



U.S. National Parks

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June 20, 2021

Title Page

U.S. National Parks

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Summer Semester 2021

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June 20, 2021

Edition Notice

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Paperback ISBN: 978-0-000000-0

Library of Congress Control Number 01020009821

Edited by Cynthia Gail Manor

Layout by Cynthia Gail Manor

Front and Back Cover Photographs © [Vitas Edush](#)

Page Header Photograph © [Kris Wiktor](#)

Printing Acme Printing, Inc., USA

First Paperback Edition June 2021

Acme Publishing Company
101 Commerce Street
Austin, TX, 78778

usnationalparks.org



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Chapter 1: Big Bend National Park

Big Bend National Park (NP) is nestled along the curve of the Rio Grande River in West Texas. This “curve” or “bend” is where the park gets its name. Big Bend NP became a national park in 1935.

Although it is one of the least visited national parks (lower 48 states), park has as much to offer as the more popular parks in terms of recreation, adventure, and nature exploration.

Fast Facts

- Located in West Texas
- 801,163 acres (1,252 square miles)
- Larger than Rhode Island
- Only U.S. park that contains an entire mountain range - the Chisos Mountains
- Gets its name from the “bend” of the Colorado River at its southern border
- Designated as **International Dark Sky Park**¹, a top location for viewing night sky objects

¹"An IDA International Dark Sky Park (IDSP) is a land possessing an exceptional...quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment. ". (dark-sky.org)

Basic Information

At 1, 200-plus square miles, it contains a variety of geological features, including wetlands, springs, rivers, deserts, canyons, and mountains. The elevation ranges from 1,715 to 7,832 feet. These factors contribute to the extensive biodiversity of wildlife and plants.

It also geologically diverse. According to the National Park Service, “visitor[s] can readily observe rock strata exposed at odd angles, standing vertical, or turned completely upside down. Rocks often appear to be completely displaced and do not “fit” within the areas in which they are found.”

Big Bend is the only park in the United States that contains an entire mountain range - the Chisos Mountains.

In 2001, The National Audubon Society established the park as a **Globally Important Bird Area**¹. Expedition Wildlife included Big Bend NP as one of its best U.S. birding locations for 2020.

Big Bend NP is also one of the best locations for viewing the night sky - an excellent spot for stargazing and taking awe-inspiring photographs night sky phenomena. In 2012, the International Dark-Sky Association designated the park as an **International Dark Sky Park**².

Visitor Statistics

Compared to other national parks, Big Bend is one of the least visited, making it ideal if you want to avoid crowds.

- 2017: 440,276
- 2018: 440,091
- 2019: 463,832
- 2020: 393,907

Popular Activities

According to the National Park Service, popular activities and attractions include:

¹Globally important bird areas are "places of greatest significance for the conservation of the world's birds." (birdlife.org)

²"An IDA International Dark Sky Park (IDSP) is a land possessing an exceptional...quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment. ". (dark-sky.org)

- Camping
- Hiking/Backpacking
- Rafting/Canoeing
- Birdwatching/Wildlife Viewing
- Night Sky Viewing
- Backcountry Roads
- Scenic Drives
- Historic Sites
- Guided Ranger Programs

Attractions

- Boquillas Canyon
- Castolon Historic District
- Chihuahuan Desert
- Chisos Mountains
- Emory Peak
- Glenn Spring
- Johnson Ranch
- Persimmon Gap
- Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive
- Santa Elena Nature Trail

Weather

The park is typically dry and sunny much of the year. The most popular time of the year to visit is during the spring.

The hottest weather occurs during the summer from June to August, with May and June being the hottest months.

The fall and winter months can be pleasant, but visitors should be prepared for a variety of weather conditions, including a rare snow.

Temperatures can vary between the lowest and highest altitudes during any time of the year.



Chapter 2: Grand Canyon National Park

Several million years ago, the Colorado River slowly began carving out what is one of the great natural wonders of the world.

Although it is regularly photographed, nothing compares to seeing it “in person” - experiencing the sheer vastness and majesty of it. Its high towering cliffs are layered in a spectrum of browns, grays, pinks, reds, and even violet - an even more striking sight during sunrise and sunset.

Fast Facts

- Located in Arizona.
- 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide and a mile deep
- 5.9 visitors in 2019
- Second largest canyon in the world (behind the Kali Gandaki Gorge in Nepal)
- Formed by the Colorado River over a 3 to 6 million-year period
- Has an average depth of 1 mile
- Creates its own weather
- Hopi, Navajo, Havasupai, Paiute, Hualapai Native American tribes live there

Basic Information

The Grand Canyon National Park was established in 1919. About 190 miles long, and 6,000 feet deep, the canyon covers 1,900 square miles. It is one of the deepest canyons

in the world.

It contains a plethora of wildlife, including the following species:

- Mammals: 91
- Birds: 450
- Reptiles: 41
- Invertebrates: 1,443

In 2014, Grand Canyon NP was designated as a **Globally Important Bird Area**¹.

The canyon is home to the Hopi, Navajo, Havasupai, Paiute, and Hualapai Indian tribes.

South Rim

The South Rim is the most popular and accessible part of the canyon. It is open year-round. The abundance of visitor and family-oriented services makes it a favorite of first-time canyon visitors.

Many of the most recognizable photos of the Grand Canyon have been taken from viewpoints in this part of the canyon.

North Rim

Located over 200 miles away from the South Rim, the North Rim features a much different, but not less impressive, experience.

It is more rugged, cooler and contains more greenery than the warmer, drier South Rim. It also has “the highest concentration of plateau-top trails in the Grand Canyon.”

It has fewer visitors than the South Rim. According to GrandCanyon.com, it has 1/10th of the visitors than the South Rim. In addition, it is not open all year. It typically closes after the first snows of the season.

Visitor Statistics

In 2019, the Grand Canyon was the second most visited national park with 5.97 million visitors. (The #1 park was Great Smoky Mountains National Park).

- 2017: 6,254,238
- 2018: 6,380,495

¹Globally important bird areas are "places of greatest significance for the conservation of the world's birds." (birdlife.org)

- 2019: 5,974,411
- 2020: 2,897,098

Popular Activities

- Hiking/Backpacking
- Mule Rides
- Train Rides
- Scenic Drives
- Camping
- Rafting/Canoeing
- Helicopter Tours
- Ground Tours

Attractions

- Bright Angel Hiking Trail
- Desert View Drive
- Desert View Watchtower
- Geological Museum
- Grand Canyon Skywalk
- Havasupai Falls
- Hermit Road Drive
- Mather Point Overlook
- Rim Trail
- South Rim Mule Rides

Weather

Vast differences in elevation and terrain create a huge variety of weather conditions, even within the same season. One part of the canyon might have cool rain while at the same time another location is experiencing record heat.

Generally, the best times of the year to visit are March-May and September-November, not only due to the weather but also the crowds.



Chapter 3: Yosemite National Park

Since 1906, over 205 million visitors have experienced the majesty of this national treasure, nestled in Central California near the Nevada border.

Yosemite National Park is best known for its iconic falls, giant sequoia trees, El Capitan granite monolith, and the iconic, granite Half Dome. In fact, Yosemite Falls is the tallest waterfall in North America and the sixth tallest waterfall in the world.

Fast Facts

- Located in California
- 1,200 square miles
- 4.3 million visitors in 2019
- Is best known for its waterfalls
- Has the 6th tallest waterfall in the world - Yosemite Falls
- Can see night rainbows or “moonbows” in its falls
- Its giant sequoias are the biggest living things on the earth
- Is the first federally protected and preserved land area in the United States

Visitor Statistics

In 2019, Yosemite NP was the 5th most visited national park.

- 2017: 4,336,890
- 2018: 4,009,436

- 2019: 4,422,861
- 2020: 2,268,313

Popular Activities

- Camping
- Hiking/Backpacking
- Rock Climbing
- Rafting/Canoeing
- Fishing
- Horseback Riding
- Wildlife Viewing
- Scenic Viewpoints
- Ice Skating
- Guided Ranger Programs

Attractions

- Bridalveil Fall
- Chilnualna Falls - Wawona
- El Capitan
- Half Dome Hike
- Olmsted Point
- Tunnel View
- Yosemite Falls
- Yosemite Valley

Weather

According to the National Park Service, winters generally are cold and rainy. Nearly three-quarters of the annual rainfall occurs during the winter.

The effect of elevation is particularly evident in the spring. The effects of winter still grip the higher elevations, while lower elevations are more spring-like.

Summers tend to be warm and dry, punctuated with the occasional thunderstorm. Highs may reach 100's.

Regardless of the time of year, visitors should be aware that elevation also affects the weather and plan their itineraries accordingly.



Appendix A

General Resources

- [National Park Service](#)
- [National Park Visitor Use Statistics](#)
- [United States State Parks](#)
- [US Dept. of Interior](#)



Appendix B

Big Bend National Park Resources

- [Factsheet](#)
- [Visitor Statistics](#)
- [International Dark Sky Association](#)
- [Visit Big Bend](#)

Grand Canyon National Park Resources

- [Factsheet](#)
- [Visitor Statistics](#)
- [Visit Arizona](#)
- [Grand Canyon Conservancy](#)

Yosemite National Park Resources

- [Factsheet](#)
- [Visitor Statistics](#)
- [Visit California](#)
- [Travel Yosemite](#)



Glossary

G

Globally Important Bird Area

Globally important bird areas are "places of greatest significance for the conservation of the world's birds." (birdlife.org)

I

International Dark Sky Park

"An IDA International Dark Sky Park (IDSP) is a land possessing an exceptional...quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment. ". (darksky.org)



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June 20, 2021

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