

# Zion & Bryce Canyon National Parks' Top 15



## The Narrows

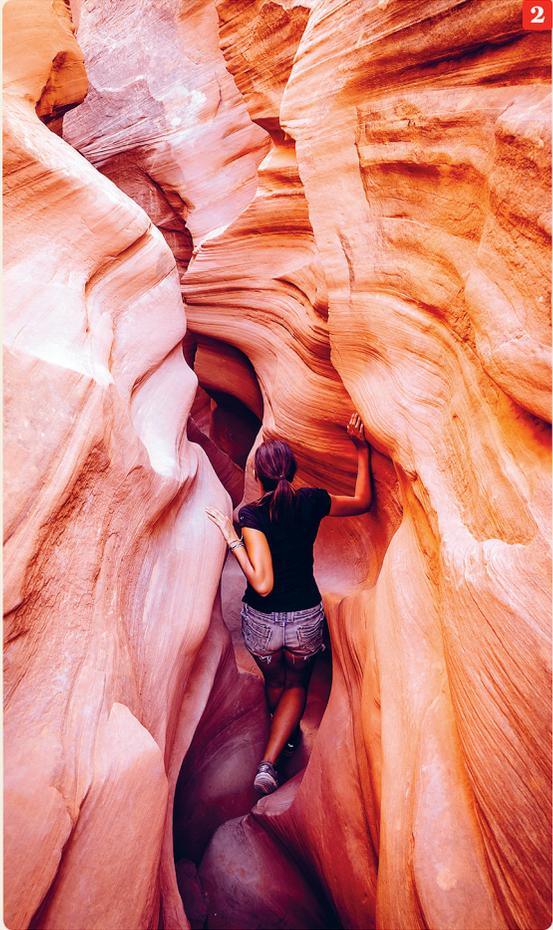
**1** One of Utah's most famous back-country routes is this remarkably fun hike down the Virgin River (p58). It's deceptively easy at first, but once you hit the confluence with Deep Creek you'll be glad you brought that walking stick. By day two you'll be wading through chest-deep pools, the echoes of the rushing water growing louder and the dark canyon squeezing tighter until you reach Wall Street, where the sheer sandstone buttresses shoot up a neck-craning 1500ft. No permit? No worries: day hikers can get wet too.

## Canyoneering

**2** Canyoneering is that perfect combination of adventure, problem-solving, unsettling beauty and commitment. And indeed, it's that last element that gives the sport its particular thrill – for once you rappel into a serious canyon, there is generally only one way out. Luckily, the remarkable diversity of chasms in Utah means that you don't always need a rope or wetsuit to find yourself in some hidden corner of the earth. Get a taste at Escalante's Dry Fork (p142), which contains three nontechnical slots all within walking distance of one another. Below: Peek-a-Boo canyon (p143)



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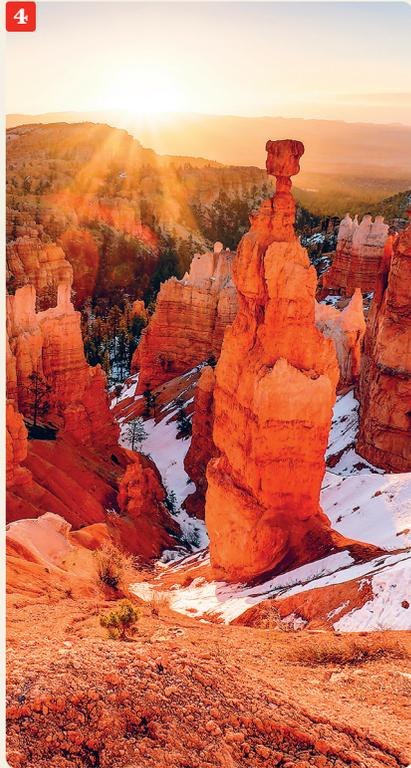
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### Mountain Biking Moab

**3** Moab is one of the mountain-biking capitals of the world, where the desert slickrock surrounding the town makes a perfect 'sticky' surface for knobby tires. Challenging trails ascend steep bluffs, twist through forests and slam over 4WD roads into the wilds of canyon country. And you'll surely redefine adventure after treading the roller-coaster rock face of the Whole Enchilada (p205). There's a reason why some Moab hotels have a shower for bikes. One trip and you'll be hooked.



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### Fairyland Loop

**4** The sorbet-colored, sandcastle-like spires and hoodoos of Bryce Canyon pop like a Dr Seuss landscape. Though the smallest of Utah's national parks, this is perhaps the most immediately visually stunning, particularly at sunrise and sunset when an orange wash sets the otherworldly formations ablaze. Search for the perfect panoramic photo op from the Rim Trail, or let your imagination work overtime on the aptly named Fairyland Loop (p112), an all-day foray that gets up close and personal with wildly shaped hoodoos and ancient bristlecone pines.

### Fiery Furnace

**5** Eroded over millions of years, Arches' namesake formations elegantly defy gravity and struggle against the passage of time. A hike through the desert to Delicate Arch – the unofficial state symbol – is de rigueur for any first-time visitor, but if you want to walk on the wild side, sign up for a guided tour through the sandstone labyrinth known as the Fiery Furnace (p198). It's composed of giant fins and spectacularly narrow canyons – you'll be scrambling your way through one of the most improbable natural mazes on the planet.

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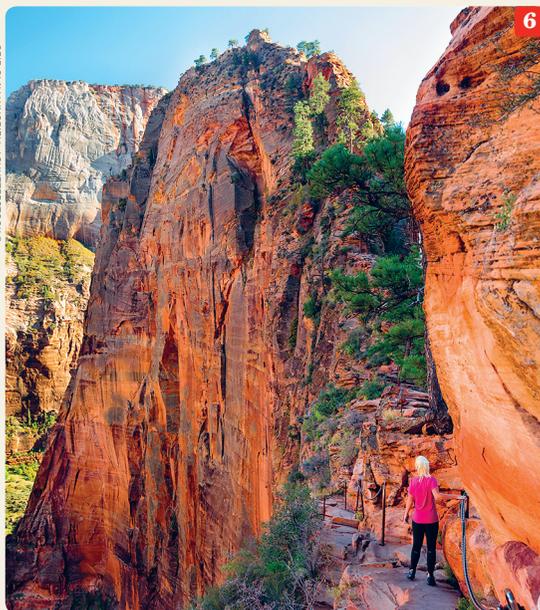
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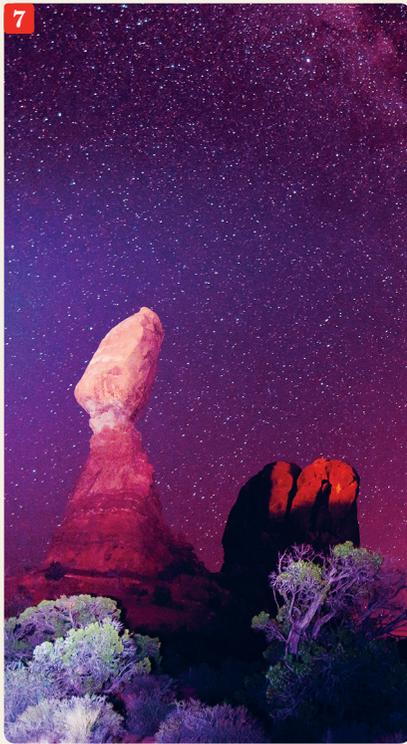
## Angels Landing

**6** The climb to Angels Landing (p54) in Zion Canyon is among the most memorable day hikes in Utah, if not North America. The 5-mile trail hugs the face of a towering cliff, snakes through a cool canyon and climbs up Walter's Wiggles (a series of 21 sharp switchbacks) before finally ascending a narrow, exposed ridge – where steel chains and the encouragement of strangers are your only friends. Your reward after reaching the 5790ft summit? A lofty view of Zion Canyon, and some unreal photos of your vertigo-defying adventure.

GERI OLAW UNKAPFEL / SHUTTERSTOCK ©



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## Stargazing

**7** The American West is known for its star-studded nights, but few destinations can compete with Capitol Reef's views of the heaven-spanning Milky Way. If you want to watch for shooting stars from your sleeping bag or contemplate the possibility of life in distant galaxies, this is certainly the spot: Capitol Reef (p160) is one of the last preserves of natural darkness in the USA, with over 7500 stars visible to the naked eye. Evening stargazing programs are held here and in Bryce Canyon; the latter also hosts moonlit hikes.

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## Climbing

**8** There's no sport quite like rock climbing. From a distance it appears to be a feat of strength, but balance, creativity, technical know-how and a Zen-like sangfroid are all parts of the game. Clinging by your fingertips 1000ft up on one of Zion's internationally renowned big walls? Not the place to lose your cool. Experts dream of tackling the cracks at Indian Creek or the desert towers of Castle Valley, while beginners can get in on the action via a guided climb, learning the basics outside Moab (p214) or Springdale. Top right: Indian Creek (p214)

## Driving Highway 12

**9** No American vacation is complete without a road trip, and there's no stretch of Utah asphalt more compelling than Hwy 12 (p153). Stretching from Capitol Reef in the northeast to Bryce and Red Rock Canyon in the west, this byway traverses 124 remote miles, passing desert slickrock, colossal domes, photogenic buttes and cool forests of aspen and fir. Take a 4WD detour along Burr Trail Rd, stop in Boulder for a bite at Hell's Backbone Grill, and remember to take it slow as you traverse razor-thin Hogback Ridge.

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## Canyonlands

**10** If Arches is Red Rock 101, then Canyonlands (p176) is graduate school. Those looking for desert adventure, deep quiet or a long, challenging backpacking trip will find it in the park's vast, impenetrable acres of arid wilderness. Distant mesas and sidewinder-like canyons, carved out by the mighty Colorado and Green Rivers, are visible from overlooks on the Island in the Sky, while more remote districts – the Needles, Horseshoe Canyon and the Maze – beckon back-country veterans, on foot, bike or raft.

Below top: Mesa Arch (p182)

## Las Vegas

**11** As you awake from your in-flight nap – rested, content, ready for red-rock inspiration – here comes Vegas (p98) on the horizon, like a showgirl looking for trouble. As you leave the airport and glide under the neon of her Strip, she puts on a dazzling show: dancing fountains, a spewing volcano, the Eiffel Tower. Her most dangerous charms lie in the gambling dens – seductive lairs where the fresh-pumped air and bright colors share one goal: separating you from your money. Step away if you can for fine restaurants and dazzling entertainment from Cirque du Soleil.



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## Landscape Photography

**14** Every park has its superlative viewpoints: Canyonlands alone could form its very own top 10 list. Goblin Valley's surreal formations enchant those in the know, while few places can match the majesty or contrasting colors of Zion. If you had to pick just one spot for photography, however, the Wave (p159) – a mesmerizing swirl of red and white layers, seeming to ripple across the slickrock with all the sensuousness of flowing water – might be the winner, encapsulating all that is visually sublime in canyon country. Above top: The Wave (p159)

## Hanging Gardens

**15** If the Utah sun has you feeling as shriveled as a raisin, you're going to find these lush desert oases all the more remarkable. Fed by mesa-top precipitation that has slowly percolated down through sandstone over the course of millennia, these vertical gardens appear where dripping seeps exit shaded canyon walls, forced outward by a layer of harder rock. Look for scarlet monkey flowers, mosses, golden columbines, maidenhair ferns and purple violets clinging marvelously to the rock face. Zion (p52) has some lovely examples.

# Native Americans of the Grand Canyon

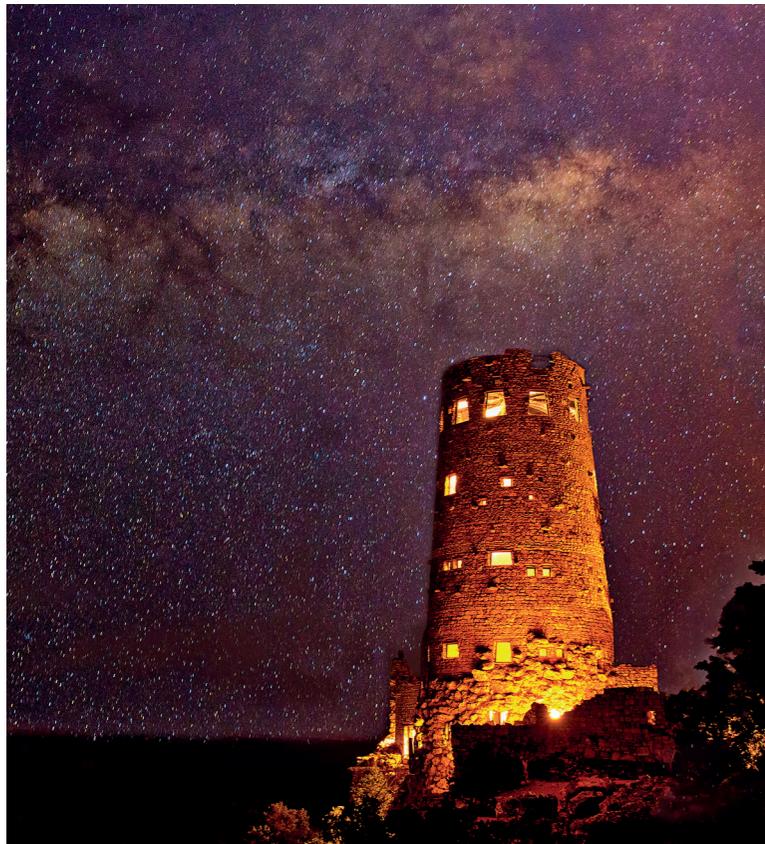
ARIZONA / CULTURE & LANDSCAPES

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*We all know about the canyon's distinct and unparalleled beauty, its awesome geologic canvas and its draw for lovers of the great outdoors. Less recognized, perhaps, is the Grand Canyon's compelling human history, the drama that lies in the stories and cultures of those who have lived in and around the canyon for millennia.*

Right Mather Point, South Rim





Above Desert View Watchtower, South Rim

Much like the past geological eras revealed in the cliff walls, there are distinct layers of human culture here too. Maybe you'll spot petroglyphs on the walls beneath the South Rim, or explore the ruins of a 12th-century Ancestral Puebloan community who lived in the canyon. Perhaps you'll visit a cliff dwelling outside Flagstaff, or hear the echoes of some of the earliest legends told about this place.

Stories about the Grand Canyon range from estranged lovers and lightning-bolt-hurling brothers to timeless sagas about the creation of humankind. The Hopi have a particularly special relationship with the Grand Canyon – this is the site of their emergence on Earth. In the Southwest, certain Pueblo tribes believe that the universe consists of several worlds stacked one upon the other. In order to pass from one world to the next, Spider Grandmother gave her people a reed, which they used to climb up through the old dying world's ceiling, emerging through the floor of the new world. For many Hopi clans, this birthplace is not just a myth – it is an actual location known as the *sipapuni*, a domed mineral spring located on the floor of the Grand Canyon. Although the Hopi eventually settled on the mesas to the east, over the centuries they have continued to make return pilgrimages to their sacred *sipapuni*.

All together, there are eight contemporary tribes that have ties with the land in and around the Grand Canyon. Which part of the canyon you visit will determine which cultures you will have the opportunity to learn about.



### Rafting the Colorado River

Considered the trip of a lifetime by many river enthusiasts, rafting the Colorado offers an all-access pass to the Grand Canyon, in all its wildness, peace and ancient, mighty glory. There's the rush of running rapids beneath spectacular canyon walls and the serenity of floating down calmer sections, listening to the musicality of ripples and birdsong. Rafters have the exclusive privilege of hiking to secret side canyons, hidden waterfalls, petroglyphs and ruins. As you fall asleep on a sandy beach beneath the stars, you'll feel an undeniable connection to the people who have lived here throughout the centuries.

### South Rim

The three rims of the Grand Canyon – South, North and West – offer quite different experiences. Over 90% of visitors only visit the South Rim, which is easily accessible and has historic buildings and particularly dramatic viewpoints. If you're visiting the South Rim, look out for the following sights.

### Desert View Watchtower

The marvelously worn winding staircase of Mary Colter's 70ft (21m) stone tower, built in 1932, leads to the highest spot on the South Rim (7522ft/2293m). From here, unparalleled views take in not only the

Left Antelope Canyon,  
North Rim