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Without the Crowds

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In some of the world's most remote—and stunning—national parks, it's just you and the wildlife.

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The world's national parks offer fresh air, wildlife, scenic vistas and breathtaking topographic formations. And that is why so many of them—from Yosemite to England's Lake District to Thailand's Khao Yai—are mobbed in peak season. But there are parks that have somehow slid beneath the radar of the photo-snapping masses. For travelers looking to really get away—far, far away—from it all, these are well worth the trip.

Located on the Seward Peninsula and named after the land link between North America and Asia, Alaska's **Bering Land Bridge National Preserve** is home to more than 100 species of birds. Situated on 1.1 million hectares, the preserve also hosts caribou, arctic fox, moose and, along the coast, humpback whales and seals. Part of what puts Bering Land Bridge off the tourist map is its inaccessibility: no roads lead there. Visitors can arrive only via boat or small plane departing Nome, or by snowmobile or dog sled during the winter months (nps.gov/bela/contacts.htm).

The **National Park of American Samoa** is just as remote. Distributed across three South Pacific islands created by extinct volcanoes, the park features unspoiled beaches and coral reefs perfect for snorkeling and diving, as well as flying foxes, fruit bats and sea turtles (nps.gov/npsa).

Panama's **Darien National Park** is the largest national park in Central America. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it's filled with swamps, beaches, mountains and dense jungle. It's also home to the only missing stretch of the Pan-American Highway that goes from Chile to Alaska. Brimming with wildlife, this 579,000-hectare rainforest is the natural habitat for jaguar, harpy eagles and parrots. Because of its challenging terrain, most visitors choose to hire a guide or join a tour operated out of the region's main city, La Palma (panama.tours.com/Rainforest/darien_eng.htm).

Wildlife lovers heading to Africa for game viewing can beat the crowds in Kenya by going to neighboring Ethiopia's **Nechisar National Park**, located some 500 kilometers south of Addis Ababa. Named after the white grass covering the region's plains, this park features diverse terrain, including thick bushland, the Amaro Mountains, hot springs and acacia trees. Visitors can see bush pigs, zebra, flamingos, crocodiles, monkeys and baboons in their natural habitat.

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Even well-traveled Italy is home to a relatively unpopulated park: **Pollino National Park**, in the country's south. Hikers in the 193-hectare expanse can walk amid Grecian laurel and silver fir trees, along mule tracks and through rolling pastures, to catch glimpses of golden eagles and European otters. The park also features some of the highest mountains in southern Italy, including the 2,000 meter Serra Dolcederme. Straddling the provinces of Calabria and Basilicata, the parkland is peppered with small towns and Albanian-speaking villages, providing visitors with a range of interesting culinary options (parks.it).

India's **Kanha National Park**, located in the state of Madhya Pradesh, inspired Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book," and is one of the best places in India to spot tigers in their natural habitat—as well as leopards, monkeys, hyenas, porcupines and bison. Kanha was originally designed in 1955 as a wildlife preserve to safely house several endangered species (kanhanationalpark.com).

The **Sinharaja Forest Reserve** in Sri Lanka is a World Heritage Site and a World Biosphere Reserve. Though relatively small—it's situated on under 19,000 hectares of rainforest—the park features dense vegetation and an amazing diversity of flora and fauna, including elephants, leopards and tree frogs, as well as native birds like the Sri Lanka blue magpie. Not many people will have a snapshot of that in their photo albums.

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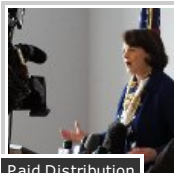


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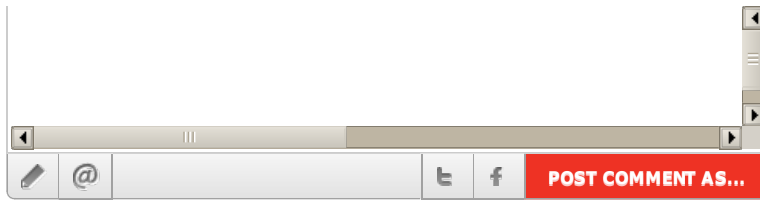
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