

ON BOARD



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Feature



The Old Man of the Desert

A Trip to Joshua Tree

The Joshua tree, from which the park takes its name, is a spiny yucca mainly found in the western Mojave section. Some guides refer to Joshua tree forests, but forest is hardly a word which comes to mind viewing these sparse old survivors dotted across bare rock in the desert. The plant reputedly took its name after Joshua in the Old Testament, it being likened to an old man standing upright with a spear. Another story is that Mormon pioneers thought the spiny trees were the outstretched arms of Joshua pointing to the Promised Land. Whichever is true the Joshua trees have stood unbowed among the desert rock since the first humans—the Pinto—made this desert their home almost five thousand years ago. While the trekkers and day trippers are uploading holiday snaps safely at home, these spindly survivors sit out every desert extreme. In February and March, some lucky visitors may see the trees send out delicate white “candle” flowers. Then again, they can be elusive and will sometimes skip a year or so before blooming again.

The park’s story began 100 million years ago with lava forming bedrock through which water and wind began to carve the twisting geology now seen as a rock climbers paradise. Tough granite outcrops and sheer monoliths offer short climbs at all levels of difficulty, but visitors do not have to clamber up Old Woman Rock or the Giant Marbles to appreciate the strange shapes that that time has carved out of old rectangular blocks. The granite offered a series of rectangular joints eaten away over time first by ground water when lakes and swamps lay in the area,



then by heat and wind in the later more arid climate. What remains are sculptured boulders sitting on top of each other in the strangely beautiful piles seen today. The Mojave section of the park, in particular, boasts spectacular geological formations now photographed by hikers happy to simply stand and look.

The park was explored by cattlemen in the 1800s who briefly introduced cows to graze on the meagre grassland they could find, though looking out over the desert that is hard to imagine now. In the Mojave section is the preserved ranch house of one settler family, the Keys, who scraped a living for sixty years raising five children in this remote location. These brave pioneers must have had enormous inner strength to survive in this lonely and hard place, but they may also have learned a thing or two from local Indians, who turned the dagger-like leaves of the Joshua tree into baskets and sandals, while the flower buds (when they chose to show) and seeds were roasted to eat. A Park archeologist estimated that at least 121 local plant species have been used by the local Indians as either food or medicine in everyday life.

Jane Travelski

National park status

The Park land had been recognized as a national monument as early as 1936 and as Southern California grew, so did the park's popularity. It now lies within a short drive for 18 million Californians, and the official protected park status conferred in 1994 is an ever greater draw to the interested visitor. Although open to visitors every day of the year the Park can still be closed to respect the first peoples of the area. By law, the Californian Desert Protection Act requires the park authority to close portions "at the request of an Indian tribe or religious community" to protect the privacy of traditional local customs.

Visitors should prepare for extremes. The locals in Twentynine Palms boast of recent temperatures up to 119 Fahrenheit recorded in 2005, but dropping as low as 9 in the cold dessert night. As there are no hotels or lodges actually within the park, this makes camping out at one of the nine designated sites a challenge for the less adventurous.

For the rest of us there are hotels in Twenty-nine Palms and the other local access town of Joshua tree.

Visitors to the park may benefit from a visit to the museum collection and visitor centers, showing the cultural and natural history of the park and how the parks resources are managed for posterity. Native American history in the area is chronicled, and some precious artifacts found showing the lives of the Native Americans and early settlers, are on display.

Among the collection is a simple woven carrying basket found in a rocky shelter. It is unknown how the artifact survived intact across time against the attentions of insects and the elements

A victim of its own success?

The park's increasing popularity also presents a dilemma. A study of 2004 revealed that of all the visitors to the park in any one year (of whom half comprised sightseeing couples or family groups and 92 percent of whom were American), the single most admired feature mentioned by visitors was the "unspoiled natural beauty" of the park and the "peace and solitude." But when asked what they liked least the most common answers were "noisy camping neighbors" and "RVs in the park." These telling responses suggest that what is most prized about such a place, is precariously balanced against its own success—the draw of more and more people seeking immersion in a place naturally devoid of human interference. By con-

trast, of all those asked, only four responses complained of the park being "too hot". Visitors often ask the age of the Joshua Trees which gave the park its name. Nobody knows for sure, as the Joshua Tree (*Yucca Brevifolia*) lacks the traditional growth rings that are counted to determine a tree's age. The tallest specimen is almost forty feet high. That's unusual, but dividing that by an average growth of one and a half inches a year suggests an age of about 300 years. But against the 100 million year scheme of things in this arid and fascinating wilderness, even these biblical trees are just passing through.

The Wildflowers of Joshua Tree

With its huge area and distinct ecosystems, Joshua Tree National Park offers a vast range of wildflowers and blooms with an estimated 813 species. In fact, it was originally proposed to name it the “Desert Plants National Park”. For wildlife enthusiasts the usual rules apply – what can be viewed will depend upon the time of year and recent weather. Many species are wholly dependent upon rainfall and nearly all growth cycles respond to temperature. Desert annuals will usually germinate between September and December, but growth is delayed until rainfall and spring temperature is suitable for the particular species. This in turn determines the eventual blooming period, when visitors to the park can see the wildflower and flora cover at its most beautiful.

Flowering begins along the park's southern boundary as early as February and at higher elevations in March and April. Regions over 4000 feet will show blooms much later, notably the higher Bernardino mountain region. The Joshua tree will flower in February or March but trees have been known to skip a season. Visitors who find it difficult telling the “Hairy Sand Verbena” from a “Forget Me Not” might seek further information in one of the park's visitor centers. Flowers are often recognized first by color group. They often carry descriptive names such as Canterbury Trumpet, Enlemann Hedgehog and Beavertail cactus. The Teddy-Bear Cholla is also known as the jumping Cholla for the ease with which its spikes transfer into unwary hikers. The Park's administration otherwise reminds all visitors that the blooms are to be viewed only and not picked.

How to get there

To get to the park, you will need a car, as there is no direct public transportation from Palm Springs airport, located 37 miles east of San Bernardino. The park itself lies 140 miles east of Los Angeles, 215 miles southwest of Las Vegas and 175 miles northeast of San Diego. Access is by Interstate 10 and Highway 62 with the main access through Twentynine Palms just south of the junction of Highway 62 and Utah trail.



Plants and wildlife

Plant diversity in the park is only rivaled by the wealth of birdlife. The park falls under a Pacific migratory route with species most abundant in the winter months. At 250 recorded species, it's not hard to see the arguments for protecting the park as a wildlife sanctuary, but only a fraction of these actually nest in the park. Many are stopping over on the way to the Salton Sea (itself referred to as “the crown jewel of avian diversity”) and more come down from nearby mountains to escape the winter snows. Above all the birds are easy to see. There is rarely anything to be described as “dense” vegetation in the Park, a very practical reason why it is so easy to spot them. Harder to find is a local species of red spotted toad, found in the northern edge of the park. This lives underground and appears to spawn only after heavy rains, an annual gamble as the cycle of the tadpole must be complete before the groundwater dries away.

Travel

Castles of the World



A gallery of eight of the most stunning castles on the planet

Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin, Germany



The palace, built between 1695 and 1699, was the summer residence for Princess Sophie Charlotte. Frederick the Great had the New Wing built from 1740 to 1742. The palace was badly damaged during World War II, but has been reconstructed in recent years.

Alhambra Castle, Granada, Andalusia, Spain

This imposing structure was originally constructed as a small fortress in the 9th century, but went largely forgotten until the mid 11th century when the Moorish king Mohammed ben Al-Ahmar had it renovated and rebuilt. Today, the castle takes up an area of about 1,530,000 square feet, has 13 towers and a citadel, and is enclosed by a fortified wall.



**Hearst Castle, San Simeon, California,
USA**



The castle as designed between 1919 and 1947 for newspaper magnate William Rudolph Hearst, who died in 1951. The Hearst Corporation donated the property to the state of California and today it's a state historic park, open for public tours. The castle, which covers an area of 60,645 square feet, features 56 bedrooms, 61 bathrooms, 19 sitting rooms and 127 acres of gardens, as well as multiple swimming pools, tennis courts, a movie theater and more.

**Ringgenberg Castle, Canton of Bern,
Switzerland**



The castle as designed between 1919 and 1947 for newspaper magnate William Rudolph Hearst, who died in 1951. The Hearst Corporation donated the property to the state of California and today it's a state historic park, open for public tours. The castle, which covers an area of 60,645 square feet, features 56 bedrooms, 61 bathrooms, 19 sitting rooms and 127 acres of gardens, as well as multiple swimming pools, tennis courts, a movie theater and more.

Dunnottar Castle, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, Scotland



Dunnottar, a ruined medieval fortress, set atop a cliff with stunning views of the region, holds a colorful and important place in the history of Scotland. William Wallace, Mary Queen of Scots, and the future King Charles II, all spent time in the castle, but Dunnottar is perhaps most famous for being the location where the Honours of Scotland, the Scottish crown jewels, were hidden from Oliver Cromwell's invading army in the 17th century.

Château de Chambord, Loir-et-Cher, France



Chambord was built over 28 years, and was modified many times over the life of its construction. There is much confusion as to who actually designed the striking castle, a blend of traditional French medieval architecture and classical Renaissance structures. Some have suggested that Leonard da Vinci may have had a hand in it, but there is no proof to that notion. The structure was never intended to provide defense against enemies, and its walls, towers, and partial moat are mostly decorative. Chambord features 440 rooms, 282 fireplaces, 84 staircases, and 800 sculpted columns within its extraordinary walls.

Prague Castle, Hradčany District, Prague



Listed as the largest ancient castle in the world, by the Guinness Book of World Records, Prague Castle occupies an area of over 17 acres (70,000 square meters). This storybook-like castle is the official residence and office of the President of the Czech Republic, and has been a seat of power for many kings and emperors dating back to the ninth century. The Bohemian Crown Jewels are kept safe inside a hidden room within the castle's walls.

Himeji Castle, Himeji, Hyōgo Prefecture, Japan



This hilltop castle, contains 83 buildings with advanced defense systems from the feudal period. The castle, with its gleaming white exterior and resemblance to a bird in flight, is also known as Hakuro-jō (White Egret Castle) or Shirasagi-jō (White Heron Castle). The castle began as a fort in 1333, but was destroyed in 1346 and Himeyama Castle was resurrected in its place. It wasn't until 1545, where the castle was remodeled to be the Himeji Castle, and even then, it would endure several more remodels through 1618. The Himeji survived heavy bombing in World War II, and emerged from the Great Hanshin earthquake in 1995, virtually undamaged.

Four Must-See Destinations for the Curious Traveler



Whether you're new to travel, or haven't traveled in a while and want to dust off your passport, we've got some destinations that are easy to navigate, have diverse offerings, and will leave you feeling like a well-seasoned traveler. From London's West End to the Latin Quarter in Paris, to an exotic adventure in the Kwun Tong District of Hong Kong, to a relaxing visit to Bernal Heights, San Francisco, we've got you covered.

See and be seen in the West End



Whether you're a theater enthusiast, enjoy epic shopping, or love to stroll and people watch, you'll find London's West End has an endless opportunity to partake in all these activities. The West End is the heart of London's "Theaterland" and offers the best in drama, comedy, and musical productions. Entertainment abounds on the seasoned stages of the West End's 40 or so landmark theaters.

When not attending a show, you can wander through miles and miles of the best shopping in the world, including Oxford, Regent, and Bond Streets. Feast your eyes on the endless choices of global brands and locally-sourced goods that abound in the upscale department stores, hip boutiques, and unique crafter stalls in the West End.

Then, at the end of the day, treat yourself to a relaxing and luxurious evening at the historic West End Landon Hotel. Enjoy a five-star meal, overlooking the city, at the Landon Rooftop Cafe, followed by a soak in your room's private jacuzzi. Top off the day with a comfortable and restful slumber that will have you ready for another day of exploring the many sights around the West End.

A neighborhood of intellect, art, and culture



The Latin Quarter is considered the intellectual center of Paris, and was named at a time when all students and professors of the Sorbonne University spoke Latin. Today it's home to a dizzying array of intellectual venues including bookstores, schools, churches, and publishing houses.

Some of the delights of the region include gourmet food and wine tastings, as well as tours of favorite haunts frequented by famous writers and other intellectuals, including Ernest Hemingway, Oscar Wilde, and Gertrude Stein, to name a few. Walking tours of historical churches, some dating back as early as the 12th Century, including the St. Germaine des Prés Abbey and the Church of the Cordeliers, are also aplenty.

If you'd prefer a bit of non-intellectual pursuit, there is no shortage of charming boutiques where you can purchase treasures from this fascinating and culturally-rich region. When night falls, head to the Underground Jazz Club to hear the most celebrated voices in jazz, both long-standing and up-and-coming. And all of this is easily within walking distance from the center of the Latin Quarter.

Asia's World City



Kwun Tong, one of the largest and most populous districts in Hong Kong, creatively mixes the old with the new, providing the traveler with a refreshing variety of sights and activities. It's both a mini-metropolis, with such features as the skyscrapers of Millennium City, and a network of long-standing villages, that maintain their cultural influence and color.

In the course of a day, visitors to Kwun Tong can take a leisure walk on a pristine beach, hike on a picturesque nature trail, explore a historical trail featuring restored military remains, enjoy a fishing or leisure cruise, power-shop at one of the largest indoor malls in the region, visit ancient temples, and celebrate city nightlife.

Then, back in one of the region's most sophisticated hotels, you can enjoy such modern conveniences as in-room game consoles and unlimited movie rentals. You might even soak in a window garden hot tubs, while watching the twinkling lights of the city, framed against the natural beauty of Hong Kong's mountain ranges.

Experience San Francisco like a local



Forget the hustle and bustle that vacation or work travel often brings. Experience San Francisco with an inner calm and peace, and feel like a native exploring your own town. There's no better way to feel the local vibe than a welcoming trip to the Bernal Heights neighborhood.

If you're craving time in the great outdoors, rent a bicycle to explore the neighborhood or take a mini-hike up to the top of Bernal Hill. Bernal Hill Park, one of the largest parks in San Francisco, is a designated "off-leash" dog park, so if you're traveling with Fido, you won't want to miss this opportunity. Or simply spend a relaxing afternoon sipping lattes and people-watching, at one of the many award-winning bakeries in Bernal Heights. And don't miss the Alemany Farmers' Market, one of the oldest farmers' markets in the U.S., operating on Saturdays, at the southeast corner of Bernal Heights.



Lifestyle

Life & Style: Jamie Eionto

Q&A

Q. This year you've had a busy schedule filming two movies, and the release of your book. How do you keep up with it all?

I love what I'm doing, and I think that makes it easier for me to keep going. Acting just feels natural to me. If I took myself too seriously then I think I would start to feel burned out. But I'm just keeping it real, just going out there and enjoying it. The book tour has been so much fun, it allows me to connect a lot more with my fans. You don't get that at five a.m. on the set. It's been great to meet them and get to share my story with them.

Q. What is your favorite thing to do on a Saturday night?

When I'm filming it doesn't matter what day of the week it is, I'm in bed early. Sometimes I'll work for three weeks straight and then get three days off. When I am off it's all about relaxation. Sometimes I'll go to my favorite day spa, and sometimes I'll just stay in and order pizza. It just depends on how I feel. When I'm not filming I like to go out with my friends and go dancing or catch a movie. Whatever moves me in the moment.

Q. Where do you find your inspiration?

My mom is a huge inspiration to me. She raised four kids and worked full time, and somehow she always managed to find time for us. She worked really hard and never gave up. Anytime I'm feeling a little burned out I think about how she used to handle the four of us, and we were a handful, yet she was still smiling at the end of the day. She did the hard work, what I do is easy in comparison.



More Q&A

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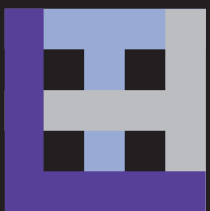
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