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Continued: Low-key national parks

Why Sequoia-Kings? About 200 miles southwest of its more famous High Sierra neighbor, Sequoia-Kings Canyon is akin to Yosemite in scenery and topography. It doesn't boast landmarks as famous as Half Dome or El Capitan, but it does offer more hiking trails (about 800 miles total), higher mountain peaks (Mount Whitney is the tallest in the continental United States at 14,497) and those 2.5 million fewer annual visitors. Even John Muir declared it "a rival to Yosemite."

The landscape's variety here might even be better. In just one challenging 16-mile day-hike up the High Sierra Trail, we started out in a boulder-lined canyon with cascading waterfalls and worked our way up to Eagle's View, where we couldn't see anything (we had hiked into the clouds). As we headed down the other (shaded) side of the mountain, we hiked over deep snowpack (in mid-June) and into a grove of the park's giant namesake trees -- thicker than those Yosemite buses, and way cooler.

INSTEAD OF GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS ... MAMMOTH CAVE

Why not the Smokies? It's not the nation's most renowned park, but Great Smoky Mountains is actually the most visited -- by far. Its average of 9.4 million annual visitors is more than twice that of No. 2, the Grand Canyon. Chalk it up to the Appalachian Trail and the scarcity of parks in the Southeast. Or maybe it's the proximity to Dollywood.

Why Mammoth Cave? The great misconception about Mammoth Cave National Park (in central Kentucky) is that it's just a big hole in the ground. We fell in love with what's above ground, from all the green mountainous scenery to the winding Green River.

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Mammoth Cave does see about 600,000 annual visitors, but most come just to hit "the cave" -- which is indeed something to see, an amazing labyrinth of 367 cavernous miles that's said to be the world's longest. If the (guided) spelunking makes you nervous, you can always find liquid courage by touring Maker's Mark or other nearby whiskey distilleries.

INSTEAD OF GRAND CANYON'S SOUTH RIM ... GRAND CANYON'S NORTH RIM

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ALong the Cruiser Lake Trail, Voyageurs National Park.

Chris Welsch, Dml - Special To The Star Tribun



black bear in Foothills... Sequoia-kings canyon national park.

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I liked

This article and thank the writer for contributing it, but I respectfully disagree with him. I admit, having dress shoes to go hiking is idiotic, but in all honesty, who cares? It was the fact that they were slowing him down that bothered him, what does dress shoes have to do with anything, so if they were acting the same way but wearing hiking shoes, it would have been ok. Also I found it very stereotypical for him to point out that the people were Japanese, again, why do you have to say that they were Japanese? Doesn't the point get across without indicated the people race/nationality. Are you implying all Japanese people dont know how to hike, I kind of got that from the article. I think the author needs to realize, that some people like taking pictures, I like to hike for the exercise, but I also like to take pictures and I always get out of the way, but what annoys me is when all these bearded hippies who probably hadn't showered for days almost ran my mom over as she was walking on the trail. The power hikers are just as guilty as the fanny pack hikers. I think both groups need to understand and respect the other parties reason for being there.

posted by percyroy12 on May 16, 10 at 7:17 pm |

2 of 9 people liked this comment.

Minor nitpick

Mount Whitney is the tallest peak in the contiguous US. Mt. McKinley is the tallest in the



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continental US. (Both in undervisited national parks.)

posted by bradnews on May 16, 10 at 7:48 pm |

3 of 3 people liked this comment.

Thanks Chris

Great article, timely too, I just pulled the maps out a couple of nights ago to plan a trip west.

posted by gojohnnygo on May 16, 10 at 8:37 pm |

1 of 1 people liked this comment.

brown bears are not in California

So you must have seen a black bear, which are mostly harmless and easily scared..

posted by gslalomstyle on May 16, 10 at 9:52 pm |

1 of 1 people liked this comment.

Go to Canyon Lands NP in Feb -

you will be lucky to see any one besides your self

posted by toolman28 on May 18, 10 at 2:13 pm |

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