

National Parks: Desirable Luxury or Human Necessity?

They may make for an exhilarating and adventurous family outing, but are national parks really worth all the merit? National parks are millions of dollars short on funds and are still trying to recover from the presumably unrepairable damage caused by the inevitable “35 day” government shutdown. (Aljazeera, 2019) National parks are a desirable luxury that will continue to cause more harm than good if we cannot help them overcome their many obstacles. National parks have many roadblocks in their way, such as, the health industry glorifying alternative beneficial resources, becoming a financial burden on taxpayers, and being widely undermanaged and disrespected.

Some national parks are claiming to improve your mental health and state of mind. While that may be true, national parks are not the only way you can improve your mental health. In a 2014 article by Chatelaine it states that “Being with one's partner or friends is associated with even greater health.” So talking or just being around friends and family can increase your health and even release dopamine, which is a feel-good hormone that can make you feel more motivated and concentrated. The book, *Into The Wild* written by Jon Krakauer, states, “He was right in saying that the only certain happiness in life is to live for others.” The quote, originally said by Leo Tolstoy, was highlighted by *Into The Wild*'s main protagonist, Chris McCandless. Most humans can only last a short time without interacting with others. Being alone in national parks can only increase your chances of complete solitude and not to mention, your risk of

injury. Help Guide said in a 2019 article that, “Physical activity also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals that lift your mood.” The endorphins from physical activities can be achieved anywhere, even in your own home, and can distract your mind from negative thoughts. However, spending time with friends and family as well as exercise is not the only solution to a good mental health and a positive state of mind. A study at Harvard in 2018 proved that, “Sleep problems may increase risks for developing particular mental illnesses.” Getting a good night sleep is a big part of keeping your mind healthy. It is shown that being sleep deprived can have negative effects on your blood pressure and can even increase your risk of getting diabetes. As you can see, health benefits can clearly be distributed in different ways other than just visiting national parks.

National parks don't run themselves, in fact they can cost taxpayers millions of dollars while being billions of dollars behind on maintenance fees. In a 2017 article by David Ferry it says “The National Parks Service has \$11.9 billion worth of maintenance that has been put off indefinitely.” That number is still rising. However, very few national parks are receiving enough money to rectify the outrageous vandalism that took place during the government shutdown. According to National Geographic in a 2019 article, “Just 177 of more than 400 national parks collect fees, meaning hundreds will have to compete for funds.” This means thousands of unresolved tasks within national parks will remain inconclusive. This leads to most national parks collecting overpriced entrance fees. The New York Times stated in a 2017 article that “The entrance fees at the Grand Canyon National Park are: \$30 per vehicle, \$25 per motorcycle, and \$15 for visitors on foot or bike.” The fact that we have to pay to see our free country after

making the tedious peregrination is devastating. The entrance fees are only going to increase as time goes on and more problems in national parks arise.

National parks are beginning to feel the repercussions of their undermanaged system and visitors have seen and taken advantage of the parks shortcomings. A 2018 article by USA Today claims that, “human feces, overflowing garbage, illegal off roading, and other damaging behavior in fragile areas were beginning to overwhelm some of the West's most iconic national parks.” National parks are being demolished in absolutely ludicrous and eccentric ways. USA Today described these methods of destruction as “A free-for-all.” (2018). It truly is a free-for-all; national parks are trapped in a downward spiral and haven't showed signs of slowing down anytime soon. National Geographic stated that, “ National parks are America's public land, but right now they are America's trash cans.” (2019) During the record long government shutdown no one was there to protect our national parks and now, due to the lack of money and effort, no one is there to clean up the aftermath.

In conclusion, national parks are not the only way you can better your mental health, the National Parks Service's efforts to maintain the national parks are quickly driving American taxpayers out of money, and the system to restore the damage done to national parks is failing due to poor management and lack of respect. National parks can make for a great vacation, however, are they worth the rescue from the billion dollar hole they dug themselves into?

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