

Best City Parks

April White



New York City

The High Line, built on a former elevated railway, is a unique public park that runs two stories above street level from the meatpacking district to Hell's Kitchen. It can't rival Central Park for green space (can anything?) but the High Line is a strong contender in the people-watching category. For those on the West Side, it's a sweet spot for walking, picnicking, and checking out the ever-changing public art.

thehighline.org



San Diego

With 17 museums, 20 gardens, and miles of trails, it's easy to get overwhelmed (in a good way) at Balboa Park. Don't miss the world-famous rose garden, in bloom from March through December, and the quirky tradition of lawn bowling (lessons available).

balboapark.org



Houston

Just five years ago, much of Discovery Green was a huge parking lot. Now it's a 12-acre park with promenades, fountains, a playground, jogging trails, dog runs, and a lake (with remote-control sailboat races).

discoverygreen.com



New Orleans

You can golf, boat, bike, or horseback ride — or pack a muffuletta and just picnic under City Park's 600-year-old live oaks.

neworleanscitypark.com



Seattle

Bird lovers have found a home in the city's rugged Discovery Park. Located on 500 acres overlooking Puget Sound, the park is home to 270 different species. Plus, there are popular guided tours for one of the most common species: the novice bird watcher.

seattle.gov/parks



Greenville, South Carolina

It's hard to decide which is more beautiful: Falls Park's elegant suspension footbridge, a favorite spot for an evening stroll from downtown, or the rushing Reedy River Falls below the bridge.

fallspark.com

St. Louis

September's Great Forest Park Balloon Race, when 70 hot-air balloons launch from Central Field, may be the biggest attraction, but on any fair-weather day you'll find tennis, golf, soccer, softball, and hiking in this 1,400-acre park.

forestparkforever.org



Philadelphia

It's said that no matter where you are in Philadelphia, Fairmount Park is less than a mile away. The 9,200-acre park has something for everyone: people-watching in Rittenhouse Square, biking along Kelly Drive, hiking in the Wissahickon, and in the winter, sledding at Belmont Plateau.

fairmountpark.org



Boston

Boston Common has the name recognition, but Boston Public Garden has the swan boats. The unique boats have been a fixture of the flower-filled, perfect-for-strolling park for more than 130 years.

cityofboston.gov/parks

Atlanta

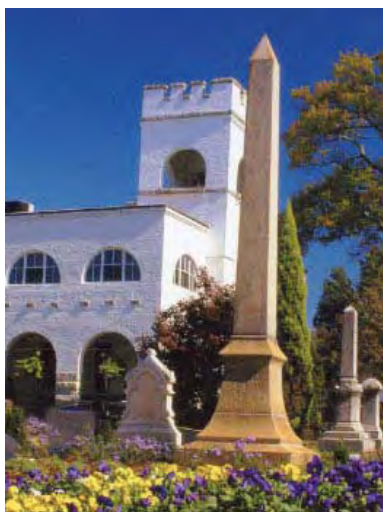
One of the country's most unusual city parks: Oakland Cemetery, where Atlantans picnic, jog, and even marry amid the gravestones.

oaklandcemetery.com

Washington, D.C.

Rock Creek Park follows its namesake creek through the district, a path that includes wide swaths of wilderness for hiking and narrow slivers of urban running trails. Get your workout as you sightsee: the park skirts the National Zoo, the U.S. Naval Observatory, and the Kennedy Center.

nps.gov/rocr



Denver

Many of the Mile High City's 200-plus parks are interconnected by 80 miles (!) of paved, car-free urban trails. A cyclist's dream.

denvergov.org/parks

San Francisco

Yes, Golden Gate Park has it all — unless you're under the age of eight. Then you want to be at Yerba Buena Gardens, one of the country's coolest playgrounds. There are slides, a jungle gym, a carousel, a labyrinth, and plenty of places for parents to sit back and enjoy. Raining? It's right next to San Francisco's children's museum.

yerbabuenagardens.com

Chicago

The lakeside Millennium Park has quickly become the city's cultural town square, hosting hundreds of free concerts and compelling public art. A photograph of yourself peering into the curious, mesmerizing Cloud Gate sculpture is a must.

millenniumpark.org

Phoenix

Don't expect lush lawns and elaborate flower gardens. South Mountain Park, just a few miles from downtown, is all dramatic desert. Its 16,000 acres of rocky, dry terrain are a mountain biker's paradise.

phoenix.gov/parks