



Exploring the non-urban

Park visitors don't have to travel far in Northern California this summer with more than 100 state parks open. State parks offer a variety of scenery and activities for all ages of visitors. The parks are full of history, color, and the perfect formula for making lasting impressions.

Leaving lasting impressions is what [Emerald Bay State Park](#) is known for. The 1929 Vikingsholm house of Laura Knight is a marvel. Summer tours allow for views of Lake Tahoe and Fannette Island in beautiful Emerald Bay. Vikingsholm is nestled in majestic pines right on the lake, with a hiking trail covering two miles of remarkable lakeside scenery. Once done with the hike, Lake Tahoe provides for a chilly 60 degree swim.

Enjoying more lake views and hiking trails is not far down the road from Lake Tahoe at [Donner Memorial State Park](#). The park is known for the Donner Party that found themselves trapped by the Sierra winter of 1846. Donner Park offers camping and fishing in addition to hiking trails. The trails lead to Emigrant Trail, a museum, and picnicking sites. The hikes make for an enjoyable family outing.

A trip through Sierra canyons leads to the gold rush era mining town of Coloma. [Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park](#) marks the discovery of gold that transformed California from little known to well known. The park has sites showing how gold was mined and gold panning reenactments. Retrace the steps of early pioneers to see the working reconstruction of John Sutter's sawmill.

Just because James Marshall did not get rich from gold mining doesn't mean that people gave up. After realizing that gold was located in ore, deep underground, extensive tunnels were created to retrieve it at [Empire Mine State Historic Park](#). Tour the mine's maintenance shops, the opening of a mine shaft, and the gardens and house of mine owner William Bourn. The park makes for a great afternoon walking from site to site.

Yet more gold claims were staked in the Sierra foothills at [Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park](#). The site of hydraulic mining that washed away mountainsides in search of gold was largely successful for miners, but devastating for farmers downstream. The mined mountainsides offer an incredible display of what hydraulic mining can do. Most impressive is the mid-1800s technology that left a lasting impact on California's landscape. The park features easy walking trails, with one leading to a 600-foot deep mining pit. The mining town is complete with a drug store, livery stable, and general store.

Although Napa valley doesn't have any gold mines, they do have plenty of estates worth their weight in gold. One estate that is commonly overlooked is that of Jack London. The most famous and successful author of his time left behind some 1,300 acres that is now California's [Jack London State Historic Park](#). The London residence offers a glimpse into the writer's personal life with tours of The House of Happy Walls museum, and inviting hiking trails with oak trees, redwoods, streams, and deep canyons.

[Sonoma Coast State Beach](#) adds to the scenery of Sonoma County with its rocky coves, tall bluffs, colorful wildflowers, and abundant waterfowl. Once finished with hiking, relax at a picnic table and observe a distant barn in the soft glow of the sunset.

Drawing visitors in is the unique placement of the North coast [Richardson Grove State Park](#), named after California's 25th governor. Explore the old-growth forest just outside the park to find a rare walk-through tree. In addition to hiking through the redwoods in the park, make plans to camp at the park to take advantage of the interpretive programs, educational exhibits, and natural history displays.

Unique and secluded (all in the same breath) help describe [Angel Island State Park](#), a park that has seen many changes from pirating to military occupation. Angel Island is roughly one square mile in size, but offers five miles of hiking trails. The park also provides bicycling and overnight camping. Ferry service to the island makes for a fun arrival with views of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Hiking in California state parks reveals the hidden treasures and diversity that lay trapped within the busy state. Each park offers something different for every visitor and surely something new, even for those who have already been. Northern California state parks provide great access to the outdoors and affordable summertime recreation.

To search for a park by region, county/city, or activities go to [Find-A-Park](#)