



# Grand Canyon National Park

Drop into America's belly as you dip in and out of side canyons or dive to the Colorado River.

The Grand Canyon is not merely unique among American monuments. It's unlike any place else on the planet, wild or not. The numbers—one mile deep, up to 20 miles wide, 277 miles long, and packed with 2 billion years of geologic history—barely scratch the surface. But what's truly amazing is that just six percent of the 4-plus million annual visitors actually leave the roadside overlooks, leaving 95 percent of the park to hikers. The only other visitors, on mules or on rafts, rarely leave their restricted corridors. On foot, you'll encounter all of the Grand Canyon's gifts, from cliff-dancing bighorn sheep to hidden springs, and unmatched sunsets to awesome solitude. To make the most of your vacation, visit in the cooler spring or fall months, reserve your backcountry permits early, and set aside extra days for dayhikes and a visit to the lesser-traveled North Rim.

## The Stats

- Acres:** 1.2 million
- Miles of trail:** 588
- Website:** [nps.gov/grca](http://nps.gov/grca)
- Phone:** (928) 638-8777
- Visitation:** 4.5 million (282,663 backcountry)

## Entrance Strategy

### Getting There

From Phoenix, the park's south rim is a 230-mile, four-hour drive on I-17 N and then US 89 NW. From Las Vegas, it's a 276-mile, four-and-a-half hour drive via US 93 and I-40. The turn-off to the South Bass Trailhead (**1**) is located just south of the park entrance gates, which means you avoid the most crowded entrance station.

### Season

In this extremely dry country, and the best time to hike is late spring, when water is most plentiful. Late fall is good too, but check with park rangers on water availability. Triple-digit temperatures make most routes below the rim hazardous in summer.

If you head out in hot weather, plan to consume five to six liters of water a day, plus electrolyte tablets or salty snacks.

### Best Frontcountry Campground

The 70 spacious sites in Ten X Campground (2) (in Kaibab National Forest) sit in a secluded forest just four miles south of the park entrance on US 180. They're \$8 cheaper and less crowded than any campground in the park. Contact: (928) 635-8200; fs.fed.us/r3/kai. Note: When Ten X is closed (November to April), hit Mather Campground in the park (877-444-6777; recreation.gov).

### Pre-Trip Breakfast

If you're starting in Flagstaff—or leaving Phoenix at dawn—pick up a sinfully smooth Mars Hill mocha and a tasty egg burrito at Late for the Train (3) in Flagstaff (928-773-0308). In the park, your best option for a quick, cheap breakfast is Maswik Cafeteria, (4) in Maswik Lodge at the west end of Grand Canyon Village. Note: The town of Tusayan, (5) just south of the park entrance, offers little restaurant fare beyond standard fast food franchises.

### Gear Shop

Peace Surplus (928-779-4521; peacesurplus.com), (6) in Flagstaff, rents trekking poles for \$3 per pair, per day—a smart pick-up to save your knees. There's no full-service gear store in the park or Tusayan, but you can buy fuel and basic groceries at the Grand Canyon Village store. (7)

### Permits

Avoid the tourist-oriented South Rim Visitor Center, near Yavapai Point, and go straight to the hiker-specific Backcountry Information Center (928-638-7875) in Grand Canyon Village. (8) There you can get required permits (\$10, plus \$5 per person per day), maps, info on trail conditions, and backpacking advice. Apply for your permit up to four months in advance (this is a must during popular spring and fall hiking months) online at nps.gov/grca/planyour-visit/backcountry-permit.htm.

## Exit Strategy

### Clean Up

Built in 1905 and perched on the edge of the rim in Grand Canyon Village, the El Tovar Hotel (9) is both a national historic landmark and a great place to take a bubble bath in a clawfoot tub. Rates for a queen size room start at \$196 per night, and it's a worthy treat. Make reservations well in advance. grandcanyonlodges.com

### Pig Out

Savor canyon views and wild game dishes like buffalo carpaccio at El Tovar's dining (10) room, the park's most upscale restaurant (for reservations, call 928-638-2631). For a more casual meal—like baby back ribs drizzled in prickly pear barbecue sauce—plus local microbrews like Apache Trout Stout, go the Arizona Room at Bright Angel Lodge in Grand Canyon Village (no reservations required).

## You're A Tourist, Now Act Like One

Every park in our backpacking hall of fame has its own Old Faithful—a spectacle so jaw-dropping you won't curse the hordes. At Grand Canyon, it's a new film. Post-hike, cool off in the air-conditioned IMAX theater (11) in Tusayan. In classic IMAX fashion, "Grand Canyon: Discovery and Adventure" film gives you a stomach-churning, condor's-eye view of the Big Ditch. Swoop off the rim and sail over the place you just trekked. Located in the National Geographic Visitor Center. Tickets \$13; open 8:30 am to 8:30 pm. (928) 638-2468; explore-the-canyon.com

## How to Score Grand Canyon's Most Coveted Permits and Campsites

Want to sleep at famous Phantom Ranch, the rustic bunkhouse set in a cottonwood grove on the Colorado River? As with the park's top trails and campsites, you better plan ahead. Phantom Ranch's \$36 hiker beds often fill within three hours on the day the office begins taking reservations (call the first of the month, 13 months in advance). Here's how to beat the rush, no matter where you'd like to hike in the park.

**[1] Do your homework** Rangers are wary of hikers who ask for ideas on routes. In the ranger's mind, it shows inexperience (i.e. potential rescue), and they'll direct you to the cattle paths: Bright Angel, South Kaibab, Hermit. Know your options and ask for a specific route.

**[2] Hike in winter** December to February is better than midsummer for hikers: With dark red canyons dusted in white, peaceful trails (permits are no problem), and T-shirt weather at river level. Pack in-step crampons for the first mile of trail below the rim.

**[3] Escape everyone** Cross the canyon on the 22-mile North/South Bass Trails, and you'll find a fraction of the Bright Angel/North Kaibab traffic—but no bridge on the river (ask a rafter to shuttle you across). Desperately seeking solitude? Only 0.2% of visitors make the bumpy journey to Tuweep, a ranger station/campground with a sheer 3,000-foot overlook.

## Five Classic Grand Canyon Adventures

### DAYHIKE: Tanner Trail

You won't run into any street-shoe, just-off-the-tour-bus dayhikers on this little-traveled trail located on the far eastern end of the park's south rim. From the Tanner trailhead at Lipan Point (12) (two miles west of the Desert View entrance), it's seven quad-and-calf burning miles (roundtrip) to the top of the Redwall just below Cardenas Butte (13). Once there, feast your eyes on unobstructed views of the eastern Grand Canyon, Marble Canyon, and the Colorado River. There are no water sources on this hike.

### DAYHIKE/OVERNIGHT: Bright Angel Trail to Plateau Point (14)

This stout and justifiably famous trail dives more than 12 miles and 3,000 feet to a photogenic perch offering five-star views of the Colorado River and the second deepest canyon in the United States. For details on this out-and-back route, plus an interactive map and downloadable GPS data, go to backpacker.com/grandcanyon1.

### **DAY/WEEKEND Powell Plateau (15)**

Create your own adventure and enjoy crowd-free vistas of the Grand Canyon from a less-familiar perspective on this remote, pine-forested tableland. It rises a mile above the Colorado River near the canyon's North Rim and offers plenty of camping options. [backpacker.com/grandcanyon2](http://backpacker.com/grandcanyon2)

### **WEEKEND: Deer Creek-Thunder River Loop (16)**

You'll pass one of North America's steepest rivers, the Grand Canyon's slimmest narrows, and some of the Southwest's biggest waterfalls and most inviting swimming holes on this 21.4-mile outing. This route could also very well be the toughest long-weekend hike in Grand Canyon National Park, but you won't regret a single sunny mile. [backpacker.com/grandcanyon3](http://backpacker.com/grandcanyon3)

### **MOUNTAIN-BIKE ALONG THE NORTH RIM (17)**

The Rainbow Rim Trail tracks the edge of the North Rim for 18 miles in Kaibab National Forest, hitting five overlooks with sweeping views of Powell Plateau and the western Grand Canyon. Car camp at Fire or Fence Points, just 100 feet from the edge. No permits required for these primitive sites. (928) 635-8200; [fs.fed.us/r3/kai/recreation/trails/nkrd\\_rainbow\\_rim.shtml](http://fs.fed.us/r3/kai/recreation/trails/nkrd_rainbow_rim.shtml)

## **Essential Gear For The Grand Canyon**

*A complete checklist, plus five picks our testers won't leave home without*

### **Black Diamond Contour Shock Flicklock Compact Trekking Poles**

The very steep, very rugged trails that get you away from Grand Canyon's crowds can pound your quads and tweak your knees. Limit the ache with good trekking poles. These eliminate the pogo stick feel of many anti-shock sticks, and the super-strong elliptical shafts withstood 250 pounds of hiker and gear in testing without a bend or break. Plus, the concave tips added extra bite during low-angle push-offs. The Compact version packs down to 24 inches and extends to 49 inches (good for hikers shorter than 6' 1"). \$130; 1 lb. 6 oz.; [bdel.com](http://bdel.com)

### **MSR Dromedary Bladder**

There are other ways to store water for dry camping in the desert, but none are as packable and reliable as this proven canvas bladder (available in 2-, 4-, 6- and 10-liter models). The 1,000-denier Cordura fabric is virtually puncture-proof and the plastic cap and pour spout never leak. \$33; 7 oz. (4-liter); [msrgear.com](http://msrgear.com)

### **Five Ten Camp Four Boots**

Low-cut and low on the clunkiness factor, the Camp Four offers support for moderate loads and agility for tricky canyon terrain. A polyurethane exoskeleton wraps the heel, providing exceptional lateral stability, and the sticky tread clings spiderlike to sandstone. The nubuck leather upper and rubber toe cap protect against cactus and rocks. The absence of a waterproof membrane increases breathability; one tester reported total comfort on 10-mile, 90-degree days in Arizona's Superstition Wilderness. \$100; 2 lbs. 6 oz.; [fiveten.com](http://fiveten.com)

### **Western Mountaineering Summerlite Bag**

Desert nights can be surprisingly cold—even dropping below freezing in the shoulder seasons—which makes this ultralight sack the perfect choice for the Grand Canyon: It's surprisingly warm. Lofty 850-fill down stuffing and a featherweight nylon shell make the pound-plus bag extremely packable—and true to its 32°F rating. A full-length two-way zipper offers adequate venting on mild nights. \$290; 1 lb. 3 oz.; [westernmountaineering.com](http://westernmountaineering.com)

### **Deuter Aircontact Zero 60+10 Backpack**

Lightweight, air-conditioned, and abrasion-resistant, this pack can handle 40-pound loads in hot, rugged country. A large hydration sleeve inside the packbag, along with two generous water bottle pockets on the outside, provide plenty of liquid carrying capacity for dry trails. It also comes in a women's model. \$145; 4,250 cu. in.; 3 lbs. 5 oz.; (303) 652-3102; [deuterusa.com](http://deuterusa.com)

## **CLOTHING**

### Outerwear

- waterproof/breathable jacket
- fleece jacket or wool sweater
- synthetic hiking pants
- synthetic shorts

### Baselayers

- midweight long john top
- midweight bottoms (optional)
- synthetic briefs
- synthetic sports bra
- synthetic T-shirt
- cotton T-shirt

### Accessories

- wool or fleece hat
- synthetic liner gloves

### Footwear

- camp footwear (optional)
- wool or synthetic socks (2)
- liner socks (2)

### Extras

- sun hat
- personal locator beacon (optional)
- bandanna

## **GEAR**

- internal or external frame backpack
- screen tent or tarp
- down sleeping bag (20°F to 40°F)
- inflatable sleeping pad
- trekking poles
- stove and fuel
- lighter and waterproof matches
- cookset
- utensils, bowl, and insulated mug
- headlamp w/extra batteries and bulb
- 32 oz. water bottles (2)
- water treatment (filter, tablets, drops)
- pocket knife or multitool
- compass or GPS (and map)
- sunglasses
- first-aid kit with personal medications
- stuff sacks
- assorted zipper-lock bags
- lots of sunscreen (SPF 15+)
- lip balm (SPF 15+)
- toilet paper and trowel

# BACKCOUNTRY PERMIT REQUEST FORM

Submit form by fax (928) 638-2125 (preferable) or by mail to:  
Backcountry Information Center, Grand Canyon National Park, PO Box 129, Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Trailhead Vehicles \_\_\_\_\_  
st pl # st pl #

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_ Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
see Large Groups info below

# of People: \_\_\_\_\_ \* (if part of a larger group obtaining more than 1 permit, an Organization Name is required) Beginning Trailhead: South Bass

# of Equines: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending Trailhead: Hermits Rest

To assist us in understanding your intentions, please start with your first backcountry night even if it is not to be reserved through this office. Include rim lodge nights if they fall in the middle of an itinerary. Always include nights at Phantom Ranch lodging, Forest Service land, Tribal land, and at rim stock sites. Dates should be consecutive within itinerary. Only Grand Canyon backcountry use areas (have a 3 digit code) can be reserved with this form.

Nights	Nights	Nights
Date	Date	Date
Use Area or Campsite	Use Area or Campsite	Use Area or Campsite
First Choice 1 <u>Ruby</u> 2 <u>Ruby</u> 3 <u>Slate</u> 4 <u>Boucher</u> 5 _____ 6 _____	Second Choice 1 <u>Red Canyon</u> 2 <u>Horseshoe Mesa</u> 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____	Third Choice 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____

(Itinerary requests can be longer than 6 nights.)

Please do not send me a Grand Canyon Hiking Video (I already have one).

Payment Information: Pay by credit card or check. Payments are non-refundable. Cost: \$10 processing fee plus \$5 per person per night.

--- Exp. Date: /

Total Authorized Permit Cost: \_\_\_\_\_ Cardholder Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Frequent Hiker Membership** Waives the \$10 permit fee for 12 months from date of purchase

I am already a member     
  Please enroll me for 1 year/ \$25     
  No Thanks

**Information, Deadlines, and Constraints:**

Large Groups: In order to preserve the backcountry experience of other visitors and to decrease impacts caused by social trailing, regulations stipulate that all permits are void when a group (i.e. same club, organization, group of friends, etc.) obtains multiple permits for the same campground or use area for the same night. Please contact the Backcountry Information Center for further clarification prior to applying.

Canyon hikers are fully responsible for knowing and obeying all regulations; request a free copy of the Backcountry Trip Planner by calling (928) 638-7888 or visit the backcountry section of our website at [nps.gov/grca](http://nps.gov/grca). Reservations can be made by fax, mail or in person (see contact information at the top of the form). Permit requests are not accepted by telephone. Requests must be postmarked or faxed on the first of the month, four months prior to the proposed start month; please allow 3 to 6 weeks for your request to be processed. Walk-in requests are limited to 3 requests per person and are processed immediately. Permits cancelled at least 3 days in advance will receive a hiker credit (minus a \$10 cancellation fee) valid for 1 year. All fees paid to the Backcountry Information Center are NON-REFUNDABLE! Denied requests will not incur a charge.

The South Rim Backcountry Information Center is open 8 a.m. to 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. MST. Arizona does not observe Daylight Savings Time. Additional information may be obtained by contacting the Backcountry Information Center. If you wish to speak to Backcountry Information Center Personnel, you can call direct at (928) 638-7875 (1 p.m. to 5 p.m. MST, Monday through Friday except Federal holidays). Please realize this is an extremely busy phone line. You may wish to contact us by email: [grca\\_bic@nps.gov](mailto:grca_bic@nps.gov) The North Rim Backcountry Information Center is open from 8 a.m. to 12 noon and from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. from approximately mid-May through late October.

In person requests are also considered up to 4 months in advance as listed above. Walk-in requests are limited to 3 requests per person and are processed immediately. Additional written requests are considered to be hand delivered mail and will be processed randomly with all mail received that day. The South Rim Backcountry Information Center is open 8 a.m. to 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. MST. Arizona does not observe Daylight Savings Time.

Form last revised on: Nov/13/07