



Celebrating a Successful Centennial, National Park Service Looks to its Second Century

In 2016 the National Park Service commemorated its 100th anniversary with a year-long celebration, achieved with the support of a wide array of partners and generating unprecedented public engagement. The once-in-a-century event created a groundswell of support among the American public and national park enthusiasts across the world that will propel the agency into a second century of caring for the natural and cultural treasures of the United States.

From the outset, the National Park Service established a centennial goal, to connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters, and advocates. Working with the National Park Foundation, NPS launched the Find Your Park / Encuentra Tu Parque movement to engage with younger audiences, while also inviting all Americans and travelers who love the national parks and public lands. The Find Your Park campaign garnered national attention through print and web media, public service announcements, public relations, live events, social media campaigns, and donated advertising.

Find Your Park / Encuentra Tu Parque Reached New and Diverse Audiences

Since its launch in 2015, Find Your Park – and its Spanish-language counterpart, Encuentra Tu Parque -- has engaged hundreds of millions of people across the country and throughout the world, with especially great success through digital media. Over the course of the centennial, NPS social media accounts added millions of new followers, greatly increasing the digital community of park enthusiasts and supporters. Additionally, traditional media coverage of national parks in 2016 significantly eclipsed coverage in recent years. The Find Your Park campaign will continue in 2017, and the travel industry is invited to partner with the National Park Service to maintain the momentum built over the last two years.

Thousands of Centennial Events

Throughout 2015 and 2016, parks, programs, and partners across the country hosted high profile events and special programs to celebrate the centennial, from the 2016 Rose Parade to special concerts, citizen science events, endurance challenges, and much more. Thousands of activities in parks and communities offered a variety of ways for visitors to join the centennial celebration.

Visitors Flocked to the Parks

Visitation to national parks broke records in 2016 as Americans and international travelers joined the celebration. Total visitation to the entire park system in 2016 increased by 7.7% over 2015 to 330 million visits. Many of the most popular parks, such as Yosemite and Zion National Parks, set visitation records, but lesser-known “hidden gems” experienced a surge in visitation as well. Parks as diverse as San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Cedar Breaks National Monument, Joshua Tree National Park, Fort Smith National Historic Site, and Saint Croix National Scenic River saw sharp upticks in visitation across the centennial. While in some places the surge presented challenges to park staff, the engagement and interest of park visitors is welcome and vital for the long-term public support for the parks.

Support from the Tourism Industry

The tourism industry also took part in the centennial commemoration in a variety of ways. Operators, packagers, and outfitters highlighted national parks and NPS programs in their tour products and itineraries, while destinations supported the celebration with digital and social media promotion, sponsorship of special events, and advocacy. Tourism Cares sponsored a highly successful year-long volunteer program that generated 5,000 hours of volunteer time donated to five parks and gateway communities, valued at \$117,000. Volunteerism, philanthropy, and advocacy are vital supporting elements for the long-term sustainability of the national parks, and the tourism industry enthusiastically demonstrated its support during the centennial.

Looking Ahead

The centennial leaves a long-term legacy for the National Park Service that continues beyond 2016. Initiatives started in 2015 and 2016 will continue to develop, including [Every Kid in a Park](#), [Centennial Challenge](#) projects, new and improved facilities, the NPS [Urban Agenda](#), and more. The National Park Service and National Park Foundation will build on the [public-private partnerships](#) created and strengthened during the centennial to leverage more public and private support for parks and NPS programs.

The [National Park Service Centennial Act](#), passed in December 2016, will provide new tools, revenue, and authorities that will help the NPS meet the challenges of its second century. Among its many provisions, the bill establishes an endowment fund with the National Park Foundation to support projects and activities in support of the NPS mission.

The Find Your Park movement will continue to engage new audiences, and the travel industry is welcome to partner with the National Park Service to continue the momentum in 2017 and beyond. The National Park Service and its partners invite the public to explore new parks, build personal connections to remarkable places across the country, and find ways to help ensure that future generations are able to experience America's treasures.