

Valley of Fire: A Stunning Nevada State Park

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

I don't know about you, but the amazing variety of the natural landscapes across America never ceases to amaze me. Take the [Valley of Fire](#) as one example. Never heard of it? That's not necessarily a surprise, as it's a state park, as opposed to a more famous national park, that's located 55 miles northeast of Las Vegas. It's easy enough to get there on the Interstate 15, with some clear signposting, and it's also a great place to head to for a day away from the mega-hotels and casinos of Vegas.

After discovering just how far away Death Valley was and how hot it was forecast to be, we decided another plan of action was needed. A quick glance at my trusty guidebook mentioned the Valley of Fire in passing and the fact that it was about an hour's drive away, so we opted to give it a go and headed out there, not knowing much about the place. The name sounded intriguing enough and we thought we'd get some good photo opportunities there, and that's exactly what we got -- and much more.

Almost as soon as you enter the park and pay your \$6 admission fee for a car, which we thought was an absolute bargain, the landscape changes in front of you. Suddenly, from a few red rocks in front of you, almost everything that you can see is that beautiful, fiery color. You immediately understand how the red sandstone formations gave this place its name. Formed something like 150 million years ago, the landscape was created from shifting sand dunes during the age of the dinosaurs.

To give you some scale, the Valley of Fire is almost 36,000 acres in size (nearly the size of Walt Disney World), with around 20 miles of roads leading to stunning points of interest.

Our first stop was to see the Beehives, near to the west entrance of the park. Weathered by wind and water, the sandstone has been eroded away into what looks just like life-size beehives. Further along the road, a similar process over many millions of years created the Seven Sisters, so called because they're seven separate blocks of rock all near to each other.

But it's not just about the rock shapes and colors that nature has created here. The Valley of Fire has a fascinating human history as well, and no more clearly can that be seen than at Atlatl Rock. At first sight, it

just appears to be a huge rock, with a set of metal stairs leading up it, but those steps are there to take you to examples of Indian rock art, known as petroglyphs, which date back around 3,000 years. It's immediately obvious exactly what the artists were depicting, with animals, people and trees all in front of you. It's fascinating to think that art can't have changed that much in all that time, as we can still work out today what they were saying with their images.

It was sad to see that they've had to post notices everywhere around this, asking people not to damage the rock with graffiti. I can't imagine what on earth would make people think of doing this, when they have such unique history right in front of them. Hopefully the warnings will work and help to preserve this art for future generations.

In the center of the park, we came across a very well equipped visitor center with lots of interpretative displays, which help to explain the evolution of the Valley of Fire. Looking at the valley today, it was hard to imagine that, many millions of years ago, this whole area was underwater, especially as on the day we visited it was exceptionally hot outside, with the heat hitting us every time we stepped out of the air conditioning of our rental car.

The road behind the visitor center takes you up to an area called Rainbow Vista, and with good reason. The views here are a photographer's dream. I could've stayed there for hours, but I knew that if I did, then I would just take more and more photos of exactly the same area. The multi-colored sandstone in front of you just stretches for miles and miles and the silence is almost deafening. It's amazing how used we get to ambient noise, perhaps from the buzz of a busy road. Here, there's just nothing, apart from the sound of conversation from other visitors and the sound of car engines as they arrive and leave.

Exactly the same thought struck us as we made our final stop at what seemed to be the park's main icon, Elephant Rock. You won't be surprised to learn that it got its name because it does indeed look just like an elephant. I have to say that sometimes I find things like this don't live up to their name, but here it did.

Valley of Fire is open year round, with the Visitor Center open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. If you want to visit the park, it's worth keeping in mind that winters are usually milder. We were there in October and found the heat to still be oppressive, but during the summer, temperatures usually exceed 100° and can top 120°.

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

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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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