



Winter Camping Destinations Out Here

These spots offer ample opportunities for spending time in the great outdoors this winter

By Erin Brereton

Image above: Snowshoers in Mt. Hood National Forest, courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service

Camping is often associated with warm summer days spent hiking, swimming in streams, and spending quality time around the firepit.

Those special moments don't have to stop just because of a change in season, though. In fact, a report from the Coleman Company and the Outdoor Foundation shows avid campers take just as many trips in the winter as they do the summertime, and even slightly more in the winter than they do the spring

and fall.

From gawking at ice-encrusted geological features to cross-country skiing, winter camping trips to the following six locations can offer distinct and memorable experiences.



Photo of Mount Hood courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service

FOR WINTER SPORTS NUTS: MT. HOOD NATIONAL FOREST IN OREGON

During the winter months, parts of the forest are inaccessible due to snow and seasonal road closures, but there are still opportunities for camping, mostly in the lower elevations in the western portion of the forest, according to Ben Watts, recreation specialist for the forest.

The areas surrounding the mountain—which ranges from almost sea level to more than 11,000 feet in elevation—contain an extensive winter trail system used for cross-country skiing, dog sledding, and skijoring—an activity that involves standing up on skis and being pulled by dogs or a horse. Visitors can also downhill ski, sled, and go tubing at nearby resorts, according to Ben.

“Obviously, the draw during winter months is the winter sports program,” he says. However, visitors can do other recreational activities in the areas of the forest that don’t see much snow. “Some of our low elevation trails, such as Clackamas River Trail and Salmon River Trail, remain popular hiking destinations throughout the winter months,” Ben says.



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Cooler temperatures and beautiful blue skies make winter on Cumberland Island great for hiking and exploring.

FOR BIRDERS: CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE IN GEORGIA

All five of Cumberland Island National Seashore's campgrounds are open throughout winter, when temperatures typically range from the 40s to upper-60s degrees Fahrenheit. According to Park Ranger Nick Roll, the sites tend to be popular destinations around Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Reservations are required, and permit fees vary from \$22 for the island's popular Sea Camp area, which is closest to the ferry dock and offers amenities such as picnic tables, to \$9 for more primitive wilderness sites that are located up to 10.5 miles from that area.



*Photos of Cumberland Island by the
National Park Service/Audrey Bohl*

The island's 10,000 acres of designated wilderness provide numerous opportunities for spotting warblers, nesting bald eagles, and other bird species, as well as other wildlife performing animal activities guests may not see in summertime, such as alligators sunning themselves, Nick says.



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Great Sand Dunes National Park features a diverse landscape that includes grasslands, wetlands, aspen forests, and tundra

FOR AVID HIKERS: GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE IN COLORADO

No permit or fee is required to pitch a tent at the 21 numbered campsites located along Medano Pass Primitive Road in winter. However, visitors will need to stop at the visitor's center first and hike to the locations because the road is closed to vehicular traffic during the season, according to Katherine Faz, the southern Colorado park's public information officer and chief of interpretation and visitor services.

Whether guests just stop by or stay the night, in addition to taking in landscape elements that range from grasslands to aspen forests and alpine lakes, a number of people partake in various outdoor adventures, Katherine says.

“Most folks enjoy hiking in the vast openness of the dune field,” she says. “Visitors can also sled on the dunes when there is snow on them, which is a very unique experience.”



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Images of Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve courtesy of the National Park Service.



Visitors can ice climb and view ice formations at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in winter.

FOR THOSE SEEKING ART IN NATURE: PICTURED ROCKS NATIONAL LAKESHORE IN MICHIGAN

Alfresco sports fans flock to this region to climb up ice columns, scope out ice caves created by water seeping out of porous sandstone cliffs, or travel its trails via snowmobile, skis, or snowshoes.

“Besides trying to see the Pictured Rocks cliff line, a lot of folks just want to see a lot of shoreline and ice formations,” says Scott Berry, visitor use assistant supervisor and park ranger.

Visitors can stay overnight in Pictured Rocks’ drive-in or more rustic backcountry camping areas, using their campsite as a home base for exploring, for \$15 from December through April.

“There are no showers in the backcountry sites,” Scott says. “In winter, people will hike in 3 miles or so and pretty much stay there overnight and do day trips over the next day or two.”

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*Tettegouche State Park offers a free snow shelter construction lesson once a year.
Image courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.*

FOR WILDLIFE LOVERS: TETTEGOUCHE STATE PARK IN MINNESOTA

This cold-weather camping destination is the only park in the state that doesn't close its heated shower buildings, located in the Baptism River campground, during winter, according to interpretive naturalist Kurt Mead.

“That can often convince people [winter camping] is a good thing to do,” Kurt says. “Where else do you have a warm toilet seat?”

Visitors tend to bring tents and yurts to the six to eight sites the park keeps plowed; they can also learn how to build a six-foot-high snow shelter in a free annual workshop and sleep in it overnight.

During the day, sightseeing options include frozen waterfalls where water can sometimes be seen or heard running beneath the ice. Visitors may also catch a glimpse of wildlife—or at least evidence animals have been in the area. Kurt has spotted the tracks of bobcats, wolves, coyotes, and other animals on snowshoe hikes.

“Animals are so much easier to see in the snow,” he says. “A coyote can walk 20 feet away from you in the woods and it just blends in; you put that same animal on a white background and all of a sudden, it sticks out.”



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Turret Arch is part of a formation of arches within Arches National Park.

FOR THOSE SEEKING SOLITUDE IN NATURE: ARCHES NATIONAL PARK IN UTAH

More than two dozen sites are available in the park's Devils Garden Campground on a first-come, first-serve basis from Nov. 1 to Feb. 28; experienced backpackers sometimes head to the park's more remote camping zone, according to Backcountry Coordinator Keri Nelson, where they can stay overnight with a \$7 per-person pass.

"It's more of a wilderness-type primitive experience—hiking canyon bottoms and finding routes into a canyon," Keri says. "That's a lot of what makes it exciting."

Campers can hike to a number of scenic locales while in the park, such as Courthouse Wash canyon, which features prehistoric wall art, and enjoy less crowded trails during the season when temperatures generally range from the low 50s to below zero. When visiting in the winter, Keri recommends visitors carry shoe tractions or spikes for the icy trails.



Delicate Arch is the largest free-standing arch in Arches National Park. Images courtesy of the National Park Service.

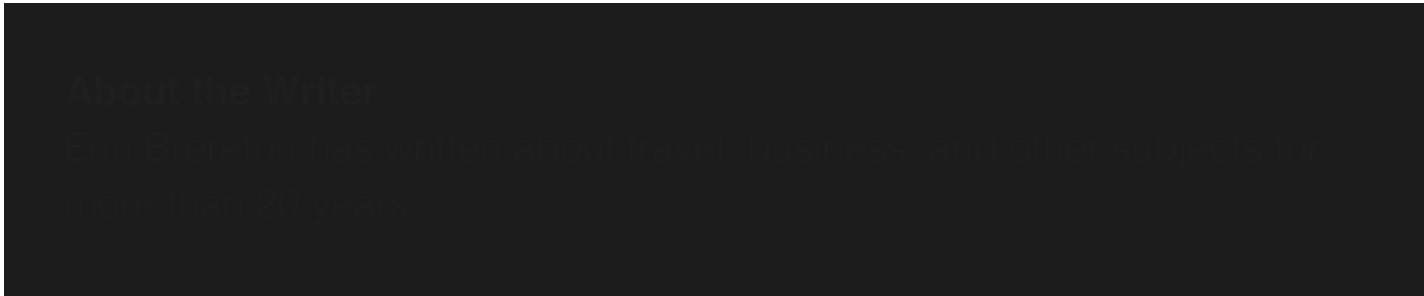
“It’s a unique experience to get snow on the ground in contrast with the red rock; but also, it just tends to be a quiet time of the year,” she says. “If you’re really interested in getting more solitude, winter is the best time to come.”



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