

Everyday
Fun

Let's
GO!

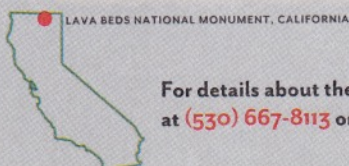
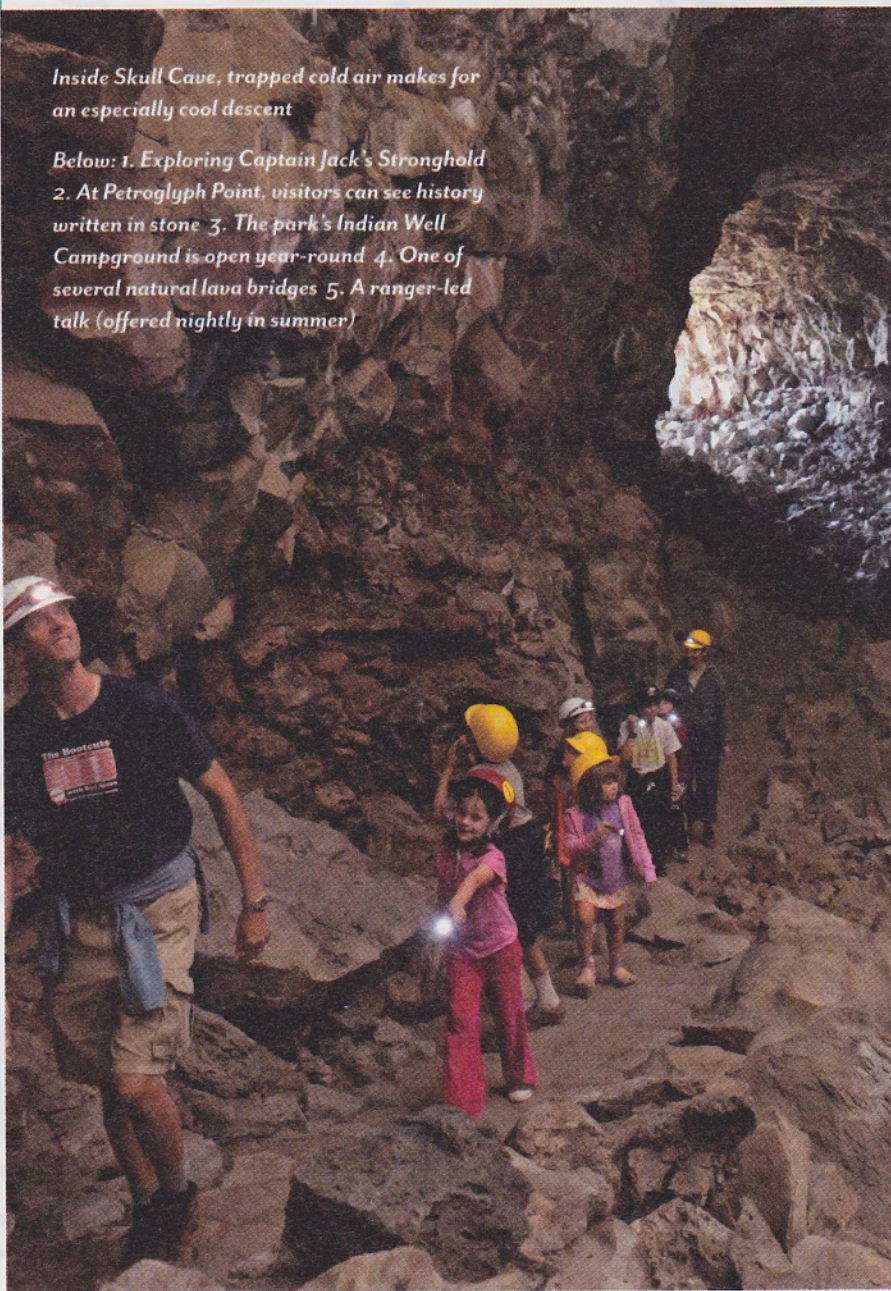
Otherworldly caverns below and striking scenery above make this desert park a must-see for adventure-loving families *By Joanna Nesbit*

Best National Parks for Families: Lava Beds National Monument

With just 130,000 visitors a year (compared to Yosemite's nearly 4 million), Lava Beds National Monument may be one of California's best-kept secrets. Here, families can hike up a cinder cone, marvel at a natural lava bridge, and head below ground to tour lava-tube caves — the hollow tunnels left behind by flows of cooling magma. But Lava Beds is about more than amazing geology. The 47,000-acre park also offers wildlife viewing, Native American petroglyphs, and miles of hiking trails. Whether you're looking for eerie underground thrills, desert beauty, or Native American history, this northern California park is still one major hot spot.

Inside Skull Cave, trapped cold air makes for an especially cool descent

Below: 1. Exploring Captain Jack's Stronghold 2. At Petroglyph Point, visitors can see history written in stone 3. The park's Indian Well Campground is open year-round 4. One of several natural lava bridges 5. A ranger-led talk (offered nightly in summer)

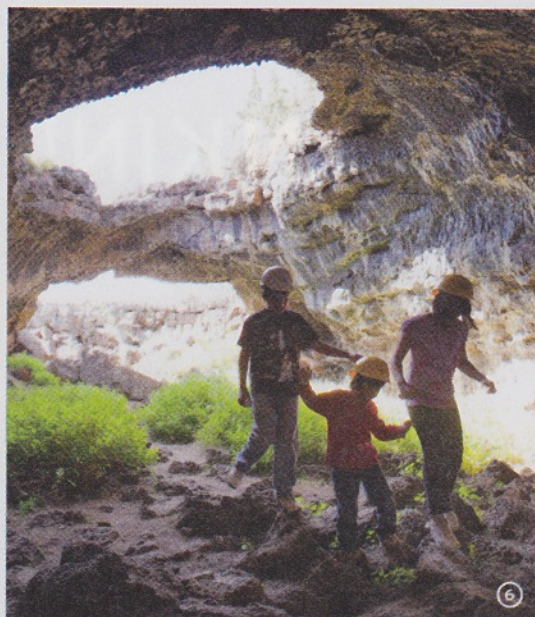


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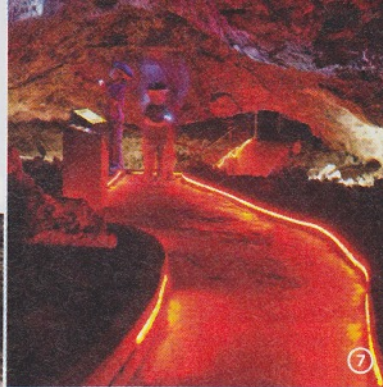
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For details about the park's offerings, call the visitors' center at (530) 667-8113 or go to nps.gov/labe.

TO LEARN MORE



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7



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6. The park's Garden Bridges were formed by the partial collapse of lava tubes
7. Lighted trails and signs make Mushpot Cave a great first stop for visitors
8. Tule Lake is an oasis in the high-desert landscape

The Star Attraction

Touring Cave Loop

Along the two-mile Cave Loop Road, visitors can explore nearly 20 caves of varying difficulty. All the Cave Loop caverns are well marked, and many are easy for families to navigate.

The less challenging caves feature higher ceilings and smooth floors, appropriate for families with young children, while the most challenging require some bending and crawling.

To get started, families should stop by the museum in the visitors' center for a primer on the region's volcanic activity, details about cave closures or

restrictions, and tips on caving safely. The center also lends flashlights and kneepads and sells bump hats (or you can use your own bicycle helmets). Rangers recommend that each family member have a flashlight as well as sturdy, closed-toed shoes and a jacket. With an average year-round temperature of 55 degrees, the caves are chilly, so bringing warm clothing, even in summer months, is a good idea.

W I L D L I F E W A T C H

The park's caves attract some fascinating creatures. Here are three to keep an eye out for.



Big-Eared Bat

Lava Beds is home to 14 species of bats, including the moth-eating Townsend's Big-Eared Bat. Look for its telltale sign: moth wings on the cave floor.



Rubber Boa

This tiny cave-dwelling snake is the size of an overgrown worm. Though small, it's a constrictor, which means it squeezes its prey rather than bites.



Wood Rat

Also known as a pack rat, the wood rat commonly makes its nest in caves. To spot one, look for conspicuous piles of twigs and branches.

Must-Visit Caves

Mushpot Cave (Cave Loop)

A lighted walkway and interpretive signs (see above) make this cave at the visitors' center an inviting first stop. Here, families can learn how the park's tunnels formed as the lava in them receded and cooled.

Golden Dome (Cave Loop)

Watch out for "headache rock" on your way down the ladder into this sparkly-ceilinged cave. The roof's gold color is the result of light reflecting off water droplets that bead around harmless cave bacteria.

Valentine Cave

Discovered on Valentine's Day in 1933, this large, accessible cave is located three miles from Cave Loop. Approximately 20,000 years younger than the Cave Loop caverns, Valentine was formed by a different lava source than the park's other tubes. Its relative youth is evidenced by its pristine condition. Valentine's walls and floors are smoother than those of other caves in the park; it also lacks modern alterations, such as ladders and handrails.

Explore the Park

Lava Beds offers prime terrain for discoveries above grade, too. Here are three spectacular spots.

Schonchin Butte Trail

This rocky path climbs almost a mile up a cinder cone to a manned fire lookout and panoramic views of the surrounding high desert, Medicine Lake Volcano, and Mount Shasta. In the summer, families can talk to the resident ranger about the monument's

fire management program, and kids can earn a Junior Fire Lookout Award.

Petroglyph Point

Located at the north end of the park, this premier rock-art site boasts 5,000 Native American carvings. The traditional territory of the Modoc people, Petroglyph Point is also the setting of the Modoc creation story. Visitors can view panels of carvings in the cliff wall, while keeping an eye out for the resident prairie falcons, red-tailed hawks, and owls.

Captain Jack's Stronghold

Named for a young Modoc leader, Kientpoos (called Captain Jack by settlers), this spot near Petroglyph Point was the site of a famous 19th-century standoff. For almost six months in 1872–1873, about 60 Modoc warriors used the protection of lava trenches and caves to hold 600 U.S. Army soldiers at bay.*

The site's self-guided walking trails, including an inner half-mile loop or a more challenging 1½-mile route, are open year-round. In summer, guided tours are given.

Don't Miss

Skull Cave

Visitors should bring a coat to this cool cave (shown on page 35), which narrows and descends just inside the large entrance. Named for the bones discovered here, it was formed when two lava tubes cooled, one atop the other, and then the upper collapsed onto the bottom tube. Cold air gets trapped inside the cave, keeping the ice floor frozen, so the hike down to the viewing platform can feel like a descent into a freezer.



At the visitors' center, families can learn about the area's Native American history

When to Visit

The park is open year-round, and each season offers visitors the chance to see something special, such as migratory birds in the fall or large herds of mule deer in the winter. Although in summer daytime temperatures approach 90 degrees, visitors should always prepare for chilly weather in this high desert park. Daytime winter temperatures range from 20 to 40 degrees.

WHERE TO STAY

In the Park

Indian Well Campground, open year-round, has 43 tent and RV sites. Campfire programs may be available during the summer (sites cost \$10; first-come, first-served; no hookups or showers; nps.gov/labe).

Outside the Park

The Medicine Lake Campground, located about 17 miles from the park and open July (weather permitting) through October, has RV and tent camping alongside the water (sites cost \$7; first-come, first-served; vault toilets, no showers; 530-667-2246).

Winema Lodge, located 8 miles north of the park entrance, is basic and homey, with a family-style restaurant (rooms from \$65; 530-667-5158; winemalodge.com).

Best Western Olympic Inn, located an hour north of the park in Klamath Falls, Oregon, offers a swimming pool and complimentary full breakfast (doubles from \$109; 800-600-9665; bestwestern.com).

CHECKLIST OF FUN

IF YOU HAVE ...

A few hours ... then try:



- ☐ Lava Beds visitors' center
- ☐ Cave Loop

A day ... then try:



- ☐ Skull Cave
- ☐ Schonchin Butte Trail

A weekend ... then try:



- ☐ Valentine Cave
- ☐ Captain Jack's Stronghold
- ☐ Petroglyph Point

