



— 150 —
**NATIONAL
PARKS**

**YOU NEED
TO VISIT BEFORE
— YOU DIE —**

By Bailey Berg

Lannoo

Welcome to a journey through some of our planet's most awe-inspiring landscapes.

From the towering peaks of the Himalayas to the vast expanses of the African savannah and from the ancient forests of North America to the tropical islands of the South Pacific, these parks represent the epitome of natural beauty and wilderness preservation. Each one is a testament to the remarkable diversity and resilience of life on Earth.

The concept of national parks traces its roots back to the 19th century, a time when industrialization and urbanization began to encroach upon once-pristine landscapes. Recognizing the need to protect these natural wonders for future generations, visionary individuals and governments around the world began setting aside areas of land as protected reserves.

In 1872, Yellowstone National Park was established in the United States, marking the birth of the modern national park system and igniting a global movement to conserve and preserve natural landscapes. This groundbreaking initiative inspired countries around the world to follow suit – today there are more than 6,000 worldwide, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

In this guide, we will delve into the wonders of 150 of these extraordinary landscapes, uncovering their rich history, unique ecosystems, and the myriad adventures they offer intrepid travelers. Whether you're a seasoned outdoors enthusiast seeking your next great expedition or a nature lover yearning to connect with the wild, these national parks promise an unforgettable experience.

Bailey Berg

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01

GOURAYA NATIONAL PARK

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

This park and biosphere reserve boasts nice beaches, walking trails, and a wide array of animals – all off the beaten track.

Named for the nearby Gouraya Mountain, which stands more than 2,100 feet tall, Gouraya National Park is located where the cliffs and the coast meet in Algeria's Bejaia Province. Among the park's most notable inland inhabitants are the Barbary macaque, a species of monkey endemic to North Africa, and the endangered Algerian hedgehogs, wild cats, and jackals. On the coast, marine mammal sightings could include sperm whales, short-beaked common dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, harbor porpoises, and the endangered Mediterranean monk seal, which can occasionally be spotted along the rocky shores. Birdwatchers also have the opportunity to observe a plethora of avian species, including eagles, falcons, and migratory birds that pass through the area throughout the year. There are also 13 villages within the reserve, the population of which is primarily of Berber origin.



02 CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

Botswana's first national park, this is one of the most biologically diverse conservation areas in Africa.

There are more elephants in Botswana's Chobe National Park than anywhere else on the planet – the park, known as “The Land of The Giants,” was specifically formed for their protection. Today there are more than 120,000 Kalahari elephants in this preserve, with some herds numbering in the hundreds. But they're not the only animals in the conservation area: there are also large numbers of buffalos, wild dogs, cheetahs, lions, giraffes, zebras, wildebeest, hippos, hyenas, and more. Part of the reason there's such a high concentration of wildlife is the Chobe River, an important water source, particularly in the dry season. That vital waterway is one of the best ways for humans to witness this animal kingdom – various companies offer boat safaris, which offer a unique vantage for wildlife watching. In addition to river safaris, Chobe offers classic land-based game drives, allowing visitors to explore more of the park's diverse ecosystems, including floodplains, grasslands, and woodlands.



03

**VIRUNGA
NATIONAL PARK**

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

It's the best place to see the endangered mountain gorilla, in one of the most biologically diverse areas on the planet.

Located in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, this vast wilderness encompasses a staggering array of landscapes, from volcanic peaks and dense forests to savannahs and swamps. The park is best known for the mountain gorillas that inhabit it. It is estimated that around 350 of the world's total 1,050 mountain gorillas live here. Visitors can spend time with some of the habituated primates (our closest animal relatives) on guided treks. Other wildlife within the park includes lions, hippos, crocodiles, leopards, and buffalos, among others, as well as myriad bird species. Despite the natural and cultural riches, Virunga National Park faces numerous threats, including poaching, habitat destruction, and political instability. Conservation efforts are ongoing, led by dedicated park rangers and conservation groups, to protect the park's biodiversity and ensure the survival of its iconic species.





04

**WADI EL GEMAL
NATIONAL PARK**

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

This unique desert and coastal wilderness includes both extraordinary ecosystems and numerous archaeological sites.

Spanning 2,880 square miles, roughly a third of which is marine space and two-thirds is land, Wadi El Gemal National Park is a protected area on Egypt's Red Sea coast. The name translates to "Valley of the Camel," which reflects the area's historical significance as a trading route for camel caravans. This park boasts a surprising array of animals, considering much of it is desert. The coastal area features more than 450 species of coral, 1,200 species of fish (including emperor angelfish, parrotfish, white-spotted puffer, and giant moray), and aquatic animals like sea turtles and spinner dolphins. Inland, you might spot the jerboa, the dorcas gazelle, the Barbary sheep, and the Nubian ibex. Beyond an exciting destination for animal lovers, Wadi El Gemal is also an intriguing spot for history buffs. The park is home to several archaeological sites dating back thousands of years, including rock art, ancient settlements, and remnants of Roman and Byzantine civilizations.



05

WHITE DESERT NATIONAL PARK

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

The otherworldly white rock formations of this red sand desert, which is home to fennec foxes and sand cats, are absolutely stunning.

Famed for its large, Seussically strange white rock formations, created by erosion caused by wind and sand, White Desert, also known as Sahara el Beyda, is one of the most unique and dreamy national parks in Africa. The rocks (made of either white calcium, quartz, chalk, or limestone) have whimsical shapes resembling everything from mushrooms to flying saucers to animals, depending on your imagination. In some places, the smaller formations simply look like piles of snow in the desert. The figures are made more surreal at sunrise and sunset, when they're painted shades of pink and orange. The park serves as a refuge for many animals, including Barbary sheep, jackals, rhinoceros and dorcas gazelles, red and fennec foxes, and the sand cat. Visitors can embark on guided tours or self-drive expeditions, getting out of the car to hike amongst the more interesting formations and to discover the park's many hidden treasures, from ancient fossil beds to archaeological sites.



06

**SIMIEN MOUNTAINS
NATIONAL PARK**

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

It is the largest national park in Ethiopia and home to species seen nowhere else, including the Gelada baboon and Abyssinian catbird.

Though chances are you've never heard of Simien Mountains National Park, the protected land is incredibly important for its biodiversity – in fact, it was one of the very first sites to be named a World Heritage Site by Unesco, for that reason. One of the most iconic inhabitants of the Simien Mountains is the Gelada baboon, often referred to as the “bleeding-heart monkey” due to the distinctive red patch of skin on its chest. The caracal, the Walia ibex, and the Ethiopian wolf are also endemic to the region (and the latter two of which are endangered). For birdwatchers, the Simien Mountains offer a veritable paradise, with over 180 avian species recorded within the park. Among the most sought-after sightings is the lammergeier, or bearded vulture, a formidable bird of prey known for its impressive wingspan and scavenging habits. Other notable species include the Abyssinian catbird, the white-collared pigeon, and the rare Ethiopian bush crow.



07

HELL'S GATE NATIONAL PARK

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

This remarkable quarter of the Great Rift Valley inspired the setting of classic Disney movie *The Lion King*.

The park's name, "Hell's Gate," evokes images of a fiery inferno, but in reality it's a serene destination – it was named after a break in the cliffs, once a tributary of a prehistoric lake. Still, two extinct volcanoes, Olkaria and Hobley's, are located in the park, as are some hot springs that are warm enough to cause burns. A quick day trip from Nairobi, it's an easy safari destination, where visitors can see a variety of wildlife, including buffalos, giraffes, lions, baboons, hyena, zebra, and various antelope species, amidst savannah grasslands and acacia woodlands. It's also a prime destination for birdwatchers, with more than 100 species of feathered creatures having been recorded within the park's boundaries, including eagles, flamingos, and the rare lammergeier vulture. Visitors can hike, bike, and motorcycle within the park, a true rarity in African safari destinations. There are also a handful of campsites and several lodges for visitors to spend the night within the protected area.



08

**LAKE NAKURU
NATIONAL PARK**

TO VISIT
BEFORE YOU DIE
BECAUSE

Some of the largest population of flamingos in the world are found in this birdwatchers' paradise, which is also home to rhinos and giraffes.

Lake Nakuru is perhaps most famous for its prolific birdlife. There are over 450 bird species, both endemic and migratory, to the park. However, it's really one bird that draws the most visitors: the flamingo. Lake Nakuru is a haven for millions of flamingos, whose vibrant pink plumage creates a stunning spectacle against the backdrop of the shimmering lake. Visitors can witness these elegant birds wading through the shallows in search of their favorite food, algae-rich crustaceans. Beyond its avian inhabitants, Lake Nakuru National Park is also home to a diverse mammalian population. The park is renowned for its protection of endangered black and white rhinoceros (more than 100 live within the borders), offering visitors a rare opportunity to observe these majestic creatures up close in their natural habitat. Additionally, herds of buffalos, zebras, giraffes, and antelopes roam the grasslands while elusive predators such as lions, leopards, and hyenas lurk in the shadows, adding an element of excitement to every safari adventure.



Colophon

Text

Bailey Berg

Book Design

ASB (Atelier Sven Beirnaert)

Typesetting

Keppie & Keppie

Back Cover Image

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© Lannoo Publishers, Belgium, 2024

D/2024/45/435 - NUR 450/500

ISBN 978-94-014-1970-3

www.lannoo.com

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