

AARP EMPLOYEE TRAVEL BLOG POSTS

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ARTICLE 4: NATURE

Suggested titles:

- 5 Stories to Inspire the Outdoor Adventurer in You
- 5 Ideas for Great Nature Vacations

Body:

[**IMAGE:** Christina Ianzito_Grand Canyon storm 2.jpg **CAPTION TEXT:** AARP employee Christina Ianzito captured this extraordinary storm in the Grand Canyon on an unforgettable nature vacation.]

Nothing beats Mother Nature for vacations. The great outdoors offers just about anything a vacationer can ask for, from excitement to restorative calm. We asked AARP employees to share their best nature-vacation memories, and their stories are sure to inspire your next trip. Share your ideas in the comments below, or continue the conversation in the [AARP Online Community](#).

Small, Quiet, Beautiful, Rinse & Repeat

St. John in the US Virgin Islands is a tried and true tradition. Just ask AARP employee Rachel Fautz: “St. John is perfect - small, quiet, beautiful. There are miles of hiking trails (including ruins and petroglyphs), numerous white sand beaches, a variety of wildlife (wild donkeys, iguanas, mongoose, sea turtles), and everyone is so friendly. It's so nice to reset and live on island time for awhile. We go in February, when it's 82 every day with no humidity ... Nothing kicks SAD in the teeth quite like the Virgin Islands. It's also a great opportunity to meet people from all over who return to the island every year.”

Right Place, Right Time, Perfect Storm

It's hardly ever a good thing when you get caught in the rain, but our own Christina Ianzito was lucky enough to watch nature do its thing in one of the most spectacular places in America. “This past summer I was at the Grand Canyon with my husband and two children when a storm started to roll in. It was evening, the sky just darkening, and we could see the rain begin to fall across the canyon and lightning flashing—it made the already incredible view even more fantastic.”

[**IMAGE:** KC_Summers_Fort%20Jefferson.jpg CAPTION TEXT: AARP employee K.C. Summers enjoys a quiet moment at Ft. Jefferson in southern Florida. Her vacation balanced city with nature perfectly.]

On the Grid? Off the Grid? How About Both!

K.C. Summers seems to be the queen of perfect compromises. On her nature vacation she balanced city with simplicity on a trip to southern Florida. “Dry Tortugas National Park is the perfect getaway. It's super-remote—you can only get there by boat or seaplane—and there are no tourist facilities, so we felt a little like Robinson Crusoe when we arrived. Yet it's just 70 miles from Key West, so we combined our visit with a stay in that funky island town. We spent a few days biking, eating, swimming and strolling Key West's charming streets, then took a passenger ferry to the park, where we snorkeled the pristine waters and explored the ruins of Fort Jefferson, a massive Civil War-era fortress. This vacation had it all!”

We're All Junior Park Rangers At Heart!

When Lona Choi-Allum visited Mount Rushmore in South Dakota with her extended family, everyone came away with wonderful memories, but the kids came away with a little something extra. “We were able to spend our vacation with extended family - so it was a multigenerational outing (grandparents, kids, and grandkids)!” she writes. “And our son, who is 6 1/2, was able to explore Mount Rushmore with his three cousins. They earned their Junior Park Ranger badge by asking lots of questions and exploring the national park. The coolest part was actually meeting one of the original drillers of Mount Rushmore!”

Go for Death-Defying Adventure

Yikes! On a National Park trip in Utah, AARP employee Tara Dunion made the most of every experience: “In spring 2014, my family and I had an amazing trip to several national parks in Utah. ... My favorite part was the death-defying hike that we took on Angel's Landing in Zion National Park, where you are up thousands of feet on a steep precipice and the only thing keeping you from plunging to your death is a very narrow rock formation and a flimsy rope. I didn't think I would make it all the way to the very end but the amazing scenery was an inspiration that helped me get to the end of the trail and back. From mountain biking in Moab on the same ridge where *Thelma and Louise* was filmed, to submerging ourselves into Antelope Canyon, this trip featured amazing adventures in a fantastic location.”

Find more great ideas for nature getaways in [AARP's Online Community](#).