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The New River Gorge National River may soon become the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.



The Bridge Walk offers an unusual perspective of the gorge.

Three National Parks Units, One Destination; Crowd-Free Adventures in Southern West Virginia's New River Gorge

FAYETTEVILLE, W. Va., July 29, 2020 - Travelers yearning for a crowd-free national park adventure will find numerous options in [Southern West Virginia's New River Gorge](#) region. The three park units - [New River Gorge National River](#), [Gauley River National Recreation Area](#) and [Bluestone Scenic National River](#) - are within a day's drive for travelers living in the East, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and Midwest. The parks offer outdoor and cultural experiences similar to those available in big, often crowded parks like Great Smoky Mountain, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Parks.

"While it seems everyone is seeking getaways in the great outdoors this summer, few want to share nature's bounty with crowds of fellow travelers, particularly during this summer of social distancing," said Roger Wilson, CEO of Adventures on the Gorge (AOTG), an adventure resort



The New River is renowned for its smallmouth bass fishing.



Adventures on the Gorge offers a variety of paddling experiences on the New and Gauley Rivers.

situated near all three parks. “This is a good year to spread the park love around and visit some of the lesser known places.”

There are 419 national park units throughout the country, and only 62 are parks. The others bear [descriptive designations](#) like national recreation area, national monument, national memorial and national river.

The New River could soon bump the national park count to 63 by becoming the country’s next national park, at least if a bipartisan group of legislators and park supporters have their way. Prior to Covid-19, there had been a strong push to designate the [New River Gorge National Park and Preserve](#). It is likely this endeavor will continue when the pandemic wanes.

“From nature to architecture to history, national parks celebrate and showcase a variety of exceptional and historically noteworthy places, and our parks here - much like many of the bigger parks - have multi-faceted appeal,” said Wilson.

Here are some big-national-park adventures travelers will find in the National Parks of Southern West Virginia:

Whitewater rafting: Rafting the Gauley River during the fall Gauley Season or navigating the early-spring rapids on the New River will provide every bit of the thrills and scenery as a trip on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon - without the expense and time commitment. The New and Gauley Rivers both offer tamer options for less experienced rafters too.

Historic architecture: National parks are full of architectural treasures, from classic lodges to train stations. Typically, the structures were built to address a visitor or infrastructure need. That holds true for the [New River Gorge Bridge](#). Built to reduce travel time between towns on either side of the river, the New River Gorge Bridge is the longest steel arch bridge in the Western Hemisphere and the third-highest bridge in the U.S. History and architecture buffs can see the bridge from the inside out on a [Bridge Walk](#). Travelers are harnessed to a wire-and-pulley system and are guided across a 24-inch catwalk for a birds’-eye view of the New River Gorge. Visitors can also explore the one-time coal-mining boomtown of [Thurmond](#), where the depot and other buildings have been preserved.

Hiking: There are countless hiking trails throughout the rugged region, including the Endless Wall Trail, named one of the best national park hikes in the country by readers of USA Today’s 10Best.com. AOTG offers [guided hikes](#) on Endless Wall and other trails.

Rock climbing: The New River Gorge features numerous routes for experienced and beginning climbers alike, and AOTG offers several guided rock-climbing and rappelling options including private instruction and two-hour, half-day and full-day excursions. Rock climbing is also an option during the full- and half-day multi-sport lake adventures from the floating island of a pontoon boat on Summersville Lake, adjacent to the Gauley River National Recreation Area.

Fishing: Because of its superior smallmouth bass population, the New River was rated one of the top four best fishing rivers in the U.S. by *Sports Afield Magazine*. Adventures on the Gorge guides show guests the best fishing spots for all-day excursions. And for anglers who prefer to do their fishing from a boat, there are full- and two-day float fishing adventures.

Kayaking: Flatwater and whitewater kayakers alike will find kayaking experiences to suit their interests. Participants in the two-hour Hawk’s Nest Lake Kayaking can casually paddle through gorgeous scenery on mostly flat water. There is also the multi-sport Summersville Lake option,

which offers a slightly more challenging adventure. Whitewater rafters can hone their kayaking skills by navigating a duckie kayak through the rapids.

Hidden Waterfalls: A spectacular waterfall in northwest Wyoming -- now called the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone -- inspired artist Thomas Moran to paint the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. The painting helped persuade Congress to create the world's first national park. Today, most of that park's 300 waterfalls are located deep in the backcountry. The waterfalls of the National Parks of Southern West Virginia, however, are a little [easier to find](#). One, in fact, travelers can raft over. The 14-foot Sweet's Falls is one of many Class V rapids that Gauley River enthusiasts navigate during Gauley Season.

More about the National Parks of Southern West Virginia

Established in 1978, [New River Gorge National River](#) encompasses more than 70,000 acres of land along 53 miles of the New River from Bluestone Dam to Hawk's Nest Lake. A rugged, whitewater river flowing northward through deep and spectacular canyons, the New River is among the oldest rivers on Earth, carving the deepest and longest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains.

The [Gauley River National Recreation Area](#) includes 25 miles of the Gauley River, known as one of the best whitewater rafting rivers in the world. The river is particularly challenging and popular during the months of September and October, when water is released from the Summersville Dam, creating incredibly fast water and huge rapids, including nine Class V rapids.

The [Bluestone National Scenic River](#) includes a 10.5-mile section of unspoiled and protected river that is a haven for a vast array of plants and animals. The river is named for the deep blue limestone streambed.

Quick national park visitation facts: [Visitation](#) at national park units varies dramatically. Great Smoky Mountain National Park saw more than 12.5 million visitors in 2019, Grand Canyon National Park welcomed 6.3 million visitors and Yellowstone National Park reported 4 million travelers. Lesser-known national parks such as those in Southern West Virginia see far fewer visitors. In 2019, the New River Gorge National River saw 1,195,721 visitors, Gauley River National Recreation Area hosted 119,282 visitors and Bluestone National Scenic River counted 37,663 visitors.

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What to know about Adventures on the Gorge

Named one of the top six adventure resorts in the country by [U.S. News & World Report](#), Adventures on the Gorge is located on more than 250 acres along the rim of the majestic New River Gorge near Fayetteville, W.Va. The resort provides an array of outdoor experiences including whitewater rafting on the New and Gauley Rivers, aerial adventures, rock climbing, rappelling, kayaking, stand up paddle boarding, fishing, mountain biking and hiking. There are also restaurants, bars and shops as well as a small-group conference center. Visitors can choose from a variety of [accommodations](#) and [vacation packages](#).

Travelers can find out more about Adventures on the Gorge [online](#), by calling 1-855-379-8738, or connecting on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Google+](#), [TripAdvisor](#), [YouTube](#), and [Vimeo](#) and signing up for AOTG [e-newsletter](#).

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