

History & Hoodoos Itinerary

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A 5-day adventure from Las Vegas through Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Arches, and Canyonlands national parks.



From Sin City to sanctuary, cleanse your spirit in the cooling waters of the Virgin River on your first stop to Utah's Mighty 5® national parks. This 5-Dayer is a no-nonsense itinerary that is a whirlwind tour of Utah's vast expanses of the most spectacular red rock around, incredible camping and lodging and bright, sunny skies to replenish your vitamin D. From Zion National Park to Arches, the weather is perfect for outdoor adventure.

Explore the itinerary below or [download the PDF](#) now

DAY 1: Las Vegas to Zion National Park

Distance: 158 miles/approximately 2.5 hours

Zion translates to "The Promised Land," and that means for you some of the most spectacular hiking of your lifetime and impossible landscapes you will never forget. Carved by water and time beyond the stretch of the imagination, Zion National Park is a canyon that invites you to participate in the very forces that created it.

Zion National Park's soaring towers and massive monoliths create a spectacular grandeur. Over 100 years old, Zion is Utah's most visited park, welcoming more than 3 million visitors in 2012. There are numerous easy, self-guided trails and more adventurous or strenuous hikes can be found in the park.

Hike: 1) The Emerald Pools in the park is a relatively easy three-mile, round-trip, signature hike and is fun for the whole family. Likewise for the accessible **2)** Riverwalk at the Gateway to the Narrows. Or choose a more strenuous adventure in **3)** the Narrows. Taller and older kids will be able to join you for this hike in the Virgin River itself. With a little extra time, hire an experienced guide and grab a permit and hike even deeper to access the magnificent **4)** Subway section of The Narrows. **5)** Angel's Landing is a strenuous 5 miles and can take several hours, but if you've given yourself the time, this is a powerful hike you'll never forget.

Canyoneering: Zion National Park has become a favorite in this exciting sport. Dozens of canyons offer route finding, rappelling, swimming and hike challenges for beginners to advanced. Permit required.

Camping: All three campgrounds are popular, so make your reservations early. There are also several campgrounds a short drive outside the park. Zion lodging abounds in gateway communities along Highway 9 and in St. George.

Additional park activities: Backpacking, bicycling, birding, horse-back riding, rafting and ranger-led programs.

Get there:

There are actually two entrances to Zion on Highway 9. From Vegas, you'll arrive at the western entrance, 33 miles east of I-15. The northern Kolob Canyons section is accessible off I-15, 18 miles south of Cedar City.

You'll follow the [Zion Park Scenic Byway](#) state Route 9 through the towns of Hurricane, LaVerkin, Virgin, Rockdale, and Springdale. Each town has a special story to share, as the byway carves through the red rock of the Virgin River corridor.

Zion Camping and Lodging:

Side Trips:

State Parks:

[Quail Creek Reservoir State Park](#) boasts some of the warmest waters in the state. [Sand Hollow State Park](#) offers boating and fishing or ride the dunes of Sand Mountain on an off-highway vehicle and camp in one of two developed campgrounds.

DAY 2: Zion National Park to Bryce National Park

Distance to Bryce Canyon: 88 miles/approximately 2 hours

We call it Hoodoo Country. It sounds like "voodoo" for reasons you'll have to see to believe. It all translates into a newfound respect for Mother Nature. Bryce Canyon's view from 9,000 feet (2,743 meters) is unlike any else in the world.

Bryce Canyon National Park is a series of natural amphitheaters sunk into pink cliffs and filled with delicate red rock "hoodoos." The most brilliant hues of the park come alive with the rising and setting of the sun. Summertime offers a myriad of walking/hiking trails and a 37-mile scenic drive overlooking incredible vistas. Bryce Canyon Lodge, a National Historic Landmark, is open April through November.

Drive: Easy drives within the park have spectacular views and you can stop along the way for various scenery. The Scenic Loop is a 38-mile scenic loop in the hours around sunrise or sunset. The park's otherworldly formations and brilliant colors come alive when the sun is low.

Hike: Navajo Loop Trail is a 1.3-mile hiking path wanders through the rock formations, drawing you into the mystical hoodoos' perspective. If you have time, continue along the Queen's Garden trail for the best round-trip access to Bryce Canyon. The trail adds about 1.8 miles (3 km) and rises 320 feet back up to Sunrise Point. Alternatively, the park recommends taking the Queens Garden/Navajo Loop combination from Sunrise Point to the canyon floor then returning up the Navajo Trail. Depending on your pace, the approximately 3 miles (4.6 km) of the combination hike will take about three hours.

At Night: Stargaze under incredibly dark skies at 9,000 feet (2,700 m). The longest active astronomy program in the National Park Service inspires unforgettable awe.

Ranger Program: Park rangers will share interesting facts and activities about the park, including wildlife stories, geologic history, kids interests, full moon hikes, astronomy, and snowshoeing.

Additional park activities: camping, ranger & astronomy programs, and wintertime cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Wake Up in Zion:

You could start your morning off with a leisure stroll and look for the 207 species of birds that call Zion National Park home. (Bird lists available at the visitors centers.) Alternatively, hit the road and get thee to Bryce Canyon!

Getting to Bryce Canyon:

Along the way you will drive the [Mount Carmel Scenic Byway](#) (with an option to stop for a short hike to get one last glimpse of Zion from the Canyon Overlook trail, just past the narrow tunnel) and a stretch of historic Highway 89, which is populated with a number of quaint towns originally established by Mormon pioneers.

Bryce Lodging and Information:

Mental Note:

Come back in winter for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. See the park in relative solitude experience the magic of snow-dusted hoodoos for yourself.

DAY 3: Bryce Canyon National Park to Capitol Reef National Park

Distance to Capitol Reef: 115 miles/About 3 hours.

Start your morning in Bryce Canyon:

Ride: Book a guided ride by horse or mule to the floor of Bryce Canyon, passing a stunning series of rock formations along the way.

Ready for a drive you'll never forget? Utah's All-American Road, a top national designation, awaits. See "Get There" at the right for more information, then get ready for Capitol Reef. *It is no wonder the Navajo called this the Land of the Sleeping Rainbow. The contrast of red Entrada and white Navajo sandstones and the a magnificent rip in the crust of the earth create surreal landscapes unlike any you have seen.*

Capitol Reef National Park splashes color for 100 miles from its northern to southern boundaries. The central geologic feature, the Waterpocket Fold, is a bulging uplift of rainbow-hued sandstone "reefs" and canyons. Much of Capitol Reef is an inviting wilderness of sandstone formations such as Capitol Dome, Hickman Bridge, and Temple of the Sun and Moon in the backcountry of splendid Cathedral Valley.

Rock art petroglyphs are abundant in the midst of Capitol Reef's red rocks and tell the story of the early indigenous people, the Fremont Culture. Close by are the large orchards of Fruita, an early pioneer settlement, and now headquarters for the park, where a variety of fruit may be picked in season. The visitor center and campground are open year-round. Cathedral Valley and other backcountry regions are reached by traveling on dirt roads, so make sure to inquire locally about current road conditions. The park is 11 miles east of Torrey or 37 miles west of Hanksville on Highway 24.

Visit: The old Fruita Schoolhouse and Historic Gifford Homestead dwellings provide a glimpse of 19th-century Utah pioneer farm life, located along Highway 24.

Walk: Take a stroll among the historic fruit orchards in the Historic Fruita District in the park and take some home with you, when in season.

Hikes: The park rangers can inform you on the easy hike to Hickman Bridge to the longer hike to Cohab Canyon. These hike give an up-close look at the desert region with a natural bridge spanning the landscape.

Additional park activities: astronomy programs, backpacking, bicycling, family-oriented, park-educational games, fishing, picnicking, and ranger-guided walks.

Get There:

The 115-mile drive along [Scenic Byway 12](#) is an amazing experience unto itself. Towns along the way have distinct character: Tropic offers motels, restaurants, a grocery store and gas station; Cannonville offers a convenience gas and snack store as well as the BLM Visitor Center; Henrieville is a picturesque town with wonderful photo opportunities; Escalante has full services during the season; and Boulder is a smaller town with several motels and eateries. The last town is Torrey, which serves as the gateway to Capitol Reef National Park. Watch for the pullouts for spectacular views of the Henry Mountains, the Waterpocket Fold, and the glorious slickrock canyons.

State Parks:

[Kodachrome State Park](#) has 67 monolithic stone spires with multihued sandstone layers revealing 180 million years of geologic time. Campgrounds and hiking available.

[Escalante Petrified Forest State Park](#) is located just 44 miles east of Bryce Canyon National Park. Hike along nature trails through the petrified forest, camp along the shores of Wide Hollow Reservoir, or rent a canoe and paddle on its clear waters. [Anasazi State Park Museum](#) is located on the site of an Ancestral Puebloan habitation that archaeologists believe was occupied between A.D. 1050 and 1175, right along Scenic Byway 12 in the heart of Boulder. The museum has a gift shop and picnic tables.

Options along the way:

Visit:

[Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument](#) has vast landscapes which offer visitors a variety of recreational opportunities. From the solitude of lonesome canyons to the excitement of winding rugged backways, the monument is truly a treasure.

Drive: The [Burr Trail Scenic Backway](#) winds through deep slickrock canyons and rolling desert forests while providing rugged access to the eastern portion of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, the southern half of Capitol Reef National Park, and a northern section of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Capitol Reef Lodging and Information:

DAY 4: Capitol Reef National Park to Arches National Park

Distance to Arches: 141 miles/2.5 hours.

Morning Drive in Capitol Reef: The

[Capitol Reef Country Scenic Byway](#) (approximately 90 minutes round trip) through the park's natural wonderland, where mysterious petroglyphs tease the imagination and dramatic slot canyons lure intrepid explorers, with pristine natural beauty and solitude.

Adventure in Arches National Park picks up where 300 million years of patient erosion has resulted in unbelievably dramatic landscapes that look more sculpted by giant mythological beings than the processes of time.

Arches National Park contains about 2,000 windowed arches, towering spires, harrowing hoodoos, and precarious pinnacles on display, including Delicate Arch, perhaps Utah's most iconic feature, which is a must-hike destination in the park. A paved 40-mile scenic drive from the park entrance provides numerous

parking areas for trail access and scenic overlooks.

Guided Tour: [Reserve](#) a tour through the Fiery Furnace. This twisting labyrinth of brilliant redrock fissures and spines is so intricate it is highly recommended to find your way through with a guide.

Hikes: The 1.5-mile hike to Delicate Arch is beautiful, with the end reward of viewing Utah's famous landmark, a famed standing any bucket list. Or hike some of the easy short trails in the park, such as the Park Avenue Trail and trails in the Windows Section of the park, or some of the longer trails in the park, such as Double O Arch, Tower Arch, and Landscape Arch.

Drive: The 36-mile round trip Arches scenic drive can take about 2.5 hours. Be sure to visit the Windows Section, which contains some of the area's largest arches.

Additional park activities: backpacking, biking, camping, canyoneering, ranger-led programs, and rock climbing.

Get There:

Destination: Moab. This world-class destination is less than 2.5 hours away. The visitor center is located five miles north of Moab via U.S. 191.

Option along the way:

[Goblin Valley State Park](#) is located on the northern route, about miles north of Hanksville along S.R. 24 northeast. The vast landscape of sandstone goblins may have visitors wondering if they're on Mars or in Utah.

Lodging and information:

DAY 5: Arches National Park to Canyonlands National Park

Distance: Moab to Canyonlands National Park, Island in the Sky district is 35 miles/approximately 46 minutes. Distance: Moab to Canyonlands National Park, The Needles district is 75 miles.

Imagine wave after wave of deep canyons, formed by the currents and tributaries of Utah's Green and Colorado rivers, divided with towering mesas, pinnacles, cliffs and spires, and spread out over tens of thousands of acres of some of the world's most breathtaking red rock country. Now times that vision by a factor of three. Canyonlands National Park is made up of three distinct districts, each increasingly more remote, more startling and more alluring.

Photography: Early morning and late afternoon bring the best photographic light to the park during the "magic hours." The park website recommends areas, formations, and times for peak photography opportunities.

Must See: Travel Dead Horse Mesa Scenic Byway to [Dead Horse Point State Park](#) for a dizzying view some 2,000 feet above the Colorado River as it winds its way into Canyonlands National Park. You're sure to treasure this panoramic perspective of the river that carved out the canyons. This is a locals' favorite.

Canyonlands National Park is Utah's largest national park with views thousands of feet down to the Green and Colorado Rivers and thousands of feet up to red rock pinnacles, cliffs, and spires. Rivers have sliced the parks into three districts: Island in the Sky is the northern section where visitors can look down to the Colorado River on the east and the Green River on the west; The Needles District is named for its

profusion of red rock spires and sandstone fins; and the Maze District is a remote and jumbled stone playground and requires backcountry use permits year-round.

Walk: Mesa Arch is a relatively easy 30-minute jaunt that leads to an arch perched right on the edge of towering sandstone cliffs and is especially beautiful at sunrise.

Hikes: Island in the Sky, the park's most accessible and visited district of the park, allows for a bird's eye view of this vast and awesome landscape. The "Island" sits atop a mesa over 1,000 feet above the surrounding terrain, the source of its aptly given name. The Grand View Point Trail is a mild two-mile round trip hike to the southernmost edge of the "Island" with expansive views of the complex canyon system formed by the convergence of the Colorado and Green Rivers. This is a must-see!

Drives: A few hours: Drive the park's 20 miles of paved roads and enjoy the spectacular views. Sunrise and sunset are particularly beautiful times of day to enjoy these lofty panoramic views of canyon country. You can drive all the way down to the Colorado River via Lathrop Canyon.

Additional park activities: drives, backpacking, camping, climbing, horseback riding, and ranger-led programs.**Backpacking:** Backpackers can experience the solitude of the park by hiking trails of White Rim (steep & strenuous) and spend the night in the backcountry. Reservations for White Rim campsites and backcountry permits are required.

Getting There:

Major entrances to the park are accessible from U.S. 191. Access to Island in the Sky is 35 miles northwest of Moab and access to the Needles District is 22 miles north of Monticello.

Lodging and information:

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