

Parks & Recreation

By Sarah Ehlen

With the weather getting warmer and summer just around the corner, you're probably thinking about planning some fun outings and weekend adventures in the great outdoors. For many, that means heading to a park for some recreational activities. Maybe it's camping in a state park, hiking in a national park, or fishing a local river.

Or perhaps it's a daily walk to the city dog park or bringing your kids to the neighborhood playground.

Whether you're exploring a small, local park or a famous national park, these excursions also provide the perfect opportunity to plan out some awesome stock photo shoots along the way.

Parks & Recreation Images as Stock:

In the United States alone, outdoor recreation is a 400+ billion dollar industry or roughly 2.2% of the entire economy. This is massive, and it also means that there is an enormous demand for a range of stock photos to represent this category.

Photo buyers love shots featuring parks and recreation because these images can be used to convey big concept ideas such as adventure, taking on challenges, connection with nature, and family togetherness to name just a few.

Plus, these types of photos can also be used to represent specific activities or places, which can be highly useful for photo buyers, particularly in the travel and tourism industry. The fact that parks and recreation-themed shots can be used for such a wide variety of purposes is a big reason why they do so well on stock photo sites.

Let's take a look at a few highly marketable stock photos for ideas and inspiration:

The image below is a great example of a "parks and recreation"-themed image that feels natural and unstaged. Everything from the life vests thrown in the canoe to the natural pose of the boy and dog make this image feel believable and authentic, which is exactly what buyers are looking for these days.





As you're out and about photographing for this theme, be ready to capture the small moments that unfold. For example, rather than only photographing these park joggers in action, the photographer took time to document the before/after moments in the first image to the left. Doing this will potentially give you a nice series that you can upload to your sites.



Keep in mind that buyers need parks and recreation themed photos that represent all age groups and demographics. Stock photo libraries are still filled with tons of images of stereotypically attractive young models. There is a huge need for images showing a greater diversity of subjects. "Active seniors" for example, are a big need that agencies are constantly asking for.



When you photograph recreational activities, make sure you're including all the necessary pieces related to that activity, especially safety equipment. In this last image to the left, notice that the riders are wearing helmets and cycling clothes. Everything about this photo feels true to life, including the mud on the tires and riders. The photographer also caught the action at a moment where there is nice visual separation between the two main riders. Although this can be tricky to do when photographing action sports, it really helps create a strong, simple composition.

Techniques:

Be ready to capture the action. Since many shots taken with a parks and recreation theme will include moving subjects, it's important to keep an eye on your shutter speed. For example, if you're trying to freeze movement, you'll want to be sure to use a fast shutter speed. As a general rule of thumb, use a shutter speed of at least 1/500th of a second or faster in order to freeze a jogger, bicyclist, or other action sports. If your subject is moving very fast, such as a speed boat, you'll likely need to shoot even faster, with a shutter speed of 1/1,000th or 1/2000th of a second.

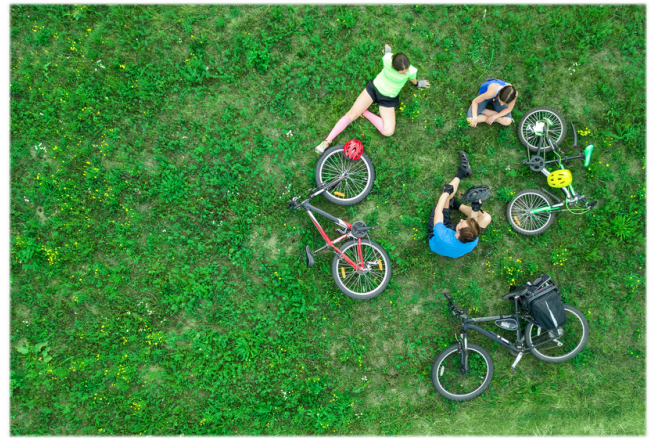
Look for leading lines. Most parks have roads, trails, bridges, or boardwalks that you can use to add depth to your image and lead the viewer into your scene. Parks are the perfect place to play with this compositional technique.

Shoot from a variety of perspectives. When you're photographing in a park, it's important to remember to change your perspective. You don't want to come away with images only taken at eye level. Look for ways to get up high or



down low to vary your camera angle. For example, you might be able to photograph from the perspective of looking down from a bridge or other high point. Another idea is to bring something soft to kneel on so that you can position your camera near ground level to change up your composition.

Also consider putting yourself in the center of the action by photographing from a first-person perspective. This is a technique in which the viewer feels like they are right there experiencing the activity first-hand. The images below are examples of this first-person perspective. Note that we have an entire Roadmap called "In Your Shoes" (Roadmap #95) devoted to this topic, so if these types of images intrigue you, be sure to check it out for additional ideas.



Change lenses.

This is another way to change your perspective and come away with a wider variety of images. It's amazing what changing your focal length can do. For

example, a wide angle lens will allow you to take in an entire scene while telephoto lenses help to hone in on particular subjects while minimizing distractions.

Plan to be out during golden hour.

Every professional landscape and outdoor photographer will tell you that golden hour is one of the best times to be outside shooting. Light can really make or break an image, so planning to be out about a half hour before and after sunrise/sunset will give you a good chance of capturing that magical, golden light.

There are many phone apps out there that can help you plan sunrise and sunset times. If you're out

exploring during the middle of day and find a viewpoint or scene that is especially photogenic, you might want to consider returning at golden hour if you can.



Important Things To Remember

Keep your concepts in mind. As you're photographing on location for this theme, think about the concepts you want to convey. For example, in these photos, the photographers got close to the action, capturing moments that are all about the joy and fun of childhood. As always with stock photography, the photos that convey a clear message are going to be most useful for buyers.



Minimize Distractions. Parks, especially city parks, tend to be busy places so you'll want to watch out for distractions sneaking into your shot. Watch the background for passersby, trash cans, port-a-potties, lamp posts, etc... Changing your shooting angle or using a wide aperture opening such as f/2.8 to blur the background can help simplify your scene. Remember, less is usually more when it comes to photography.

Bring your own models. Although landscape images will work for this theme, the best-selling photos will likely be the ones that include people out enjoying a park and doing recreational activities. Ask your family and friends to join you... most people won't object to having their photos taken while they're out exploring a park or doing something fun! You can always offer photos in exchange for a signed model release.

Watch for logos or trademarks. Watch out for logos on bikes, tents, or other recreational equipment. Sometimes a piece of black or white tape is a discreet way to cover logos before you shoot. You may need to get creative to figure out ways to exclude logos or plan on removing them in post processing. You'll also want to ask your models to wear plain clothes free of words or other branding.



Make the most of the seasons. Every season will offer different photographic opportunities in most places. Return to your favorite local spots throughout the year to capture a range of moods and activities for your portfolios. This month, you could likely capture blooms and fresh growth not available any other time of the year. Many parks also offer seasonal events that could be fun to photograph, so it could be worth checking into their schedules.

What is your park known for? Are there classic views or specific activities that your park is known for? If so, you'll want to be sure and capture those. However, you also want to look for the hidden gems and lesser known areas as well to create some unique images that will stand out.



Even at the popular, iconic spots you should always be on the lookout for unique moments and thinking of ways to “work the shot” to create interesting compositions. Buyers always appreciate a different take on even the most popular of areas.

For example, everyone has seen this standard shot of Arches National Park and it's certainly a nice image.



However, for the buyer that's looking for a different take on Arches, this shot to the left capturing a raven framed by an arch just might fit the bill.

Use pops of color. It's a good idea to ask your models to wear bright colors such as red, yellow, or orange. These



hues will really help your subject stand out amongst the greenery of a park.

Photograph details. As you're exploring a park, keep an eye out for small details such as interesting signs, etc... These sorts of shots can be very useful.



Keywording:

You'll want to include keywords that cover the place, the activity, and any associated concepts or emotions. Think in both broad terms and specific details, being sure to only include keywords that really fit with what is shown in the image.



For example, let's take a look at the image of the father and son hiking again. Here's how I would keyword it:

Yosemite, National Park, father, son, hike, walk, nature, mountain, explore, outdoors, recreation, together, adventure, family, childhood, parent, tourism, California, lifestyle, sunny, parent, wanderlust, trail, path, active, two, peaceful, rock, valley

I hope this month's Challenge gives you some inspiration to go play outside, enjoy the warm weather, and bring your camera along to document the fun! It's the perfect combination for stock photography!