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# Taming the Wild West

## Travel hacks for tackling the region's distinct geography

By Lisa A. Beach

**N**EVER BEEN TO THE Western United States? It might help to know some insider tips when visiting diverse landscapes ranging from deserts to mountains. Travel experts share their best insights for traveling to this unique part of the country:

### WEATHER WISDOM

With such diverse climates, how can travelers deal with extreme weather variations? “Bring layers,” suggests Dionne Evans, owner and luxury travel adviser with Long Beach, Calif.-based Travel by DAE. “Even though it can get very hot in the daytime, it can also go the opposite direction and be very

cold at night.” Gabriella Horvath, travel adviser and owner of Now-or-Never-Travel near Denver, notes that winter is challenging at high altitude, while summer is challenging in the desert. No matter when or where you travel, be safe by staying hydrated, wearing sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat.

### ALTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

Some destinations with the highest elevations in the U.S. are located in Western states: Mount Denali in Alaska, Mount Whitney in California and Mount Rainier in Washington, to name a few. How can travelers acclimate to elevation changes? “Drink plenty of water and give yourself a day after arrival to adjust,” Horvath advises. And Evans suggests avoiding strenuous activities on flight days.

### NATIONAL PARK KNOW-HOW

With so many iconic national parks in the region, how can travelers optimize their visits? In general, spring, early summer and late fall bring better weather and fewer tourists. But when and where you go really depends on what you want to do, from winter ice-climbing and spring wildflower photography to summer kayaking and fall hiking. Horvath says specific parks are best during certain seasons: North Cascade and Olympic in Washington and Glacier Bay in Alaska, mid-June

through mid-September; and national parks in Utah, March through June and late September through November. She adds, “Yosemite and Kings Canyon (in California) are really nice in the wintertime — but roads can be closed and inaccessible.” And Evans points out that visiting during drier months (typically May to September) gives you a better opportunity for stargazing. Also, buying an annual national parks pass is a good idea to both save money and avoid longer entrance lines. Horvath suggests checking the park's website to see if you need a timed entry.

### GUIDED TOURS VS. DIY

What other tips should travelers know about visiting national parks and other Western U.S. sites? “I have taken and sold guided national parks tours and highly recommend them for people visiting for the first time,” Evans explains. “You learn so much and might visit areas that the public may not get a chance to.” She notes that, for active travelers who might want more time to explore, hike or trek, it might be better to just book one or two guided activities to avoid being on a time limit.

Your best bet? Talk to someone who's been there, whether that's a friend, relative or travel agent who specializes in travel to Western destinations.



Mount Denali, Alaska