

**ROAMING
AMERICA**

Exploring All the National Parks

ROAMING AMERICA

Renee & Matthew Hahnel





ROAMING AMERICA

Our journey to all the national parks

Thank you for picking up our book; we are incredibly happy to be able to share this journey with you. Roaming America is the story of our visit to all the US national parks in one epic seven-month-long road trip. Like every story, it didn't just miraculously come to fruition overnight, so let's jump back to the beginning ...

We are Renee and Matthew Hahnel, travel and adventure photographers based in Seattle. We were both born and raised in Melbourne, Australia, and fate would have us meet in high school many moons ago. During the early years of our relationship, we quickly found a common interest in travel and exploring the outdoors, but little did we know what that would eventuate into.

In 2012 we embarked on our first trip to the USA, and it was our visits to places like Yosemite, Mount Rainier and Glacier that sparked a deep love for the national parks. We returned home and immediately applied for the Diversity Visa Program, which is essentially a lottery system to win permanent residency in the US.

Luck was in our favour, and in 2014 our names came up in the lottery, giving us a chance to move to America after rigorous interviews, background checks, and medical tests. So, in early 2015 we boarded a flight bound for Colorado with our lives packed into a few suitcases and almost no plans.

We immediately took to living in the mountains and cherished every weekend that allowed us to hike, take photos, and adventure to new places. Gradually our work as photographers began to replace our 9-to-5 jobs and we were eventually able to pursue our dream careers full-time. This is where the national parks road trip comes into the scene ...

It was a week before Christmas in 2016 when we received an email that immediately sparked our interest. It was from Evolve, a previous client of ours that were launching a new product. Part of the proceeds were to be donated to the National Parks Foundation in an effort to protect our natural spaces. They suggested a collaboration where they would send us to every single national park in an effort to bring awareness to their brand and mission. We honestly thought they were joking at first.

Initially, it was unclear how long this hypothetical and monumental adventure would take ... or if it was even possible. We were given a week to find out. The logistics of putting together a trip like this was not easy and we spent hours tirelessly researching all the possibilities. Finally, a week later, we got back to Evolve with a plan of how this could all come together. We proposed a trip route that would have us visit all 59 US national parks in only seven months. It was only when they said yes that it actually hit home ... that we would be taking this once-in-a-lifetime trip together.



On 1 April 2017 we arrived at Go Westy in California to pick up our van Ruby, a 1988 Westfalia Vanagon that would become our home for a good part of that year. We set off for our first national park, Grand Canyon, with a document listing our route, a few campsites booked here and there, and big expectations for how it would all pan out. Needless to say, we were in for one heck of a ride, and the months that followed shaped us immensely as individuals, a couple, and creatives.

Our journey saw us travel 25,000+ miles/40,000+ km, across 39 states, to two US territories, on 26 flights, and along countless hiking trails. Despite all the incredible experiences we were able to have, this was ultimately a working trip for us, and those seven months turned out to be the most rewarding and exhausting days of our lives.

We surprisingly didn't have too many hiccups along the way, with only a few van breakdowns and a couple of delayed flights slightly setting us back. We did, however, have our fair share of uncomfortable moments ... like the time we woke to mice running up our blankets in the van, the heart-stopping grizzly bear encounters in Alaska, and that time we caught a tropical illness in the Virgin Islands.

As you would imagine, the special moments we experienced far outweighed the bad. We had to pinch ourselves during nights where we would fall asleep under a blanket of stars, or those times we stood on mountain summits watching a golden sunset, and every day that we had the privilege of waking up somewhere new and exciting.

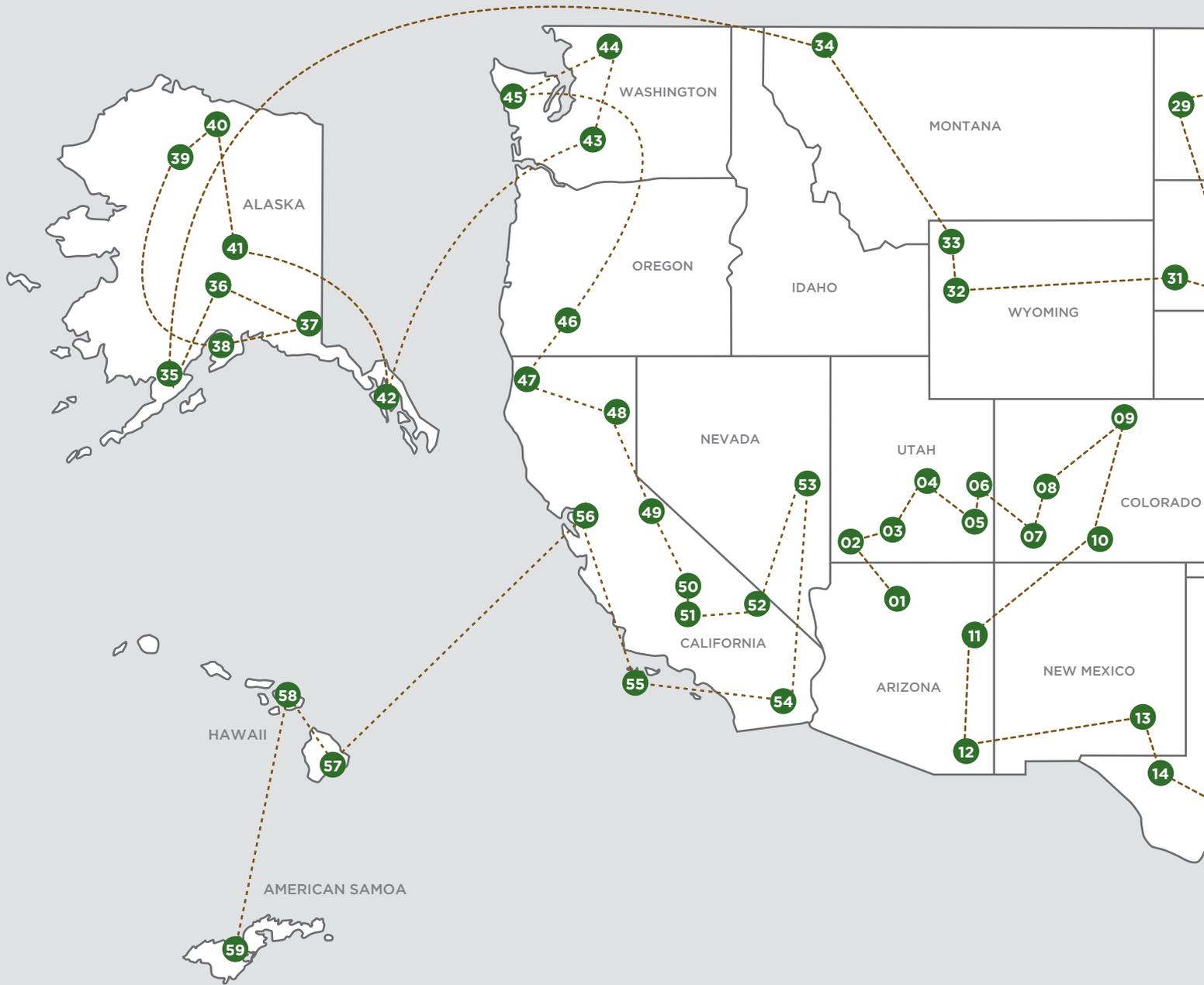
Living in the van taught us to get by with less. We recycled through the same outfits day in, day out, slept cramped up next to each other every night, cooked basic meals, and went without comforts like TV and a proper desk to work at. Instead, we replaced these things with new experiences, the chance to journal and reflect, to meet interesting people, and to spend quality time together as a couple.

This book is the result of not only our seven-month journey to all the national parks, but the countless hours of editing photographs, recording our memories, and working out how to best share our story. We hope you feel a connection to the national parks as you read through these pages, and ultimately, we hope this book inspires you to take more adventures and be a steward for protecting this beautiful world we call home.

Renee + Matthew

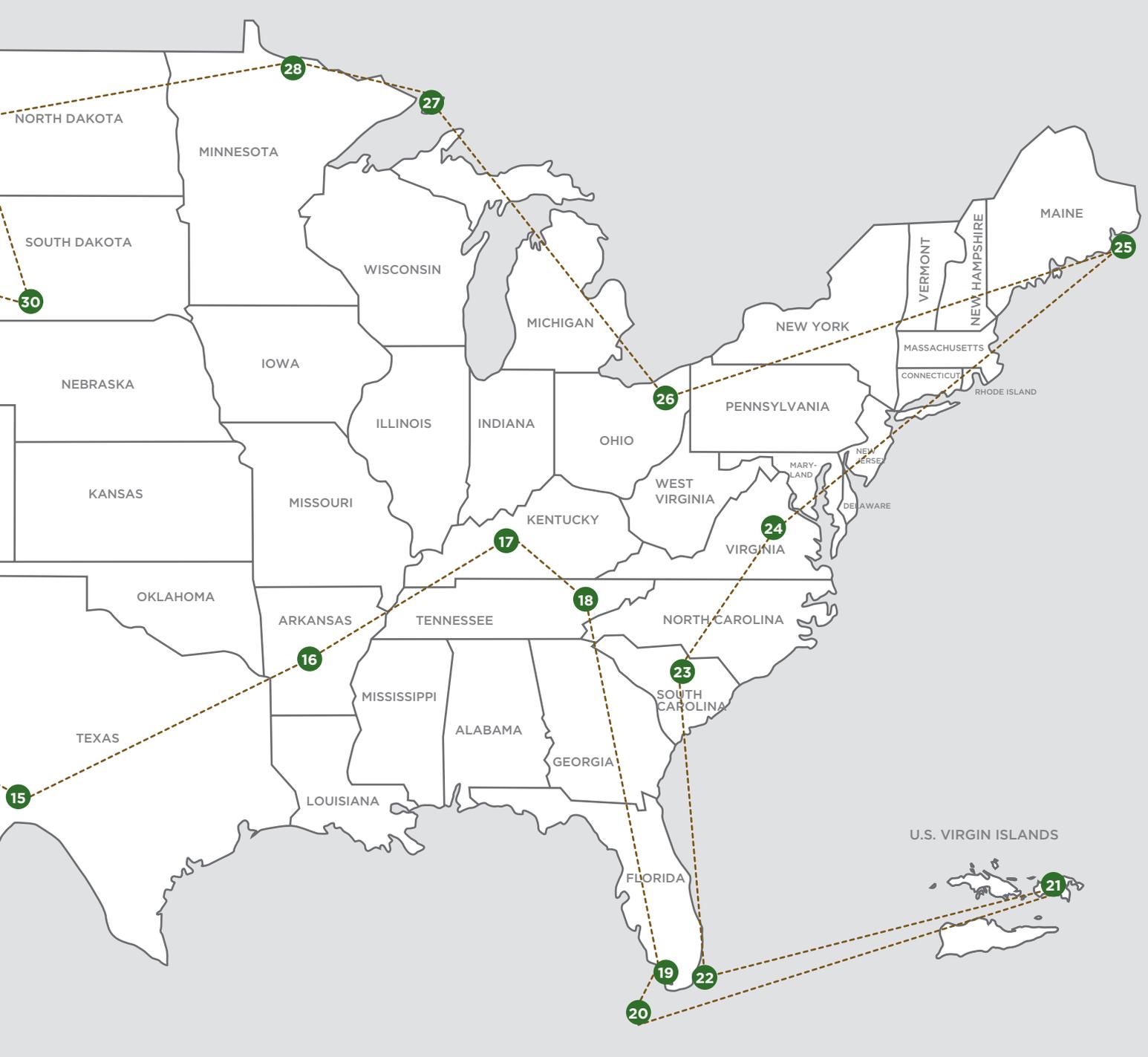
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OUR 7-MONTH TRIP ITINERARY

Route To See All The National Parks



- 01 Grand Canyon
- 02 Zion
- 03 Bryce Canyon
- 04 Capitol Reef
- 05 Canyonlands
- 06 Arches
- 07 Mesa Verde
- 08 Black Canyon
of the Gunnison
- 09 Rocky Mountain
- 10 Great Sand Dunes
- 11 Petrified Forest

- 12 Saguaro
- 13 Carlsbad Caverns
- 14 Guadalupe Mountains
- 15 Big Bend
- 16 Hot Springs
- 17 Mammoth Cave
- 18 Great Smoky Mountains
- 19 Everglades
- 20 Dry Tortugas
- 21 Virgin Islands
- 23 Congaree

- 24 Shenandoah
- 25 Acadia
- 26 Cuyahoga Valley
- 27 Isle Royale
- 28 Voyageurs
- 29 Theodore Roosevelt
- 30 Badlands
- 31 Wind Cave
- 32 Grand Teton
- 33 Yellowstone
- 34 Glacier
- 35 Katmai

- 36 Lake Clark
- 37 Wrangell-St. Elias
- 38 Kenai Fjords
- 39 Kobuk Valley
- 40 Gates of the Arctic
- 41 Denali
- 42 Glacier Bay
- 43 Mount Rainier
- 44 North Cascades
- 45 Olympic
- 46 Crater Lake
- 47 Redwood

- 48 Lassen Volcanic
- 49 Yosemite
- 50 Kings Canyon
- 51 Sequoia
- 52 Death Valley
- 53 Great Basin
- 54 Joshua Tree
- 55 Channel Islands
- 56 Pinnacles
- 57 Hawai'i Volcanoes
- 58 Haleakalā
- 59 American Samoa

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**“I felt my lungs inflate
with the onrush of scenery,
air, mountains, trees, people.
I thought, ‘This is what it
is to be happy.’”**

- Sylvia Plath











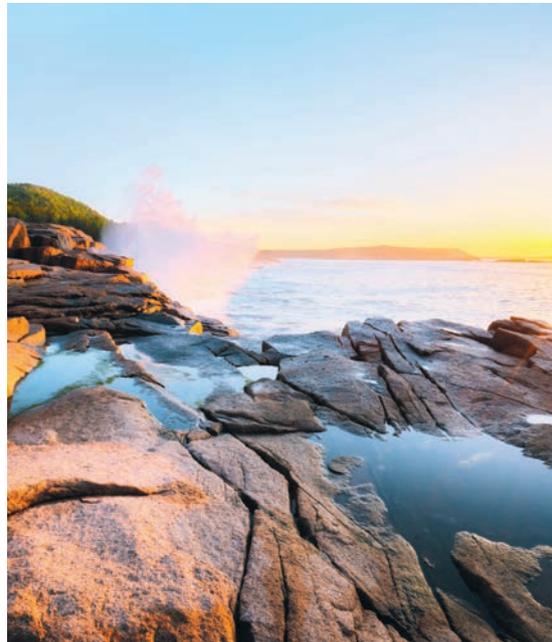




ACADIA NATIONAL PARK

New England's Finest

Visitors flock to Acadia National Park to experience a vibrant coastline, unique wildlife, and the highest point along the North Atlantic Seaboard: Cadillac Mountain. The quaint town of Bar Harbor is located just minutes from Acadia, and many visitors come to the area to sample the fresh local seafood, stroll around the downtown precinct, and explore the park. Acadia is popular in the summer for scenic driving, bicycling, kayaking, camping, boating, and swimming, whereas winter draws crowds for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.



LOCATION Maine

PARK SIZE 49,052 acres

ICONIC FEATURE Cadillac Mountain

BEST SEASON Summer and fall

VISIT TIME Highlights in 1-2 days, or best explored in 3-4 days

STAY Camp at the Blackwoods Campground, or stay in nearby Bar Harbor.

MUST HIKE Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse and the North Bubble trails

PHOTO TIP Capture sunrise at Jordan Pond and Cadillac Mountain, and sunset at the Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse.



“All sleepiness is briefly forgotten as we stand at the summit of Cadillac Mountain and watch the sun slowly glow over the Atlantic.”

Exhaustion doesn't begin to describe just how tired we are. It's the kind of sleep deprivation that leaves you unbalanced physically and mentally, struggling to make even the most basic decisions. It's 4 a.m. and our alarm goes off inside the van... Sunrises are early in Acadia during mid-June. We haul ourselves out of bed and out into the crisp Maine air. All sleepiness is briefly forgotten as we stand at the summit of Cadillac Mountain and watch the sun slowly glow over the Atlantic. Just us and maybe 15 others are the first people in the entire country to witness sunrise that day.





AMERICAN SAMOA



02

NATIONAL PARK OF AMERICAN SAMOA

South Pacific Tropical Paradise

The National Park of American Samoa is quietly tucked away in the Pacific Ocean, some 2,600 mi / 4,200 km southwest of Hawai'i. The park is bursting with beautiful beaches, rare plants and animals, extraordinary coral reefs, and a rich culture. Spread out across three islands – Tutuila, Ta'u, and Ofu – transport between different areas and tourist infrastructure are still being developed, though the locals are friendly and welcoming to visitors. These islands are vibrant in every sense of the word, from the lively people, lush hiking trails, deep blue waters, and magnificently colorful sunsets. They may just be America's best-kept secret.

LOCATION U.S. Territory of American Samoa

PARK SIZE 13,500 acres

ICONIC FEATURE Views of Tutuila from the Mount Alava Trail

BEST SEASON Year round

VISIT TIME Best explored in 3-5 days

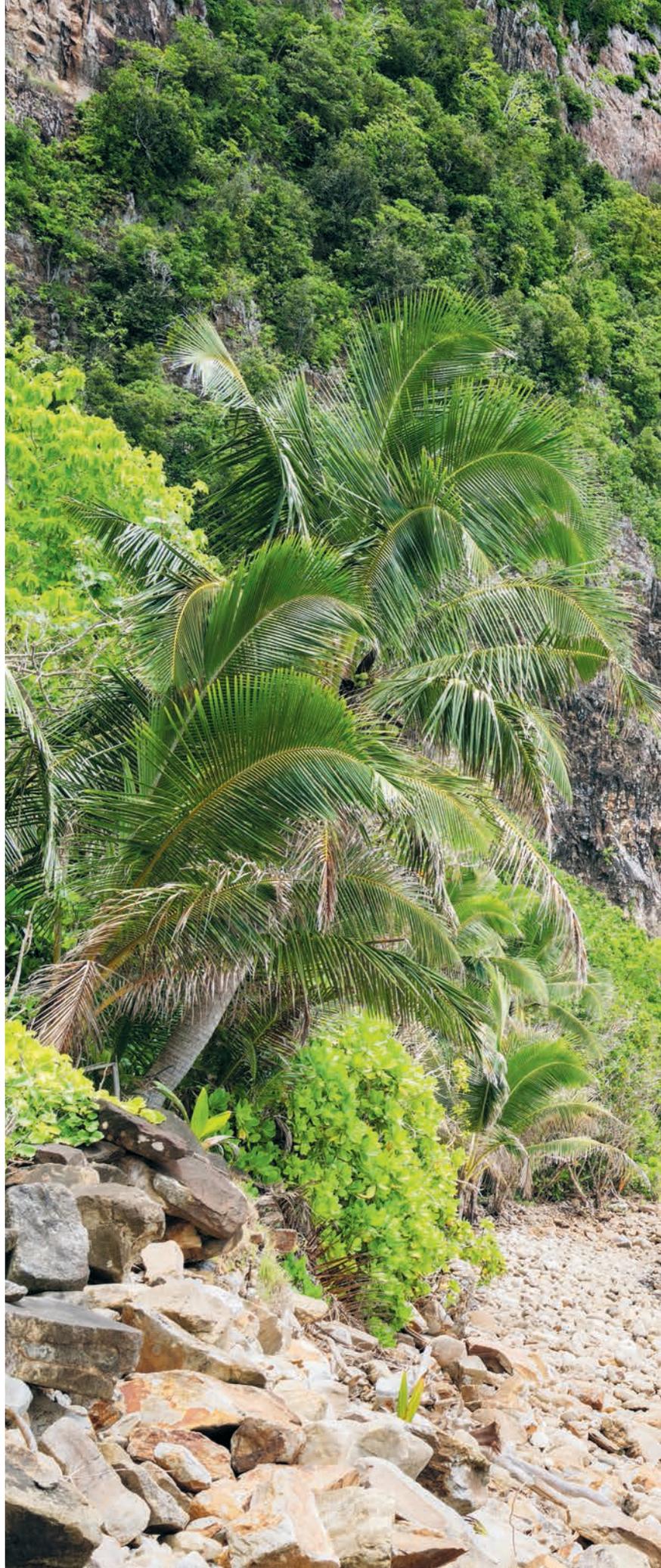
STAY The National Park Service runs a homestay program, allowing visitors to have a first-hand experience of the Samoan culture.

MUST HIKE Pola Island Trail and Mount Alava Trail

PHOTO TIP The island of Ofu provides incredible photo opportunities above and below the water. On the island of Tutuila, picturesque locations include Vatia Bay, Afono Pass, Afono Bay, and Mount Alava.

“These islands are vibrant in every sense of the word, from the lively people, lush foliage, deep blue waters, and magnificently colorful sunsets. They may just be America’s best-kept secret.”

Our time exploring Tutuila is bittersweet, for it’s the last stop on our seven-month journey to all of America’s national parks. We spend our days hiking rainforest trails, sampling local food, cooling off in the Pacific Ocean, and learning about Samoan culture. Our fondest memory is watching sunset on the beach during our last night on Tutuila. The sky was so deeply orange and red that it almost appeared as if it were on fire. Local children played around us on the beach, laughing and splashing in pure joy. What a privilege it was to witness such a scene.





COLOPHON

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