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### NATIONAL PARK GUIDE

# The Only Grand Canyon South Rim Travel Guide You Need To Plan Your Trip



Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona is always at the top of every traveler's U.S Destinations Bucket List...and rightfully so! At a mile deep and up to 18 miles wide, there is no other place in the world as spectacular as the Grand Canyon.

Although I've road tripped to the Grand Canyon four times, that magical sense of feeling like you're standing on the edge of the world at 7,000 feet high never gets old. It's easy to get lost in the park's **geological history** or mesmerized by the **canyon's brilliant colors** swirling around you. There truly is no other feeling like what you'll experience in the Grand Canyon.

And there's an endless list of Grand Canyon things to do and see. Whether you enjoy hiking, camping, geology, wildlife, stargazing, or scenic drives, the Grand Canyon is one of the best U.S. national parks for any kind of visitor looking for an adventure.

**This Grand Canyon travel guide focuses on the South Rim** since it is the more popular tourist destination compared to the North Rim. Since it is more "visitor-friendly", so easily accessible, and open all year round, many first-time visitors explore the South Rim. The Grand Canyon South Rim offers more tourist amenities and facilities than the North Rim without compromising the incredible views and once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

So if you're ready to start planning your trip to the Grand Canyon, here's your ultimate travel guide, packed with **everything you need to know, things to do, what to bring, and other insider travel tips** to make your adventure to the South Rim EPIC!



Watching sunset on the South Rim along at an observation point along the Rim Trail.

## Grand Canyon South Rim Travel Guide & Tips

- [Getting to the Grand Canyon South Rim](#)
- [Best Time to Visit the Grand Canyon](#)
- [Things to Do at The Grand Canyon](#)
- [How Long to Spend at The Grand Canyon South Rim?](#)
- [Grand Canyon Fees, Passes, and Permits](#)
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## GETTING TO THE GRAND CANYON SOUTH RIM

Because of how easy it is to get to, Grand Canyon National Park draws millions of visitors (around 5.5 million people each year) and is consistently ranked one of the top-visited U.S. national parks.

Located in the northwest corner of Arizona, the Grand Canyon borders Nevada and Utah making this national park easily accessible from several major cities. The closest major cities that are perfect for starting your Grand Canyon trip include **Las Vegas**, **Phoenix**, and **Flagstaff**, all of which are a short drive away.

- **Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon:** 4-hour drive
- **Phoenix to the Grand Canyon:** 3.5-hour drive
- **Flagstaff to the Grand Canyon:** 1.5-hour drive

Whether you are planning a day trip to the Grand Canyon from Las Vegas or an adventurous road trip through the famous American southwest, it is worth visiting Grand Canyon National Park.

### Las Vegas To Grand Canyon (4.5-Hour Drive)

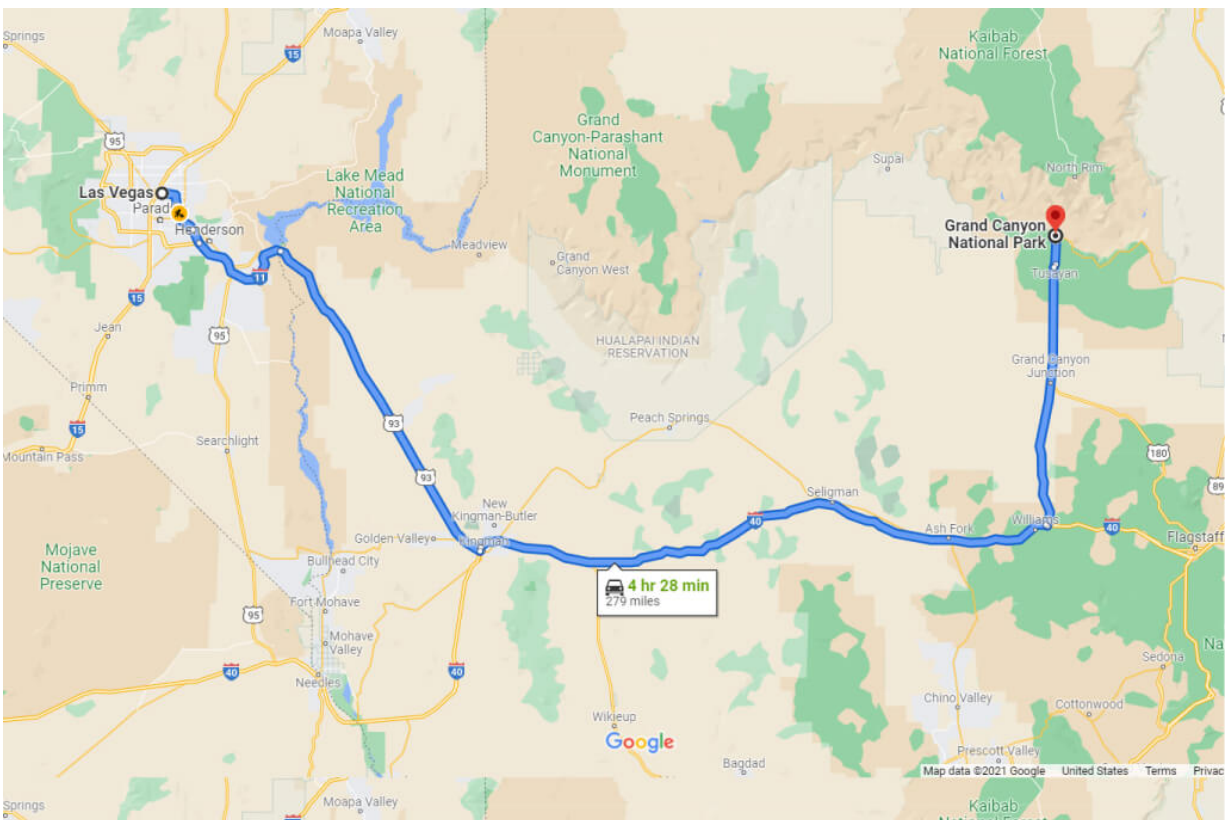


If you're planning on visiting Grand Canyon National Park, Las Vegas is one of the best places to start your trip. The Grand Canyon is only a 4-hour drive from Las Vegas!

Traveling to the Grand Canyon from further away? Las Vegas has an international airport (McCarran International Airport), making it easy and more affordable to travel in and out of.

Because it's such a short drive, Grand Canyon National Park is worth visiting when in Las Vegas. Whether you are looking for a weekend adventure or a day trip from Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon is the perfect outdoor getaway and escape from the hustle and bustle of The Strip.

Have some extra time to enjoy the scenery along your drive? Here are some of the [best stops](#) on your road trip from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon, including [Lake Mead Recreation Area](#) and the [Hoover Dam](#).

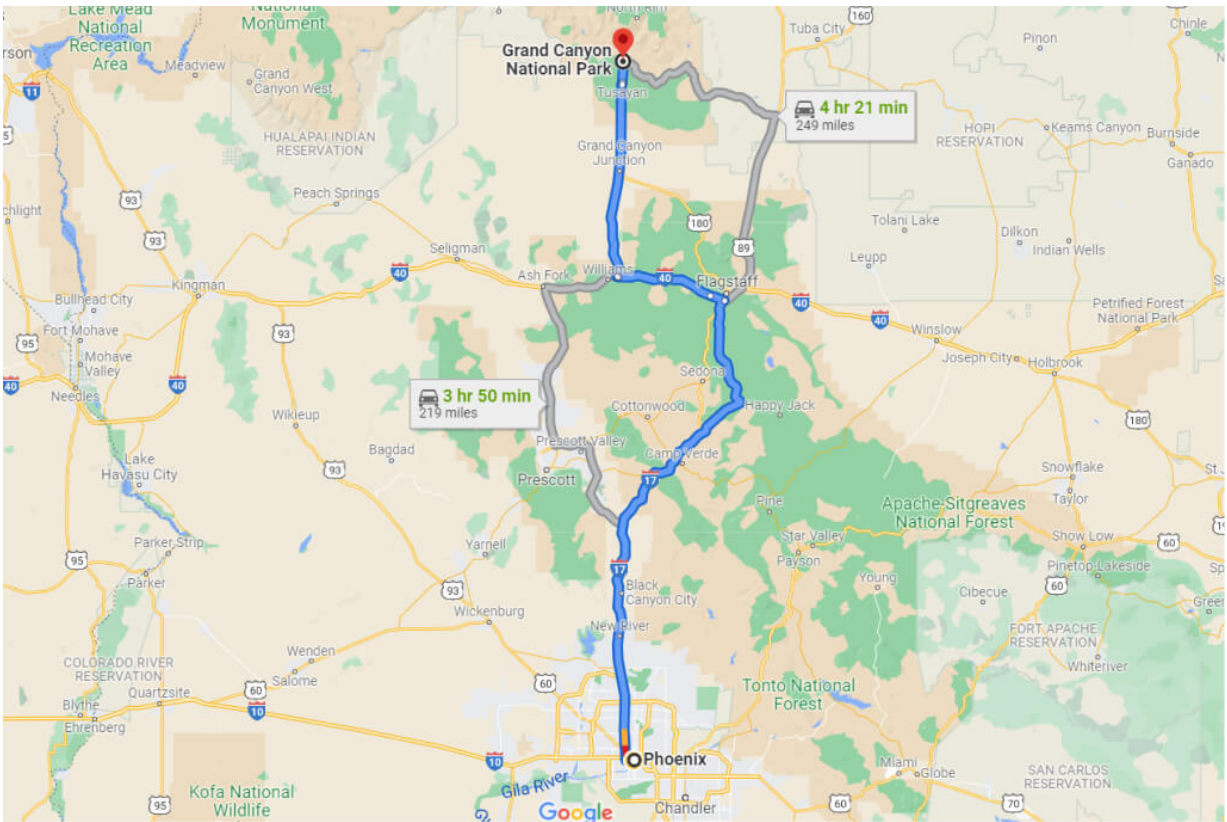


Road trip from Las Vegas to Grand Canyon South Rim.

## Phoenix To Grand Canyon (3.5-Hour Drive)

Road tripping from Phoenix to the Grand Canyon is an incredible experience. Even though it only takes 3.5 hours to drive from Phoenix to Grand Canyon National Park, this scenic drive has several epic [stops to check out](#), including [Montezuma Castle National Monument](#) and [Sedona](#).

Phoenix also has an international airport, making it a great starting point for your Grand Canyon trip if you're flying into Arizona.



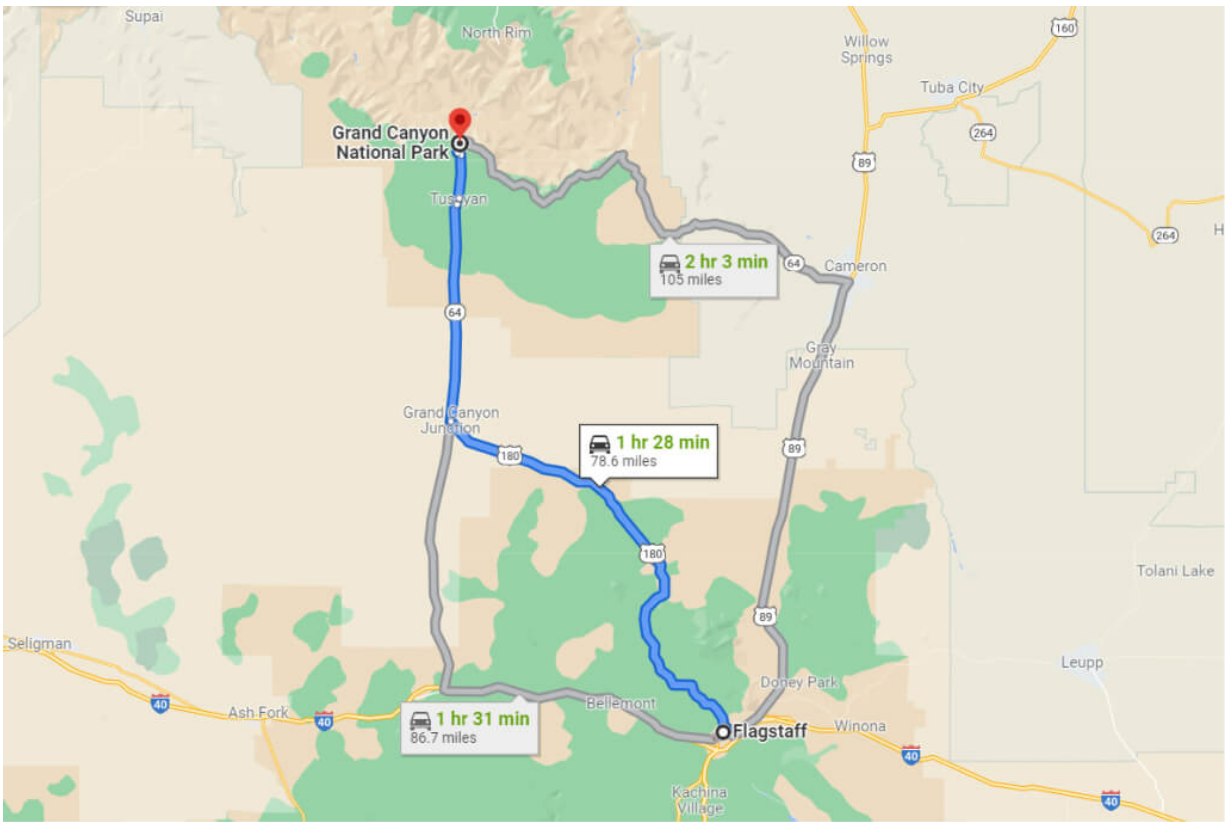
Road trip from Phoenix to Grand Canyon.

## Flagstaff To Grand Canyon (1.5-Hour Drive)

Flagstaff is the **closest major city** near Grand Canyon National Park, located about 80 miles from the entrance to the South Rim.

Since it's only a 1.5-hour drive to the Grand Canyon from Flagstaff, you can easily visit Grand Canyon National Park as a [day trip from Flagstaff](#).

Although it's not large, the Flagstaff airport will be the closest airport to the Grand Canyon.



Road trip from Flagstaff to Grand Canyon.

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## BEST TIME TO VISIT THE GRAND CANYON

Although the Grand Canyon South Rim never closes (it's open year-round), deciding on the best time to visit Grand Canyon National Park depends on what you are looking for.

The Grand Canyon weather varies drastically throughout the year due to tremendous elevation changes. From freezing temperatures and snow that covers the canyons to the hot temperatures and summer thunderstorms.

After traveling in spring, summer, and winter, **my favorite times of year to visit the Grand Canyon are spring and winter!** During spring, mild temperatures and cool, crisp nights make Grand Canyon hiking and camping so much more enjoyable and comfortable. And although I won't be camping or hiking in the winter, I particularly love the spectacular sight of sparkling snow contrasting against the bright red canyons in addition to no crowds.

### Spring On The South Rim

**Mild temperatures** and **manageable crowds** make March, April, and May the best months to visit the Grand Canyon. Temperatures range from 50F - 70F during the day and 25F - 40F at night. Because nighttime temperatures can still drop below freezing in the earlier spring months, expect some snowfall overnight!

This means comfortable Grand Canyon camping weather and pleasant hiking conditions, especially if you are hiking down to the bottom of the canyon. **Temperatures at the bottom of the Grand Canyon can be 20F hotter than at the top of the rim.**

Grand Canyon in early March means less crowds, comfortable hiking weather, and even a chance of overnight snowfall.

## Summer On The South Rim

Because June, July, and August bring the most visitors to the Grand Canyon, expect **large crowds** during the summer. And if you're like me, the frustration of navigating through crowds and trying to find a parking spot is enough to keep me away!

But the crowds aren't the only reason why summer is less than ideal to visit the Grand Canyon. Extreme heat and "monsoon" season make hiking **difficult, unpleasant, and dangerous**, especially if you're planning to hike to the bottom of the canyon. During summer, temperatures at the bottom of the Grand Canyon exceed 100F, and water sources are scarce.

## Fall On The South Rim

Like the spring months, crowds at the Grand Canyon die down during the fall, especially after Labor Day. Temperatures during the day are mild, ranging from 50F - mid-70F. But make sure to layer up at night since temperatures begin to **drop below freezing** by mid to late October.

And don't forget! Daylight starts to get shorter and shorter as fall progresses.

## Winter On The South Rim

A winter trip to the Grand Canyon is an incredible experience and offers magical, unique views of the canyons!

Temperatures on the South Rim in winter range from a low of 20F to a high in the mid-40F. But don't let these cold temperatures deter you from seeing the Grand Canyon South Rim **sprinkled in snow**, one of the most spectacular sights.

Take advantage of the minimal crowds and cheaper accommodations and visit the Grand Canyon in the winter.

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# THINGS TO DO AT THE GRAND CANYON

Even though I've visited multiple times already, every trip I have to Grand Canyon National Park always feels like a brand new experience. As big as the park is, there is an overwhelming number of things to do and see.

But that's a good thing! Whatever kind of traveler you are, Grand Canyon National Park has an adventure for everybody, especially families, kids, and solo travelers.

## First Time In The Grand Canyon

Driving your car or riding the free shuttle buses along the South Rim is one of the best ways to experience the park if it's your first time in the Grand Canyon. Hop out and admire the swirling canyon colors and geological mysteries at the observation points along the way.

Since the South Rim is extremely established, offering navigable roads and plenty of visitor services and facilities, the Grand Canyon is one of the easiest national parks to tour by yourself.

**You don't need to pay for a tour or hire a guide to thoroughly see the best of the Grand Canyon.**

**Feeling more active?** Walk along the South Rim on the [Rim Trail](#) and learn about the geological history of the Grand Canyon.

**Want a unique view of the Grand Canyon?** Hike below the rim on the [Bright Angel Trail](#) or [South Kaibab Trail](#) and see the canyons from a different perspective.

Looking for a list of the best things to do and top attractions you can't miss on your Grand Canyon trip? Check out these 10 unique ways to experience the Grand Canyon.

Riding mules with a tour group is an incredible thing to do with kids, friends, and your family and such a unique way to experience the Grand Canyon.

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## HOW LONG TO SPEND AT THE GRAND CANYON SOUTH RIM?

I've experienced the Grand Canyon in several different ways, including day trips from Las Vegas and long weekends camping on the South Rim. Whatever time you have in the Grand Canyon, it will be worth the visit and make you want to come back for more.

### Have Only A Few Hours On The South Rim?

That's plenty of time to stroll along the [Rim Trail](#) and enjoy several scenic viewpoints along the way, including [Mather Point](#), without feeling like you've missed out on what makes the Grand Canyon...well...GRAND! If you've got time to spare, hit up the [Yavapai Museum of Geology](#) to learn about the Grand Canyon's history or walk along the interactive [Trail of Time](#) and get lost in the Grand Canyon's geological timeline.

### Planning A Day Trip To The Grand Canyon?



A day trip is enough time for you to see everything above as well as experience a quick hike below the rim on part of the [Bright Angel Trail](#) or [South Kaibab Trail](#).

If hiking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon is on your bucket list, dedicate your day to hiking on Bright Angel Trail to [Plateau Point \(12 miles roundtrip\)](#) or South Kaibab Trail to [Skeleton Point \(6 miles roundtrip\)](#).

## How To Spend A Weekend In The Grand Canyon

Having multiple days in the Grand Canyon allows you to do more. You can take your time [driving or biking the scenic routes](#) or [hiking below the rim](#) (maybe even check that Rim-To-Rim hike off your bucket list?). Another advantage of spending a few days on the South Rim is that you can [stargaze under one of the darkest skies in America!](#)

Need some ideas for how to make the most out of your weekend in the Grand Canyon? Check out my [Epic 3 Day Grand Canyon National Park \(South Rim\) Itinerary](#), based on my favorite Grand Canyon trip I recently took for my birthday!

If you have time and are feeling active, hike below the rim for a new perspective of the Grand Canyon.

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## GRAND CANYON FEES, PASSES, AND PERMITS

- **Entrance fee to Grand Canyon National Park:** \$35/vehicle (good for admission for 7 days). The [annual America the Beautiful national park pass](#) is accepted at the Grand Canyon.
  - **Backcountry camping permits:** plan to backcountry camp in the Grand Canyon? Permits are required for [overnight camping](#) anywhere in the park other than the developed campgrounds on the South Rim (including at the bottom of the canyon). Backcountry camping permits cost \$10/permit plus \$8/person per night to camp below the rim and \$8/group per night above the rim.
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## WHERE TO STAY INSIDE GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK SOUTH RIM

Between campgrounds, lodges, and hotels, the Grand Canyon offers a variety of accommodation options if you're looking to stay inside the national park. Because of how popular it is to stay inside the Grand Canyon (imagine waking up to that view!) I recommend booking accommodations [as far in advance as possible](#).

## Grand Canyon Camping

**Camping on the South Rim** - Grand Canyon National Park offers three developed campgrounds on the South Rim. Advanced reservations are required and can be made at [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).

Below is a list of places to camp inside Grand Canyon on the South Rim:

- [Mather Campground](#) - located in Grand Canyon Village. Open year-round to tent and RV camping with 327 campsites available. Reservations can be made up to 6-months in advance.
- [Trailer Village RV Park](#) - Open year-round to RV camping with full hookups. Reservations can be made up to 13-months in advance.
- [Desert View Campground](#) - located 23 miles east of Grand Canyon Village. Open April - October to tents and small RV camping with 50 campsites available. Reservations can be made up to 6-months in advance.

**Camping below the South Rim** - Grand Canyon visitors can experience what life is like at the bottom of the canyon by [camping below the rim](#). Below is a list of campgrounds if you're looking to camp below the South Rim. Each of these campgrounds has a picnic table and food storage cans.

- **Indian Garden Campground** - located 4.8 miles below the South Rim along Bright Angel Trail.
- **Bright Angel Campground** - located 9.9 miles from the South Rim and 14 miles from the North Rim and can be accessed from both the Bright Angel Trail and South Kaibab Trail. Only ½ mile away from Phantom Ranch.

To camp below the rim, you will need to reserve a [backcountry permit](#) (see *Grand Canyon Fees, Permits, & Passes* section above for more info).

In addition, campers are limited to how long they can camp below the rim depending on the time of year.

- **March - October:** camp up to **2 nights** per campground per hike.
- **November - February:** camp up to **4 nights** per campground per hike.

Mather Campground on the South Rim has tons of shade, great spacing between campsites, and facilities for anybody looking for a comfortable place to camp in the Grand Canyon.

## Grand Canyon South Rim Hotels & Lodging

Looking for hotels and lodging to stay inside the Grand Canyon? Below is a list of places to stay on the South Rim. I suggest **booking accommodations as early as possible** since these places can fill up even a year in advance.

- [Bright Angel Lodge & Cabins](#) - historic, cozy lodging located by the Bright Angel trailhead and more moderately priced than El Tovar Hotel.
- [El Tovar Hotel](#) - this historic hotel, opened in 1905, is located right on the South Rim which means you don't have to leave your room for the best views of the Grand Canyon.
- [Kachina Lodge](#) - contemporary style lodging on the rim.
- [Maswik Lodge](#) - contemporary style lodging located near the Bright Angel Lodge on the other side of the railroad tracks.
- [Thunderbird Lodge](#) - family-friendly lodging on the South Rim near the Bright Angel restaurant and El Tovar.
- [Yavapai Lodge](#) - the largest lodging on the South Rim, conveniently located in Market Plaza. Easy access to the general store, deli, and U.S. Post Office.
- [Phantom Ranch](#) - lodging at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, offering both dorm-style accommodations and cabins. Meals are available for purchase. Reservations are made online only through a [lottery system](#), which you can enter **13 months in advance**.

## Affordable Lodging Outside The Grand Canyon

Staying overnight inside Grand Canyon National Park may not only be difficult to find availability for, but it can also be expensive. **For more affordable accommodations, consider staying outside the park in Tusayan, Arizona.** Located 7 miles from Grand Canyon Village, Tusayan, AZ is the closest town to the South Rim entrance with plenty of affordable hotels and lodging near the Grand Canyon.

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# GETTING AROUND GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK

Because of how visitor-friendly Grand Canyon National Park is, it's incredibly easy and convenient for people to get around the South Rim. With developed roads, an established shuttle system, and paved biking trails you can **drive your car, ride the park's free shuttle, or bike** your way through the Grand Canyons!

Depending on what season you visit the South Rim and how you prefer to travel, it may be more efficient to get around one way versus another. Here are my recommendations on how you can best travel around the Grand Canyon:

- **Drive your own car** - this is best if you are visiting during Grand Canyon's low season (November - February) when crowds are minimal. You won't have to waste your precious time fighting for parking everywhere you go. This is another great option if you want to see the park on your own schedule.
- **Ride the free shuttles** - the best way to get around the South Rim when you don't have a car or the park is crowded. With 5 different shuttle lines, you can get to any of the main attractions all year round. The Grand Canyon shuttles make it convenient (and are more environmentally sustainable) for you to get around without having to deal with the frustration of finding parking when it's crowded.
- **Bike the South Rim** - want to skip long shuttle lines, avoid wasting time on parking, or prefer to travel more sustainably? Bike the Grand Canyon? Paved trails, like the 13-mile Greenway Trail, make it easy to cruise along the scenic routes in the South Rim. Don't have a bike? Rent one from [Bright Angel Bicycles](#) near the Visitor Center.

For more detailed information and travel tips on the free shuttle system, scenic drives, and biking trails, check out my [in-depth travel guide](#) on the best way for getting around Grand Canyon South Rim.

Map of shuttle routes in Grand Canyon National Park. Photo courtesy of nps.gov.

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## GRAND CANYON TRAVEL TIPS

Here are some helpful Grand Canyon tips to help you get the most out of your trip. These travel tips are based on my own Grand Canyon experiences!

### Do Everything Early

Grand Canyon is one of the most popular parks for travelers from all around the world, which means crowded trails, limited parking, and no vacancies at hotels or campgrounds.

The earlier you plan your trip, the earlier you can begin to make campground reservations, book accommodations, and reserve your spot on a tour or mule ride. Many campgrounds can be booked up to 6-months in advance while hotels and lodges can be booked up to 13-months in advance. Don't wait until the last minute when availability is extremely limited and prices are more expensive.

Once you are at the Grand Canyon, it's important to start your day as early as possible to avoid lines and crowds. The last time I road-tripped from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon in March 2021, I arrived at the South Rim entrance late morning only to sit for about 30 minutes in a long line just to enter the park.



Starting your day early in the Grand Canyon not only means that it will be easier to find parking spots at the trailheads or near the shuttles but the trails and shuttles will be less crowded.

## Visit During Shoulder Season

Not only is summer in the Grand Canyon incredibly crowded, but it's also extremely hot. The summertime heat will make hiking to the bottom of the canyon **difficult and dangerous**.

Instead, my favorite season to visit the Grand Canyon is during early spring and fall. Temperatures are mild during the day and comfortable at night for camping.

## Beat The Heat

If you're visiting the Grand Canyon during the summer, make sure you're fully prepared to manage the extreme heat. Although there are plenty of facilities for visitors along the South Rim, bring enough water and sun protection.

And if you're day hiking or backpacking into the Grand Canyon, know where water refill stations are along your route and whether they are open or not. **Start your hike as early as possible and know your limits**.

Get an early start in the Grand Canyon. Not only will you beat the heat but you'll also beat the crowds, especially if you're hiking below the rim.

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# WHAT TO BRING ON YOUR GRAND CANYON TRIP

Depending on the time of year you visit Grand Canyon National Park, you'll need to pack accordingly. However, since desert temperatures can swing 30F-40F degrees in a single day, I'd recommend packing clothing that can be layered to prepare for both the hot and cold.

Whether you are self-driving or car camping, below is a **packing guide** for the essential things to bring on your Grand Canyon trip!

- Weather-appropriate clothing and accessories (gloves, beanie, jacket, etc.)
- Refillable water bottle or hydration pack
- Sun protection - sunscreen, hat, sunglasses, UPF clothing
- Sturdy sneakers or hiking boots
- Microspikes (if hiking when there may be ice or snow)

If you're a hiking beginner and looking for a list of what to bring on your hike, check out my post [7 Must-Have Essentials to Bring on Every Hike](#).

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## OTHER GRAND CANYON TRIP PLANNING RESOURCES

- [The Ultimate Guide to Day Hiking Bright Angel Trail](#)
- [What to Bring on Your Grand Canyon Hike](#)
- [How to Plan a Trip Like a Travel Expert](#)



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Molly Chhiv

What's up! This Cambodian kid is an outdoor addict, adventure blogger, & your personal HYPE GIRL. Through the outdoors, I've learned **self-confidence, independence, & mental strength**. My mission through The Adventure Diet is to share the power of the outdoors with you. I want to empower you with tips, tools and inspiration to get outside with confidence and find yourself.

So if you're ready, let's get out there and do this sh\*t!

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