

Utah Canyons Trip

The following Utah National Parks are must-see:

- Capitol Reef
- Bryce
- Zion
- Arches
- Canyon Lands

Also, the Grand Canyon and Canyon de Chelly (pronounced “Shey”) in northern Arizona, and Mesa Verde in nearby Colorado are worth visiting, and are covered in this piece. Dinosaur National Monument, which bridges Utah and Colorado, is mentioned without detail since we did not get there.

The first three parks are in south central Utah and the last two are in southeastern part of the state.

As far as travel is concerned, if one is flying there are two good options – Las Vegas, Nevada and Salt Lake City, Utah. Assuming you are coming and going from the east coast, there are currently non-stop flights to Las Vegas from Newark and maybe other NYC airports, and non-stop flights to Salt Lake City from Newark and Boston at least. Many people use recreational vehicles when visiting these places. This piece won’t get into details on that option except to say that RV parks can be crowded and reservations may be necessary.

The south central parks are stacked up from south to north with Zion the southernmost and Capital Reef the northernmost. Should you fly into Las Vegas it is about 2.5 hours to Zion and about 2 hours from Zion to Bryce and a like amount from there on to Capitol Reef. You can visit these parks north to south or vice versa, but if north to south you might want to fly into Salt Lake City and drive south to Capitol Reef and continue on from there.

Regardless of whether you start out in the south central or southeast you’ll have to drive across the state in between. While in eastern Utah you’ll want to consider visiting Dinosaur National Monument in northeastern Utah (do some googling), especially if you are bringing kids along.

As long as you are visiting the Utah Canyons you should head south into Arizona and visit the Grand Canyon, and while in that area visit Canyon de Chelly (pronounced “Shea”). The Grand Canyon is a must-see, well named as it is the grandest of all of the sights in this region, and in fact maybe the grandest place on planet earth.

There are a number of other parks in Utah. One we suggest is small Red Canyon, which is near Bryce. Others are surely interesting, but we have no first hand knowledge of them. Also, do not expect your sole viewing experiences to be in the parks. The drives from one to another are filled with amazing features.

Zion – The splendors of the surrounding mountains are indescribable, but no trip to Utah or the U.S. for that matter should exclude Zion. One can visit the park by bus, jeep, van, mule, or car depending on the time of year. It is quite hot in the summer. For the fit, it is a hiker's paradise.

We stayed at the Driftwood Lodge which has an excellent affiliated restaurant. Oscar's, just down the way, is also highly recommended. We had breakfast and lunch there and give it good marks. We liked Driftwood but are sure there are a number of other good options right there in Springdale near the park entrance. Two that others suggested are Desert Pearl and Cliffrose Lodge and Gardens.

Bryce – This is the favorite park of many. Thousands of hoodoos (look them up) are a visual treat you will never forget. You can visit Bryce's overlooks by bus or car. Horseback is an outstanding in-canyon option as well. The Lodge is an impressive hotel with a nice restaurant. The video at the Visitor's Center is recommended. The most striking views are from Inspiration Point. One can see all Bryce offers in a few hours if time is limited. One could, e.g., leave Zion early, visit Bryce, and drive on to spend the night at Capitol Reef. Or you could do this in reverse. You might want to take a box lunch.

Capital Reef – We did not visit this park but regret not seeing it. Visually stunning from all reports. For lodging, Sky Ridge B&B in nearby Torrey was strongly recommended by folks in the know.

Drive from Zion to the Grand Canyon, and the Grand Canyon – You can drive through the Park or go west to Hurricane (pronounced "Hurricun" locally) where you take Rte 89S then right on 64W just past Cameron, AZ. We suggest an AZ roadmap. If you go through the tunnel to the east it is more direct but you can run into serious delays getting out of the Park. The 89S drive is unbelievably scenic (Vermilion Cliffs), almost as awesome as Zion or Bryce and in many places their equal. We stayed at the impressive Best Western Premier Grand Canyon Squire Inn on Rte 64 South 6 miles outside of the south entrance to the Park. The short Grand Canyon movie at nearby IMAX is terrific.

Took a 7 hour Canyon Dave Tour (van) which included a nice lunch and snacks plus lots of information about the Native Americans who arrived here some 4,000 years ago. There are at least 50,00 sites in and around the canyon where they settled. \$318.56 for two but not that much more than other options and from what we could find the extra was probably worth it. If on a careful budget there is

a shuttle bus to the same or similar overlooks but without the lectures on geology, history, biology, etc. The Grand Canyon is one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Do it!

Canyon de Chelly – A 4+ hour drive from the Grand Canyon. The scenery along the way was out of this world. Nothing like it in the east! We stayed at the rustic Thunderbird Lodge in Chinle, AZ. Arrived in time for a 3 hour jeep trip with a Navajo guide via Beauty Tours. The entire time was spent in the sandy bottom of the Canyon, the soaring walls of which went straight up as much as 1,000 feet. We observed a number of cave dwellings made of mud and brick, each maybe 40 feet or more up from the base of the canyon. After having viewed other canyons from the rim of each, it was interesting to be right down inside one. The canyon was occupied by about 200 wild horses. Five Navajo families still live in the canyon, on private land. Some of the horses were owned by them but nonetheless grazed wild, never ridden.

On to Moab, Utah, a 3 hour+ drive. The archeological wonders along the way are as good as some of the best in the parks. Moab is a jumping off place for visits to Arches and Canyon Lands. Our visit to the latter was done by partly off-road four wheeling with a driver/guide. Touring Canyon Lands is best done by this means of transportation, but we suggest caution as some of the trails/unpaved roads can be treacherous. One we barely managed to negotiate was a washed out spot; it took six attempts. We were actually surprised when our vehicle managed to get through. The fantastic sights are so numerous here that one should be able to have a satisfactory tour of the park without getting terrified like this. River rafting in this area is a cool option. You can pick half day or all day trips, and either relatively modest rapids or more aggressive ones. We stayed at beautiful Sorrel River Ranch right on the Colorado River, but don't recommend it under present management.

Arches may be a disappointment, curiously, if one is only looking for arches. There are in fact a number of spectacular ones, but the majesty of the rest of the formations there would be worth the visit even if there were no arches. It is so beautiful that it is hard to describe. We spent less than 3 hours in this special place, short but sweet! Had we taken the trails, some lengthy and steep, it probably would have taken twice as long. With afternoon and early evening temperatures in the low 90s (September 19), we didn't want to do much hiking.

The drive to Mesa Verde, just across the state line in Colorado, takes 2+ hours. The first 50 miles was a retracement of a portion of the drive from Chinle, but so beautiful we didn't mind it at all. The Mesa Verde National Park is a thing unto itself. The main reason for visiting it is to see a number of substantial cliff dwellings. They can be viewed across small canyons or by fairly strenuous hikes. The video at the visitors center was an excellent history lesson on

indigenous people, the first of which came down from Asia over a land bridge, now the Bering Strait, 12,000 or more years ago. Beginning around 600 A.D. other tribes lived on the tops of mesas, later moving down into cliff dwellings where they lived for only about 100 years until leaving for land to the south about 1300, possibly due to local drought conditions.

We stayed at the only lodge in the park, Far View. The room was tiny, the walls paper thin, but the restaurant very good.

On to Salt Lake City, a 6 hour drive to the northwest.

Many Chebeaguers have visited these parks, but for those who haven't we urge doing so if it can be afforded. The sights to be seen are without compare anywhere else in the world! Great photo opportunities and impressive visual sights of never to be forgotten geological features! An important additional benefit is a great history lesson on our country's first settlers.

A suggestion - The way to get the most out of a trip to these parts is to engage in research first, either at the library, on the internet, or by purchasing one or more of the many excellent books that are available. The above commentary is admittedly brief, and far from thorough. Betts and I would be glad to discuss this topic with anyone who might be interested in learning more.

Eldon Mayer, 9/16