy firepits, it's the kind of place where you can float for hours after a day of hiking golden canyons and salt flats. Overlooking the pool is a singular Spanishstyle bungalow, complete with arched windows, terra-cotta accents, and a private patio perfect for morning

coffee or stargazing at night.

For those seeking to soak sore muscles after a day of hiking or bouldering in the park, the Inn's spa offers desertinspired treatments, including hot stone massages and mineral facials, all in a serene, hacienda-style setting. In other words: It's a far cry from the desolate land that the first explorers and miners endured out in the Valley.

Just a mile down the road from the Inn, the Ranch at Death Valley, also operated by Xanterra, offers a more playful, family-friendly energy. Its newly revamped Town Square features the Last Kind Words Saloon, a Western-themed watering hole decked out



This page: The historic pool bungalow at the Inn at Death Valley is the quintessential throwback room. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The park's desolate beauty; the Inn Dining Room serves refined, restorative fare; the resort's Spanish colonial revival architecture is as transporting as the surroundings; the property is home to the lowest elevation golf course in the world.

in antique pistols, taxidermy, and vintage movie posters. The menu leans hearty—think cowboy steaks, ribs, chili, and whiskey cocktails—all served in a scene straight out of a spaghetti Western.

Next door, the retro Ice Cream Parlor is a delightfully air-conditioned blast from the past. With stained glass windows, a mirrored bar, and checkered floors, it scoops up classic sundaes, banana splits, and housemade date ice cream—a sweet treat that's no doubt a respite when the thermostat peaks over 100, which happens often out in these parts.

History buffs can wander through the on-site Borax Museum, housed in the oldest structure in Death Valley, built in 1883. The exhibits showcase the rugged mining heritage of the region, including the famed 20 mule team replica wagons that once hauled borax across this arid land.

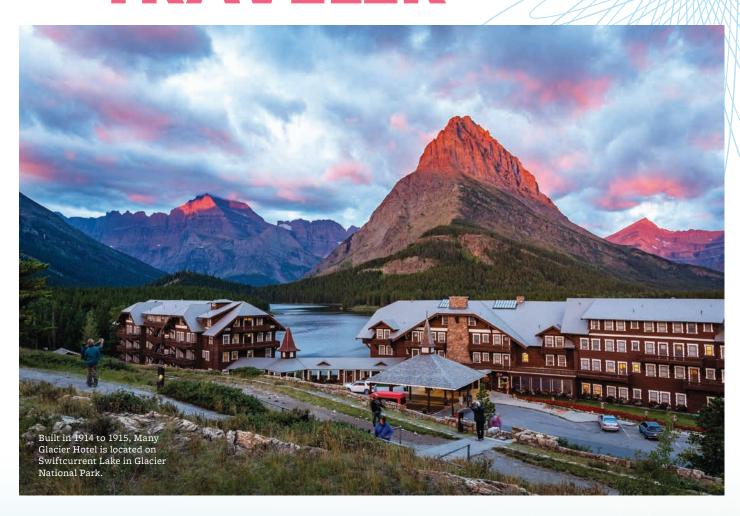
The Furnace Creek Golf Course at The Oasis at Death Valley is another draw. Its unique 18-hole, par-70 course is known for being the world's lowest elevation golf course at 214 feet below sea level. It's a challenging course, offering a distinctive golfing experience within the stunning yet harsh desert landscape of Death Valley.

What's more is that the resort offers

a central location to explore the national park's otherworldly sites, including the Mesquite Dunes, the Zabriskie Point badlands, Artists Palette, and Dante's View. It's a true blend of nostalgia, nature, and desert decadence for those who want to experience Death Valley in both comfort and style. While some guests book for a day or two to hit the high points and move along, the Oasis at Death Valley is abundantly rich in history, amenities, and a variety of experiences to justify a lingering visit of five days to fully allow the full transformative impact of this restorative, otherworldly getaway to take hold.



2 TIME TRAVELER



The Inn at Death Valley isn't the only historic lodge set within the National Parks. Here are other properties and experiences that date back to the early days of the parks.

The Ahwahnee

This Yosemite lodge was built in the 1920s and its impeccable artisan details are what really make it shine. (They don't make 'em like they used to, as they say.) California artist Robert Boardman Howard painted the linen-lined walls with local fauna, alongside a

hand-hammered copper fireplace hood. Stop by to check it out, sign up for a tour, or for the the fully immersive artistic experience, stay in the appropriately named Mural Room, which feels like you're in a time capsule.

Not to be missed on your tour is the Ahwahnee Dining Room, which has hosted countless famous guests, including Queen Elizabeth II in 1983. Adding to the storybook appeal is its 34-foot-high exposed-beam ceiling, twinkling chandeliers, and the lovely view over misty Yosemite Falls.

Grand Canyon Railway

There's something undeniably romantic about boarding a train—especially one that's bound for the Grand Canyon. Though there are many magical ways to see this natural wonder—by kayak, by helicopter, or heck, even by mule—the Grand Canyon Railway is truly unique. It follows the route passengers have taken since 1901, and it still carries the same sense of nostalgia and charm.

The Ahwahnee Dining Room, beautifully photographed for Lodge: An Indoorsy Tour of America's National Parks by Max Humphrey and Kathryn O'Shea-Evans.

Based in the charming town of Williams, Arizona, the Grand Canyon Railway whisks travelers 65 miles north to the South Rim of the national park, cutting through high desert, golden prairie, and fragrant pine forest along the way. But this is no ordinary ride. Expect live music, playful Wild West reenactments, and vintage railcars that make the journey feel like a step back in time. At the end of the line? One of the most jaw-dropping natural wonders on Earth.

For those planning a longer adventure, the Grand Canyon Railway & Hotel and adjacent RV park make it easy to stay and explore both before and after your trip. Located just steps from historic Route 66 and downtown Williams, it's the perfect launchpad for a classic Southwest road trip.

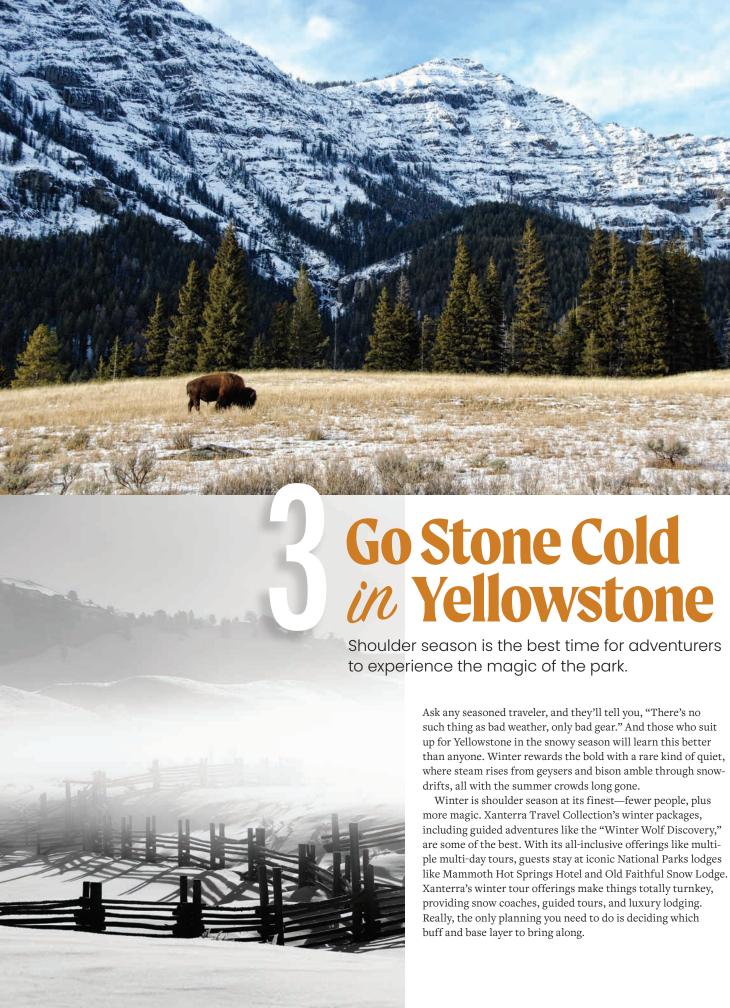
Glacier National Park Lodges

Nestled within one of America's most dramatic landscapes, the six Glacier National Park Lodges offer visitors a chance to step back in time while experiencing the grandeur of Montana's "Crown of the Continent." The grandest of them all, Many Glacier Hotel, sits on the shores of Swiftcurrent Lake with views of craggy peaks and alpine waters, designed in a Swiss chalet style that feels as timeless as the landscape itself.

Lake McDonald Lodge, built in 1913, welcomes guests with its cozy hunting lodge atmosphere and lakefront setting, perfect for sunset canoe paddles or early-morning coffee by the fire. For those seeking seclusion, Rising Sun Motor Inn (built in 1940) and Swift-current Motor Inn & Cabins (opened in 1933) provide simple, rustic accommodations with trailheads right outside the door, ideal for hikers chasing

wildflowers, waterfalls, and wildlife on the park's 700 miles of trails. A short ride on the historic Red Bus tours leads you to Village Inn at Apgar, a midcentury modern gem right on the edge of Lake McDonald, offering some of the most affordable—and scenic—sunset views in the park. Motel Lake McDonald keeps things refreshingly simple, giving you front-row access to the lake and nearby Apgar Village amenities.

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GODARK IN THE PARKS

Sunset staff photographer Thomas J. Story on how to document dark skies.

Night photography takes not only a keen eye but quite a bit of planning. Sunset's staff photographer has been shooting the outdoors for 25 years. Here are his tips on how to get it right.

Pack Smart Night photography requires a tripod and a fast lens (at least f/2.8) set at ISO 3200. To maintain sharp stars, you'll want the exposure under are a great, moderately low-cost about shooting the night sky regularly.

Slow Your Shutter The

night mode in newer iPhones is pretty great, but there are slow older models. The AstroShader

one. It lets you do long exposures in the daytime as well.

Put It in Perspective It's helpful to have something in the foreground for visual interest that puts the sky into context, like a person in the sand dunes with a headlamp or another object, like a tree branch, in the frame.

Map it Out As with many things in life, knowing when and where to be there is half the battle in photography. To prepare, use Google Earth to scout your location. No matter what, you want to be as far as possible from light pollution from cities, buildings, and even larger campsites. The Night Sky app will let you map the constellations anywhere you are on Earth.

Avoid the Full Moon Though the look of a full moon can be beautiful in its own right, if you're trying to capture the stars, the light from its glow will impact celestial visibility. Instead, plan as close to the new moon as possible.

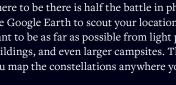
Use Red Light Purchase headlamps with this function, as it doesn't mess with your night vision and dilate your eyes as much as a standard light would. It's also mindful of other folks who might be enjoying the outdoors, too.

Dress Warm Bundle up and bring layers. Especially if you're shooting in the desert, temps can drop quickly. Since you may have some trouble using gloves while operating a camera, even if they're tech-friendly, pocket warmers can really come in handy.

20 to 30 seconds, otherwise it will result in star trails. Star trackers investment if you become serious

shutter apps available for iPhone and Android that can also help for app lets you stack multiple expo-

sures to pull more detail. Slow Shutter Cam is also a really great



SAY WE TO YOSEMITE

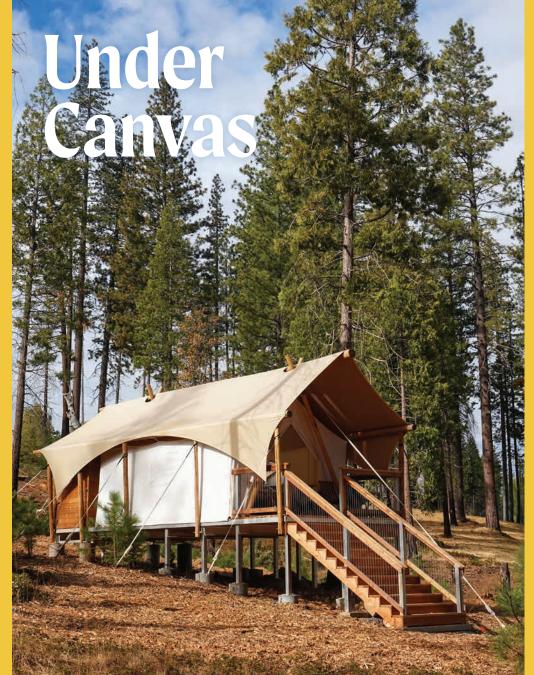
It's hard to contemplate the idea of newness when it comes to a place that's been around for hundreds of millions of years, like Yosemite National Park. The magnificent granite formations that make up its iconic monoliths like Half Dome and El Capitan were first formed during the Cretaceous period. In its more recent history, it was designated as the third National Park in the U.S. in 1890, after Yellowstone (1872) and Sequoia (1890). But within the last year, several new adventure hotels and glamping options have cropped up, offering new and exciting ways to see Yosemite through a different lens.

These new accommodations are catering to a continually growing interest in Yosemite National Park. On average, about four million people visit each yearhikers, climbers, campers, bikers, photographers, and nature lovers of all kindsmany of whom are drawn by its awe-inspiring beauty and natural splendor. But with the recent cuts to the national parks' staffing, it's more important than ever to recreate responsibly, leaving no trace and giving back where vou can. Here's a look at what's new in Yosemite.

OPENS WINTER 2025

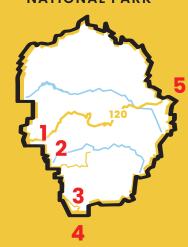
This sprawling 17-acre retreat located minutes from Sierra National Forest and 15 miles from the South Gate of Yosemite National Park features 104 cabins, a pool, sauna, hot tub, and cold plunge. The property will also feature a casual bar and restaurant and outdoor fire pits for relaxing after a day in the park.







YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



- 1 UNDER CANVAS
- 2 EVERGREEN LODGE
- 3 WILDHAVEN
- 4 OUTBOUND
- 5 FIREFALL RANCH

COMING SOON

Under Canvas pitches its luxe safaristyle tents in prime, nature-adjacent spaces throughout the West, and the latest location is no exception. The idyllic, 80-acre camp is set inside a serene mountainside forest that's just 10 minutes from the west entrance of Yosemite National Park. Sleep among towering California black oak and ponderosa pine while indulging in West Elm furnishings and king-size beds with plush linens. There's a YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System) stop directly across the way, offering car-free access into the park, and there are nearby trailheads and natural swimming holes within close proximity.



Just outside Yosemite's northwest gate in the Gold Rush town of Groveland, the ranch is set on the original 19th-century stagecoach route that led to the park. Despite its historic roots, Firefall Ranch, which is named after the natural phenomenon where Horsetail Falls appears to flow with lava in late February, is now decidedly modern. There's plenty to do in your downtime, from hopping on the complimentary beach cruisers to lounging in the hammocks or challenging your travel buddies to a round of ping-pong in the game room. For a luxe option, book into its three-bedroom homes, which come equipped with double-sided indooroutdoor gas fireplaces, private decks, and heated bathroom floors.

Evergreen Lodge introduced 22 new high-end canvas tents at its historic lodge located near the Hetch Hetchy Valley on the western border of Yosemite off Highway 120. Once you've gotten your fill of exploring the park, head back to basecamp for lawn games, including bocce and forest disc golf, then soak your sore self in its saltwater pool and hot tub and enjoy a nightcap with its daily offering of fireside s'mores.





Take a test drive of the #vanlife with Moterra Campervans, whose turnkey itineraries and fully built-out vehicles will make your time in the Sierra that much more memorable. Designed by a team of seasoned guides who spent years leading groups through the region, you'll pull up to groves of giant Sequoias, hidden swimming holes, lesser-known hiking trails, and charming local eateries. Each campervan comes fully equipped with cozy bedding, comprehensive kitchenware, and all of the essential camping gear, and its team handles everything on the ground for your trip, including necessary reservations and logistics, allowing you to fully relax and reconnect with nature.



Dive Deep

Kenan Chan shares secrets of Channel Islands National Park underwater wilderness.

Kenan Chan is a biological science technician and lead diver at the Channel Islands National Park, where he's spent the past decade exploring one of the wildest underwater worlds on the planet. From massive kelp forests to crystal-clear waters buzzing with marine life, he's seen it all—while keeping a close eye on the ecosystems that make this place so special. Here, he shares insights from his years monitoring the islands.

The Channel Islands are often called the "Galápagos of North America." What makes them so biologically unique?

The waters surrounding the park are extremely productive and are able to support large breeding colonies of pinnipeds and seabirds. These rich waters are home to commercially viable species, such as the California spiny lobster, market squid, red sea urchins, and many finfish that are caught and exported around the world. Abalone, large marine snails, also call these waters home, including both the white and black abalone, which are listed as critically endangered.

Above water, the park is equally impressive with species like the small island fox, island scrub jay, and the Santa Cruz Island dudleya, which are all endemic. The Channel Islands are also an important location for conservation efforts. There have been many success stories of bringing species back from the brink of extinction or eradicating non-native plants and animals that negatively impacted the ecosystem. The Chumash tribe has called these islands home for thousands of

years, so the islands hold a lot of cultural importance as well.

You're in the water nearly every day. What have you come across that surprised you?

Many of us who do this type of work have trained our entire lives for it. One of the important things we do in our annual monitoring is quantify species and track changes in the ecosystem in both intertidal and subtidal areas. Our work over the last 40 years has enabled us to track things like the introduction of invasive species of algae. Seeing the first appearance of *Undaria pinnatifida* off Anacapa Island was surprising, and while not something any of us wanted to encounter, it was a dive I will always remember.

Another rare experience was seeing a critically endangered white abalone near one of our permanent monitoring sites. For many of us, this was the first time we had seen a wild specimen.

What do you think people most often misunderstand about Marine Protected Areas, or ocean conservation efforts in general?



We often think of MPAs as no-take zones, however, that is not the case for all areas. Fundamentally, MPAs were created in order to delegate areas where species can grow without added pressure from humans, creating a refuge for species like lobster to grow and spawn, thereby helping restock the surrounding areas that are not under any protection.

Here at the Channel Islands, we can see more and larger lobster at some of these protected sites. The results are visible. During lobster season, you can see lobster trap buoys forming the delineation of the MPA line. These areas were not created to punish those of us who enjoy fishing, rather, they were established to help ensure we continue to be able to fish and enjoy the resources.

Do you have a favorite marine animal that lives in or around the Channel Islands? What makes it special to you?

Abalone. These are large marine snails that eat algae. While they are still a snail, they can be quite fast when trying to escape a predator or if they sense food. Finding an abalone during the surveys is always like finding a little hidden treasure. The juveniles we encounter can be thumbnail-sized, so seeing them can require a trained eye. It can be hard to think of a snail as being charismatic, but I would argue these snails are actually pretty cute if you take a look at their "faces."

What's your favorite dive spot in the park?

One of my favorites is one of the most accessible and visited by dive charter boats. Cathedral Cove is located on the front side of Anacapa, and it has a large sandy cove surrounded by sloping rock that is covered with kelp. I love swimming just on the edge of the sandy part, peeking out of the kelp and looking at the clear blue water as light beams pour down between the kelp blades above.

For people who want to visit, what's your advice for doing it responsibly?

The Channel Islands are an incredibly beautiful place to visit, however, it is important for people to remember it's remote. The weather can be different than the mainland, with wind and much cooler conditions.

There are reservation campsites on each island where you can explore miles of trails. Keep your eyes out for endemic species like the island fox, brought back from the brink of extinction, thanks to the hard work of scientists and conservationists. You may spot bald eagles, which for decades had gone locally extinct as a result of chemicals like DDT, but thanks to a successful reintroduction program are breeding once again on the islands.

Also, be prepared to be self-sufficient. There are no stores or food on the islands. Pack in, pack out.



Earlier this year, the National Park Service laid off more than 1,700 employees, including 1,000 permanent staffers—many of whom were forest managers, EMTs, wildfire responders, and rangers. Supporters of the parks system banded together in protest. And while some employees were reinstated, many declined or were placed on administrative leave.

These layoffs combined with a \$900 million budget reduction proposed for 2026, the largest in the parks' history, threaten not only the park units but the vital ecological programs and scientific research that take place within their bounds. This comes at a time when attendance has never been higher. In 2024 alone, 331.9 million visitors came for recreation. Now, fewer hands are managing more people, and that comes with critical consequences, exacerbating an already fragile ecosystem.

So what can we do? First: go. But do so mindfully. Support parks through your fees, buy from local businesses, and practice the principles of "Leave No Trace." Then, consider giving to organizations and nonprofits working to fill the gaps, advocating for funding, maintaining trails, and educating visitors. Even small donations can help preserve these wild places for generations to come. According to Emily Douce, the deputy vice president for government

affairs at the National Parks Conservation Association, "The most essential way to support a good park experience, now and into the future, is to use your voice. We need our elected officials and decision-makers to hear how important our national parks and the people who care for them are to our country. Speak up and engage your community. Let's be loud, clear, and constant in our love for parks and rangers."

Sierra Club

One of the oldest grassroots environmental groups fighting to preserve public lands and ensure equitable access to nature. act.sierraclub.org

National Parks Conservation Association

This century-old watchdog group is advocating for strong park protections and federal funding. npca.org

Western National Parks Association

This organization provides education, funding, and interpretive support to more than 70 parks across the Western U.S. wnpa.org

The Nature Conservancy

This global conservation organization is working to protect critical landscapes and biodiversity—including many areas adjacent to National Parks. nature.org



Check In at AutoCamp

New parks-centric programming and offerings at America's favorite Airstream collective.

Longtime Sunset favorite and frequent Travel Awards winner AutoCamp has opened its newest design-forward outpost, AutoCamp Sequoia, just in time for summer. Nestled just minutes from the entrance to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, the property is the brand's fourth California location and ninth overall in the U.S. Known for its sleek Airstream suites, the new site was designed by Portland-based Waechter Architecture with interiors by HVS Design, blending modern minimalism with natural textures that nod to the towering sequoias surrounding the property.

The brand has also committed to deepening its dedication to the public lands it celebrates. Over the past year, it has contributed \$67,000 to organizations like the Mojave Desert Land Trust and Zion National Park Forever Project. This ethos extends to its new Ranger in Residence program, which offers complimentary stays to National Park Service rangers affected by recent federal job cuts. In return, rangers can continue their commitment to land stewardship despite the current climate, leading guest programming at AutoCamp and its Field Station sister properties in locales like Yosemite, Joshua Tree, Zion, and Sequoia.

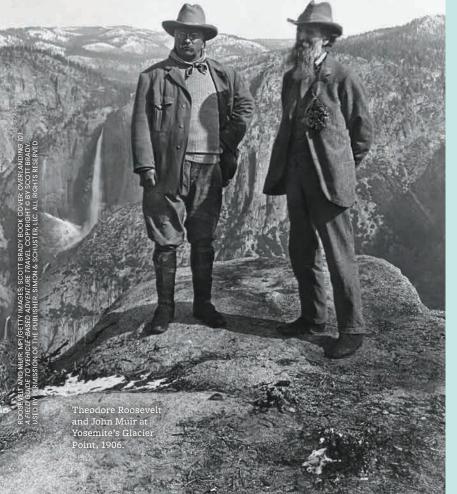
For those planning a national park adventure, AutoCamp has launched a dedicated parks page on its website, complete with conservation tips, real-time accessibility updates, and responsible recreation advice. And this season, AutoCamp added a playful twist to its culinary offerings: Guests can rent a Gozney Tread pizza oven and craft artisan pies at their campsite using local ingredients and handmade dough, all available at its outpost shops. It's all a part of a continued effort to help guests be more informed stewards of the land they explore, and do it in style.

AutoCamp's signature Airstream camps, which include a new location near Kings Canyon National Park, offer vintage luxury accommodations to visitors.

Read Muir's Modern Muses

6 new environmental books inspire preservation of the parks.

John Muir once wrote, "The mountains are calling, and I must go." But today, they're calling us to do more than explore they're asking us to protect. These recently released books celebrate a similar spirit of the famed naturalist and author, known as the "father of the national parks," encouraging deeper connection with, and understanding of, the outdoors. Whether you're road-tripping, overlanding, or dreaming from your armchair, they'll inspire mindful adventure and stewardship.



Carbon

The Book of Life BY PAUL HAWKEN

Environmentalist Paul Hawken reimagines carbon not as a climate villain but as life's essential element and offers a new way to view our relationship with the Earth—rooted in possibility, not despair. (Viking, \$28)

The National Parks Traveler's Companion

A Journal Featuring Bucket Lists Writing Prompts, and Passport Stamp Logs

This charming journal helps you track visits to all 63 U.S. national parks, with checklists, prompts, and stamp spaces. It's a tactile reminder to treat each wild place like a story worth remembering. (Clarkson Potter, \$22)

Overlanding 101

A Field Guide To Vehicle-Based Adventure Travel

BY SCOTT BRADY

Adventure pro Scott Brady shares everything you need to know about overlanding, from off-road techniques to choosing gear. It's empowering and rooted in respect for the lands you'll traverse. (Simon & Schuster, \$28)

Parks 2

BY BRIAN KELLEY

Photographer Brian Kelley's latest coffeetable stunner features vintage maps, historic park ephemera, and essays celebrating our public lands. It's a nostalgic journey through the national parks and a call to protect their future. (Standards Manual, \$64)

Coastal

130 Recipes from a California Road Trip

BY SCOTT CLARK WITH BETSY ANDREWS

This cookbook serves as an edible postcard from a food-fueled California road trip. Clark, chef-owner of Dad's Luncheon ette in Half Moon Bay, captures the magic of the beach bonfires and sun-drenched surf towns. (Chronicle Books, \$35)

Eventually a Sequoia

Stories of Art, Adventure & the Wisdom of Giants BY JEREMY COLLINS

Peppered with musings, photographs, and illustrations, this eco-travelogue documents environmental change-makers from the granddaughter of Jacques Cousteau to Sierra Club members and indigenous Gwich'in activists looking to defend the Alaskan Arctic from drilling. (Mountaineers Books, \$30)

