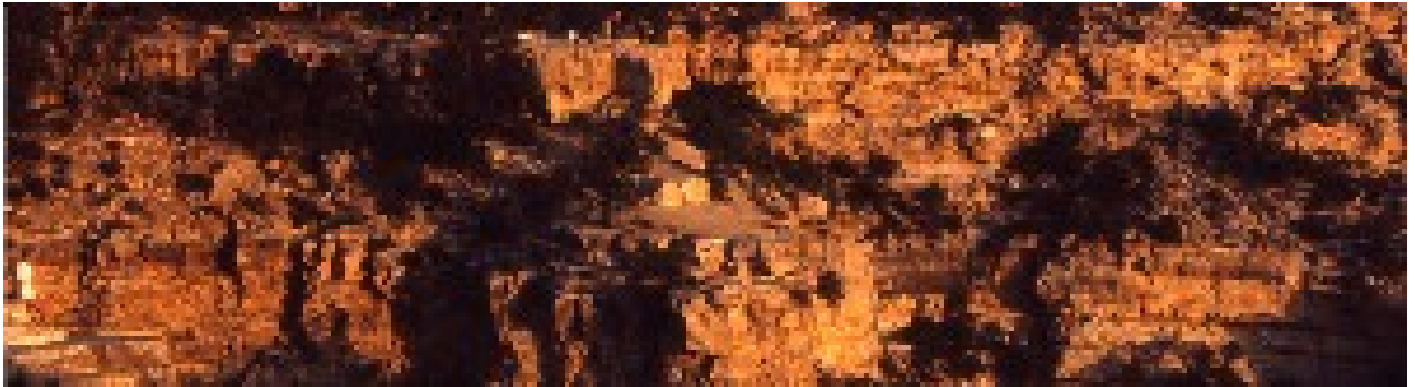


When you're in Las Vegas and decide to make a side trip to the Grand Canyon, there are several options. If you have your own car or a rental, it is at least a six-hour drive to the North or South Rim of the Grand Canyon. Those hours seem like many more when you're driving in the summer Arizona and Nevada heat.

Forty years ago, Vegas was a relatively small city of 100,000, you could've made it in five hours of mostly driving through the empty desert. Now the city and extensive suburbs hold more than a million residents, along with another six million tourists walking and driving around much of the time.

If you start from a downtown hotel, it could take you an hour just to drive through endless city traffic and on to the highway. I wouldn't advise a short Vegas vacation to include a trip to the Canyon unless you sign on for a helicopter or other aircraft ride.



It is 180 miles by air, takes about an hour each way, and costs \$300 a person and up, depending on how much of the Canyon you see. There are also small fixed-wing aircraft tours, but they can't swoop in and out below the Canyon rim like the choppers do. Some of the fancier Canyon trips include overnights in tents or ranch houses, special meals, mule rides down the Canyon floor and other features. Tour companies pick you up at your hotel. Of course, the price can go up and up, depending on the extent and luxuries of the trip.

Bus tours are much cheaper, about \$150 a person, but too confining. Most of your clear Canyon viewing will be when you get out of the bus and walk around the Rim for a short time. We've done most of the Grand Canyon routes, including driving our own car, bus tours and chopper rides. All were very enjoyable, and we intend to do it again soon. You can check the many websites for the great variety of Canyon air and ground trips from Las Vegas.

Depending on the season, when you plan in advance, there are some car rentals and tours that

offer discounts. If you don't want to plan in advance, when you arrive, you can check with your hotel front desk. in-hotel tourist magazines or scan the Vegas phone book. However way you get to the Canyon, it is one of the most breathtakingly scenic experiences you'll ever see in America, or anywhere else in the world.