Parking & Best Times to Visit

Maquoketa Caves State Park

Parking at Maquoketa Caves State Park

Parking is free and admission to the state park is free — the only cost is for camping sites if you choose to stay overnight.

Key Parking Facts

With less than 150 parking spots and as many as 1,500 people visiting on a summer weekend day, parking fills up fast. Parking is only allowed in designated spots — if no spots are available, visitors are asked to return at a later time.

Park staff recommends visiting mid-week or avoiding the peak window of 11 AM–4 PM on weekends.

Types of Parking Available

- Designated RV parking
- Motorcycle spots
- Accessible parking for visitors with disabilities
- Bike racks for cyclists

Main Parking Area

The main trail system starts at the parking area off 98th Street, near the entrance to Upper Dancehall Cave. This is the central hub for accessing most of the caves.

Camper Tip

If you're staying at the campground, it is easiest to set up at your campsite and travel by foot or by bike — this gives you a chance to explore the many nature trails without worrying about parking.

Best Times to Visit

Best Overall: Spring & Fall

The best time to visit is during the spring and fall when the weather is mild, making it ideal for hiking and cave exploration.

Spring (April–May): Flowers bloom and trees come back to life, with temperatures starting to warm up — a peaceful time before summer crowds arrive.

Fall (September–October): Leaves change to brilliant yellows and oranges, with cooler temperatures making for a more pleasant hiking experience.

Summer: Busy but Beautiful

Summer is peak travel season — the forest surrounding the caves will be a lush green, but expect high temperatures and large crowds. The caves stay around 52°F year-round, offering a welcome cool-down on hot days.

❄️ Winter: Skip It for Caves

Trails remain open and are beautiful, Since the caves are closed during this time, travel during winter months is not recommended for most visitors.

🦇 Cave Closure Dates — Critical to Know!

The caves in the park are closed every year from November 15th until April 1st as they serve as a hibernaculum for overwintering bats.

🕐 Best Time of Day

Arrive early morning (before 11 AM) or late afternoon (after 4 PM) on weekends to avoid peak crowds and find parking more easily. Weekday visits are the least crowded option overall.

📊 Quick Reference — Season Guide

Season	Caves Open?	Crowds	Conditions
Spring (Apr–May)	✅ Yes	Low–Medium	Mild, beautiful blooms
Summer (Jun–Aug)	✅ Yes	Very High	Hot, lush green
Fall (Sep–Nov 14)	✅ Yes	Low–Medium	Cool, fall colors
Winter (Nov 15–Mar 31)	❌ No	Very Low	Cold, icy trails