



# Two Days of Wonder

Hit the highlights on a side trip to Grand Canyon National Park. BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER

**Inspiring Awe:**  
(Left to right) Mather Point, Hopi Point, Hermit's Rest and Desert View

PHOTO: ©TUDOR MARIAN | DREAMSTIME.COM, ©SUTTHIRAT WONGSUNAKORN | DREAMSTIME.COM, ©FILEDIMAGE | DREAMSTIME.COM, ©MARYNA KONOPLYTSKA | DREAMSTIME.COM

Last year 4.7 million visitors experienced one of America's most spectacular natural wonders, Grand Canyon National Park. I was determined to be one of them. But with only 48 hours to spare in an itinerary spanning the length of Arizona, would a quick detour to this UNESCO World Heritage site make sense? It had been on my bucket list for decades, so I decided to go for it, even for just a quick peek over the rim and a short hike into the abyss.

Arriving at the Grand Canyon Visitor Center, I made a beeline for Mather Point, a short hike along the nearby Rim Trail. Yes, my jaw dropped. The size of the canyon floored me, as did the palette of earth tones cascading down its craggy rock walls: ochre, gray, ivory with hints of green. Winding for 277 miles with the Colorado River snaking along its bottom, this vast chasm measures up to 6,000 feet deep and up to 18

miles wide. About 90 percent of park visitors view it as I did, from the South Rim.

Hiking along the rim proved a fairly easy endeavor, especially when riding the park's shuttle bus along 7-mile-long Hermit Road. I popped out at a few of the nine viewpoints along the rim to stand in awe of one of the most spectacular examples of arid land erosion on the planet. Maricopa Point overlooks a former copper and uranium mine dating back to 1891. Powell Point displays a memorial honoring 19th-century Colorado River explorer John Wesley Powell. Hopi Point's wide vistas make it a prime spot for viewing sunrises and sunsets. The road ends at Hermit's Rest, where one of the canyon's most noteworthy architects, Mary Colter, designed what resembles a long-ago miner's cabin. The Hermit Trail takes a deep dive into the canyon here, but I chose to save my legs for another day hiking the popular Bright Angel Trail.



At 9.5 miles long, Bright Angel proves deceptively difficult for the occasional hiker like me. The foolhardy attempt to go down and back in a day. The park's handy hiking brochure warns it takes two. Why? The change in elevation and temperature. The trailhead sits at 6,860 feet, while Bright Angel Campground at the bottom lies at 2,480, a difference of 4,380 feet. Park brochures and signs along the trail warn it takes twice as long to climb up than to hike down. Uphill hikers have the right of way, as do mules on guided treks into the canyon. More than once I stood plastered against the canyon wall as the beasts plodded past.

Temperatures rise the lower hikers go. I started out on a brisk March morning well-supplied with water, snacks, sunscreen, broad-brimmed hat, hiking stick, broken-in hiking shoes and layers of clothing. Off came the coat, then the long-sleeved shirt and zip-off pant legs. By the time I reached the 1.5-mile Rest House, I was ready to turn around. Even so, my wimpy roundtrip took nearly four of the precious 48 hours I had allotted to experience the Grand Canyon.

Tamer pursuits provided a change of pace. At Kolb Studio, a family home and photography studio built in 1905, I browsed the Amazing Kolb Brothers exhibit. Ellsworth and Emery

Kolb's camera skills brought early visitors to the Grand Canyon and helped it gain recognition as an American treasure. The Yavapai Geology Museum sits on the edge of the canyon and features picture windows for gawking at the view. Exhibits explain the layers of sandstone, limestone and shale eroded over three of the four eras of geological time. Hopi House, designed in 1905 to mimic a dwelling of the Hopi tribe, displays Native American arts and crafts for sale.

Visitors with more time attend free park ranger programs; rent bikes to pedal along 13 miles of roads and Greenway trails; and take whitewater raft trips, guided bus excursions and air tours by helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft.

On my last morning, I made the 23-mile drive from Grand Canyon Village to Desert View near the park's east entrance. A watchtower, a Mary Colter creation inspired by the design of Ancestral Puebloan people, overlooks Desert View Point, where the Colorado River bends 90 degrees. The site also has a stone memorial devoted to 128 passengers who perished when a TWA Lockheed L-1049 Constellation and a United Airlines Douglas DC-7 collided over the canyon in 1956. It was a sobering end to an otherwise upbeat two days inspired by the natural beauty of Grand Canyon National Park.

## INFO TO GO

The closest commercial airport to Grand Canyon National Park's South Rim is Flagstaff Pulliam Airport, 80 miles away in Flagstaff, Arizona. Grand Canyon National Park Airport offers limited air service 7 miles from the park. More distant options include airports in Phoenix, 231 miles, and Las Vegas, 278 miles. Amtrak serves Flagstaff with connecting bus service to the canyon. The Grand Canyon Railway offers daily train service from Williams, Arizona. The Grand Canyon National Park website lists companies authorized to conduct tours of the park with pick-up locations in cities around the Southwest.