

The Grand Canyon: Travel Feature

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

There are many places that claim to be "wonders of the world" these days, but few are as spectacular as the Grand Canyon. This place really does take your breath away when you see it for the first time.

Although for some people a visit is a once in a lifetime opportunity, the place has such a great pull for me that after two visits, I'm eagerly planning to make it three times lucky next year. One reason for all these visits is that there are just so many different ways to experience the Grand Canyon, literally by air, water and ground.

But getting there is only half the story. The real treasure is what awaits you on your arrival and no photograph you see will ever do the Grand Canyon justice. You just can't comprehend the enormity of the place, not even if I tell you that it's 277 miles long and, during those couple of hundred of miles, on average, it's around 4,000 feet deep. At its widest point, it's 15 miles across, but even when you know all that, you still can't picture the scene that awaits you there.

The Canyon was carved out over millions of years by the Colorado River, which flows through it to this day. That's the first way that you can experience the Canyon, floating down the river on a pontoon boat - something offered by a number of tour operators as part of half and full day packages. It's certainly a method of travel that I intend to try out on our next visit. These shorter trips promise a taste of the longer, multi-day white water rafting adventures that have long been offered along the river.

As the canyon is so deep, there are really two different perspectives that you need to see this place from - one is from the rim, where you can see how the river seems to gash through the landscape for as far as the eye can see and the other is from the canyon floor.

On my first visit, we took a light aircraft flight over the canyon, which gave us a bird's eye view. One of the most stunning sights was as the ground just literally gave way beneath us, with the canyon suddenly appearing from nowhere.

But that's only half the story. When I returned, we took a helicopter flight that lands on the base of canyon floor and that's something that any trip here should include. You get such a different perspective from being down there, as opposed to just viewing the canyon from above.

With flights over and into the Grand Canyon, you need to have a strong stomach. On both occasions, we encountered strong winds and if you're not a fan of flying, this isn't the best way to travel. However, if that doesn't bother you, it is an excellent way to see and do a lot in a short period of time, as driving around here takes many hours to get from one sight to another. Naturally, before you visit you need to think about how much time you'll have to enjoy the canyon. Once you decide that, it's easy to work out which is the best way to travel. Flights allow you to enjoy a half day or full day, whereas if you're driving, at the very least it will be an exceptionally long day, or you may want to allow a few days here to see everything in a more relaxed way.

There are plenty of places to stay in the area, either at Grand Canyon Village or at Tusayan, a few miles south, if you do want to extend your stay, but it's worth booking in advance, as the Grand Canyon is an exceptionally popular place to visit.

So what other options do you have if you want to get into the canyon without taking off? You can either use two legs and hike down or get some four legged help and ride a mule, but you won't be able to do that in a one day visit. Your trip will take at least a few days, even if your aim is just to hike from rim to rim. That 25 mile hike requires a mile of elevation gain to get you out of the canyon!

Most of the five million people who come here annually see the Grand Canyon from their car at overlook points along the South Rim. That's because it's the most accessible part of the area and is open year round, with restaurants, camping and lodging, although some facilities are closed during the winter and in the busy summer months, you definitely need to book ahead.

If you choose to head for the North Rim instead, then you'll only have a few months when it's possible, as it's 1,000 feet higher than the South Rim - it's usually closed by snow from late October to mid May each year. If you want to drive from one rim to the other, be prepared for a long day - although it's only 10 miles straight across the canyon, to drive around it is more like a 200 mile trip!

Unsurprisingly, the Grand Canyon is a National Park and to enter it, you have to pay a fee of \$25 for each vehicle, all of which is invested back into the park and the National Park Service, which maintains it. The charge allows you admission for seven days to both of the rims. If you visit with a tour operator, you shouldn't have to pay the charge.

If you choose to visit on your own, rather than as part of an organized tour, there are some things you should remember. For starters, both

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rims are way above sea level and if you suffer from heart or respiratory problems, you may experience problems and find walking around strenuous. Don't forget to fill up with gas and keep the tank full, as you never know when you'll find the next gas station. And carry lots of water with you in your car, especially in the summer months.

Whichever route you choose to take to get to the Grand Canyon, it's one of those places that you should make every effort to visit if your plans take you to the southwest of America. You won't be disappointed with what you find there - both on the rim of the canyon and 4,000 feet below on its base. And if you're anything like me, you'll also find a reason to ensure that one day to return to see it all again.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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