

There is something to be said about the effects of nature on the soul. How it fuels the soul by allowing one to tune in to one's "self" in a stage like no other. And there is no better stage to experience nature than in a national park.

To visit and explore a national park is to be in constant awe. You can't help but marvel at these natural wonders. They provide a playground for hiking, horseback riding, boating, and so many other activities. The National Park System of the United States now comprises 390 areas covering more than 84 million acres in 49 States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, Saipan, and the Virgin Islands. Places like the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, and Zion are all popular destinations and must-see parks, but so are some of the lesser known but equally amazing parks such as Black Canyon and Death Valley.

Our national park quest began back in 1997 and, to date, we have visited most of the major national parks in the U.S., and two of Canada's as well. Our trips have created memories like no other, and have instilled in our children a love for America's greatest places. These have been unforgettable family trips for us. I realize we have been blessed to have experienced these God-made wonders, and I highly recommend that you venture into at least one national park in your lifetime. Here's a link to the National Park Service: National Parks – Find a Park. It will provide you with a list of national parks to choose from, and information to plan your visit.

In the near future, I will begin posting additional "Exploring the National Parks" entries containing travel information and links on some of the great national parks we have visited. Look for them soon.

The National Park Conservation Association plays a crucial role in ensuring that these magnificent lands and landmarks are protected in perpetuity by, among other things, educating us about the importance of preserving the parks, and by helping to convince Congress to uphold the laws that protect the parks. I encourage you to become part of the NPCA to help protect our national parks for this generation and those to come. Every little bit we do as individuals to help protect and maintain these natural wonders makes a

difference, as our government has its hands full as it is with other important programs needing its funding.

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
An eternity in an hour.
– *William Blake*

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