

Badlands National Park



Figure 1 NPS Badlands National Park

Badlands National Park has entered many bucket lists recently, and it is easy to understand why! Bringing rugged beauty and geological deposits to the table, Badlands National Park has nearly one million guest a year. After reading, you will have a base knowledge of the history of the park and recommendations of when to visit, where to hike, and where to stay.

Badlands History



Roughly 150 years ago, the Great Sioux Nation, including the Oglala Lakota, dominated the prairie and called it home. The valleys provided the tribes with everything they would need: shelter, fresh water, and game for huntingⁱ. Unfortunately, by the late 1800's homesteaders started to arrive in, what is now, South Dakota. The pilgrims forced the Sioux out of their territory. Then, the prairie lands were converted to suit farms and ranches.

In 1939, the area was cleared of residents to create Badlands National Park. The name had come from the Oglala Lakota tribe. When they had lived in the Badlands, they would call it "mako sica"ⁱⁱ which is Badlands in the English language. Later on, French fur trappers followed the Lakota's lead; they had called the Badlands, "les mauvaises terres a traverser" or "bad lands to travel across."

Wildlife



Badlands National Park is home to a variety of animals. One of the most notable animals in this National Park is Bison. Bison have roamed the Great Plains for centuries. When the Great Sioux Nation ruled the Badlands, there were close to 30 million bison. The bison that were hunted by the Native Americans did not go to waste; the Native Americans had found a way to use every part of the animal. Unfortunately, when the Europeans started moving inland, the bison nearly went extinct. The bison went from 30 million to 325 left in the wildⁱⁱⁱ. Thankfully, with hard work and dedication, the bison were able to repopulate the area. **Bison are wild animals. Do not provoke. Maintain a distance of at least 100ft.**

Another animal found in Badlands National Park is the prairie dog. Prairie dogs are a keystone species to the Badlands as they are prey, make homes, and clip vegetation^{iv}. Prairie dogs are very unique; some scientists believe that they have one of the most complex languages. Prairie dogs have sensitive stomachs and **cannot** process human food. **Do not feed prairie dogs. Do not touch or pet prairie dogs; they will bite, and many still carry the Bubonic Plague.**

Lastly, Badlands National Park is home to prairie rattlesnakes. Although these slithery creatures may be intimidating, they are not aggressive, and usually try to avoid people. Bites are extremely rare; there has been no recorded fatalities from a snake bite in the state of South Dakota. Luckily, the prairie rattlesnake is the only venomous snake in the National Park^v. To

prevent a bite, please watch where you put your hands and feet. You should wear boots and long pants.

When to Visit

Although the Badlands may not be as busy as other National Parks, it can still be very crowded. To beat the crowds, try visiting in September. September is a good time to pursue backpacking as well. The temperatures are not as extreme.

If you have to do vacation in the summer, you should visit in June before it gets too hot. July and August are notoriously miserable. If you are looking for adventure and a unique visit, I would recommend visiting in January. South Dakota can have brutal winters, so check the weather frequently and bundle up!

Hiking Trails



Whether you are looking for a family friendly trail or a challenge, there are hiking trails for everyone! All trails can be found on AllTrails.



If you are looking for a short and easy walk to take with the kids, I would recommend The Window Trail. It is marked as an easy trail, and is only .3 miles.

Another stunning trail marked as easy is the Medicine Root and Castle Trail Loop. At 4 miles long, you will have plenty of time to take in the stunning views without being worn out. Don't forget to be aware of rattlesnakes throughout your hike!

My last suggestion is a 3.6-mile trail, Sage Creek Wilderness Trail. The trail is marked as moderate and is known for the lack of shade. Be sure to bring plenty of water!

Conclusion

Badlands National Park isn't the flashiest park, but there is plenty to do around the area. Badlands National Park is close to many different historical monuments. It is a relatively short drive from Mount Rushmore, and the statue and museum of Crazy Horse. Crazy Horse goes into massive detail about the Great Sioux Nation and other Native American tribes in South Dakota if you are looking for more information about previous tribes. Badlands National Park is an extraordinary National Park to explore. With the extreme temperatures and variety of wildlife and hiking trails, there is something for everyone!

Works Cited

"Associated Tribes of Badlands National Park." *National Park Service*.

"Mako Sica: Naming the Badlands." *National Park Service*.

"Wildlife in the Badlands." *National Park Service*.

ⁱ "Associated Tribes of Badlands National Park"

ⁱⁱ "Mako Sica: Naming the Badlands"

ⁱⁱⁱ "Wildlife in the Badlands"

^{iv} "Wildlife in the Badlands"

^v "Wildlife in the Badlands"