

NATIONAL PARKS

The 27 Best National Parks in the US for Camping, Stargazing, and Wildlife

From classics that can't be missed to the totally underrated.

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Paul James Campbell/Getty

Yosemite National Park, California

For decades, [rock climbers](#) have made the migration to [Yosemite National Park](#), undeniably the most iconic of the nine [national parks in California](#), to test their skills and push the boundaries of the sport. And with the skyscraper-like granite monoliths that dominate the landscape—the tallest being El Capitan at over 3,000 vertical feet—it only makes sense that Yosemite continues to be a premiere destination for climbers worldwide. [Hiking](#) one of the most iconic features in the park, Half Dome, is an adventure for experienced hikers that requires a 4,800 foot ascent over the course of a 14-mile round trip hike. The strenuous and exposed nature of the trek, which requires the use of cables near the summit, make this one of the most difficult [hikes in any national park](#). To curb crowds, daily visits are limited to 300 through a permitting system.

But the spectacular rock faces and the valleys they rise from can be appreciated by non-climbers, too. With over 94% of the park's 1,200 square miles being designated wilderness, there is plenty to explore. Shorter day hikes like the half-mile Bridalveil Fall Trail or the five-mile Mirror Lake Loop are easier alternatives.

Best for: Adventurers and backpackers. Yosemite's granite monoliths make the park a world-class climbing destination, perfect for anyone from a first-timer to seasoned veteran. Even those who don't want to try technical climbing can explore thrilling and exposed hikes, like the one to Half Dome's summit. There are also plenty of longer hikes, ideal for those who want to strap on their [overnight pack](#) and get away from the roadside crowds.

Where to stay: Named after the natural phenomenon in which Yosemite's Horsetail Fall is illuminated in a fire-like orange glow just before sunset (typically in February), [Firefall Ranch](#) is the region's newest luxury resort. The 300-acre space opened in the spring of 2024, offering a mix of private luxury cottages and villas. [Rush Creek Lodge and Spa](#), which is located just minutes from the park's west entrance, is another luxury option with standard rooms, suites, and villas. The lodge also offers guided trips and daily on-site activities, perfect for families. [EXP Journeys](#), which organizes luxury travel experiences, is debuting a new "[glamping](#)" [experience at Yosemite](#) in 2025.