



# 17 HOLY HIKES

Make a modern-day pilgrimage to one of these sacred sites.  
By Jen Rose Smith

## OBSERVATORY TRAIL

### HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK, HI

As you hike past lava tubes and across loose cinder on 13,677-foot Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, you'll be a guest in the home of Pele, the powerful goddess of Hawaiian volcanoes. Her white dog is said to roam the slopes of the mountain when an eruption is imminent, so watch for a flash of fur while trekking the 6.4-mile (one-way) Observatory Trail, which climbs from 11,150 feet to the summit. From the Mauna Loa Weather Observatory, follow cairns over jagged *a'a* and smoother *pahoehoe* rocks. Pass the North Pit, part of the Moku'aweoweo Caldera, near mile 3.8, then continue another 2.6 miles to the true summit, where you can breathe some of the clearest, cleanest air on earth (a result of altitude plus seaborne air). Make it an overnight: Snag a bunk in the Mauna Loa summit cabin (\$10 wilderness permit required).

**Contact** nps.gov/havo

## SUMMIT TRAIL

### BEAR BUTTE STATE PARK, SD

A hunched spine of igneous rock surrounded by prairie, Bear Butte is a holy site for more than 15 tribes. (Its Lakota name, Mato Paha, translates to Bear Mountain.) The peak is

linked to the Supreme Being by some and is frequently used as a site for vision quests and ceremonies. Tackle the 3.7-mile out-and-back to the top on the Summit Trail, passing bushes decked with ceremonial cloths and bundles of tobacco—symbols of prayers left behind by visitors. Once on the 4,426-foot summit, look south for views of the Black Hills—another spiritually significant site for many Native peoples—and scan the surrounding prairie for a glimpse of Bear Butte State Park's resident buffalo herd. **Contact** bit.do/bear-butte-sp

## THREE SISTERS TRAIL

### LAVA BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT, CA

California's Pit River Tribe has long traveled to the Medicine Lake Highlands—the caldera of an ancient, collapsed shield volcano—for vision quests and prayer. Follow in their footsteps and explore the caldera's lava tubes and flows on a 10-mile loop along the Three Sisters Trail in Lava Beds National Monument. Tackle it in November, when cool temps and low-hanging fog add to the feeling of mystery. From the Three Sisters trailhead, head east, taking time to poke around in the volcanic rubble and caves. Then head into the high

**Bear Butte reflects in Bear Butte Lake.**

desert, passing through sagebrush and stands of juniper to mile 8.7. Connect the Lyons, Missing Link, and Bunchgrass Trails to loop counterclockwise back to the trailhead. **Contact** nps.gov/labe

## MT. MONADNOCK

### MONADNOCK STATE PARK, NH

The bare, rocky summit of Mt. Monadnock stands just 3,165 feet above sea level, but the peak loomed large for New England's most iconic transcendentalist writers. Emerson wrote an ode to the place, while Thoreau, who first climbed Monadnock in 1844, believed that a good, sweaty hike up one of the world's "natural temples" was a solid improvement on a morning in church. To see what the fuss was about, park at the Monadnock State Park headquarters in Jaffrey. From there, the most direct route to the summit is the steep White Dot Trail, which climbs 2 miles through a dense deciduous forest that explodes with fall color in October. After communing with the spirits of the writers on the bald summit—bring a copy of Emerson's poem "Monadnock" to hold an open-air reading—return to the trailhead on the gentler, 2.1-mile White Cross Trail, making a 4.1-mile loop. **Contact** nhstateparks.org