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The Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains are the most well-known mountain ranges in the continental United States. Both ranges are popular for taking vacations with their families to do outdoor activities like hiking, mountain biking, rafting, rock climbing, horseback riding, skiing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling. Even though they have similarities that are wide and far, they are easily distinguishable by their age, height, vegetation, and wildlife.

The rocky mountains are easily distinguishable by their young age and very sharp peaks, only being formed 60,000,000 years ago (U.S. National Park Service). The origins of the Rocky Mountains are a mystery in themselves, but a main theory about how they formed is subduction, a process when one tectonic plate slides under another tectonic plate (U.S. Geological survey). As for the ranges that involve the Rocky Mountains Mt. Elbert is the highest with 14,439 ft. and is part of the 14ers, a set of mountain peaks that are all above 14,000 feet (U.S. Forest Service). On the other hand, the Appalachian Mountains are 210 million years older than the Rockies, having been formed 270 million years ago via continental collision of the African and North American tectonic plates. After the collision there were continuous folds, faults, and earthquakes that continued to form the mountains that we know today (Clark). The highest mountain in the Appalachians is Mt. Mitchell which stands at 6,683 feet (Schowalter-Hay). The elevation of the Appalachian Mountains is much lower than the Rockies because they are much older and have been worn down by erosion.

The Rocky Mountains and Appalachian Mountains both have a variety of vegetation that include trees, grass, and flowers. The Rocky Mountains have blue columbine, spruce, fir, lodgepole pine, ponderosa, aspen, and Douglas fir. As you go higher and higher you see less and less trees and sometimes flowers such as the alpine tundra and blue columbine flowers (National Park Service). These are the main groups of vegetation that appear on the Rocky Mountain slopes, so there is very little undergrowth. The Appalachian Mountains have their own distinctive vegetation. Most of the trees are deciduous instead of pine, which include sugar maples, red and white oaks, serviceberries, and balsam fir. Some different plants are azalea, mountain laurel, and Catawba rhododendron (Appalachian Trail Conservancy). With the different varieties of trees and plants they make the Appalachian Mountains a beautiful sight to see in both spring and fall. These also make thick undergrowth amidst the trees and shrubs.

Although the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachian Mountains have a different variety of animals, there is one animal that they have in common and that is the black bear. The animals in the Rocky Mountain region are not constantly visible, but there are multiple species of animals such as elk, bighorn sheep, bobcats and mountain lions, black bear, ground squirrels, marmots, and greenback cutthroat trout (National Park Service). In contrast the Appalachian Mountains are home to several species of animals such as the white-tail deer, beavers, moose, black bears, feral ponies and porcupines (Appalachian Trail Conservancy). Feral means that the ponies escaped from their pens and became wild. Although the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachian Mountains are different, they both are home to a variety of animals that are also an attraction to see.

The Appalachian Mountains and the Rocky Mountains, differ, but yet again they are similar, the Appalachian Mountains are older and shorter in height, and the Rocky Mountains are younger and taller in height. They also have distinctive vegetation and wildlife. Even though the Rockies and the Appalachians are different they both are stunning mountain ranges that are hotspots for a vacation visit.

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