5 Breathtaking National Parks in Europe

Very few things are as exciting as spending a couple of weeks — or even months — traveling through untamed areas of the world. Especially when you're an avid fan of spending your holidays in nature, which is one of the best ways to invest in your personal well-being (that's science). But whether you've visited Europe before or if you've only spent your time dreaming about it, it's good to know that the Continent has a *lot* to offer to nature lovers. So, if you're willing to go off the beaten path and explore the Old World, the following are some of the most breathtaking national parks in Europe.

Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia

Croatia has gained a lot of popularity over the past two decades — in particular, since shows like Game of Thrones and Succession were famously filmed in the country.

But while the hordes of tourists head to Dubrovnik, Split, and Hvar, nature lovers may feel a bit more at home in the country's oldest national park — Plitvice Lakes.

Having made it onto the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1979, this national park offers seven attractive hiking routes that visitors can take to go through the 16 lakes, finishing their tour with a visit to the spectacular Sastavci waterfalls. Or, if you're thinking of visiting in the summer, make sure you rent a boat and row around Kozjak Lake for an opportunity to enjoy a sunny and refreshing workout.

Sarek National Park, Sweden

Looking to cool down? Head to one of Sweden's most amazing sites, the Sarek National Park.

This national park in Europe is home to some of the country's highest mountains, almost 100 glaciers, the impressive delta of the Ráhpaaädno River, and herds of reindeer. Sarek is a great place to go for a hike (almost all year round.)

Of course, you should note that this destination is *not* for the faint of heart. There are no marked trails or accommodations on site, so if you're a fan of comfort, you should definitely pick one of the alternative parks on this list.

Vatnajokull National Park, Iceland

Want to visit something larger than life? Well, in that case, the 4.600 square miles (that's 14% of all of Iceland, in case you were wondering) of Vatnajokull National Park might just be the perfect destination for you.

Enjoy hiking, ice climbing, and snowmobiling, or book a guided tour of the unique ice caves. It's also worth mentioning that Iceland offers an exceptional opportunity to see a place where volcanoes and volcanic lakes are covered by ice of the most beautiful blue color — something that any travel photography enthusiast would be thrilled to document.

Gran Paradiso, Italy

Want to pick a destination that's slightly more accessible? Why not head to Gran Paradiso National Park in the north of Italy? Not only is this one of Europe's most breathtaking destinations, but it can also tie in beautifully with a Tuscan road trip. You can book a cheap flight to Milan, then enjoy the beautiful sight of rolling hills, old towns, and food and wine that will make you think you've never tasted something delicious before.

Gran Paradiso is a great destination to add to your bucket list, and not just because of the skiing and climbing opportunities. This is one of the few truly accessible wildlife locations in Europe, making it a superb choice for those traveling with family, large groups, or even (leashed) pets.

Cairngorms National Park, Scotland

Finally, do you want to plan a European vacation that combines city tours with some quality time in nature? In that case, it might not be a bad idea to head to Scotland.

For example, the Cairngorms National Park is just a 2-hour drive away from Edinburgh. This means that, hypothetically, you could spend the first part of your week in Scotland exploring the country's capital, Edinburgh. Then head to Inverness for a taste of the Scottish highlands. And lastly, finish the week off with a couple of days spent at the massive Cairngorms park.

You won't lack things to do, whether you're a fan of hiking, climbing, cycling, stargazing, or just want to see *more* historical sights, including Balmoral Castle, famous for being the summer residence of Queen Elizabeth II.

Honorable Mention: Azores, Portugal

OK, the Azores archipelago may not have the status of a national park (nor is it near *anything* else

in Europe). Nonetheless, it's absolutely worth a visit if your goal is to have a unique holiday.

The archipelago is famous for its beautiful landscapes, mild climate, stunning flora, and some of the world's most unique cheeses and wines.

So, if you've already spent a good amount of time in Europe (or are looking for sustainable travel ideas), why not experience something completely new? After all, the flight from Lisbon only takes 2.5 hours. And if that's the "price" to pay to do some whale watching, surfing, yachting, or canyoning like you've never done it before, well, it's more than worth it.

Final Thoughts on National Parks in Europe

There you have it, five of Europe's most breathtaking national parks to visit on your next trip to the Old Content.

What's great about all these choices is that they are relatively easy to get to. And if you're one of those adventurers who prefer to spend long periods of time on the road, you could even plan one continual trip. That way, you'll see more while exploring Europe and have the perfect opportunity to create a memory.

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- On our site: More on Europe.

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