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The Magazine of Western Living

Sunset

MAY 2002

From Washington
to New Mexico,
discover the **28** best
state parks in
the West

Great Escapes

PLUS:

- Inspiring garden makeovers
- A Mexican grill party
- Creating a shower spa

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best state parks

IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, EIGHT MORE DON'T-MISS STATE PARKS

NEAR JULIAN ANZA-BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK



This sprawling 600,000-acre desert park marks the Colorado Desert's western edge. With elevations ranging from a few hundred feet to 6,193 feet at Combs Peak, you'll see everything from ocotillos to Coulter pines. The 3-mile trail up Borrego Palm Canyon is one of the park's nicest.

WHERE: About two hours from San Diego or Palm Springs. **WHEN:** Oct–Apr. **COST:** \$2 per car. **CAMPING:** 147 sites from \$10; (800) 444-7275. **FYI:** In good years, dynamite wildflower displays. **CONTACT:** (760) 767-4205 or www.anzaborrego.statepark.org.

NEAR CORONA CHINO HILLS STATE RESERVE



This beautiful inland park with rolling green hills makes up some of the most critical wildlife habitat in Southern California. In addition to open grasslands, there are a few forested areas, such as Water Canyon, and some rare black walnut woodlands. Wide dirt roads are ideal for mountain biking.

WHERE: 4½ miles north of the junction of State 71 and State 91 off Soquel Canyon Pkwy. **WHEN:** Year-round; best Oct–Jun. **COST:** \$2 per car. **CAMPING:** 10 sites from \$7; no reservations. **CONTACT:** (909) 780-6222 or www.parks.ca.gov.

NEAR CORONA DEL MAR CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK



A popular mountain biking and hiking destination, the 2,300-acre park extends a few miles inland from a 3½-mile-long coastline. The coast is notable for its sandy beach as well as a few isolated rocky coves. Renovation work is continuing on the park's beach cottages, some dating back to the 1920s.

WHERE: Off Pacific Coast Hwy. between Corona del Mar and Laguna Beach. **WHEN:** Year-round. **COST:** \$3 per car. **CAMPING:** 32 sites (accessible by 3- to 4½-mile hikes) from \$7; (800) 444-7275. **CONTACT:** (949) 494-3539 or www.parks.ca.gov.

NEAR SANTA BARBARA GAVIOTA STATE PARK



Straddling both sides of the Gaviota Pass, the park ranges from a popular sandy beach to 2,458-foot Gaviota Peak. Accessed on a 6-mile round-trip hike, the peak's views take in the coast. An easy-to-reach hot springs is just ½ mile from the parking area for the trail to Gaviota Peak.

WHERE: 33 miles west of Santa Barbara off State 1; parking for both beachgoers and hikers. **WHEN:** Year-round. **COST:** \$2 per car. **CAMPING:** 50 sites from \$10; no reservations. **CONTACT:** (805) 968-1033 or www.parks.ca.gov.

NEAR MORRO BAY MONTANA DE ORO STATE PARK



With sea otters feeding in rocky coves and California poppies and lupines blooming on a marine terrace, nature lovers won't find a better coastal park anywhere. Easy paths edge the coves, or you can opt for some climbing on trails that travel into the park's mountains and reveal broad coastal views.

WHERE: On Pecho Valley Rd., 4 miles southwest of Los Osos. **WHEN:** Year-round; wildflowers best Mar–May. **COST:** Free. **CAMPING:** 82 sites from \$7; (800) 444-7275. **CONTACT:** (805) 528-0513 or www.parks.ca.gov.

SAN DIEGO OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO STATE HISTORIC PARK



Join a free walking tour here to gain a glimpse into San Diego's early days. Among the most notable of the numerous preserved buildings are the 1827 Casa de Estudillo and the 1829 Casa de Bandini—its namesake restaurant is one of the city's most popular Mexican restaurants.

WHERE: At San Diego Ave. and Twiggs St. **WHEN:** Year-round. Museums 10–5 daily; one-hour tours at 11 and 2. **COST:** Free. **FYI:** There's shopping at the Bazaar del Mundo and plenty of dining options. **CONTACT:** (619) 220-5422 or www.parks.ca.gov.

NEAR NEEDLES PROVIDENCE MOUNTAINS STATE RECREATION AREA



Most travelers on Interstate 40 race past this park in the eastern Mojave Desert without ever knowing that they missed its easily explored limestone caverns. After the sunshine and vast spaces of the desert, the cool darkness of Mitchell Caverns and its gothic stalactites and stalagmites are quite refreshing.

WHERE: From Needles, take I-40 west 55 miles, then take Essex Rd. northwest 16 miles. **WHEN:** Year-round; tours daily Labor Day–Memorial Day. **COST:** \$2 per car; \$3 tours. **CAMPING:** 6 sites from \$8; no reservations. **CONTACT:** (760) 928-2586 or www.parks.ca.gov.

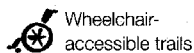
PACIFIC PALISADES WILL ROGERS STATE HISTORIC PARK



The onetime ranch of the legendary humorist sits along the divide between some of Southern California's most expensive real estate and its wildest country. Rogers's ranch house is open for tours. Views from the park's trails looking back at the city are among the best in the metropolitan area.

WHERE: Off Sunset Blvd. **WHEN:** 8–sunset daily, year-round. House tours on the half-hour from 10:30–4:30. **COST:** \$3 per car. **CONTACT:** (310) 454-8212 or www.parks.ca.gov. — M.J. ♦

KEY:



Wheelchair-accessible trails



Horse trails



Fishing



Guided tours/living history

For 32 other state parks around the West, visit www.sunset.com/travel/stateparks.html.