



I HEART PARKS

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About the Author: Kelly Smith Trimble lives outside Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Knoxville, Tennessee, where she writes about gardens, homes, crafts and, possibly her favorite subject, national parks. Kelly and her husband, Derek, highly recommend both the sunrises and sunsets in Arches National Park, where they spent their honeymoon.

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Take your vows in the Rocky Mountains, or take a date to Lady Liberty. Honeymoon on the beach in the Virgin Islands, or propose under the stars in Haleakalā. See the sun rise in Acadia, and watch it set in Arches. Coast to coast, the national parks offer hundreds of opportunities to make lasting memories with the one you love.

In this guide, we share some of our favorite parks for romantic adventures. Some spots are nestled in America's greatest cities: San Francisco, New Orleans, St. Louis, Washington, D.C., and New York. Others are far from the lights and the hustle and bustle. They're escapes where you can find the solitude and space to reconnect.

What do these diverse national parks have in common? They're all places we love – and places we love to share. We know you will too.

Acadia National Park

MAINE



PEAK SEASON: May to October, with a fall-color rush in early fall; many roads and park facilities are closed November through April

WHAT'S TO LOVE: As the first national park east of the Mississippi, Acadia holds a special place in the hearts of northeasterners and all Americans. The park showcases the rugged coastline and the lives of people who've lived and thrived there for generations. But as much as Acadia is known for its sea-level experiences, the park also has attractions of great heights.

PURSUIITS FOR PAIRS: Make plans to catch the sunrise on Cadillac Mountain, the tallest along the Atlantic coast in the U.S. at 1,530 feet. You can access the peak via a 3.5-mile narrow and winding road, open April 15 through November.

Bikers will enjoy traversing the park's historic carriage roads, which are closed to motorized

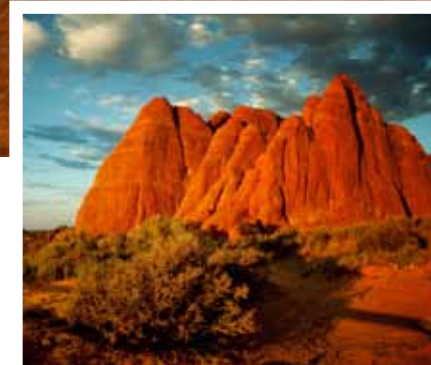


vehicles and lead you over beautiful stone bridges that are celebrated man-made landmarks on their own. Find the bulk of carriage roads in the southern portion of the park near Jordan Pond. You can top off a morning or afternoon of cycling with local Maine crab cakes, lobster stew, or seafood chowder at the historic Jordan Pond House.

Acadia welcomes small, informal weddings and commitment ceremonies throughout the park with a permit. Check the website for more information and to submit an application with a \$50 fee.

Arches National Park

UTAH



PEAK SEASON: The most popular and pleasant seasons are spring and fall; summer can be extremely hot and winter extremely cold

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Arches is well known for its more than 2,000 natural stone arches (the highest density of them in the world), as well as other geologic marvels. It's also a vast high-desert landscape with phenomenal views around every turn and is consistently ranked as one of the best national parks for watching the sunset.

PURSUIITS FOR PAIRS: A short one-to-two hour drive through the park can take you to some of the most iconic spots, including a viewpoint for Delicate Arch (the most famous),

but seeing the park on foot is a must if you have the time. Couples might find significance in Double Arch, which is actually two giant arches joined at one end. This spot can be reached via a quick and easy half-mile trail.

Views at Arches will take your breath away no matter the time of day, but Arches is known specifically for its sunsets. Be aware, though: this is not a well-kept secret. While watching the sunset at Delicate Arch may sound romantic, during peak season you'll likely be surrounded by a whole host of strangers with the same idea (and some may not value quiet the same way you do).

If you prefer a little solitude, just look around. Arches is relatively unpopulated save for a few spots and has views everywhere you look. Try Tunnel Arch or just pull over somewhere, anywhere there's an open spot, and take it in. Or get up early to catch the sunrise; Balanced Rock is close to the park entrance and offers a nice vantage point.

Everglades National Park

FLORIDA



PEAK SEASON: Winter and early spring, when south Florida offers warm, dry respite from cool weather elsewhere in the country; summer and fall can be wet, hot, and buggy

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Everglades National Park protects the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River. You can combine your Everglades trip with a jaunt to one or more of several other amazing parks near the Everglades, including Biscayne National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, and Dry Tortugas National Park.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: Everglades is a water and wildlife wonderland, and activities range from bird watching, to fishing, to biking. A paddling and camping trip will make a special Valentine's Day excursion for romantic adventurers. Combine one of many half-day canoe or kayak trails with a cozy night at one of the two campgrounds (call ahead for



reservations), or go all the way with a multi-day backcountry paddle into aptly named Hell's Bay (wilderness permit required).

For those who prefer to sit back and let someone else navigate, you can also reserve spots on several boat and tram tours that take you along the mangrove coast and into the famed River of Grass. Be sure to get reservations, especially if you're traveling in winter, the busiest season.

Glacier Bay National Park

ALASKA



PEAK SEASON: The park is open year-round, but is full-service only from May through September; June, July, and August are peak months

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Part of a 25-million-acre World Heritage Site that is one of the largest international protected areas on earth, this 3.3-million-acre piece of the southeast Alaska wilderness includes glaciers, mountains, fjords, rivers, lakes, coastline — and all the amazing variety of plant and animal species to go along with these diverse environments.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: Even if cruises aren't normally your thing, you should reconsider for

an Alaskan cruise — it's one of the best ways to see so many features of this amazing state, including Glacier Bay National Park. Many Alaskan cruises spend a full day in Glacier Bay and start off by picking up a park ranger as they enter, so cruisers can get a fully interpreted experience. Wildlife spotting is especially good from the ship. You may see harbor seals, humpback whales, grizzly bears, mountain goats, and even puffins.

If a boat sounds nice but you'd rather spend more time (and have more solitude) than a cruise allows, sea kayaking is your best bet. Kayaks are available for rent in the park, or you can bring your own. Both beginner and experienced kayakers should check out available guided tours for day or overnight trips. Trips begin at Bartlett Cove, where you'll also find Glacier Bay Lodge, park headquarters, the visitors center, campground, and several hiking trails.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

CALIFORNIA



PEAK SEASON: Spring through fall; winter is the rainy season, but it's a good time for whale watching

WHAT'S TO LOVE: One of the world's largest urban parks with almost 60 miles of coastline, Golden Gate offers something for everyone. Get a nature fix on the popular beaches and trails of the northern section in Marin County, including the redwood forest in Muir Woods National Monument. Learn the history of the central San Francisco area. Or opt for a more private adventure in the southern San Mateo district, where new park additions include the still-working Rancho Corral de Tierra and a one-of-a-kind view from atop steep Montara Mountain.

PURSUIITS FOR PAIRS: Couples with an unapologetic tendency toward the cliché shouldn't miss an opportunity to walk down Lovers' Lane. In the Presidio of San Francisco, the short historical trail takes you through



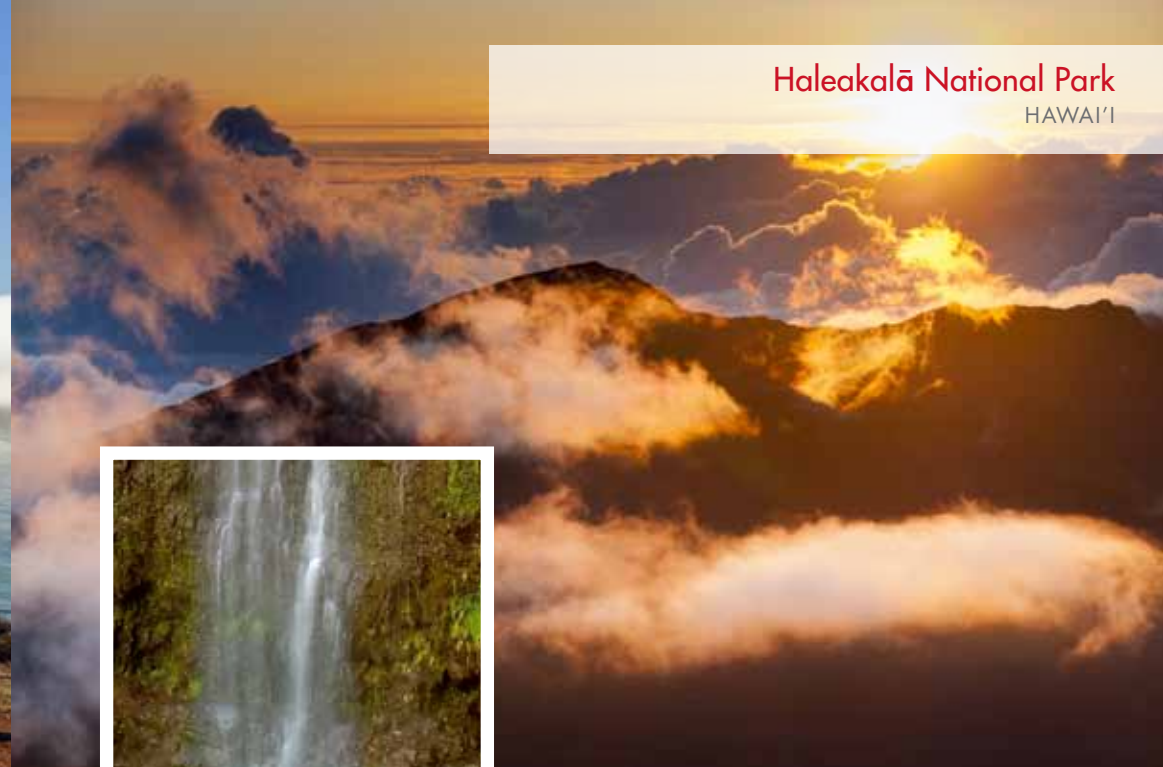
eucalyptus groves and along a footbridge built in 1885.

Though it may not seem like a romantic getaway, Alcatraz Island is home to one of the most loving bird species around. Western Gulls mate for life, and a large colony convenes on the island every year to defend their territory and raise their chicks.

No matter what you do during the day, plan a romantic evening at the historic Cliff House for drinks and dinner at sunset. Call ahead or go online for reservations at Sutro's, or walk-ins are welcome at The Bistro.

Haleakalā National Park

HAWAII



PEAK SEASON: Year-round, be prepared for unpredictable weather; always stop by the visitor center and ask about current conditions

WHAT'S TO LOVE: If you're looking for the real Hawai'i, this is it. Here, Hawaiian culture and natural history converge in a beautiful and sometimes stark landscape, shaped by volcanoes and cared for by natives for more than 1,000 years.

PURSUIITS FOR PAIRS: Both sunrise and sunset can be seen from the summit. Weather is unpredictable, but if you get a clear view, you won't regret the 1.5-hour drive from Kahului.

Remember to bring your coat; temperatures typically hover around freezing at dawn and dusk. If you go for sunset, stick around for stargazing and witness one of the clearest night skies around. Binoculars are a must.

Swimming in the Kīpahulu area's many natural pools, nestled along the coastline, couldn't be more romantic. But if you'd rather explore on land, opt for a hike instead. Kīpahulu's few miles of trails wind through the lush tropical landscape.

Haleakalā offers plenty of backcountry and drive-in camping spots, or you can reserve one of only three wilderness cabins instead. Accessible only by trail — anywhere from 3.7 to 9.3 miles depending on your starting point — the cabins have pit toilets, wood-burning stoves, and basic outdoor cooking equipment. At a flat rate of \$75 per night, the cabins will sleep up to 12 people, but you can just bring two.

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial

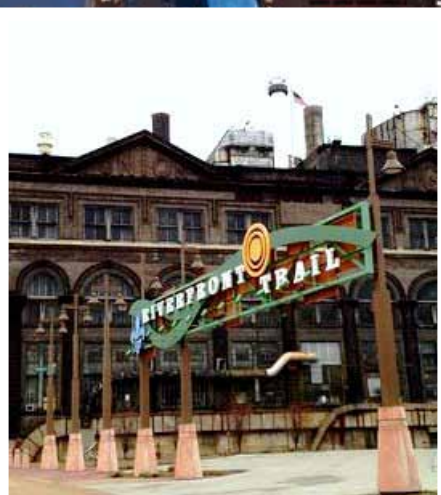
MISSOURI



PEAK SEASON: Crowds can be heavy in the spring and summer, though extended hours and lighter traffic make summer evenings a great date option; also try a trip in fall or winter, when you'll likely have little to no wait and the weather is generally pleasant

WHAT'S TO LOVE: The Gateway Arch celebrates St. Louis' role in the westward expansion of the U.S. and serves as a monument to the spirit of western pioneers. With foundations sunk 60 feet into the ground, it's built to withstand earthquakes and high winds and to sway up to 18 inches. Passing through the arch is a must for road trippers heading west.

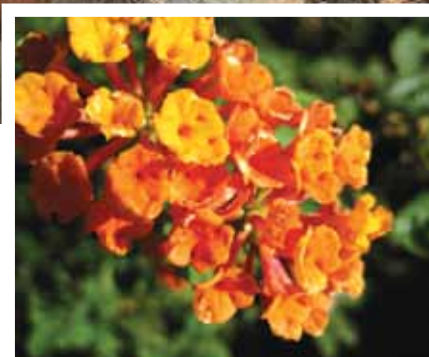
PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: Make time to visit the Museum of Westward Expansion, where a series of 33 15-foot-high murals depict the journey of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark through the west. You can also catch a movie about Lewis and Clark's expedition at the park's giant-screen Odyssey Theatre.



A tram ride to the top of the Arch is a must — there, you'll get a phenomenal view of the St. Louis area. Day-of tickets aren't always available for purchase, so be sure to secure tram tickets ahead of time. You can also rent a bike (or bring your own) and explore the 11-mile St. Louis Riverfront Trail along the Mississippi River, starting at the Arch. You'll find plenty of shopping and dining options to round out your visit. If you're staying over in St. Louis, be sure to walk back by the Arch to see it illuminated at night — still today, it stands as a beacon to opportunity in the American West.

Joshua Tree National Park

CALIFORNIA



PEAK SEASON: Spring and fall have moderate weather and the most visitors; summers are hot and winters are cold

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Joshua Tree is known for its amazing plant diversity, including the namesake Joshua Tree, cholla cactus and wildflowers in spring. Here, you get a feel for three distinct ecosystems: the Colorado Desert, Mojave Desert, and the Little San Bernardino Mountains. Only a few hours drive from Los Angeles, San Diego, or Las Vegas, Joshua Tree is a must-do detour whether you have a day or week to spend.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: Who needs a boring bouquet of flowers when you can go straight to the source? The best place to view wildflowers depends on various factors (including rainfall and temperatures) but you can bet that lower areas will bloom first, as early as February, and high elevations will bloom in March and April. If you can't make it until later in the spring or early summer, you should find blooms holding on at the higher desert elevations.

Joshua Tree is also a perfect vacation pick for couples that relish camping or backpacking together. Most of the park is wilderness, so backcountry options abound. For those who prefer sticking a little closer to civilization, there are many shorter trail options and drive-in campsites, though be aware (or be delighted) that campgrounds in Joshua Tree don't have RV hookups or showers.

National Mall

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



PEAK SEASON: Open year-round; spring and summer are the most popular times, but that also means crowds

WHAT'S TO LOVE: This group of memorial parks centered at the National Mall is so extensive, we don't have room to list them all. But you'll recognize a few highlights: Lincoln Memorial, Ford's Theatre National Historic Site, Thomas Jefferson Memorial, Washington Monument, Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Even if you've been here before, you'll always find something new to experience together in the nation's capital.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: The simple act of walking, exploring, and reflecting on important events and people in American history holds a certain romance. Each memorial is unique, and the urge to visit them all is unavoidable. But couples should also plan time for relaxing in what's arguably the most interesting urban park in the country. Travelers from all over the world visit here, so the people-watching is fantastic.



Grab lunch from one of the many vendors around the National Mall and stake out a spot on the steps of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial for a lunch break and survey the scene — you'll love the view of the Mall and the people in it. Or, if you have more time, bring a blanket, a picnic, and a Frisbee and live like a local for an hour or so. You can also get an altogether different view of the memorials and cherry blossoms from the water. The tidal basin paddleboats are available for rental daily from March 15 to Labor Day (and select days in the off season), weather permitting.

New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park

LOUISIANA



PEAK SEASON: Year-round; special events in April, October, and December offer more than your share of jazz

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Jazz is a distinctly American musical form that mixes blues, gospel, and ragtime sounds, and New Orleans is its home. The park visitor center in the French Quarter is a hub of information about jazz events around the city, and you can find park-sponsored concerts and events year-round down the street in the newly renovated Old U.S. Mint building.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: If you love jazz, then what could be more romantic than experiencing these sounds in their birthplace? Concerts happen almost daily, so no matter when you visit, you'll find the sounds. But in April (which is officially called Jazz Appreciation Month), the area virtually explodes with music, hosting both the French Quarter Festival and New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.

This city offers a magical holiday experience like no other in the country or the world. With the French Quarter streets and buildings decorated for Christmas, it's like stepping into a painting. If you plan on visiting New Orleans in December — especially if you're planning a holiday engagement proposal — make sure you include a visit to the Old U.S. Mint building to catch some jazz and set the mood. Then head out into this one-of-a-kind city to see where it takes you.

Olympic National Park

WASHINGTON



PEAK SEASON: Spring through fall; winter, the wet season, can be unpredictable, though some areas, including Hurricane Ridge, offer opportunities for winter sports

WHAT'S TO LOVE: With amazing diversity — from snowy mountaintops to sandy coastline, from wildflowers to rain forests — Olympic is a place of beauty and wonder, preserving the best of the Northwest. When planning, it helps many visitors to divide the large park (over 922,000 acres) into three zones: Mountains, Forest, and Coast, and depending on time limitations, try to experience them all.

PURSUIITS FOR PAIRS: Looking for the perfect honeymoon spot? Built in 1916, the historic Lake Crescent Lodge makes a great basecamp for enjoying the park without sacrificing creature comforts. Choose from rooms in the lodge itself or from various cottages and cabins nearby. Wherever you sleep, be sure to reserve a spot for watching



the sun set over Lake Crescent, whether on the sun porch or in Adirondack chairs by the water — and don't forget to order hors d'oeuvres.

You'll have plenty of options for hikes and paddles at Lake Crescent to keep you satisfied for days, and you can easily make day trips to other areas of the park from here, too. The Elwha River and Sol Duc (including old growth forest) areas are just a half-hour drive, the coastline is within 45 minutes, and the Hoh Rain Forest is about an hour away. Each distinct area offers its own activities and charms.

Rocky Mountain National Park

COLORADO



PEAK SEASON: Spring and summer are best for wildflowers and trail accessibility; the trails are all yours in winter if you're up for activities like snowshoeing and cross country skiing

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Here's your access to some of the most amazing and iconic mountain landscapes in the country. Whether you prefer to experience it from your car, on foot, bike, skis, or horseback, Rocky Mountain is a life-list park that's best enjoyed together.

PURSUIITS FOR PAIRS: Take a half-day or more to drive historic Trail Ridge Road, which spans the park from East to West, crossing

the Continental Divide. Designed in the early 1930s, the two-lane road gives way to amazing views at all elevations.

How about saying "I do" lakeside with a spectacular view? If you picture magnificent scenery and a small group of family and friends for your ideal wedding ceremony, then consider Rocky Mountain as a venue. The park welcomes small to medium-sized weddings (no more than 100 people, wedding party included) in a variety of locations. Check the park website to download a ceremony permit request.

It's hard to pick just one trail in this park, but if you're looking for something on the easier side, try the Bierstadt Lake Loop. Named for German-American landscape painter Albert Bierstadt, who captured the area on canvas in the 1870s, this 3.2-mile round-trip trek presents views of the Continental Divide, including famed Longs Peak.

Shenandoah National Park

VIRGINIA



PEAK SEASON: Spring is ideal for wildflowers; fall brings gorgeous color changes

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Centrally located on the east coast, Shenandoah National Park is accessible from several major cities, including Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Pittsburgh from the north, and Charlottesville and Richmond from the south. For urbanites looking to escape the city for a while, Shenandoah provides the perfect getaway.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: Here's a place where you can bring back the romance of a Sunday drive, no matter what day you travel. One of the best-known attractions of this park is Skyline Drive, a 105-mile stretch of road spanning the length of the park along the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Along the way, you'll see wildflowers and woodland animals like deer, wild turkeys, and maybe even black bears. You can stop at landmarks for one of many ranger-led tours, including Rapidan

Camp, the summer retreat of President Herbert Hoover. Allow three or more hours (depending on weather) to make the drive, and stick to the 35 mph speed limit. Why would you be in a hurry to leave here anyway?

For couples with more time to spend, park the car and go for a hike. Shenandoah has more than 500 miles of trails, from waterfall and vista destination hikes to wilderness strolls. This park also hosts 101 miles of the Appalachian Trail. Four designated campgrounds offer plenty of spots to spend the night. Costs range from \$15-20 and some require reservations while others are first-come, first-served, so check the park website for details. Backcountry camping is free, but requires a permit.

Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island*

NEW YORK



PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: Plan your visit far in advance to avoid frustrations. Security on Liberty and Ellis islands is tight. But the trip is well worth the extra effort.

Get pedestal tickets to visit the Liberty Island Museum and pedestal level of the statue, which offers a good view of New York Harbor. For a stunning and once-in-a-lifetime view, plan as much as six months ahead for access to Liberty's crown. You'll both think it's worth the extra effort.

At Ellis Island, turn on your inner history buff and take advantage of all this park offers. Start with the free film, "Island of Hope, Island of Tears," then join a free, 45-minute, ranger-guided walking tour to get a real feel for the history at the park. Couples will also enjoy searching the more than 22 million passenger records in the American Family Immigration History Center for evidence of branches in their own family trees.

PEAK SEASON: April to September is the busy season, when wait times can double; plan ahead and be sure to make reservations for the ferry and pedestal and crown visits, no matter the season; the ferries to Liberty Island also take you to Ellis Island

WHAT'S TO LOVE: Dedicated in 1886, France gave the Statue of Liberty to celebrate our country's centennial. Having recently overcome the Civil War, the U.S. was solidified as the model for liberty and democracy around the world. In the decades after the dedication, Lady Liberty became a welcoming vision to thousands of immigrants whose first stop in the U.S. was nearby Ellis Island.

* Parts of Ellis Island have been temporarily closed to the public

Virgin Islands National Park

VIRGIN ISLANDS



PEAK SEASON: Winter and early spring are the best and most popular times to visit

WHAT'S TO LOVE: How does a virtually untouched tropical paradise sound? On the island of St. John, this national park preserves subtropical forests, swamps, and coastal areas that are home to 800 plant species and more than 50 tropical bird species.

PURSUITS FOR PAIRS: This is the park where you can finally have that dream tropical vacation, whether you've been waiting five or 50 years. Charter a sailboat for the day and explore the crystal blue waters. Try snorkeling or scuba diving to witness the park's many inhabitants below the surface, from sea turtles to barracuda. Or just park yourselves on the beach to enjoy some tranquility without the overwhelming crowds you get at other vacation spots.

Unless you've brought or chartered your own sailboat and paid the requisite anchoring or mooring fee (\$15), you'll need somewhere to sleep. At Cinnamon Bay campground within the park, choose from bairesites (read: bring your own tent) or tent sites where the canvas tents are already set up and furnished, complete with flooring and much-needed mosquito netting. Or opt for four solid walls in one of the campground's cottages.

DIRECTORY

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