

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK



Joshua Tree in southern California was declared a national monument on August 10, 1936, and designated by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve in 1984. It was granted national park status on October 31, 1994, by the Desert Protection Act, which also increased the park's size by 234,000 acres. In 2019, the park was extended again. The Sand to Snow National Monument borders the park to the west.

SIZE
790,636 acres (1,235 sq. mi./3,200 km²)
Size rank among National Parks: 15 of 63

ELEVATION
Highest point: Quail Mountain (5,816 ft./1,773 m)
Lowest point: Pinto Wells (934 ft./285 m)

GEOLOGY
The rock formations in the park were formed about 100 million years ago when magma cooled and solidified beneath the earth's surface and was exposed by erosion after millions of years. Strong winds, unpredictable downpours, and climatic extremes have left their mark over millions of years, and the horizontal and vertical cracks loved by rock climbers were formed by numerous earthquakes. The most spectacular rock

formations can be seen at Jumbo Rocks, Wonderland of Rocks, and Indian Cove.

FLORA AND FAUNA
The park is home to mountain lions, rattlesnakes, roadrunners, desert tortoises, scorpions, and tarantulas. Most are active during the evening and early morning. Coyotes can be seen patrolling near park roads, jackrabbits and shy kangaroo rats emerge from their burrows to forage for food in the evenings, and herds of desert bighorn sheep crisscross the landscape. Especially in spring and summer, a surprising variety of birds transit through the park via a migration route known as the Pacific Flyway. In addition to the wildlife, there are over 800 different plant species, including the memorable jumping cholla cactus, whose easily-dislodged spines seem to "jump" into the clothing and skin of passing hikers.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

The climate is generally warm and exceedingly dry. Days are usually clear with less than 25 percent humidity. Temperatures are most pleasant in spring and fall, with averages between 50 and 85°F (10 to 29°C). Daytime highs in summer often reach 122°F (50°C). Winter brings cooler days with temperatures around 60°F (15°C) and freezing nights. It snows occasionally at higher altitudes.

CONSERVATION

Joshua Tree National Park owes its existence to Minerva Hamilton Hoyt, a Pasadena citizen who launched a campaign to protect the region in the 1920s (see right). After many years of bureaucratic struggle, the area was finally designated a national monument on August 10, 1936, thanks to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1984, it became a Biosphere Reserve and finally a national park with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act in 1994.

BEFORE YOU GO

There are visitor centers at all three entrances, but no lodging, restaurants, or stores in the park. Trails will drag on more than you might think. In the desert, it gets very hot during the day, and temperatures can drop to freezing during the night. Bring more water than you think you need, at least one gallon (4 liters) per person, per day. Backcountry camping permits are free, and can be obtained by self-registration at one of the 13 backcountry boards located throughout the park.

BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Joshua Tree is best visited in October, November, March, and April. In spring, carpets of flowers cover the desert. Summer months can be extremely hot, while midwinter tends to be very cold and windy.

HIDDEN GEM

The Geology Tour Road offers a fun off-pavement adventure and provides access to several trails and rock-climbing areas. The road is a bit bumpy and sandy but can be navigated by most vehicles with medium-high clearance.

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE PARK

- The Joshua tree looks like a tree, but it is in fact a member of the Agave family.
- It almost never rains in the park: on average, less than an inch of precipitation falls each year.
- Five oases of desert fan palms are scattered throughout the park, indicating those few areas where water occurs naturally and wildlife abounds.

Minerva Hamilton Hoyt

CONSERVATIONIST



In the early 1900s, cactus gardens were all the rage in L.A. Deserts were wild and unruly places, and people would go on joyrides in their newly purchased cars to dig up rare plants in the desert. One of the first people to take issue with this was Minerva Hamilton Hoyt. Born on a Mississippi plantation in 1866, she grew up in a privileged family and became a socialite who later married a wealthy surgeon in New York. Her passion for gardening brought her to the deserts of the American Southwest, which she turned to for solace following the deaths of her infant son and husband. She admired the austere beauty and extraordinary inventiveness of desert plants that managed to thrive in the harsh climate, and she was horrified by the widespread destruction she witnessed. Minerva Hoyt began a relentless fight to protect these places in the 1920s. As Conservation Chair of the California chapter of the Garden Club, she arranged exhibitions of desert plants shown in Boston, New York, and London. Later, Hoyt founded the International Deserts Conservation League to establish parks to preserve desert landscapes. She hired well-known biologists and desert ecologists to prepare reports on the virtues of the desert regions to get the support of top politicians. While President Hoover followed her proposal to establish Death Valley as a national monument, he wasn't inclined to do the same for her proposed Desert Plants National Park. Instead, she persuaded Hoover's successor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose New Deal administration established national parks and monuments as a job-creation initiative. Hoyt found an ally in Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, and on August 10, 1936, the president signed a proclamation establishing Joshua Tree National Monument.