

LEVELED Book • S

NATIONAL PARKS



Written by Julie Mettenburg

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Find a special place of your own.

Your Special Place

Imagine stumbling upon a special place in the wilderness that's all your own. As you pick your way across a slick log, you can hear cool water trickling in a stream below. The sun reflects off the red canyon walls while an eagle soars quietly overhead. Dry grasses rustle around the perfect hiding spot, and gazelles leap in the distance.

Untouched places like this are becoming rare as humans use more and more land for farming, housing, and taking resources. But thankfully, many nations of the world have preserved areas of wilderness as national parks. In national parks, you can still find your own special place.

The Value of Parks

Protected lands are important for many reasons. Many national parks protect a rich **diversity** of plants and animals that might otherwise be changed by human development. In a protected area, native plants and animals can exist without interference by humans. Endangered animals can survive without the threat of habitat destruction and hunting.

Many parks protect cultures and their histories. In the world's national parks, you can see **artifacts**, or objects left behind from past civilizations. Some preserve an ancient way of life still in practice.



The Grand Canyon is one of the most famous national parks.



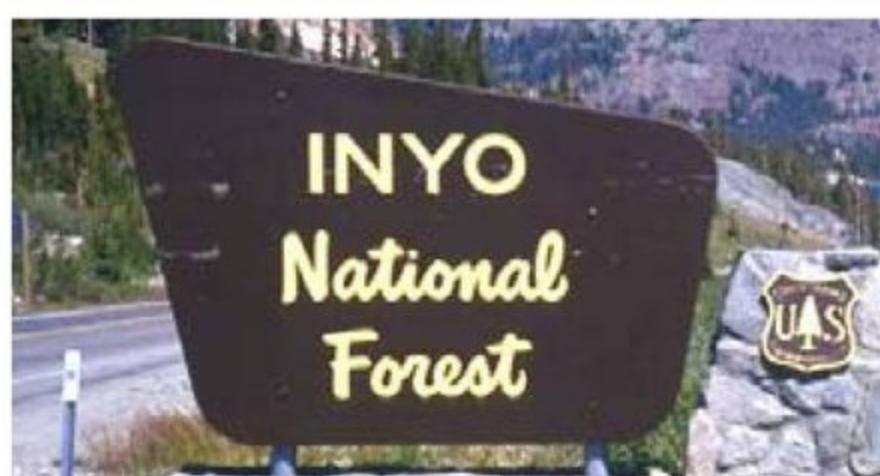
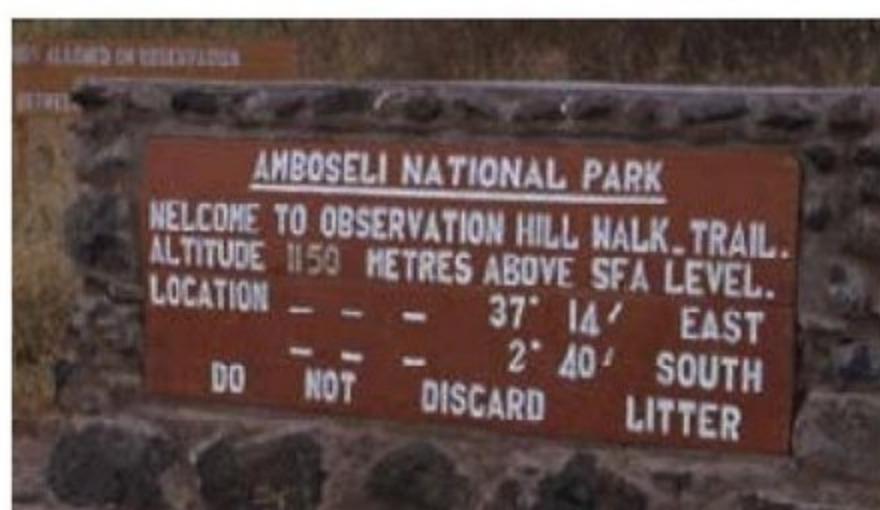
Yellowstone has many geysers.

National parks also provide wild, untouched places where people can get away from it all. Visitors can view rare wildlife, unique landforms, ancient artifacts, and pieces of their own history. They also can surround themselves with the beauty of nature through hiking, backpacking, camping, and other activities.

The United States Congress gets the credit for setting aside the first national park in 1872. President Ulysses S. Grant signed the bill creating Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. The new law recognized the unique and fragile beauty of Yellowstone's steaming geysers, pools of bubbling mud, and abundant wildlife.

Today, hundreds of countries around the world have joined the **preservation** effort. There are more than 1,000 areas of preserved land around the world.

Now that you know a little about national parks, let's explore a few up close. Maybe one of these will contain your special place.



Do You Know?

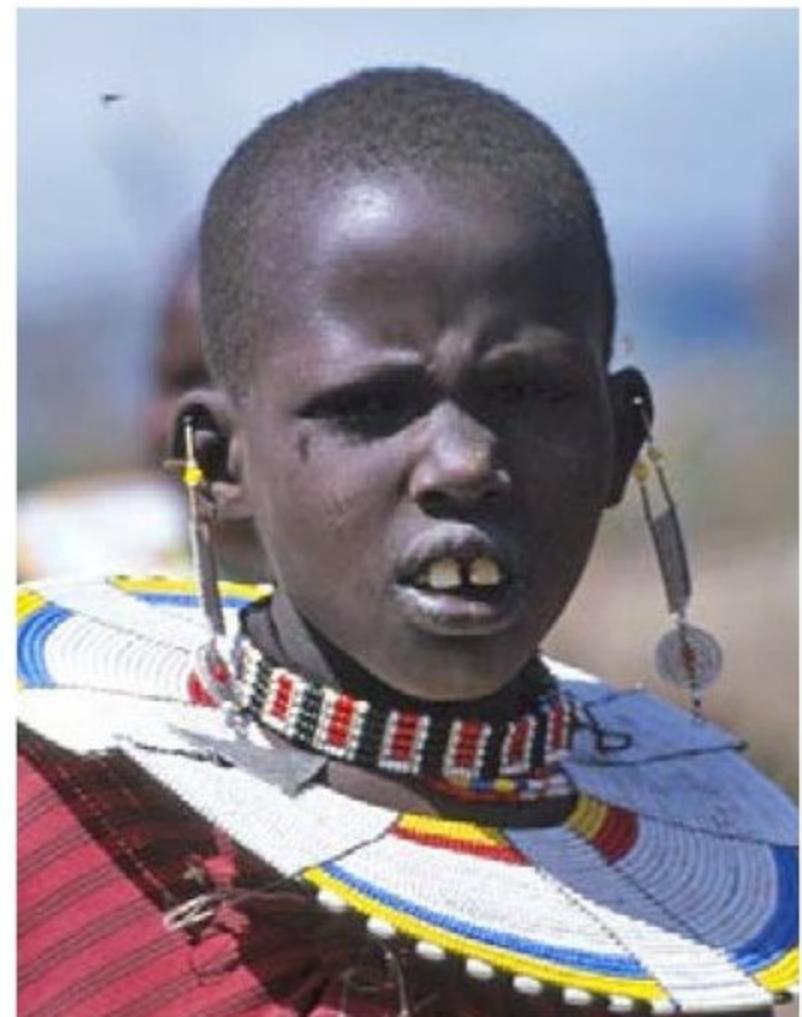
Around the world, there are many types of sites that are protected by the government. Here are just a few of the designations you might see:

- National park
- National monument
- National forest
- Game preserve
- World Heritage Site
- National reserve
- Preservation area

World-Famous Wonder: Serengeti National Park and Masai Mara Reserve

Tanzania and Kenya—Films and photographs from the Serengeti (SARE-en-GET-ee) are perhaps the most famous images of Africa. Dry grasses rustle across broad landscapes colored brown, red, and orange by the African sun. Lions, gazelles, zebras, and antelope lounge peacefully on the immense plains.

In 1913, an American hunter “found” the Serengeti, still unknown to Westerners, and introduced it to the world. But the Masai (muh-SEYE) people have called it home for thousands of years. They herd cattle and live in traditional villages in the Kenyan portion of the park. The Masai are famous for their beautiful red clothing, jewelry, and body paint. To the Masai, the Serengeti has always been Siringitu: “the place where the land goes on forever.”



Masai child



The Serengeti plains feature plentiful wildlife.

The Serengeti is one of the oldest and largest **savannas**, or dry grasslands, on Earth. It is the last home of many of the most famous African animals. Every year, hundreds of thousands of wildebeests and zebras **migrate**, or move across the plains, following the seasonal rains. Amazing predators, including lions, crocodiles, cheetahs, and hyenas, follow them. Several of the Serengeti's animals, including rhinos, cheetahs, and some antelopes, are severely endangered. Without the park to protect their **habitat**, these creatures would probably become **extinct**.



Sea turtles nesting on a Costa Rican beach

A Country's Proud Heritage: Santa Rosa National Park

Costa Rica—Costa Rica, a tiny country in Central America, includes many natural and cultural treasures. In Santa Rosa Park, many of these special features come together. First, there is the Pacific coastline where many endangered sea turtles gather by the thousands to nest. The ocean by these beaches is also known for good surfing.

The inland portions of the park feature savannas and the largest area of dry tropical forest in Central America. This habitat supports howler monkeys, wild pigs, and over 50 species of bats that nest in the park's many caves. Many scientists come to this rich natural landscape to study how the plants and animals of the forest and ocean interact. Two historical sites preserve the memory of important battles in the struggle for Costa Rican independence. Visitors can tour these sites and enjoy hiking, camping, and surfing.



Many bats nest in Santa Rosa's caves.

Park Among the People: Rock Creek Park

Washington, D.C., U.S.A.—It's easy to imagine national parks as expanses of wild territory. It's not so easy to imagine a park inside a major city. Yet that's just what Rock Creek Park is. It is a small, 1,700-acre area of preserved cultural and natural heritage, right in the center of the U.S. capital city.



Washington monument

Established in 1890, this park provides city dwellers with a spot of nature nearby. They can escape among the plants, animals, and rushing water of a forest. A theater hosts outdoor concerts

and plays in the summer. The park is also filled with historical treasures from the times of the Piscataway Tribe, the founding of the U.S. capital, and the Civil War.



Other Urban Getaways

- ① Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site, New York City
- ② Gateway National Recreation Area, New York City
- ③ Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri
- ④ Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco, California



Visitors tour the marine conservation area in Quebec.

A Whale of a Place: Saguenay-St. Lawrence National Marine Conservation Area of Canada

Quebec, Canada—Mountains rise up from the shores of Saguenay Fjord (SAG-eh-nay fee-YORD), a narrow, but extremely deep, arm of the sea. From the east, the St. Lawrence Estuary flows into the fjord. An estuary is where freshwater from a river mixes with saltwater from the ocean. In the fjord, waters of different temperatures and saltiness form layers, and each layer supports its own kind of wildlife. This unusual mix of water forms the whole park—it's entirely underwater!

The mix of freshwater and saltwater in the fjord provides many nutrients that attract all sorts of sea creatures. Plankton, fish, birds, and mammals all call it home. Many species of whale, including minke, fin, pilot, humpback, and blue whales, come here during warmer months. The rare beluga, or white whale, lives here year-round. Seals, fish, and invertebrates such as crabs and shellfish are also abundant.

So, how do you visit an underwater park? Many people choose to get close to whales and other animals by boat. The park offers whale watches and trips on kayaks—small, canoelike boats. Visitors also can go scuba diving, hiking, and ice fishing.



Many whales come to the Saguenay Fjord during warmer months.

Unique Spots Around the World

Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii, U.S.A.—

In this park, you can view the world's largest, most active volcano. Visitors watch as red-hot, glowing lava rolls in fiery streams from the volcano. When it falls into the ocean, it sends up **plumes** of steam. This is the formation of the island, up close! Wilderness areas also provide hiking and camping among Hawaii's unique landscapes and plants.



Steam from lava hitting the ocean

Everglades National Park, Florida, U.S.A.—

Alligators glide through the wetlands of North America's largest subtropical wilderness. Fragile swamps, grasslands, and marshy



coastline are preserved here. Rare mammals such as the Florida panther and the manatee also flourish.

Florida's everglades

Sareks National Park, Sweden—Sweden was the first country in Europe to create national parks.

This one, far north above the Arctic Circle, is Western Europe's largest area of wilderness. It is filled with majestic mountains and glaciers. It is also home to the Saami, or Lapp people, who herd reindeer.



Above the Arctic Circle

Tassili N'Ajjer National Park, Algeria
(tah-SEE-LEE n-AH-jer)—Algeria, in Northern Africa, is situated in the fierce Sahara Desert.



Cave art tells stories.

drawings and engravings in caves and on the sides of cliffs. The art documents the history of humans since 6000 BC!

The landscape wasn't always desert, however, and past civilizations left behind more than 15,000

Parks Under Siege

Often, it is difficult for countries to set aside useful land to establish national parks. Even after a national park is established, many threats can face preserved lands. In poor countries, people often use parklands

for growing crops, grazing livestock, and gathering firewood to feed hungry people. If there is war or political troubles, people fleeing the violence often damage fragile environments.



People can damage land by not picking up their trash.

Some preserved lands hold gold mines of sorts—

oil fields, mineral resources, or forests for logging. Many people believe that these resources should be used to create economic growth, and governments occasionally agree.

Even in a well-protected national park, too many visitors can cause plenty of problems, from leaving behind litter to trampling trails to polluting the air with snowmobile exhaust. It also can be difficult to experience the wilderness while surrounded by people.

For all of the above reasons, national parks can become spoiled. Yet this reinforces their importance. Most areas of the world already have been changed by human industry and development. National parks are some of the last areas that have not been affected by human development. If future generations are to find their own special natural places, then people around the world must work to preserve these national treasures.



Yellowstone's geysers attract millions of visitors each year.

Glossary

artifacts	objects and pieces of art from ancient times (p. 5)
diversity	many different types of things living together (p. 5)
estuary	the end of a river where the fresh water mixes with salt water (p. 14)
extinct	the dying out of an entire species of animal or plant (p. 9)
fjord	a narrow sea inlet between steep slopes and cliffs (p. 14)
habitat	the natural environment of an animal or plant (p. 9)
migrate	move from one area to another every year (p. 9)
preservation	the act of saving something as it is for the future (p. 7)
savannas	dry grasslands (p. 9)

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Front cover: Wildebeests and zebras in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania and Kenya

Title page: Monument Valley, Utah and Arizona, U.S.A.

Back cover: Geyser at Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, U.S.A.

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