Headline: Unappreciated attractions pack most punch

Deckhead: Find hidden gems in the shadows of famous counterparts

Underrated is a verb that never will let you down. How could it? The definition spells it out.

*Underestimate the extent, value or importance of someone or something.*

It’s easy to be underrated among a group of stars. That goes for vacation destinations, as well. We constantly are told about places we *must* visit. But there also are places we *should* visit – ones that rarely are mentioned but are hidden gems waiting to prove their value.

They are sites less crowded and exist in some of the U.S.’s quieter spots. They might prove to be kinder to your wallet, but there is nothing cheap about them.

Take Yellowstone National Park, for instance. Old Faithful is arguably the most famous geyser in the world. But have you heard about Castle Geyser? The cone-shaped blistering fountain is older than its famous sister. It erupts less frequently, but when it does, it can shoot water as high as 90 feet into the air.

Mount Rushmore flaunts four of our country’s most memorable presidents. But don’t ignore the Crazy Horse Memorial that is fewer than 20 miles away. It’s a tribute to the Lakota warrior who famously led Native American fighters in the Great Sioux Way of 1876-77. It is the largest mountain carving in the world – an awe-inspiring sight.

Few destinations in New York City are more popular than Central Park. But if you’re interested in the perfect remedy for maddening crowds, visit Tryon Park. It’s north of Central Park and sits on the edge of the Hudson river. It’s a modest 67 acres in size, but it boasts eight miles of peaceful pathways and the Cloisters, a branch of the Met focusing on medieval works.

Glacier National Park ranks among the top 10 most-visited parks in the U.S. But the North Cascades, located about 500 miles away in Washington, remains blissfully anonymous. Appreciate the snowy peaks, fir-covered hills and glaciers. Among the most striking natural wonders is the North Klawatti Glacier.

Palo Duro Canyon in Amarillo doesn’t have much of a reputation – at least compared to its southwest competition, the Grand Canyon. Palo Duro is blessed with similar rugged red rocks and epic sunsets and sunrises but attracts a fraction of visitors. More than 30 miles of trails make it a playground for hikers, bikers and horseback riders.

Yosemite’s Half Dome attracts major crowds. It rises 5,000 feet over the Yosemite Valley and offers fabulous views, but there are plenty of other bluffs found in the American West, including Devils Tower. Northwest of Yosemite in Wyoming, Devils Tower is a national monument that matches Half Dome in height and is sacred to many groups of Native people.

Rock formations are geological gifts, and Natural Bridges National Monument is a shrouded jewel near the famed Arches National Park. The former is named for its trio of bridges carved out by rivers. It’s also the first designated International Dark Sky Park worldwide, providing star-studded solitude.

Big Sur is a fabled stretch of California’s storied Highway 1. It’s a leading attraction for sightseers. A quieter journey, however, is sitting farther north. Oregon’s shoreline includes a utopia like Ecola State Park. Drivers will find similar rock-studded sands and dramatic bluffs and might even spot a whale.

It’s wise to visit the U.S.’s most admired destinations, but don’t forget about the little guys. They have plenty to offer and always deliver.

Cutline: DEEP IMPACT – Palo Duro Canyon Lighthouse watches over the beautiful lands of the Amarillo natural wonder. Image: Kip. Adobe Stock.