

# WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO NAME



## An overlander's quest to find *THE* Joshua Tree

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PHOTOS BY WILLIAM DORÉE

Following visits by peyote-popping hippies, but long before Los Angeleno influencers descended upon Joshua Tree National Park, Irish rock band U2 immortalized it by name. Their 1987 album was named after the boho chic-est national park. Thanks to the popularity of the album and the band itself, it became one of the most fabulous hipster destinations in the Golden State.

We spent five action-filled days overlanding in this dry corner of California, where towering rock formations and, of course, forests of Joshua Tree, also known as *Yucca brevifolia*, pepper the landscape. You can climb, bike and hike on this rocky terrain, and as a bonus, you can immortalize your stay with a selfie and the subsequent bragging rights that come with it.

### Starry nights

If a full day of activities has you worn out, take it easy, grab a chair and wait until sunset when the park really comes alive. Recently designated as an IDark Sky park by the International Dark Sky Association, a gaze upward will reveal dark skies full of the most radiant stars. They are out-of-sight!

Clear skies and a diverse geography have led the park to take necessary steps to protect its land from an overabundance of stargazing visitors. It's best to call ahead for the latest information.

Regardless, bring your tripod and camera and be prepared to capture what the heavens have to offer during your visit.

### Campsite vs wild camping

There is no wild camping inside the Park. The Bureau of Land Management offers free camping near the National Park's North and South entrances.

We stayed at Black Rock Canyon Campground at the Park's northwest corner on our first night. This campsite is located on a hillside with beautiful views of the majestic Joshua trees. It's further from the rock formations, but closer to the North entrance to the park. But the views of the dense grove of trees appear like a landscape scene from a Dr. Seuss book.

On our second night, we chose the famous Jumbo Rocks Campground, which is the largest one in the National Park. Here you will wake up to closeup views of the bouldering rocks and have access to the trail that leads you to the famous Skull

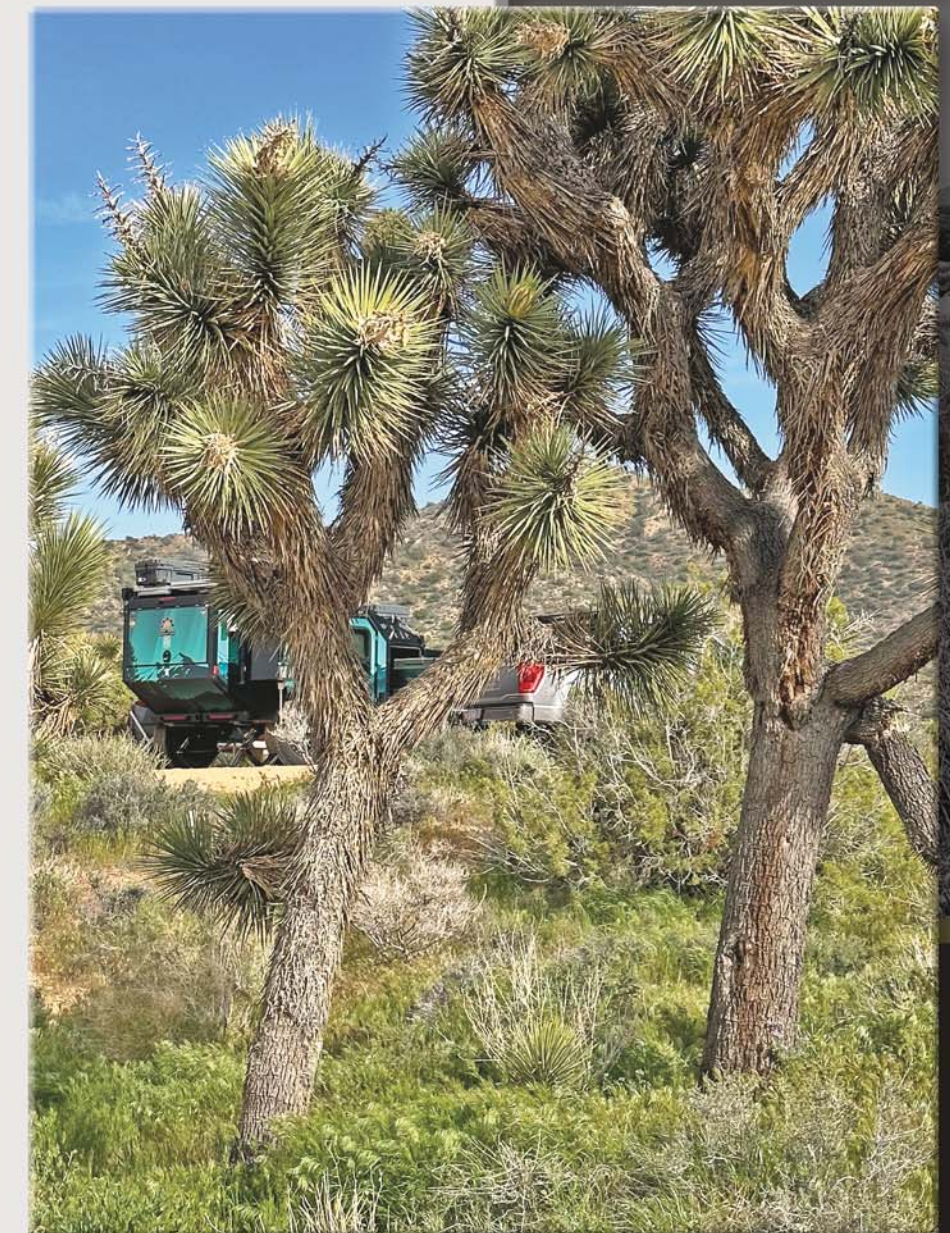
Rock. It is also a great spot for stargazing.

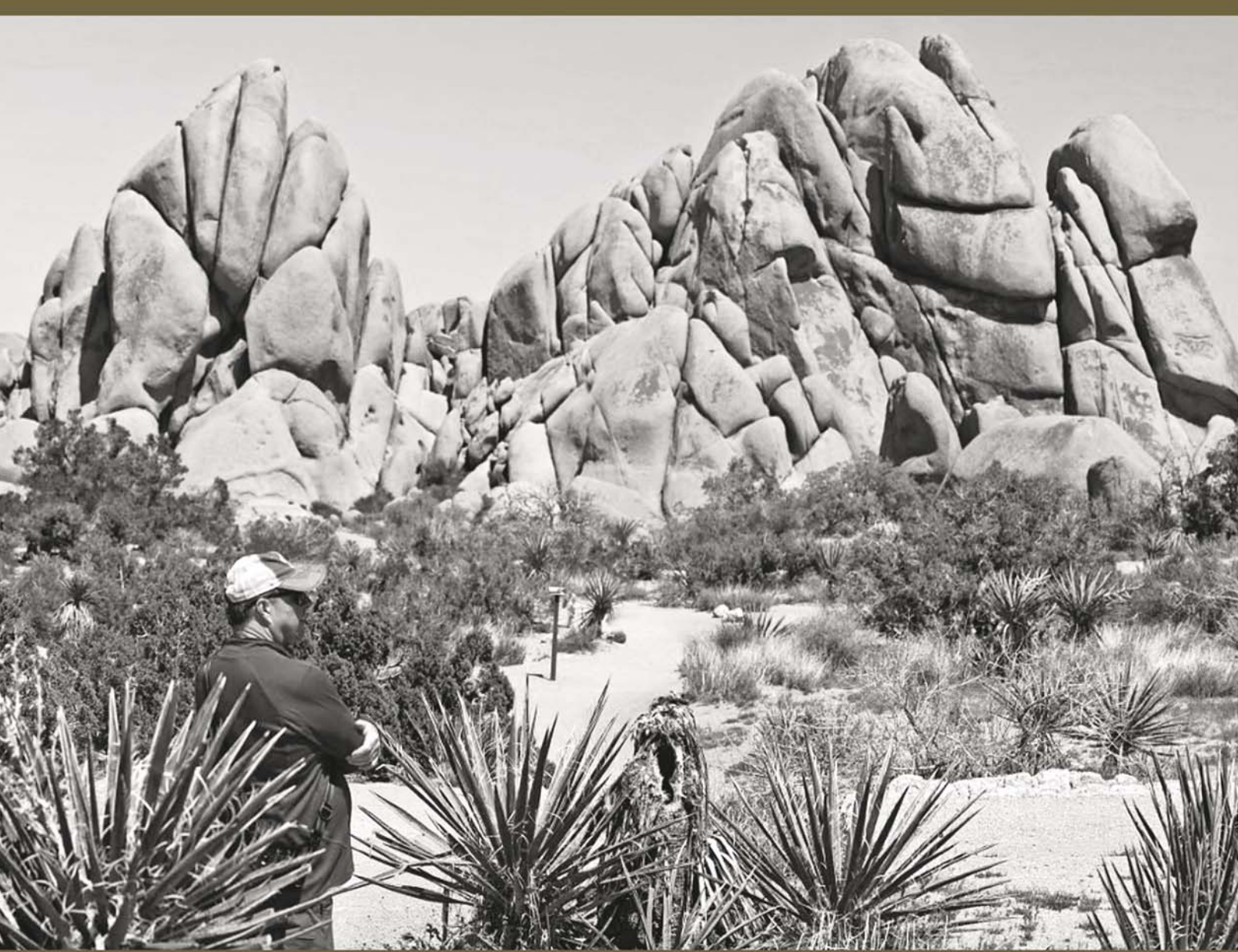
### Our quest

But that's not what we were looking for; we were on a quest to find *THE* Joshua Tree immortalized by the rock band U2 on their album cover of the same name.

We headed out to the Park Service Visitor Center for some information on this famous tree and answers we got. It turns out that U2's iconic photoshoot was not taken inside Joshua Tree National Park at all, but at Zabriskie Point in Death Valley National Park. Yes, the inside cover photo, where the U2 bandmates moodily look into the camera with a lone Joshua Tree looming in the background, was shot in Death Valley along Highway 190.

(cont'd)





Sadly, that's the only association between the Irish band and a National Park. We were told an autographed guitar is at the Visitor Center in Joshua Tree National Park. Oh, a must-visit is the Harmony Motel, where the band stayed during their desert escapade. Outfitted with retro-chic furnishings, it reminds visitors of road-tripping in a different age.

As for "the Joshua Tree," it died years ago. All that remains is its trunk and a bronze commemorative plaque in the ground, engraved, posing a simple question: "Have you found what you're looking for?" The commemorative plaque was made by U2 superfan Ernie Navarre in 2003. It has become a shrine for the band's fans. Many leave notes answering the posed question.

Overlanders can find the mysterious location in Darwin, California, a half-mile off the west side of route 190. It's actually closer to the outskirts of Death Valley National Park.

### Be surprised

Without proper preparation, the Mojave Desert can be an inhospitable place. But it can also be beautiful. For a new perspective, we discovered world-renowned South African artist Daniel Popper's new installation *Transmission* rising almost 30 feet above the sand. This larger-than-life goddess sculpture is set to evoke a sense of peace, love and connection. Made of concrete and steel, embellished with glass mosaic, this will take your breath away.

The striking sculpture is anchored by two set of palms adorned with dichroic mirror mosaics that change color as the rays of sunset reflect on the circular cut-outs. In a way, it seems to connect earth, sky and viewer in a magical way. Just like the Mojave itself.

Please note this art installation is definitely Instagram worthy, but it is not located at Joshua Tree. Instead, it can be found at the Mojave Moon Ranch. It can be viewed from the road or by taking a few steps along a path designed to bring viewers in for a closer look.

As with almost every trip we have been on, there's always more to discover than meets the eye. Getting off the beaten path and venturing onto nearly 800,00 acres of mystical beauty will make memories that will never leave you. There are plenty of back roads to discover, but some may re-

quire a permit.

There is a 79-mile point-to-point trail near Joshua Tree that is rated "Easy" by AllTrails.com. It's a popular trail, but on some days, you can find it less crowded and even more scenic. The trail ends near the North entrance of the Park. Before entering remember to replenish groceries in the city of Joshua Tree.

The evening temperatures can get quite chilly, so it was a no-brainer to pull out the Camp Chef to make a delicious steak and crispy potato dinner around the campfire. But if you prefer, there are great dining options outside the park in Twentynine Palms.

From sunup to sundown and all night in between, we did find what we were looking for. And then some. ■

