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Park Rangers

Written by Katherine Follett

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Two visitors show their workbooks to a ranger at North Cascades National Park in Washington.

What's It Like to Be a Park Ranger?

Imagine being a **park ranger**.

Picture yourself leading **visitors** to a beautiful hidden waterfall. Think about walking people step-by-step through an exciting battle from history. Imagine holding a turtle for schoolkids to touch. Imagine skiing into a snowy forest to save a hurt hiker.

Being a park ranger is a lot of work. Rangers work long hours. They work nights and weekends. They might hike for miles in a single day. They face wild animals and wild weather. Still, most rangers say it's the best job in the world.

Ranger Gear

Rangers wear uniforms so visitors know who they are. They carry gear that helps them do their outdoor job. A typical ranger needs:

- hiking boots
- a sun hat
- a radio
- rope
- a flashlight
- a first-aid kit
- sunscreen
- bear spray*



*Bear spray is high-powered pepper spray. If a wild animal attacks, bear spray can stop it.



Delicate Arch at Arches National Park in Utah

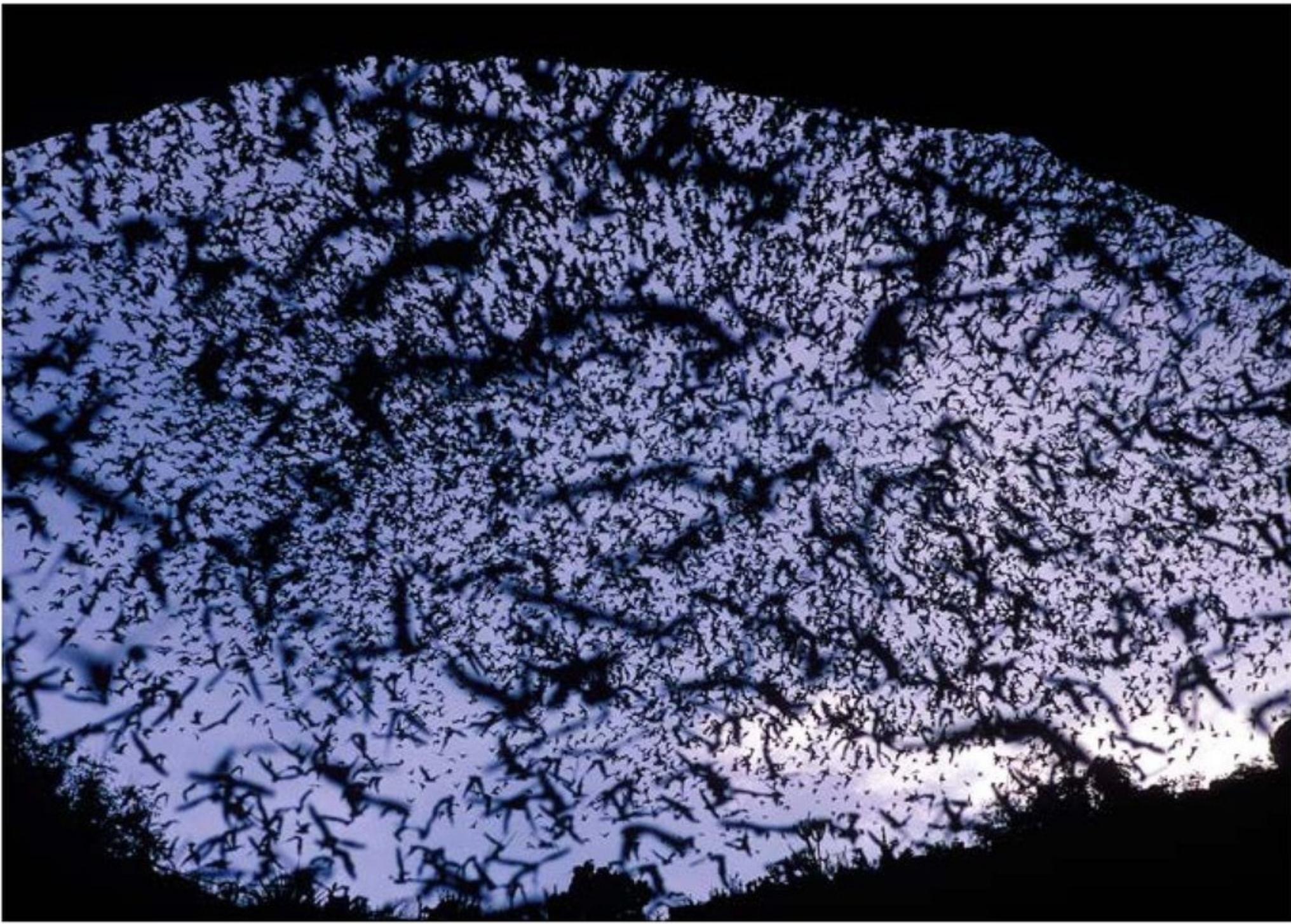
Where Do Rangers Work?

Park rangers work in **national** or state parks. Some parks are beautiful natural areas, such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. Others are important places from history. Many parks include **museums** and **public** buildings. Some include **memorials**, which help us remember an event or a person who died.

Parks are special places set aside for the future, but people visit parks today. They hike, ski, and fish in parks. They see beautiful art. They walk on beaches and rest near waterfalls. Park rangers work to keep all the visitors safe. Rangers also teach people about the park and how to save it for the future.



A state park ranger directs traffic during a fire in California.



At Carlsbad Caverns, Mexican free-tailed bats exit their cave at sunset.

What Do Rangers Do?

Park rangers do many different jobs. Some rangers teach the public. At Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico, rangers teach people about bats while millions of them fly out of a cave. At George Washington's birthplace in Virginia, rangers show how the Washington family ate dinner in the 1730s. At Alcatraz Island in California, rangers tell how some men escaped from the famous prison.

Some rangers work with scientists and other experts. In the Everglades, rangers track Florida panthers. They make sure these endangered animals are safe and healthy. In Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada, rangers keep track of wildfires set to keep the forest healthy.

Park rangers also help protect parks. In Navajo National Monument in Arizona, rangers make sure visitors don't damage Native American ruins. On Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, rangers keep people from stepping on bird nests. Endangered birds lay their eggs on the beach.

In Wisconsin's Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, protecting snakes is part of a ranger's job.



Leader of the Pack

Not everyone who works for the National Park Service is a ranger. Take biologist Doug Smith, who studies animals in Yellowstone National Park.

"Everyone confuses biologists with rangers," Smith says.

In the early days of the Park Service, rangers did biology and everything else. Now, he says, "They're really involved with taking care of people."

Smith's focus is more wolves than people. He came to Yellowstone in 1994 to help restore wolves to the park.

Today, there are eleven packs in the park and 85–90 wolves.

"In the park, it is clear that our mission is to restore natural systems, to bring nature back to the way it was before we messed it up," Smith says. "So we did it, and we're doing it, and we're trying to understand it."



A dart shot from a helicopter made this Yellowstone wolf sleepy. Now Doug Smith fits a radio collar to the wolf. The radio collar will help biologists with wolf research.



In Montana's Glacier National Park, rangers learn rescue skills.

Other park rangers keep visitors safe. In the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, rangers sign in every hiker. They make sure everyone comes home safely. If a hiker goes missing, rangers search the mountains. If a hiker is sick or hurt, rangers may need to fly the person out.

Saving people can be dangerous. Rangers face flash floods, crumbling cliffs, and wild animals. In fact, park rangers have one of the riskiest jobs in the world!

What Do Rangers Need to Know?

Rangers in different parks know about different things. At Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, a ranger shows visitors how lava created the mountains, caves, and sea cliffs. A history expert at the Statue of Liberty tells what the statue means to people moving to the United States. Musicians at the New Orleans Jazz Park play music the city is famous for.



A park ranger guides a visitor at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.



Mountain goats live in Glacier National Park and several other parks. They usually stay above the areas where trees grow.

Even rangers working in the same park are experts on different subjects. One ranger in Glacier National Park describes how **glaciers** shaped its beautiful valleys. An animal expert leads scientists to the park's mountain goats. Another expert talks about the stars in the big, dark Montana sky. A ranger who knows first aid helps a hurt hiker.



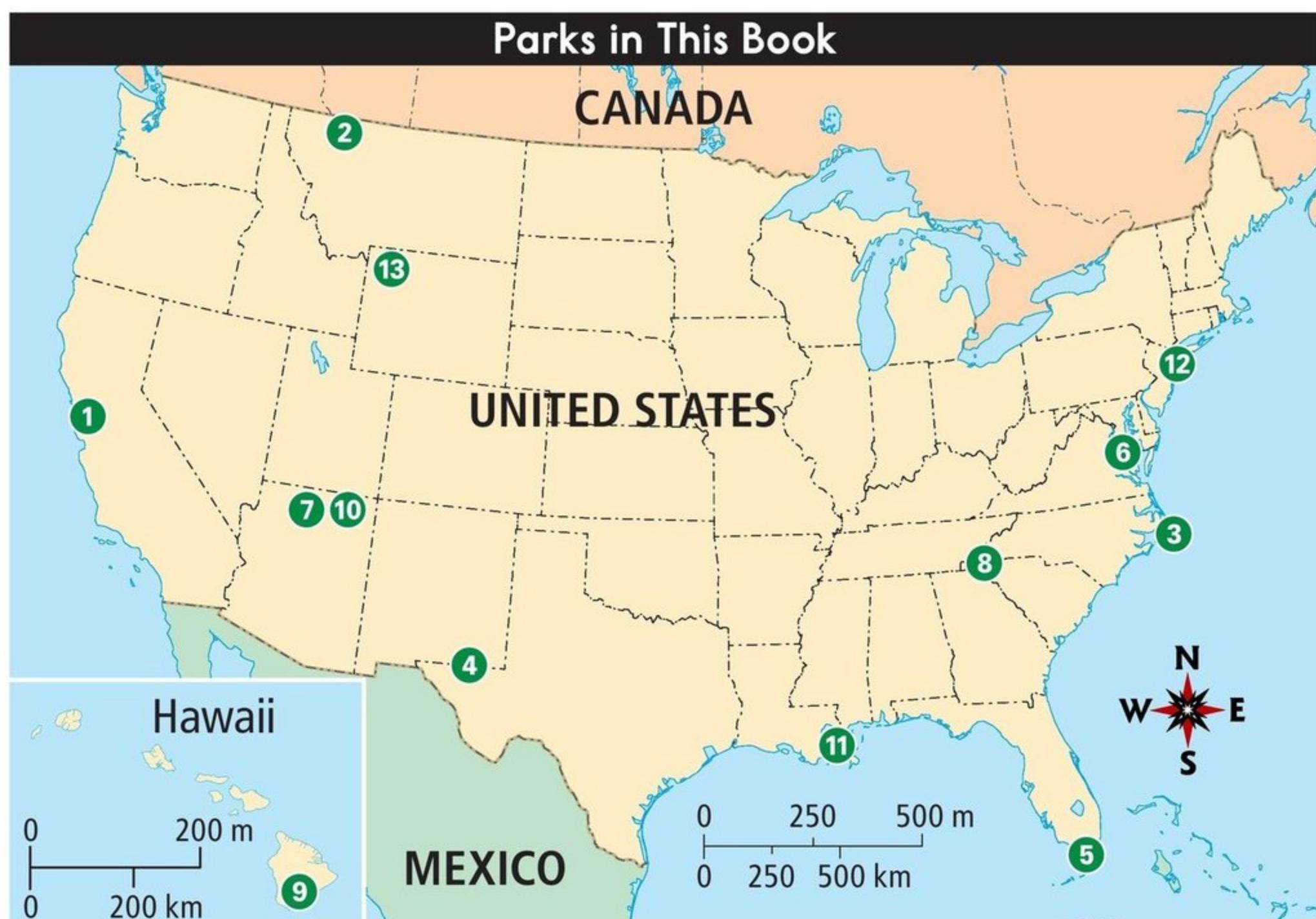
This girl is a volunteer ranger in Florida's Biscayne National Park.

Can I Be a Park Ranger?

Does being a park ranger sound like fun? You can start by becoming a park volunteer. Volunteers do many of the same jobs as rangers. They learn about what goes on inside a park.

Most rangers go to college. Some study history or science, while others study the wild lands and how people use them.

Many people want to be park rangers. To get the job, you must show that you're a hard worker and a good leader. If you love nature and history, and you want to help **preserve** it, you might make a great ranger!



- ① Alcatraz Island, California
- ② Glacier National Park, Montana
- ③ Cape Hatteras National Seashore, North Carolina
- ④ Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico
- ⑤ Everglades National Park, Florida
- ⑥ George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia
- ⑦ Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona
- ⑧ Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina and Tennessee
- ⑨ Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii
- ⑩ Navajo National Monument, Arizona
- ⑪ New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, Louisiana
- ⑫ Statue of Liberty National Monument, New Jersey and New York
- ⑬ Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho

Glossary

experts (<i>n.</i>)	people who have a lot of knowledge about a subject (p. 9)
glaciers (<i>n.</i>)	large bodies of accumulated ice and compacted snow that are found year round and that slowly move downhill (p. 13)
memorials (<i>n.</i>)	things that represent the memories of people, places, things, or events (p. 6)
museums (<i>n.</i>)	buildings used to store and show things that are important to history, science, or art (p. 6)
national (<i>adj.</i>)	owned or maintained by a country's government (p. 6)
park ranger (<i>n.</i>)	a person whose job it is to watch over and protect a national or state park (p. 4)
preserve (<i>v.</i>)	to take care of and save for the future (p. 15)
public (<i>adj.</i>)	open to everyone; meant to be shared with others (p. 6)
visitors (<i>n.</i>)	people who come to spend time at a place or with someone (p. 4)

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