

# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

## The Most Scenic Way to Explore This Remote Midwestern National Park Is by Boat—and It Has Mirror-like Lakes and 500 Islands

You can even stay in a houseboat in Minnesota's Voyageurs National Park.

By [Lydia Mansel](#) | Published on July 2, 2025



Houseboat on Lake Kabetogama in Voyageurs National Park, Minnesota.

Credit: Jon Lauriat/iStockphoto/Getty Images

There are some national parks where the experience revolves around hiking trails and scenic drives; water features—such as lakes, rivers, and waterfalls—are secondary. [Voyageurs National Park](#) is not one of those destinations. (The national park has seen an 89 percent Google search increase, according to adventure tour operator [Explore Worldwide](#).)

Located in northern Minnesota, just south of the Canadian border, the 218,000-acre park is made up of 30 lakes and 500 islands, and it's best explored by boat. According to [BoatMart](#), "Boaters can explore the seemingly endless waterways, set up camp at remote sites accessible only by boat, enjoy canoeing, or try their hand at kayaking in the breathtaking arboreal beauty of Northern Minnesota."

An entrance pass is not required to enter the park, but travelers are encouraged to plan their visit by reserving a boat or campsite or booking a tour ahead of time. Notably, almost all of the campsites within the park can only be accessed via water, so keep that in mind when planning a trip.

If you're interested in captaining your own boat, you have a couple of options. The [National Park Service](#) recommends a few different outfitters, depending on your preferred vessel and desired location. The park has four water access points, which you'll find at the Rainy Lake, Kabetogama Lake, and Ash River visitor centers, as well as the Crane Lake Ranger Station. At Rainy Lake, for example, Voyageurs [Outfitters](#) and [Rainy Lake Aquatics](#) rent motorboats, canoes, [kayaks](#), and stand-up paddle boards.

Some travelers opt for a scenic boat tour instead. From mid-June through the end of September, the park offers various [guided tours](#) that range in length from 1.5 to 6.5 hours. The park's North Canoe Voyage brings guests out on the water, either Rainy Lake or the Ash River, in a 26-foot-long canoe, a replica of what a voyageur would have traveled in during the early 1800s. The Life on the Lake Tour also gives a historic view of the area, taking

passengers around Rainy Lake, pointing out gold mines and fish camps, and explaining what life was like for the trappers, loggers, gold miners, and fishermen who once explored this area.

Those who'd prefer to spend a few days in the park (and not set up a campsite) can choose to [rent a houseboat](#). These types of watercraft are rented from companies outside of the park—places like [Northernaire Houseboats](#), [Voyagaire Lodge & Houseboats](#), and [Ebel's Voyageur Houseboats](#). Permits are [required](#), but the additional effort and fees are worth it.

Not only can you spend your days swimming, fishing, and seeing the natural beauty of the park, but you may also be able to spot the [northern lights](#) at night. While winter is technically the best time to spot the aurora borealis from Voyageurs National Park, an [International Dark Sky Park](#), September is the sweet spot for travelers who want warmer weather (and water) and a good chance to see the northern lights.

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