

National parks centennial offers lots to do, see



A view of Humpback Rocks from the Blue Ridge Parkway near MP 6. (National Park Service / HANDOUT)

By **Stephanie Citron**
For The Baltimore Sun



Related



2016 spring-break destinations just one flight from BWI

MAR. 4, 2016



2016 spring break destinations from Baltimore

MAR. 5, 2016



Black History Month travel destinations

JAN. 29, 2016

SHARE THIS



Centennial means national parks offer even more to see, do.

Many of those attractions are hosting events and activities throughout 2016 to celebrate the Park Service's centennial and its objectives: that the most wondrous and spectacular landscapes in the world's largest democracy should be accessible to everyone, and that our indigenous plant and animal life should be provided protected free-range habitats.

These are the places and spaces where your senses become enlivened with the exotic sights, sounds, and smells of wildlife, scenery, and history, ever so slyly teaching your kids about stewardship without your saying a word.

Even better, such excursions can accommodate any budget and style, ranging from low-cost campsites to high-end lodges.

- June 4 is National Trails Day; U.S. park sites host events demonstrating their array of trail activities, including hiking, biking, paddling, horseback riding, and wildlife spotting. (nationaltrailsday.americanhiking.org)
- On National Park Week (April 16-24) and on the Park Service's 100th anniversary (Aug 25-28), admission fees will be waived at all park sites, and many parks are also hosting their own free days throughout the year. (nps.gov/findapark/national-park-week.htm)
- And fourth-grade students — hurry! you can visit free through the rest of the 2015-2016 school year, thanks to the Every Kid in a Park initiative. (everykidinapark.gov)

Of course, the dramatic landscape of Yellowstone and Yosemite make wonderful excursions.

But you needn't venture so far to enjoy America's wonderful park spaces. We've uncovered some fabulous ones within easy driving distance of Baltimore. Be certain to check their dedicated websites for special centennial events and activities.

Info: nps.gov/subjects/centennial/



*The Sunken Forest at Fire Island National Seashore.
(National Park Service)*

Fire Island National Seashore

New York State's only federally designated wilderness is a barrier island just off the coast of Long Island, with stunning dunes, forests, wetlands and a variety of ecosystems.

The island, sandwiched between the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, contains no paved roads, just 26 miles of shoreline, covered with white sand, laced with flecks of red garnet and black magnetite. ([nps.gov/fiis](https://www.nps.gov/fiis))

Well preserved: The "globally rare" Sunken Forest, where saline mist of the sea actually stunts the growth of the flora. Some of the dwarfed trees in this maritime forest date back 300 years.

Don't miss: The Otis Pike Wilderness, where dunes can soar 40 feet high. The 16th-century William Floyd estate, on the mainland but still part of the national forest, is a 25-room mansion filled with three centuries of relics, 12 outbuildings and a family cemetery of eight generations of Floyds, including one of the original signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Stay: The Fire Island Hotel: Housed in a turn-of-the-20th-century lifeboat station perched atop a sand dune, this resort boasts one of the best views on the island. Choose a family cottage, with kitchens and outdoor showers. From \$250. ([fireislandhotel.com](https://www.fireislandhotel.com))