

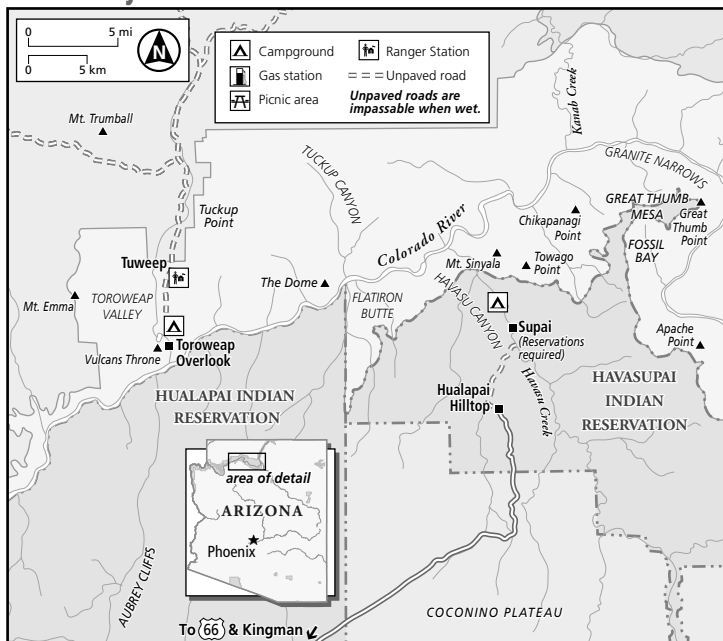
Welcome to the Grand Canyon

Years ago, upon completing a hike in the Grand Canyon, I stood at the rim, gazing one last time at the colors below, and vowed right then to inform everyone I knew how lucky they were to be alive. My good intentions lasted for only a day, but it was an unforgettable one, and when it was over I realized that the canyon had moved me the way religion moves fervent believers. At the time I wasn't sure why. Only after I began work on this book did I begin to understand all those things that, for me, make the canyon not just a beautiful place, but a sacred one as well.

When I returned to the canyon, I was awed by the terraced buttes and mesas, rising thousands of feet from the canyon floor and dividing the many side canyons. Early cartographers and geologists noticed similarities between these pinnacles and some of the greatest works of human hands. Clarence Edward Dutton, who scouted the canyon for the U.S. Geological Survey in 1880 and 1881, referred to them as temples and named them after eastern deities such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. François Matthes, who drew up a topographical map of the canyon in 1902, continued the tradition by naming Wotans Throne and Krishna Temple, among other landmarks.

The temples not only inspire reverence but also tell the grandest of stories. Half the earth's history is represented in the canyon's rocks. The oldest and deepest rock layer, the Vishnu Formation (the name is debated by geologists), began forming 2 billion years ago, before aerobic life-forms even existed. The different layers of sedimentary rock that piled up atop the Vishnu tell of landscapes that changed like dreams. They speak of mountains that really did move, eroding into nothingness; of oceans that poured forth across the land before receding; of deserts, swamps, and rivers the size of the Mississippi—all where the canyon now lies. The fossils in these layers illustrate the very evolution of life.

Grand Canyon Overview



Many of the latest products of evolution—over 1,500 plant and 400 animal species—still survive at the canyon today. If you include the upper reaches of the Kaibab Plateau (on the canyon's North Rim), this small area of northern Arizona includes zones of biological life comparable to ones found as far south as Mexico and as far north as Alaska. The species come in every shape, size, and temperament, ranging from tiny ant lions dwelling on the canyon floor to 1,000-pound elk roaming the rims. And for every species, there is a story within the story. Take the Douglas fir, for example. Once part of a forest that covered both rims and much of the canyon, this tree has endured since the last ice age on shady, north-facing slopes beneath the South Rim—long after the sun-baked rim itself became too hot and inhospitable.

As much as I like the stories, I also enjoy the unexplained mysteries. The web of ecological cause-and-effect among the canyon's species is too complicated for any mortal to untangle. It leaves endless questions to ponder, such as why the agave blooms only once every 20-odd years. Similarly, the canyon's rocks withhold as much

The Grand Canyon's Concessionaire

Xanterra Parks & Resorts (☎ 888/297-2757 or 303/297-2757) is authorized to provide visitor services to Grand Canyon National Park through 2012. As the park's concessionaire (and the largest park and resort management company in the United States), it operates all lodging and dining on both the South and North Rim, as well as motor coach tours and mule rides on the South Rim. Xanterra offers online reservation services for visitors to the Grand Canyon at www.grandcanyonlodges.com or www.xanterra.com, where you can also learn more about the company.

always productive, things. I think about the prospectors who clambered through the canyon in search of precious minerals, and then wonder about the ones who stayed here even after their mines proved unprofitable. I wish I could have met icons like Georgie White, who began her illustrious river-running career by *swimming* 60 miles down the Colorado River in the western canyon; and Mary E. Jane Colter, the brilliant architect who aspired to create buildings that blended with the landscape, going so far as to grow plants out of the stone roof at the Lookout Studio. I'd still like to meet David Brower, who, as executive director of the Sierra Club, helped nix a proposal to dam the Colorado River inside the Grand Canyon. He did so by running full-page ads in the *New York Times* that compared damming the canyon to flooding the Sistine Chapel.

Theodore Roosevelt also belongs in this group. During his 1903 visit, the canyon moved him to say: "Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it. What you can do is to keep it for your children, your children's children . . . as the one great sight which every American . . . should see." That wasn't just talk. He backed up his words, using the Antiquities Act to declare the Grand Canyon a National Monument in 1908. Congress established Grand Canyon National Park in 1919.

Although most visit the park for recreational reasons, the canyon has a daunting, even ominous side. Everyone, no matter how many times they enter it, must negotiate for survival. One look at the clenched jaw of a river guide as he or she rows into Lava Rapids will remind you that the canyon exacts a heavy price for mistakes. And the most common error is to underestimate it. Try to escape, and it becomes a prison 10 miles wide (on average), 277 (river) miles long, and with walls 4,000 feet high. The canyon's menace, for me, is part

of its allure—a reminder of man's insignificance when measured against nature's greatest accomplishments.

Clearly, you can suffer here, but reward is everywhere. It's in the spectrum of colors: The Colorado River, filled with runoff from the Painted Desert, runs blood red beneath slopes of orange Hakatai Shale; cactus flowers explode in pinks, yellows, and reds; and lichens paint rocks orange, green, and gray, creating art more striking than the works in any gallery. It's in the shapes, too—the spires, amphitheatres, temples, ramps, and cliffs—and in the shadows that bend across them before lifting like mist. It's in the myriad organisms and their individual struggles for survival. Perhaps most of all, it's in the constancy of the river, which, even as it cuts closer to a beginning, reminds us that all things break down, wash away, and return to the earth in time.

1 The Park Today

The new millennium finds Grand Canyon National Park considering an ambitious plan for altering the park. This plan, known as the **General Management Plan**, dates to the tail-end of a 2-decade period during which park visitation more than doubled to 4.6 million. By the mid-'90s, the park's resources were badly strained. On a typical summer day, some 6,500 vehicles drove to the South Rim, only to find 2,400 parking places. Faced with gridlock, noise, and pollution from emissions during high season, the park planned major changes, designed to accommodate the 6.8 million annual visitors that the park, at that time, expected to receive in 2010. However, a decline in the number of tourists to the park following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and fuel price increases has left implementation of the General Management Plan uncertain.

Under the plan, private vehicles would eventually be barred from most areas along the South Rim, including the historic district in Grand Canyon Village, Hermits Road, and all but one overlook (Desert View) on the Desert View Drive. Instead of driving, visitors would travel by light rail from a new transportation staging area in Tusayan (just south of the park's south entrance) to a larger orientation center—the Canyon View Information Plaza—inside the park near Mather Point. A second light rail line would link the Canyon View Information Plaza with the Village Transit Center in Grand Canyon Village. At both the Canyon View Plaza and the Village Transit Center, visitors would be able to board shuttles that would transport them to other developed areas on the South Rim.

Private cars would not be banned altogether from this part of the park. Visitors camping or staying in lodges and campgrounds away from the rim would be allowed to drive directly to those areas. Those staying nearer the rim would be driven by van from parking areas farther out. Visitors would also be able to drive through the park on Highway 64, a through-road connecting the towns of Williams and Cameron, Arizona. However, they would not be allowed to park at the overlooks west of Desert View.

The plan also calls for an extensive “greenway” trail for cyclists, walkers, and equestrians, four miles of which have already opened. Paved in places, the plan is for the greenway to eventually cover 38 miles on the South Rim between Hermits Rest and Desert View. Another 8-mile branch of the greenway would link Tusayan with the Canyon View Information Plaza. An additional 28 miles may eventually be constructed on the North Rim.

In time, the new transit and trails system should help the National Park Service achieve its goal of restoring the rim areas to a quieter, less polluted state. Visitors hoping to learn in depth about the park would be able to do so in a cluster of historic buildings in Grand Canyon Village known as the **Heritage Education Campus**. Other parts of the General Management Plan move commercial activity and housing away from the rim and, in some cases, out of the park.

The park has been able to pay for some of the elements of the General Management Plan itself, using a percentage of the fees charged for admission and other park usage. But the most ambitious elements, including light rail service, require appropriations from Congress. The light rail plan alone would cost nearly as much as the entire construction budget for the Park Service. Congress may have lost an impetus for funding major improvements when visitation to Grand Canyon leveled off in the late 1990s and declined after September 11, 2001.

At present, visitors can ride the park’s existing shuttle bus system around Grand Canyon Village, to all overlooks on Hermits Road, and to Yaki Point and Yavapai overlooks. Yet automobiles still strongly affect the visitor experience in most of the park’s developed areas, at least in peak season. As long as most people still drive into the park, the visually stunning **Canyon View Information Plaza** will look strangely out of place. As a major element of the General Management Plan, the plaza was designed as a mass transit center and lacks automobile parking.

2 The Best of the Grand Canyon

Choosing the best things at Grand Canyon is like naming the best thing about your true love. However, I've done my best to isolate a few of the best places and ways to appreciate the park's larger beauty.

- **The Most Dramatic Rim View: Lipan Point** (on the Desert View Drive, South Rim). Above a sweeping curve in the river and with views far downstream to the west, Lipan Point is the most dramatic and easily accessible place to view the canyon, as well as a superb spot to watch the sunset. The **Unkar Delta**, one of the most archaeologically rich areas in the park, is visible directly below the overlook. See "Desert View Drive" in chapter 3. That said, all of the points overlooking the Colorado River along the rim offer dramatic views. These include Pima, Mohave, Hopi, Moran, Lipan, and Desert View.
- **The Best Scenic Drive: Desert View Drive** (South Rim). You'll see more of the canyon on this route than on the canyon's other two main drives (The Cape Royal Rd. and Hermits Rest Route). The westernmost overlooks open onto the monuments of the central canyon; the eastern ones have far-ranging views of the Marble Platform and the northeast end of the canyon. Along the way, you can stop at the 825-year-old Tusayan Pueblo, which was once occupied by the Ancestral Puebloans. The Watchtower, a historic building artfully fashioned after towers built by the Ancestral Puebloans, is a perfect place to finish the drive. See "Desert View Drive" in chapter 3.
- **The Best Historic Building: Hopi House** (next to El Tovar hotel). Blending almost seamlessly into the surrounding landscape, this captivating house was designed by Mary Colter in the early 20th century to house Hopi artisans and sell their wares. Although the building no longer serves as a residence, it still sells Native American arts and crafts. See "Historic & Man-Made Attractions" in chapter 3.
- **Best Place to Picnic: Vista Encantada** (on the North Rim's Cape Royal Rd.). These picnic tables have canyon views and provide a convenient stopping point when you're visiting the overlooks on the Cape Royal Road. You'll find few tables on the South Rim, so there you'll need to be more creative. If the weather is calm, pack a light lunch and walk along one of the rim trails until you find a smooth rim-rock or bench on which to picnic. See "North Rim: Cape Royal Drive" in chapter 3.

- **The Best Bike Ride: Hermits Road in summer** (South Rim). During high season, when this road is closed to most private vehicles, motorized traffic consists mostly of the occasional shuttle bus. Between shuttles, you'll often have the gently rolling road and some of the overlooks to yourself. See "Other Sports & Activities" in chapter 4.
- **The Best Rim Walk: Rim Trail between Yavapai and Mather Points.** This walk along the rim affords views straight down into the canyon. Paved and smooth, it lets walkers enjoy the scenery without worrying too much about their footing. Its 10-foot width allows groups of friends to stroll side by side. And, given its location between two of the park's busiest overlooks, it can be surprisingly quiet. On the North Rim, try the Widforss Trail. See "Trails on the South Rim" in chapter 4.
- **The Best Day Hike Below the Rim: Plateau Point Trail** (accessible via the Bright Angel Trail). With views 1,300 feet down to the Colorado River, Plateau Point is a prime destination for fit, well-prepared day hikers. The hardest part of this 6.1-mile (each way) trip is on the Bright Angel Trail, which descends 4.6 miles and 3,060 vertical feet from Grand Canyon Village to Indian Garden. The trail head for the Plateau Point Trail is a half-mile west of Indian Garden on the Tonto Trail. From there, it's a smooth and relatively level stroll to the overlook. This is an especially tough hike in summer, when you may not want to venture further than Indian Garden. See "South Rim Corridor Trails" in chapter 4.
- **The Best Corridor Trail: North Kaibab** (North Rim). For people backpacking into the canyon for the first time, this is a scenic, less-crowded alternative to the South Rim corridor trails. During its 14-mile-long, 5,850-vertical-foot descent from rim to river, the trail passes through vegetation ranging from spruce-fir forest to Sonoran desert. Cottonwood Campground lies halfway down. The trail ends near Phantom Ranch, the only lodging inside the canyon within the park boundaries. See "North Rim Corridor Trail" in chapter 4.
- **The Best Active Vacation: Oar-powered raft trips through the Grand Canyon.** Expensive and worth it, these trips negotiate thrilling rapids on the Colorado River. Between the rapids, they move slowly and quietly enough to reveal the subtle magic of the canyon. During stops hikers have access to some of the prettiest spots anywhere. See "Other Sports & Activities" in chapter 4.

- **The Best RV Park: Kaibab Camper Village** (Jacob Lake, ☎ 928/643-7804). For once, an RV park that doesn't look like the lot at a drive-in movie. Old growth ponderosa pines and views of Jacob Lake (the tiny pond) make this RV park, located about 45 miles from the North Rim entrance, the best by far in the Grand Canyon area. Campers can pick up a few supplies at nearby Jacob Lake (the motel, store, gas station, and restaurant). Now it even has showers. See p. 107.
- **The Best Car Campground in the Park: North Rim Campground** (☎ 800/365-2267). The campsites along the rim of Transept Canyon have lovely views amidst ponderosa pines and are well worth the extra \$5. Ponderosa pines shade all the sites, which are far enough apart to afford privacy. For hikers, the Transept Trail begins just a few yards away. If you're on the South Rim, try **Desert View Campground** (p. 99). See p. 102.
- **The Best Historic Hotel: El Tovar Hotel** (Grand Canyon Village, ☎ 928/638-2631). Made of Oregon pine, this grand 1905 hotel rises darkly above Grand Canyon Village on the canyon's South Rim. Inside, moose and elk heads, copper chandeliers, and rooms with classic American furnishings add to its almost-spooky character. By far the most upscale in the park, this hotel received a significant face-lift for its 100-year anniversary. See p. 110.
- **The Best Bar in the Park: El Tovar deck** (at El Tovar hotel, ☎ 928/638-2631). It's hard to imagine a more inspirational view of the South Rim than that from the deck of El Tovar. A draught beer come sunset could be the defining moment in your quest to better know the Canyon. Light dishes are offered, as well. See p. 113.
- **Best Place to Watch the Sunset: Westernmost Deck of Grand Canyon Lodge.** While the sun disappears behind the pines along the rim, you can soak up the colors on the horizon while sitting in a comfortable chair and sipping a beverage from the nearby saloon. After the sun sets, warm up by the immense outdoor fireplace on the lodge's eastern deck. For unobstructed views, go to Lipan Point on the South Rim or Cape Royal on the North Rim. See p. 117.
- **The Best Accessible Backcountry Destination: Waterfalls of Havasu Creek.** Surrounded by the red-rock walls of Havasu Canyon, these turquoise-colored falls seem to pour forth from the heavens into the cauldron of Grand Canyon. Travertine

dams the creek in places, forming many seductive swimming holes. The 10-mile hike or mule ride from Hualapai Hilltop helps ease you into this area, home to the Havasupai Indians. See “Havasupai Canyon & Supai” in chapter 7.

- **The Best B&B: The Inn At 410 Bed & Breakfast** (Flagstaff, ☎ 800/774-2008 or 928/774-0088). Your journey doesn’t end at the door of this inn. Inside, each of the elegantly decorated rooms recalls a different setting. One room celebrates the cowboy way of life, another recalls a 19th-century French garden, and a third is fashioned after a turn-of-the-20th-century Mexican courtyard. See p. 130.
- **The Best Expensive Hotel: Best Western Grand Canyon Squire Inn** (Tusayan, ☎ 800/622-6966 or 928/638-2681). Located just a mile outside the park, this hotel offers many of the amenities generally associated with resorts in big cities. Here, you’ll find the town’s best dining (in the elegant Coronado Room), its liveliest watering hole (downstairs, in the bar that locals call “The Squire”), and its only tennis courts (for guests)—not to mention luxuries such as a beauty shop and concierge. The deluxe rooms in the main building are the area’s best. See p. 137.
- **The Best Expensive Restaurant: Cottage Place** (Flagstaff, ☎ 928/774-8431). The quiet serenity of Flagstaff’s most elegant restaurant is ideal for special occasions, a wonderful spot to peacefully celebrate your vacation to the Southwest. Original artwork decorates three rose-colored rooms, where soft conversations are heard from the candlelit tables. Chateaubriand for two is Executive Chef/Owner Frank Branham’s signature dish. See p. 133.
- **The Best Moderately Priced Restaurant: Pine Country Restaurant** (Williams, ☎ 928/635-9718). The pie here is so good, many locals order dessert first. Most of the straightforward dinner entrees—baked chicken, pork chops, and fried shrimp—go for under \$8. See p. 148.
- **The Best Inexpensive Restaurant: The Black Bean Burrito Bar and Salsa Company** (Flagstaff, ☎ 928/779-9905). Get a burrito as heavy as a hand weight, at a price that makes it feel like a handout. The food is ready within seconds after you order, making this a great place to get a quick fix after a long day. See p. 135.

- **The Best Steakhouse: Winchester** (Williams, ☎ 928/635-2220). It's not cheap, but the Winchester is quickly earning a reputation as the best restaurant in Williams, serving outstanding organic Black Angus beef and offering an upscale, country atmosphere that is impressive, different, and fun. Choose your cut from a meat case and then watch it slowly sear on an open mesquite grill. See p. 149.
- **The Best Area Museum: Museum of Northern Arizona** (Flagstaff, ☎ 928/774-5213). This museum has one of the most extensive collections of Native American art in the country. Both functional and striking, the artifacts are compellingly displayed, in exhibits that illuminate the close relationship between the indigenous people and the land of the Colorado Plateau. There's no better place to begin learning about the area. See p. 127.
- **Best Place to Escape the Crowds: Anywhere More than a Half-Mile from the Nearest Parking Lot or Shuttle Bus Stop.** The vast majority of park visitors seldom venture farther than a half-mile from a parking area. If you're willing to walk a half-mile or more, whether it's on a corridor, rim, or wilderness trail, you'll begin to experience some quiet and solitude. This is one of my favorite ways to enjoy the canyon.