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The Ultimate GRAND CIRCLE Complete Travel Guide

2026

Free Preview Edition

The traditional 7-14 day loop through the American Southwest's greatest national parks, monuments, and tribal lands -- in complete depth.

* 2026 Fact-Checked * The Mighty 5 in Full Depth * Grand Canyon, Monument Valley + Page

WELCOME

One Region. The Best of the American West.

The Grand Circle is the roughly 1,000-mile loop connecting Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands, Arches, the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, and the red-rock corridor around Page, Arizona -- widely considered the single greatest concentration of national parks and monuments on Earth. This guide covers the traditional route in complete depth: full profiles for every Mighty 5 park, the Grand Canyon's South and North Rims, Monument Valley, the Lake Powell corridor, three of the region's most important national monuments, and every classic stop in between -- built into both a 7-day highlights itinerary and a complete 14-day loop.

FREE PREVIEW

Welcome to Your Free Preview

This free preview includes sample sections from **The Ultimate Grand Circle Guide 2026**, reproduced exactly as they appear in the full 126-page guide. Some pages mention chapters, pages or sections that are only in the full guide, and the page labels at the bottom of each page are numbered for this preview.

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HOW TO USE THIS PREVIEW

Read the route overview first, then see how a full park chapter and a complete monument chapter are built, and finish with the 7-day highlights loop. The complete guide adds every remaining park, the 14-day loop, connective stops, region-wide planning and the cheat sheet.

Planning details in these sections were checked for the 2026 edition. Park fees, permits, hours, road conditions and reservation systems change often, so always confirm with the official source for each destination before you travel. Some links are affiliate links; if you book through them, we may earn a commission at no additional cost to you.

HOW THIS GUIDE WORKS

The Traditional Grand Circle Route

This guide follows the classic Grand Circle loop -- the route most guidebooks, tour operators, and repeat visitors mean when they say "Grand Circle." It does not attempt to cover every national monument in the Four Corners region; that's a genuinely different, longer itinerary involving Mesa Verde, Chaco Culture, Canyon de Chelly, and Petrified Forest. This is the tighter, traditional loop built around the Utah Mighty 5, the Grand Canyon, and the Page/Monument Valley corridor connecting them.

What's Covered in Full Depth

- All five Utah Mighty 5 parks -- Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands, Arches
- Grand Canyon National Park -- South Rim and North Rim
- Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park
- The Page, Arizona corridor -- Antelope Canyon, Horseshoe Bend, Glen Canyon NRA/Lake Powell, Rainbow Bridge
- Three of the route's most iconic national monuments -- Bears Ears, Vermilion Cliffs (The Wave), and Navajo National Monument

What's Covered as Connective Stops

- Dead Horse Point, Cedar Breaks, Kodachrome Basin, Grand Staircase-Escalante (Scenic Byway 12), Goblin Valley, Natural Bridges, Goosenecks + Valley of the Gods, Four Corners Monument
- Both a 7-day highlights itinerary and a complete 14-day loop itinerary
- Region-wide lodging, dining, permits, and pro tips

A NOTE ON THE MIGHTY 5 PROFILES

Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands, and Arches each already have a dedicated, full-length AdventureFamilyVlog guide. The profiles in this book are written to stand completely on their own -- you will not need to buy anything else to plan a great visit to any of these five parks. If you want even more exhaustive trail-by-trail detail for a single park, the standalone guide for that park goes deeper still.

UNDERSTANDING THE GRAND CIRCLE

One Region, Three States, Countless Landscapes

The "Grand Circle" isn't an official government designation -- it's a travel-industry term for the loop of national parks and monuments ringing the Four Corners region, almost all of it built on the Colorado Plateau. This high desert province, roughly the size of California, rose as a single geologic block over the last 70 million years while the Colorado River and its tributaries carved through it, exposing rock layers that span nearly 2 billion years of Earth's history.

Elevation drives everything. The route swings from around 2,000 feet at the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon's inner gorge to over 9,000 feet on the Bryce Canyon and Cedar Breaks plateaus -- a difference that can mean 30-40 degrees of temperature swing between stops on the same day. Plan layers regardless of season.

This is also Native land. A significant stretch of the traditional route -- including Monument Valley, Navajo National Monument, and much of the Page corridor -- lies within the Navajo Nation, the largest reservation in the United States. These are sovereign tribal lands with their own laws, fee structures, and permit systems entirely separate from the National Park Service; America the Beautiful passes are not accepted. Respect posted rules, hire Navajo guides where required, and recognize you are a guest on someone else's homeland throughout this section of the loop.

Driving the Loop -- Realistic Distances

- Springdale (Zion) to Bryce Canyon: ~1.5-2 hrs
- Bryce Canyon to Capitol Reef: ~2 hrs via Scenic Byway 12
- Capitol Reef to Moab (Canyonlands/Arches): ~2.5-3 hrs
- Moab to Monument Valley: ~2.5-3 hrs direct -- adding Natural Bridges, Bears Ears, Goosenecks, or Valley of the Gods along the way makes it a much longer travel day
- Monument Valley to Page: ~1.5-2 hrs
- Page to Grand Canyon South Rim: ~2.5-3 hrs
- Grand Canyon South Rim to Zion (closing the loop): ~2.5-3 hrs

Total Loop Reality Check

- The full traditional loop is roughly 900-1,000 driving miles
- Minimum to see it without feeling rushed: 10 days
- Comfortable, unhurried pace with real time at each stop: 14 days
- A tight highlights version is possible in 7 days -- both itineraries are in this guide
- Fly into Las Vegas (closest to Zion) or Salt Lake City (closest to the Utah parks) and out of Phoenix or Las Vegas (closest to the Grand Canyon) to avoid backtracking

PART ONE -- CHAPTER 1 OF 5

Zion National Park

Utah's most visited national park -- Angels Landing, The Narrows, and 2,000-foot canyon walls

ZION NATIONAL PARK

Utah's Most Visited -- And Most Rewarding to Plan Well

Zion draws over 4.5 million visitors a year through the town of Springdale into a canyon carved by the Virgin River through Navajo Sandstone walls that rise 2,000 feet straight from the canyon floor. What separates a great Zion trip from a frustrating one is almost entirely preparation: the shuttle system controls nearly all canyon access, Angels Landing requires a permit year-round, and a major 2026 change restricts large vehicles on the east-side highway.

2026 KEY UPDATES

(1) Angels Landing permit required year-round for the chain section above Scout Lookout -- $6 application fee, $3/person if selected, lottery on Recreation.gov. (2) Zion-Mt. Carmel Highway: vehicles over 35'9" long, 7'10" wide, 11'4" tall, or 50,000 lbs are BANNED between Canyon Junction and the East Entrance effective June 7, 2026 -- the previous tunnel escort permit option is eliminated. (3) South Campground reopened May 29, 2026 after a rehabilitation project, with reservations now required through Recreation.gov (bookable up to 14 days ahead) -- expected to close again for winter. (4) Weeping Rock reopened September 2025 after years of rockfall closures -- verify current status before visiting, as it has a history of sudden closure.

How the canyon formed: The Virgin River has been cutting down through Navajo Sandstone -- ancient wind-blown dunes deposited roughly 180 million years ago -- for about 13 million years, producing a canyon only 20-30 feet wide at the bottom in places while the walls rise nearly 2,000 feet. Iron oxide creates the deep red and orange in the lower walls; higher up, where the iron has leached away, the sandstone returns to cream and white. Zion was Utah's first national park, established in 1919.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
Mar-May	Jun-Aug	Sep-Nov	Dec-Feb
Waterfalls at peak flow, wildflowers. Narrows likely cold and high-water. Peak crowds Apr-May.	95-105F+ in the canyon. Angels Landing permit essential. Narrows warm and accessible.	Cooler temps, fall color on cottonwoods in October, crowds thin after Labor Day, all trails open.	Private vehicles allowed in Zion Canyon (shuttle not running) -- drive to Temple of Sinawava.
EXCELLENT	HEAT CAUTION	BEST OVERALL	LOCAL SECRET

THE LOCAL SECRET -- WINTER DRIVING IN ZION CANYON

A late November to February visit is the single most underrated Zion strategy. The shuttle shuts down and you can drive your own vehicle all the way up Zion Canyon to the Temple of Sinawava trailhead -- impossible from March through November. Hotel rates in Springdale drop 40-60%.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Fees, Hours + Access	Details
Entrance fee	$35/vehicle (7-day) -- covers all park areas. $30 motorcycle, $20/person on foot/bike/shuttle. Zion Annual Pass $70, America the Beautiful $80.
Nonresident surcharge	$100/person additional for non-US residents age 16+, effective Jan 1, 2026. Rangers check ID for every vehicle occupant 16 and older.
Hours	Open 24 hours, 365 days a year. Zion Canyon Visitor Center open daily near the South Entrance.
Kolob Canyons	A separate, far less-visited section of Zion accessed via I-15 Exit 40, with its own visitor center -- same admission, a fraction of the crowds.
Cashless	All entrance stations are cashless -- card or mobile pay only.

GETTING AROUND -- THE SHUTTLE, PRIVATE VEHICLES + THE NEW TUNNEL RULES

RV + LARGE VEHICLE OWNERS -- READ THIS FIRST

Effective June 7, 2026, vehicles over 35'9" long, 7'10" wide, 11'4" tall, or 50,000 lbs are banned on the Zion-Mt. Carmel Highway between Canyon Junction and the East Entrance. The previous tunnel escort permit option is eliminated. Large vehicles can still enter through the South Entrance for the main canyon -- they just cannot drive to or through the east-side tunnel. Verify your vehicle's dimensions before arrival.

Route	Season / Hours	Key Notes
Zion Canyon Shuttle (free)	Mar 7-Nov 28, 2026. First departure ~7 AM.	No reservation needed -- just board. Only access to Angels Landing and Narrows trailheads in season. Runs every 5-10 minutes at peak.
Springdale Town Shuttle (free)	Same season as park shuttle	Park in Springdale, ride into the park -- avoids Visitor Center lot competition entirely.
Private vehicle (Zion Canyon)	Late Nov-Early Mar only	The winter secret: drive your own car all the way to Temple of Sinawava.
Private vehicle (Mt. Carmel Highway)	Year-round, size-limited	South to East Entrance via the historic 1.1-mile tunnel. Canyon Overlook Trail is accessed here -- no shuttle stop.

The Springdale parking strategy: the most common Zion mistake is driving to the Visitor Center lot and waiting 30-45 minutes for a shuttle space. Instead, park anywhere in Springdale, walk the pedestrian bridge into the park, and board the shuttle at the Visitor Center stop, which has far less competition than the main lot. An even better tip we have is to rent e-bikes from Zion Guru! This is the BEST way to experience Zion National Park! We have a 10% discount code for the bikes AND the dry gear for hiking The Narrows. Use AFV10 to save!

COMPLETE TRAIL GUIDE -- EVERY MAJOR HIKE IN ZION

Zion has trails for every level, from a flat paved riverside stroll to one of the most thrilling chain-assisted summits in the American West. Below are in-depth profiles for every major trail, organized roughly from most iconic to most accessible.

1 Angels Landing

The most thrilling hike in Zion -- chains, exposure, and the best view in the canyon

5.4 mi RT	1,488 ft	Permit Req.	Strenuous
DISTANCE	GAIN	ACCESS	DIFFICULTY

Overview: Angels Landing is the signature hike of Zion National Park and one of the most famous trails in the United States. The final half-mile above Scout Lookout follows a narrow sandstone fin with sheer drop-offs on both sides, assisted by chains bolted into the rock. At the summit (5,790 feet), you look directly down 1,488 feet to the canyon floor -- across to the Great White Throne, east into the Narrows canyon, and in every direction across the Zion plateau. Nothing else in the park matches this view.

TRAILHEAD + LOGISTICS

Shuttle Stop 6 (The Grotto). No private vehicle parking here during shuttle season. The trail climbs through Refrigerator Canyon (a cool, shaded slot), then ascends Walter's Wiggles -- 21 short switchbacks cut directly into the cliff face -- to Scout Lookout. The permit is required only for the chain section above Scout Lookout; hiking to Scout Lookout does NOT require one and is an excellent hike on its own.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

The summit view is best in the first two hours after sunrise and the last two hours before sunset, when canyon walls glow warm and shadows run long. Photograph the chain section looking back toward Scout Lookout for the classic narrow-ridge composition.

CROWD STRATEGY

Permits are distributed via two Recreation.gov systems: (1) Seasonal lottery -- apply quarterly for your planned season, opens roughly two months ahead. (2) Day-before lottery -- opens 12:01 AM, closes 3 PM Mountain Time the day before your intended hike, results at approximately 4 PM. $6 per application, $3/person if selected.

LOCAL INSIDER TIP

Hiking to Scout Lookout without a permit puts you at the base of the chains looking up at the summit -- a dramatic viewpoint most visitors don't realize requires no permit at all. A great fallback if your lottery application doesn't come through.

TRAIL TIPS + WARNINGS: Do not hike the chain section if uncomfortable with heights or exposure -- people have died on this trail, and the chains are an assist, not a guarantee of safety. Wet rock makes the final section extremely dangerous; rangers close it in rain. Download your permit before leaving Springdale -- cell service is unreliable in the canyon.

2 The Narrows (Bottom-Up)

Hiking in the river through the world-famous slot canyon

3-9+ mi RT	Minimal	No Permit	Moderate
DISTANCE	ELEVATION	DAY HIKE	DIFFICULTY

Overview: The Narrows is unlike any hike in this guide -- you are hiking IN the Virgin River, through a slot canyon where the walls rise 1,000 feet and the passage narrows to as little as 20 feet wide. The hike begins at the Riverside Walk (the flat, paved 1.1-mile walk to the river's edge) and then continues upstream in the water. You hike as far as you want -- most visitors go 1-3 miles before turning back, where the canyon dramatically narrows into 'Wall Street,' the most photographed section.

TRAILHEAD + LOGISTICS

Shuttle Stop 9 (Temple of Sinawava), the last stop on the line. Walk the paved Riverside Walk to the river's edge, then step in. Water depth ranges from ankle to waist depending on season. Waterproof boots, neoprene socks, and a walking stick are strongly recommended; all rentable from Springdale outfitters for $30-50/person.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

Wall Street is the iconic section -- walls visible sky-only overhead, reflections in calm pools, light beams entering from above. Wide-angle lens and a waterproof case are essential; early morning light penetrates deepest.

CROWD STRATEGY

The river route spreads people out naturally -- no bottlenecks like a fixed trail. The first mile sees the most traffic; beyond Wall Street (1.5-2 miles in) the canyon quiets significantly. Start on the 7 AM shuttle to be in the river by 8 AM.

LOCAL INSIDER TIP

Zion Guru (code AFV10 for a discount) is a well-regarded local Springdale outfitter for gear rental and guided Narrows tours for first-timers wanting expert knowledge of the route and current conditions.

TRAIL TIPS + WARNINGS: Do NOT drink or submerge your head in the river -- toxic cyanobacteria has been detected in the system. Check flash flood conditions at nps.gov/zion before entering; the canyon can flood rapidly from storms 30+ miles away with no visible rain in the canyon itself. If rangers say the river is closed, it is closed.

PART THREE -- CHAPTER 2 OF 3

Vermilion Cliffs National Monument

Home to The Wave -- the single hardest permit to win in the American Southwest

VERMILION CLIFFS NATIONAL MONUMENT

The Wave, White Pocket, and Buckskin Gulch

Vermilion Cliffs protects 280,000 acres of the Paria Plateau along the Arizona-Utah border, including the Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness. It's best known for a single formation: The Wave, in the Coyote Buttes North permit area -- among the most photographed, most difficult to access, and most sought-after hiking permits in the entire United States. But the monument holds much more than The Wave for visitors who don't win the lottery.

THE WAVE -- 64 SPOTS A DAY, 200,000+ APPLICATIONS A YEAR

Coyote Buttes North (The Wave) is capped at 64 visitors per day, split between two systems: 48 people/12 groups through an Advanced Lottery (Recreation.gov, opens 4 months ahead of your target month, $9/application) and 16 people/4 groups through a Daily Lottery (opens 2 days before your hike, mobile-only, and only while physically inside the geofenced area near Kanab or Page). Winners of either lottery pay a small additional per-person recreation fee and must attend a mandatory safety briefing before hiking. The hike itself is an unmarked, GPS-navigated 6.4-mile round trip across open desert -- there is no trail, no shade, and no cell service.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
Mar-May	Jun-Aug	Sep-Nov	Dec-Feb
Mild temps, ideal hiking conditions for the exposed Wave route and Buckskin Gulch.	The Wave hike crosses fully exposed open desert -- summer heat here is genuinely dangerous.	The best season alongside spring -- comfortable temps and the clearest light for photography.	House Rock Valley Road can become impassable with rain or snow -- verify conditions before driving.
EXCELLENT	EXTREME HEAT	EXCELLENT	COLD, ACCESS RISK

THE WAVE + OTHER VERMILION CLIFFS EXPERIENCES

1 The Wave (Coyote Buttes North)

The most competitive hiking permit in the American Southwest

6.4 mi RT	Unmarked	Lottery Req.	Strenuous
DISTANCE	TRAIL	ACCESS	DIFFICULTY

Overview: A rolling, wave-patterned sandstone formation roughly 190 million years old, famous for its sweeping red-and-gold banded curves. The formation itself is small, but the permit area, Coyote Buttes North, contains additional formations worth exploring for those who make the draw.

TRAILHEAD + LOGISTICS
Wire Pass Trailhead, reached via the unpaved, minimally maintained House Rock Valley Road -- passable in a 2WD high-clearance vehicle in dry conditions, impassable to any vehicle when wet. No trail markers past the first mile; navigation is by GPS waypoints provided with your permit.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS
Midday light, counterintuitively, works well here -- the banded curves read best without long shadows breaking up the pattern. A wide-angle lens captures the sweeping rock forms most effectively.

CROWD STRATEGY
By design, only 64 people total enter the permit area on any given day -- even at capacity, this is one of the least crowded major sights on this entire route.

LOCAL INSIDER TIP
Apply to the Advanced Lottery first for anyone planning a Grand Circle trip months out; treat the Daily Lottery as a backup only if you're already in the area with flexible dates.

TRAIL TIPS + WARNINGS: No shade, no water, and no marked trail for the entire 6.4-mile round trip -- this is a serious undertaking in a remote wilderness area. Cell phones are unreliable throughout; carry a satellite communicator if you have one.

2 White Pocket

The Wave's permit-free alternative -- with its own 4WD access challenge

Varies	No Permit	4WD Req.	Half Day
DISTANCE	ACCESS	VEHICLE	TIME

Overview: A dramatically swirled sandstone formation with a similar visual character to The Wave, requiring no lottery permit at all -- the tradeoff is a seriously difficult, deep-sand 4WD approach road that strands unprepared vehicles regularly.

TRAILHEAD + LOGISTICS
Best reached with a guided tour from Kanab or Page (roughly $200-250/person) unless you have serious high-clearance 4WD experience and a properly equipped vehicle. Search White Pocket and Vermilion Cliffs tours on Viator -- this is not a road to attempt in anything less.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS
The swirled, layered rock patterns here rival The Wave's -- a legitimate alternative for photographers who don't win the lottery.

CROWD STRATEGY
The access difficulty alone keeps visitor numbers low -- expect relative solitude even without any permit system in place.

LOCAL INSIDER TIP
A guided tour removes the vehicle risk entirely and typically includes route knowledge that maximizes your time at the formation itself rather than navigating.

TRAIL TIPS + WARNINGS: Deep sand sections have stranded countless unprepared vehicles -- do not attempt this road in a standard SUV or without genuine high-clearance 4WD capability and experience.

3 Buckskin Gulch

One of the longest and deepest slot canyons in the world

Up to 21 mi	Permit Req.	Strenuous	Full day+
FULL LENGTH	ACCESS	DIFFICULTY	TIME

Overview: A narrow, twisting slot canyon carved into the Paria Plateau, often cited as the longest continuous slot canyon on Earth -- day-use permits are notably easier to obtain than The Wave, making this a strong alternative for a genuine slot-canyon experience.

TRAILHEAD + LOGISTICS
Wire Pass Trailhead (shared with The Wave access road) is the most popular entry point for a shorter day-hike sampling of the gulch; the full length requires a serious multi-day backpacking commitment.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS
The narrow, deep passages create dramatic shafts of light at midday -- bring a tripod for longer exposures in the low-light canyon interior.

CROWD STRATEGY
Significantly less competitive permit process than The Wave -- often available same-day, making this the more realistic slot-canyon option for spontaneous travelers.

LOCAL INSIDER TIP
Check flash flood forecasts obsessively before any Buckskin Gulch trip -- this canyon has a serious history of flash flood fatalities, and there is often no escape route once you're inside.

TRAIL TIPS + WARNINGS: Flash flood risk here is severe and well-documented -- never enter if rain is forecast anywhere in the watershed, even if the sky above you is clear.

4 California Condor Viewing

Watch North America's largest bird soar along the cliff face

Roadside	Free	Seasonal Peak	Binoculars
ACCESS	COST	BEST TIMING	RECOMMENDED

Overview: Vermilion Cliffs was a key release site for California condor reintroduction, and the endangered birds -- with nearly 10-foot wingspans -- are regularly spotted soaring along the cliff face from several roadside viewing areas.

TRAILHEAD + LOGISTICS
Navajo Bridge, near Marble Canyon, is one of the most reliable viewing spots -- condors are sometimes seen perched on the bridge structure itself.

CROWD STRATEGY
A quiet, low-key activity most Grand Circle travelers skip entirely -- uncrowded even at peak viewing times.

PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS
A telephoto lens is essential for meaningful bird photography here; the condors typically soar at significant distance from any roadside vantage point.

LOCAL INSIDER TIP
Look for numbered wing tags -- researchers track individual condors, and the tag numbers can sometimes be matched to specific birds' histories online.

TRAIL TIPS + WARNINGS: No special access needed, though patience helps -- condor sightings aren't guaranteed on any given visit.

PERMITS + ACCESS SUMMARY

Activity	Permit?	Details
The Wave (Coyote Buttes North)	Yes, lottery	Advanced Lottery (Recreation.gov, 4 months ahead) or Daily Lottery (2 days ahead, geofenced, mobile only). $9 application fee plus a small per-person recreation fee if selected.
Coyote Buttes South	Yes, easier lottery	Same Recreation.gov system as Coyote Buttes North but a meaningfully higher success rate -- a good backup if The Wave doesn't come through.
White Pocket	No	No permit required, but a serious 4WD approach road -- a guided tour removes most of the risk.
Buckskin Gulch (day use)	Yes, easier than The Wave	Permits available through the BLM, often same-day -- far less competitive than Coyote Buttes North.
Condor viewing (roadside)	No	Free, unrestricted roadside viewing at several pullouts along Highway 89A.

WHERE TO STAY + EAT

Kanab, UT is the most practical base for Vermilion Cliffs -- close to the House Rock Valley Road access point and well-stocked with hotels, outfitters, and restaurants. **Page, AZ** works as an alternative base if you're combining this stop with the Antelope Canyon/Horseshoe Bend corridor covered elsewhere in this guide.

Search Kanab area hotels | Bundle hotel + rental car via Expedia

PRO TIPS

Maximizing Your Odds

- Apply to the Advanced Lottery the moment your travel dates firm up -- it opens 4 months ahead -- it's your best shot
- Small groups (solo or pairs) do meaningfully better in the Daily Lottery than large groups
- If The Wave doesn't come through, Coyote Buttes South, White Pocket, and Buckskin Gulch are all legitimate, less competitive alternatives with similar visual drama
- Never miss a lottery deadline -- winning and then missing the acceptance window forfeits the permit entirely

Safety Essentials

- No shade, no water, and no marked trail on The Wave route -- treat it as a genuine wilderness undertaking
- Check House Rock Valley Road conditions before driving -- it becomes impassable when wet
- Never enter Buckskin Gulch or any slot canyon with rain forecast anywhere in the watershed
- Cell service is unreliable throughout the monument -- a satellite communicator is a worthwhile investment for serious backcountry plans

COMMON QUESTIONS

Q: What are my actual odds of winning The Wave lottery?

Low -- the area draws over 200,000 applications a year for just 64 daily spots. Applying to both the Advanced and Daily Lotteries, and keeping your group small, meaningfully improves your odds without guaranteeing anything.

Q: Is there a way to see similar scenery without a permit?

Yes -- White Pocket requires no permit at all (though a seriously difficult 4WD approach), and Buckskin Gulch's day-use permits are far easier to obtain than Coyote Buttes North.

Q: Can I hike The Wave with kids?

It's a serious, unmarked, shadeless 6.4-mile round trip requiring genuine navigation skill -- appropriate only for fit, experienced older kids and teens who can handle real desert hiking conditions.

Q: What's the best base town for Vermilion Cliffs?

Kanab, UT is closest to the House Rock Valley Road access point and has the area's best range of hotels and outfitters. Page, AZ works well if you're pairing this stop with Antelope Canyon or Horseshoe Bend.

PART FIVE

The Complete Grand Circle Itineraries

A 7-day highlights loop and a 14-day complete loop, built from everything in this guide

PLANNING YOUR LOOP

Two Itineraries, One Honest Trade-Off

Every destination in this guide could fill its own multi-day trip. These itineraries make the real trade-offs explicit rather than pretending you can see everything well in a week. The 7-day version prioritizes the Utah Mighty 5 plus Monument Valley and the Page corridor, with Capitol Reef compressed to a drive-through stop and the Grand Canyon cut entirely. The 14-day version is the genuine complete loop -- every anchor destination in this guide gets real time.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE 7 DAYS, READ THIS FIRST

Seven days is not enough time to properly see the Utah Mighty 5, the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, and the Page corridor together -- something has to give. The itinerary below cuts the Grand Canyon entirely rather than trying to squeeze in a rushed partial visit, and compresses Capitol Reef into a drive-through stop. If the Grand Canyon is a must-see for your trip, seriously consider the 14-day version, or a separate dedicated Grand Canyon trip.

THE 7-DAY HIGHLIGHTS LOOP

Day	Focus	Key Stops
1	Arrive + Zion	Fly into Las Vegas, drive to Springdale (~2.5 hrs), afternoon in Zion Canyon -- Riverside Walk or Emerald Pools.
2	Zion (full day)	Angels Landing (if you secured a day-before lottery permit) or the Narrows bottom-up hike. Dinner in Springdale.
3	Zion -> Bryce Canyon	Morning in Zion (Canyon Overlook Trail on the way out), drive to Bryce (~2 hrs), sunset at Sunset Point.
4	Bryce -> Moab	Sunrise at Sunrise Point, Navajo + Queen's Garden combo loop, then the long drive to Moab (~4.5 hrs) via a brief Capitol Reef drive-through on UT-24.
5	Arches (full day)	Sunrise at Delicate Arch or the Windows, Devils Garden in the afternoon. Dead Horse Point at sunset if energy allows.
6	Canyonlands -> Monument Valley	Mesa Arch and Grand View Point in Island in the Sky (morning), then the drive to Monument Valley (~3.5 hrs) for sunset.
7	Monument Valley -> Page -> Depart	Sunrise at Monument Valley, drive to Page (~1.5-2 hrs), Horseshoe Bend (no reservation needed), depart from Page or continue to Las Vegas/Phoenix for your flight home.

What this itinerary sacrifices: a real Capitol Reef visit, any Grand Canyon time at all, Antelope Canyon (unless you extend Day 7 or book a very early tour slot), and every connective stop except Dead Horse Point. If any of those matter more to you than something on this list, swap freely -- this is a starting template, not a rulebook.

THIS FREE PREVIEW ENDS HERE

Get the Complete Grand Circle Guide

The complete guide is 126 pages covering the traditional Grand Circle loop in full depth. Beyond the sections in this preview, it includes:

- The rest of the Zion chapter: every major hike from Observation Point to the Pa'rus Trail, permits, lodging and FAQs
- Full chapters for Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and Arches, each with a complete trail guide
- Grand Canyon National Park, South Rim and North Rim, with trail guides and 2026 North Rim details
- Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park and the Page, Arizona corridor: Antelope Canyon, Horseshoe Bend, Lake Powell and Rainbow Bridge
- Bears Ears and Navajo National Monument chapters
- Eight connective stops, from Dead Horse Point and Cedar Breaks to Goblin Valley and Natural Bridges
- The complete 14-day loop and The Wave / Vermilion Cliffs add-on
- Where to stay region by region, a booking timeline, money-saving strategy, photography timing and loop-wide FAQs
- The whole-route cheat sheet

PLAN THE WHOLE LOOP WITH CONFIDENCE

Every park, every classic stop, and two complete itineraries in one guide. Get The Ultimate Grand Circle Guide 2026 at AdventureFamilyVlog.com.

Keep adventuring, keep exploring, and we'll see you on the next adventure!

-- Heather & Jesse, Adventure Family Vlog