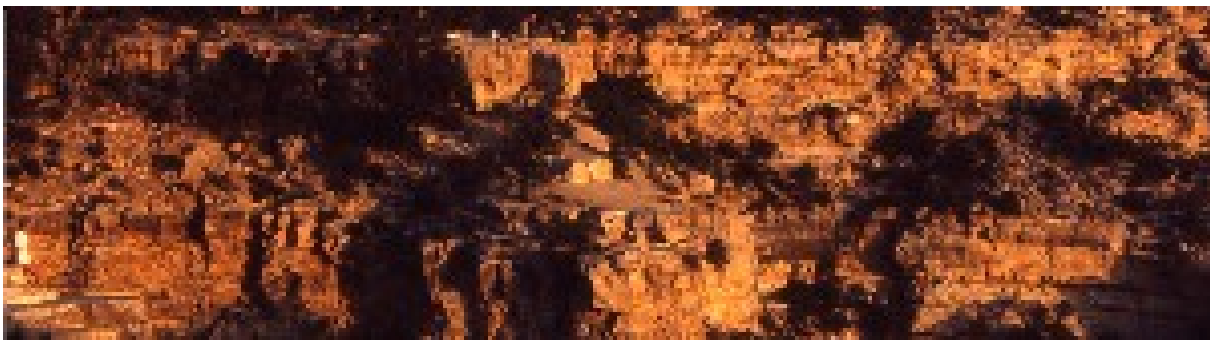


Entrance to the Grand Canyon National Park is 270 miles east of Las Vegas, 247 miles north of Phoenix, and 60 miles north of Flagstaff. The Canyon is one mile deep and 277 miles long. Running along at the bottom, between the North and South Rims, is the Colorado River. It runs for 1,450 miles from Colorado's Rockies to the Gulf of California.

The Canyon's two rims are ten miles apart, and the multi-colored geological rock formations in between, from rim down to river. From the bottom up, they were formed in the Precambrian, Palaeozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic eras.

However, the Grand Canyon isn't just a geological wonder. The reason the U.S. government made it a national park is because it is also a glorious destination for visitors to see and enjoy its many facilities. People don't often think about its ancient history while rafting on the mighty Colorado River or riding mules down the Bright Angel Trail. They also enjoy hiking through the multitude of trails along the North or South Rims or camping and RVing at the many welcoming sites throughout the Canyon area.



For those who come to camp with their own wheeled sleeping quarters, there are a dozen RV campsites nearby and within 30 miles of the Grand Canyon. Nightly hook-ups for RVs cost from \$15 to \$35, and campsites charge from \$10 to \$15. Kaibab Camper Village is the closest RV park to the North Rim, located next to Jacobs Lake. The Mather Campground and RV facility is right next to the North Rim, and is operated by the National Park Service.

The most desired hotels are located directly on the South Rim, the most popular destination for more than 90 percent of the visitors who come to the Grand Canyon. Although, as the bird flies, the distance between the two Rims is only about ten miles, driving distances along the winding roads to get from one to the other can be as long as 200 miles and take at least two hours of rough driving.

For lodging at North Rim facilities, advance reservations are a must. During the summer

season, for visitors to get the hotel of their choice, they may need to book them as early as six months in advance. For rooms and suites with window views out to the Grand Canyon, reservations a year in advance are recommended.

El Tovar Hotel rates run from \$150 to \$250 per night, Grand Canyon Village charges are from \$125 to \$175, Hualapai Lodge rates are \$50 to \$75, and Bright Angel Lodge and Cabins rates are between \$180 and \$300. Some of the facilities do not include private baths with the rooms.

Bright Angel or nearby Maswik Lodge are preferred by visitors who want to combine their stay with the famed mule rides down the Canyon trails to the Colorado River one mile below. The mule corral and starting point for the Bright Angel Trail along the spectacular scenery into the Canyon is right next to the two lodges.

A one-day mule ride costs about \$145 and includes a box lunch. For those who want to overnight at the Phantom Ranch at the Canyon bottom by the Colorado River, the cost is about \$250 per night, including lodging and meals. Because the mule ride is one of the most popular features at the Grand Canyon, reservations must be made at least a year in advance.

Many visitors who make the trek down to the Canyon floor are there to join in on the fun of the great rafting available on the Colorado River. Like the mule rides, rafting isn't for the faint of heart. At times, especially after big rainfalls up-river, the water can be very rough and as cool as 45 degrees.

Rafting can cost as little as \$50 for a two-hour ride over relatively mild water, on up to \$2,500 for a six-day, fly-in excursion that includes all meals, sleeping quarters, days rafting on the river and scenic helicopter flights to and from hotels in Las Vegas and other nearby resort cities.

For those hikers, backpackers, RVers and other Canyon visitors who still have enough energy to party after the sun makes its spectacular exit from the South Rim, there's the Bright Angel Bar. In addition to drinks and snacks in the rustic atmosphere, there are various offerings of foot-stompin' contemporary and traditional live Western music.

The El Tovar Lounge is a great place to be, especially if timed just at sundown. Visitors can sip drinks and munch light dinners on the portico as they watch Mother Nature put on her daily art show. With wildly-sweeping brushes she paints the Canyon walls in various hues of red, orange, purple and finally, blues in the night.

Inside the lounge, there are many man-made features to admire, including rustic wood floors, walls and beams, stained glass and an artistic display of framed paintings, all depicting various Canyon scenes from over the years.

For those who can tear themselves away from the Canyon's glories for the evening, the Maswik Lounge and Sports Bar may appeal to them. If visitors want to interrupt their encounters with Mother Nature outside to find out what's going on in their favorite sport, inside are seven huge TV sets where all kinds of live and re-run athletic events are happening for their pleasure. A variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks are served, and just a few steps away from the

sports bar is a cafeteria, where everything from a light snack to a full meal is available.

Weather at the Grand Canyon is as varied as the changing colors of its rock formations. The North Rim, which reaches almost a mile higher than the South Rim is much more in the temperate zone than in Arizona's warm desert climate. It can get as much as 200 inches of snow in a winter season, and is closed to visitors from mid-October to mid-May. The North Rim makes a great summer destination, because the temperature seldom rises above 75 degrees.

The South Rim is open to visitors throughout the year, and winter weather can bring as much as 20 inches of rain and a few chilly, snowy days. Winter daytime high temperatures may drop to 50 degrees, but most of the year the weather is between 70 and 85 degrees. A mile down on the Canyon floor, like the rest of Arizona, the summer temperatures can soar as high as 105 degrees.

For more information about the Grand Canyon and nearby attractions, call 928-638-7888, or go to the official National Park Service online at <http://www.nps.gov/grca/contacts.htm>