



THE BLOG

10 Secret Spots in America's Top National Parks

Short of visiting in winter and hiking deep into the backcountry, the parks' popularity can make it tricky to find your own slice of solitude. Tricky, but not impossible. Here are 10 scenic spots you can have all to yourself.

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07/01/2015 02:15pm EDT | **Updated** July 1, 2016

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America's National Park Service runs more than 405 sites, including national seashores, recreation areas, historical sites, and national parks. Collectively, these sites receive about 70 million visitors a year -- with more than 10 million of them heading to just one national park in particular (Great Smoky Mountains).

Short of visiting in winter and hiking deep into the backcountry, the parks' popularity can make it tricky to find your own slice of solitude. Tricky, but not impossible. Here are 10 scenic spots you can have all to yourself inside the country's most-visited national parks.

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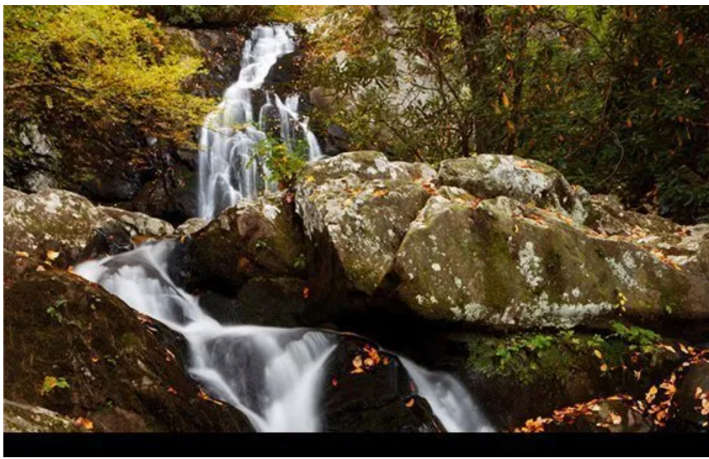
Spruce Flats Falls, Great Smoky Mountains National Park



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Great Smoky Mountains National Park saw more than 10 million visitors in 2014. That's more than the Grand Canyon and Yosemite *combined*. But given that the majority of those visitors saw the park from the scenic highway that winds its way through the mountains, you'll have an easier time finding your own area of the park if you're willing to get out of the car.

More than 800 miles of hiking trails carve their way through [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#), which sprawls across North Carolina and Tennessee. One of the best secret gems is the short, moderately steep trail to the hidden [Spruce Flats Falls](#). The trail, not shown on most park maps, begins behind the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont. After parking at the visitor center, head up the gravel path that leads toward the staff housing area. When the trail splits, head right and make your way downhill to the base of the falls. You may pass school groups, but the quick two-mile round-trip hike is worth it to see the nearly 30-foot multi-tiered waterfall.

(Photo: [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

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Toroweap Overlook, Grand Canyon National Park



Nearly 5 million people visited [Grand Canyon National Park](#) in 2014. About 90 percent of them head to the [South Rim](#) while the remaining few drive the extra

percent of them head to the [South Rim](#), while the remaining 10% drive the same distance to the [North Rim](#). But just because you head north doesn't mean you're out of the woods (or crowds) yet. Finding a secret slice of Grand Canyon National Park requires you to think beyond the developed rims.

One of the best spots, kept secret mostly because it requires navigating 60 miles of the unpaved Country Road # 109 and has no services, is the [Toroweap Overlook](#). Located in the northwest of the park, abutting the just-as-remote [Grand Canyon-Parashant National Monument](#), the Toroweap Overlook (also known as Tuweep) offers visitors to the primitive area views of one of the narrowest and deepest portions of the inner canyon. In addition to the Colorado River 3,000 feet below, you'll see remnants from the area's volcanic activity.

A high-clearance vehicle is must for the last three miles, and it's worth booking one of the nine campsites (available by permit) so you can take in the view at sunrise and sunset while still having time to explore the area's two hiking trails.

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(Photo: [Grand Canyon National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Artist Point, Yosemite National Park

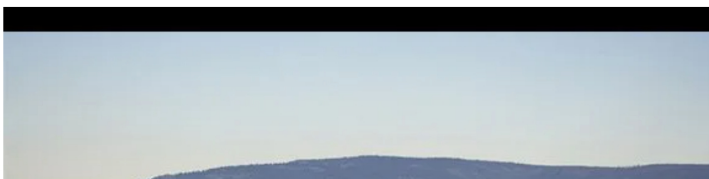


While nearly 4 million visitors come to [Yosemite National Park](#) each year, most of them never leave Yosemite Valley. Granted, the seven-mile-long canyon—carved from a river and later enlarged by glaciers—is worth the visit because of its views of Half Dome and Yosemite Falls. But the real beauty of Yosemite National Park lies in the acres of unspoiled nature it preserves.

Let the hordes of tourists unload for a quick photo op at Tunnel View. You can use this as your parking area to reach the just-as-spectacular view at [Artist Point](#). The trailhead starts on the uphill side of the road. You'll walk along the Pohono Trail for about a half-mile before hanging left when it meets up with the old stagecoach road that leads into Yosemite Valley. After another half mile, you'll know you've arrived when you hear yourself inhaling deeply. Return the same way you came.

(Photo: [Yosemite National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Point Sublime, Yellowstone National Park





The world's first national park attracts just over 3.5 million annual visitors, many of which unload from tour buses, wait on Old Faithful, and depart shortly thereafter. Depending on your crowd tolerance, it may feel like there are 3.5 million people sitting right around the geyser at any given point. But with more than 2.2 million acres and over 900 miles of hiking trails, [Yellowstone National Park](#) holds a ton of hidden-in-plain sight trails that remains relatively unused despite their easy access.

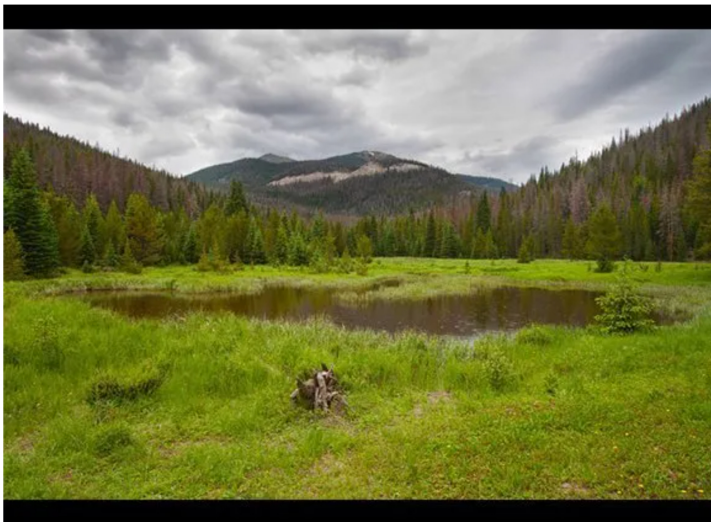
Travel just over half a mile on the South Rim Trail before heading the additional half-mile to [Point Sublime](#). You'll arguably have better, more expansive views of the yellowy, pink, and orange-striped canyon, the Yellowstone River, and the Lower Falls than you can find at any of the made-for-car viewpoints.

Whatever you do at Yellowstone, as long as you get out of the car and head away from the roads, you'll likely find wildlife, aquamarine pools, mudpots, and waterfalls that the majority of park visitors didn't even know existed.

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(Photo: [Yellowstone National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Lulu City, Rocky Mountain National Park



Of the hundreds of trails available to hikers, most visitors to [Rocky Mountain National Park](#) opt for summit hikes (the park has 60 peaks that tower more than 12,000 feet) or trails that lead to lakes or waterfalls. The [trail to Lulu City](#) doesn't lead to any of these, but it gets bonus points for taking you to the site of a late 1880s mining camp.

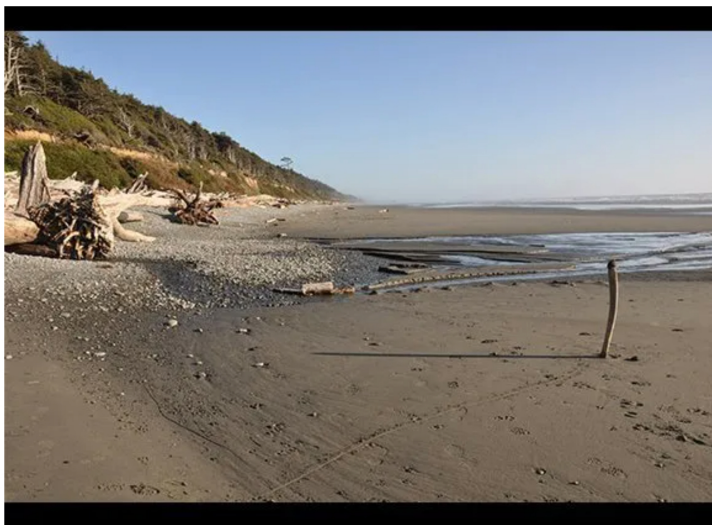
You can find the ghost town by starting at the Colorado River Trailhead. You'll parallel the river and, if you're looking, will spot tailings from the Shipler Mine about two miles into the hike. Pass by meadows before reaching remains of cabins and old building foundations on this fairly easy 3.7-mile one-way trail.

To extend your hike and see Little Yellowstone (the park's miniature version of

the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone), stay right when you come to the fork for Lulu City. Once you're at the canyon, follow the Grand Ditch until you meet the stage road that will take you to Lulu City for a total loop of nearly 14 miles.

(Photo: [Rocky Mountain National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Beach 1 and Beach 2, Olympic National Park



Most visitors stick to the rainforest and mountains—Hoh Rainforest, Hurricane Ridge, Lake Quinalt—when they visit the [Olympic National Park](#). Those that do opt to visit the coast usually head to well-known beaches like Kalaloch, Ruby, and Shi Shi. All of these places have, indeed, earned their reputation and demand a visit. But for your own strip of sand with easy access that doesn't require a miles-long trek, pay a visit to Beach 1 and Beach 2 before Kalaloch when heading north on Highway 101, or Beach 3 and Beach 4 after Kalaloch (but before Ruby Beach).

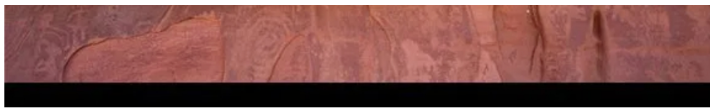
Don't confuse these with First, second, and third beaches near The Forks, unless you want to hang out with rabid *Twilight* fans. Look carefully on the right side of the road for small pullouts where you can park. Some may mark which beach you're at, but it's easy to drive past. Short trails through the woods open up to vast expanses of some of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in Washington (and sandier than some of their more famous counterparts). As with any coastal visit, check the tides beforehand, look for any signs marking overland trails, and watch for high waves that make the tree trunks scattering the beach quite dangerous.

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(Photo: Kate Sitarz)

Petroglyph Canyon, Zion National Park



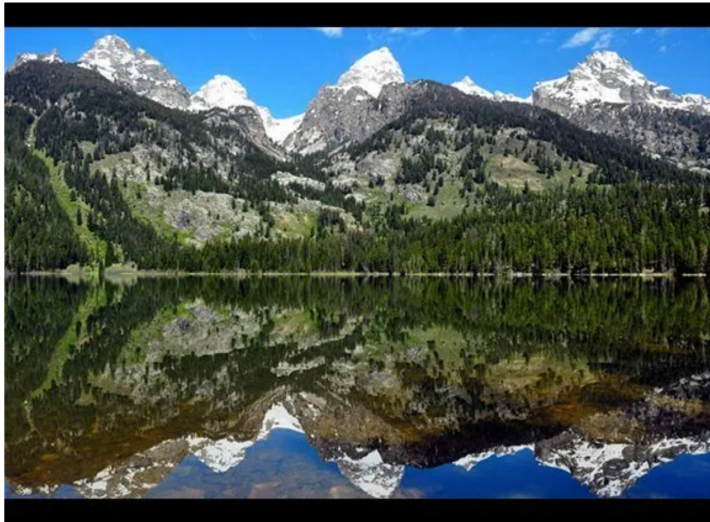


Most visitors to [Zion National Park](#) come for the natural wonders as seen from popular hikes like Angel's Landing, the Narrows, and even the lesser-known—because-it's-so-hard-to-get-a-permit Subway. But if you're not most visitors, consider adding a visit to one of the park's cultural wonders: [Petroglyph Canyon](#).

The canyon is very hush-hush—even if you ask a ranger about it—likely because touching has already eroded some of the other areas in the park known for petroglyphs. Plus, deliberate vandalism continues to threaten the delicate rock art. This particular archeological site features more than 150 figures, nearly all petroglyphs (incised images) with one small red triangle pictograph (painted image). Instead of giving convoluted directions to the site, we urge you to respect the preservation efforts of the National Park Service and consult a park ranger at the visitor's center if you're interested in this piece of history.

(Photo: [Zion National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Bradley Lake, Grand Teton National Park



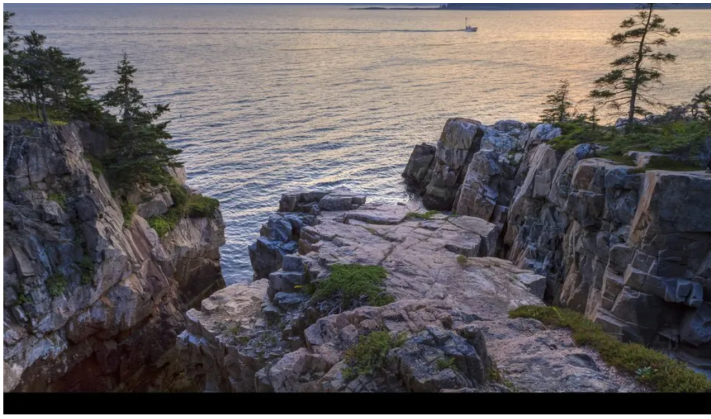
Fortunately for visitors to the Grand Tetons, [Grand Teton National Park](#) sits below Yellowstone, drastically reducing the number of people that actually stop. For a relatively flat hike leading to iconic Teton scenery, head to Bradley Lake. You can opt to start from the Lupine Meadows Trailhead or the Taggart Lake Trailhead. From either trail, there are multiple paths that stray off, so it's easy to get lost. But the beauty in this is if you have a map, you can make it to Bradley Lake and shake off some of the other hikers—if there are any.

From the Taggart Lake Trailhead, you can make this into about a six-mile loop hike or opt to go a bit further and look for the Avalanche Canyon trail. Unmarked on maps, enough people travel this trail that it's fairly noticeable, despite debris from avalanches sometimes blocking portions of the path. Look for the trail on the north shore of Lake Taggart. As you move up the canyon, cairns mark the path that eventually leads to Lake Taminah. However, if you've made it that far, you have (hopefully) planned for an overnight trip and have bear canisters—this is grizzly country, after all.

(Photo: [Grand Teton National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Schoodic Point, Acadia National Park





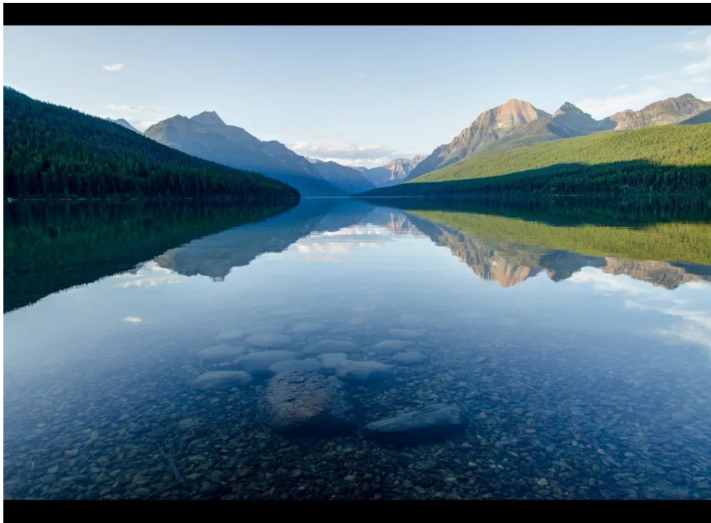
Most people associate a visit to [Acadia National Park](#) with a visit to Mount Desert Island. But even though the majority of the park is located there, opt to visit the only section of the park that's connected to the mainland. The Schoodic Peninsula, in particular [Schoodic Point](#) at the peninsula's tip, offers quintessential views of waves throwing a salty spray into the air as they crash against granite cliffs.

The park also includes several islands, many favored by birds for nesting, including Little Moose Island, visible from Schoodic Point. Rent a kayak to paddle there, or access it by foot at low tide (just make sure you head out before the tide turns). Paddling to the Porcupine islands—off the coast of Bar Harbor—is another great option.

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(Photo: [Acadia National Park](#) via Shutterstock)

Bowman Lake, Glacier National Park



Glacier National Park's Going-to-the-Sun Road is considered by many to be one of the world's most spectacular drives. But off this road (the main highway through [Glacier National park](#)) you can find one of the most remote sections of the park: [Bowman Lake](#).

Don't get discouraged based on the long trek down pothole-laced roads. The ride is worth it, with a campground at one end of the eight-mile lake and a backcountry campsite at the other. Use the spot as a launching point for day hikes like the Numa Ridge Lookout trail that leads to a fire watch cabin and views of several area peaks and lakes. Or just use the off-the-beaten-path location as an excuse to zen out.

But perhaps the biggest secret of Glacier National Park is to visit now: Fewer than 25 of the park's 150 glaciers remain, with the lingering glaciers expected to

permanently disappear by 2030.

(Photo: [Glacier National Park](#) via Shutterstock)


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