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Link to photos:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1XbuFKPCcWt41SglHavv2NfkMG5LnwMxn>

Title (in search results): 12 natural phenomena to see in the US

Natural phenomena in the US: where to catch Mother Nature's quirks

Keep your peepers peeled, and you'll see cool natural phenomena wherever you go – whether it's a mirage in the desert, a forest in brilliant fall colors, or a chubby squirrel raiding a bird feeder.

But some things are so extraordinary that they merit a special trip. Below you'll find 12 of the amazing tricks nature pulls off in the United States!

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Animal shenanigans

Overwintering monarch butterflies



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/usa-california-pismo-beach-migrating-monarch-1281396553>

Alt: Monarch butterflies blanketing tree branches

Caption: *Man, the California beaches are really crowded this time of year*

Each fall, the majestic monarchs migrate from the slopes of the Rockies to spend the winter in California – much as heat-loving movie stars do.

Though you'll find them all over central California on Highway 1, they tend to congregate at Pismo Beach in San Luis Obispo County. Go to visit them at the Monarch Butterfly Grove, or check out other sites on the [Western Monarch Trail](#).

 **Where and when:** Monarch Butterfly Grove, Pismo Beach, CA; Nov-Feb

Migrating tarantulas




<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/male-oklahoma-brown-tarantula-734998222>

Alt: Oklahoma brown spider crossing the road

Caption: *Just a single brown spider who loves watching movies and going to the gym*

The ultimate lovers: male Oklahoma brown tarantulas will walk 500 miles – okay, skitter over 443,00 acres – to find a mate in southeast Colorado.

To spot these randy arachnids en route, head out to the Comanche National Grassland just before sunset on a warm day. Mid-September through October is the time to visit – go figure their *saison de l'amour* is our spooky season!

 **Where and when:** Around La Junta, CO, in Sep-Oct. Read these [viewing tips](#) if you plan to go

Synchronized lightning bugs




<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/synchronous-fireflies-qm477695122-66845699?phrase=synchronous+firefly>

Alt: Male synchronous fireflies glowing among the trees at night

Caption: *Chicks dig it*

In the animal kingdom, at least, males really know how to put on a spectacular mating-season show. One species that attracts not just females but humans is the synchronous firefly (*Photinus carolinus*) found in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

In late spring, the male lightning bugs sync their shine so the lady bugs (not ladybugs) can find them. The pulsing glow is such a popular attraction that the park holds a lottery each year for vehicle passes. If you want to see them, plan ahead!

 **Where and when:** Great Smoky Mountains National Park, late May - late June (check the [official website](#))

Coquí frog chorus



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/coqui-tree-frog-bromeliad-el-yunque-1588963438>

Alt: Coqui tree frog sitting in a bromeliad

Caption: *Gotta catch 'em all! (The ladies, that is)*

Small but mighty: though the coquí tree frog is quite small – averaging about one to two inches long – you can hear its loud, distinctive call even from outside the forest. Like a Puerto Rican Pokémon, it calls its own name: "Co... co-KEE!"

Thirteen of sixteen native species can be found in El Yunque National Forest, so if you want to hear some coquí males calling for some co-cuties, you know where to go.

 **Where and when:** El Yunque National Forest, Puerto Rico; year round

Weird Earth

Northern Lights




<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/aurora-borealis-northern-lights-reflections-lake-321197930>

Alt: Green aurora borealis over a lake in Fairbanks, Alaska

Caption: *Hey, Valkyries, I'm SLEEPIN' 'ere!*

Spirits of the dead? Shining shields of Valkyries? Or the interaction of atmospheric gases with solar wind hitting the Earth's magnetic field? The science may not sound as romantic as the myths, but that doesn't make the experience of seeing the aurora feel any less mystical.

While the Northern Lights are often associated with the Nordic countries, don't forget about Alaska! The town of Fairbanks sits under the Auroral Oval (say that ten times fast) and often has clear skies, so your chances of seeing the aurora borealis are high. Just come during the colder seasons, when it gets dark enough – in this part of the world, that means between late August and late April.

 **Where and when:** Fairbanks, AK; generally Aug 21 - Apr 21

Thor's Well



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/thors-well-water-cascading-into-on-1732640993>

Alt: Pacific Ocean falling into Thor's Well

Caption: *Hammers were swung, lessons were learned*

Legend has it, Thor got a little carried away while swinging Mjollnir and... broke the ocean. (Okay, we made that up, but doesn't it sound like something he would do?)

This sinkhole on the Oregon coast is famous as the "drainpipe" of the Pacific, where the high tide starts rolling in and just keeps going. It fills up and then sinks down as if breathing, and occasionally it coughs up a fountain of water 25 feet in the air. While it's not a gateway to the underworld as some people claim, it's still best to keep your distance to avoid getting pulled in.

 **Where and when:** Oregon coast near Cape Perpetua, any day at high tide

Yellowstone geysers and springs



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/grand-prismatic-spring-view-yellowstone-national-784576060>

Alt: View of Grand Prismatic Spring at Yellowstone

Caption: *Caution: HOT*

Old Faithful is the faithful ol' classic, of course, but at Yellowstone, there's plenty more where that came from – over 500 geysers, in fact. And that's just the tip of the geothermal... er, iceberg?

The park lies in the caldera of a collapsed volcano, which is like sitting on a buried boiler. You have over 10,000 hydrothermal features to explore, including a variety of steam vents, mudpots, rainbow-colored springs, and acidic pools that could [dissolve the skin off your bones](#) in a (really) hot minute. Seriously – don't get too close!

 **Where and when:** Yellowstone National Park, year round

Singing sand dunes



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/couple-hiking-great-sand-dunes-national-747370657>

Alt: Couple hiking on a sand dune in Colorado

Caption: *If you don't stop humming, Paul, I will THROW YOU off this dune*

The Bing Crosbys of sand, these special dunes can be found where the humidity is just low enough and the sand grains are the right size, with the right amount of silica. When the wind passes through in an avalanche or sandstorm, it creates a "song" that sounds less like crooning and more like rumbling (or a [swarm of throat-singing bees](#)).

There are an estimated 30 places around the world with the right conditions for singing sands – including several in the US – but a popular destination is the Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado. It was made famous by the real, human Bing Crosby in the 1942 song, "[The Singing Sands of Alamosa](#)."

 **Where and when:** Great Sand Dunes National Park; timing difficult to predict

Gravity Hill



<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/auto-on-move-gm94169346-228187>


Alt: Van driving around a curve in the forest

Caption: *You've just crossed over into the Twilight Zone*

It sounds like a Coldplay song, but gravity hills are **real glitches in the Earth's gravitational field** that you can find around the world.

All right, so they're *probably* optical illusions, but potato, potahto. One of the best-known such places is in a location where it's easy to test – an intersection in Wexford, Pennsylvania, just outside Pittsburgh.

When you come to the stop sign on McKinney Road where it hits Kummer, put your car in neutral and watch it start to roll backward – apparently uphill! Be sure to look for other cars first, but this isn't a well-traveled road and should give you a chance to try it out.

 **Where and when:** Intersection of McKinney and Kummer Rd in Wexford, PA; happening 24/7

Glowy fungus and plants

Bioluminescent waves



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/bioluminescence-san-diego-coast-1741610234>


Alt: Blue bioluminescent waves on the shoreline of San Diego at night

Caption: *Whoa, rad colors, dude!*

Every few years, a red tide rolls in on the coast of California, most notably in San Diego. "Harmful algal bloom," as it's known by scientists, is when algae grow like subaquatic 'roiders and produce toxins that damage marine life and even make people sick. As if that weren't bad enough, they turn the water a lurid red.

On the bright side, though, the same phytoplankton causing the damage bring a beautiful neon-blue glow to the water at night, when they're riled up by the motion of the waves. The best viewing conditions are farther from the city lights, in places like Sunset Cliffs or Torrey Pines State Beach and Solana Beach to the north.

You can also find bioluminescent waters at Laguna Grande in Fajardo, Puerto Rico. Local tours will lead you out on a kayak to see the glow up close!

 **Where and when:** San Diego beaches, nighttime in early spring or late summer

Bioluminescent fungi




<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/decaying-oak-wood-bioluminescence-1219113022>

Alt: Foxfire glowing green in decaying oak wood

Caption: *Now that's a magic mushroom*

In the hot, humid forests of southern Appalachia, conditions are sometimes ripe for a few species of fungi to start glowing a radioactive shade of green. They do this by producing a protein called luciferase – what an angelic name, huh?

The poisonous orange jack-o'-lantern (*Omphalotus olearius*) and the brittle-looking bitter oyster (*Panellus stipticus*) are two species to look for in summer. In fall, the parasitic species *Armillaria mellea*, or honey mushroom, earns its romantic nickname "foxfire" when its thready parts (mycelium, to those in the know) infect a tree and give off a green glow. Oaks are common victims, so know your trees!

 **Where and when:** Central to southern Appalachians on a very dark summer night (no moon, no light pollution)


Rainbow swamp



<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/rainbow-sheen-cypress-swamp-result-decomposition-1235724046>

The boggy places of Florida sometimes sport a psychedelic sheen, as if a hippie swamp witch had left tracks to say "Hagatha wuz here." It happens when oils and tannic acids released from decaying plants, especially cypress trees, form a slick, reflective surface on the water that looks iridescent when hit by sunlight at a low angle.

While it could technically happen in any swamp (Hagatha isn't picky), the Sunshine State offers ideal conditions with its heavy humidity and plentiful sunny days. The longer there's no rain or wind, the longer the surface goes undisturbed, and the rainbow pool has a chance to form.

 **Where and when:** Florida wetlands, particularly Feb-Mar

Of course, this is only a very partial list – so get out there and open those ears and eyes!