



Name: _____

America's Crown Jewels: Famous National Parks and Their Stories

The United States' national park system protects some of the most breathtaking landscapes on Earth. Here are eight of the most famous parks and their fascinating histories:

Yellowstone (1872)

The world's first national park spans Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho. Famous for its erupting Old Faithful geyser, colorful hot springs, and roaming bison herds, Yellowstone started the global national park movement.

Yosemite (1890)

California's granite wonderland features El Capitan's sheer cliff face and Yosemite Falls (North America's tallest waterfall). John Muir's writings helped protect this Sierra Nevada treasure.

Grand Canyon (1919)

Arizona's 277-mile-long chasm reveals nearly 2 billion years of Earth's history in its layered rock walls. Theodore Roosevelt called it "the one great sight every American should see."

Great Smoky Mountains (1934)

Straddling North Carolina and Tennessee, this misty forest is America's most visited park, protecting over 19,000 documented species in its lush Appalachian ecosystem.

Rocky Mountain (1915)

Colorado's alpine paradise contains 77 mountain peaks over 12,000 feet high. Trail Ridge Road takes visitors through tundra ecosystems just like in Arctic regions.

Zion (1919)

Utah's first national park features towering sandstone cliffs in shades of red and pink. The Narrows hike takes adventurers right through a river between thousand-foot canyon walls.

Acadia (1919)

Maine's coastal gem was the first national park east of the Mississippi. Visitors can be the first in the U.S. to see sunrise from Cadillac Mountain's summit.

Everglades (1934)

Florida's "River of Grass" protects rare species like manatees, American crocodiles, and panthers in its unique tropical wetland ecosystem.

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Park Protection Timeline:

- 1872: Yellowstone starts the system
- 1916: National Park Service created
- 1933: Historic sites added to protection
- 2020: New River Gorge becomes newest park

These parks represent America's commitment to preserving natural wonders "for the benefit and enjoyment of the people" - a promise made over 150 years ago that continues today. From geysers to glaciers, each park tells a unique story of our nation's geological and cultural heritage.

1. Which national park was established first?
 - a) Grand Canyon
 - b) Yellowstone
 - c) Great Smoky Mountains

2. Why is Great Smoky Mountains the most visited park?
 - a) It has the tallest mountains
 - b) It's easy to reach from eastern cities
 - c) It protects over 19,000 species

3. How is hiking in Zion's Narrows different from hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park?
