



There are many great national parks throughout the U.S., thanks to President Theodore Roosevelt. For more than a century, visionary Americans were determined to preserve the natural beauty for everyone to enjoy.

Choosing just a few is almost an impossible task, because each in its own way makes a great experience. However, just to name a few, the choice could be those in the Far West: Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Zion and Death Valley. Grand Canyon: The Arizona wonder boasts some of the world's most spectacular views. For example, you can find a comfortable place to sit at Yavapai Point. There you'll enjoy the ever-changing colors and shadows at dawn, daytime, dusk and night.

More energetic seniors can hike over the magnificent trails along the top. The South Rim is open to tourists all year long. The North Rim, 80 miles north across the Canyon, has wintery weather, and is only available to visitors from mid-May through mid-October.

Venturesome vacationers can hike or ride sturdy mules down the Bright Angel Trail nearly ten miles to the Canyon floor at the Colorado River. When you visit the Grand Canyon, you'll marvel at what nature took a million years to carve.

Yosemite: This California destination offers all kinds of adventures. It spans nearly 2,000 square miles, and has sparkling rivers, spectacular waterfalls and giant redwood tree forests, surrounded by the mighty Sierra Nevada Mountains. For the hardest seniors, there's the challenge of climbing El Capitan, a white granite rock formations that rise almost two miles up from the park below.

There's fishing and boating on the two rivers that have carved their way through Yosemite, the

Tuolumne and Merced. There are many scenic hiking trails and horseback adventures.

Zion: This great national park occupies nearly 230 square miles in Utah. Like Grand Canyon, it features a deep cut formed over eons by the Virgin River into Zion Canyon. Zion wasn't the first name chosen for the national park. In 1909, President William Howard Taft declared it Mukuntuweap National Monument. Fortunately for school children and others who then had to spell the name and write essays about their visit, President Wilson, decided in 1918 to call it Zion.

Rock climbers can try the stony wall challenges of Touchstone, Spaceshot, Prodigal Son and Moonlight Buttress. For others looking for tamer exercises, there are horseback riding, hiking trails and campsites.

Death Valley: With such a forbidding name, one would believe not too many tourists come to this national park. However, millions of venturesome visitors come here annually. Badwater Basin is nearly 300 feet below sea level, and seldom sees any water, bad or otherwise.

In July and August, the temperature can climb to as high as 120 degrees, so autumn is the perfect time of year to visit. The more than 200 square miles of white salty sand dunes have often served as the locale of familiar movie lost-in-the-desert disaster scenes.

The relatively cool mornings at Death Valley offer many picturesque trails and occasional coyote songs for hikers and bikers. One destination is Scotty's Castle, a park station that was once the grand home of an old prospector who built it from money he claimed he made during the 19th Century gold rush.

National parks are great for venturesome senior vacations. Beyond the natural beauty, each offers modern conveniences, such as air-conditioned tourist buses and limos, modern motels, excellent restaurants, convenient campgrounds and much more. For more info about these and all the other American national parks, go to www.nps.gov