



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



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

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



People can damage land by not picking up their trash.

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.

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.