

# Grand Canyon: The Natural Wonder Done Right

Written by Allison Young

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Yes, it's postcard-worthy, but so much better in person.



My first trip to the Grand Canyon was a total bust. Armed with two friends from college and a full tank of gas, we screeched out of sunny Phoenix with grand dreams. We cranked the Belinda Carlisle and eventually the heat, and by the time we hit Sedona we had to buy layers and mittens to keep warm. It was *BRRR* cold. And then the snow came, sheets of its. The sky transitioned from bright to blah, yet we trudged on. The greatest natural wonder of the world was calling and we were keen to answer.

We high-fived as we drove through the gates of the park, a natural wonder in its own right with pine trees as far as the eye could see. Not that we could see much. That snow was unrelenting. But surely once we reached the spectacular South Rim we'd get our Clark Griswold on, soak in the soaring views—277 miles long, 600 vertical feet at its deepest—and then turn around and go home.

But when we stood on its edge, all we saw was white. White, white, white. I could barely make out my hand in front of my face for the power of the powdery stuff. It was a total whiteout. But all was not lost. We bundled back in the car, drove out of the park and cozied up in the IMAX Theater for the Grand Canyon movie, which somehow seemed more spectacular since we were a stone's throw away from the actual thing.

When people asked me if I'd been to the Grand Canyon, I nodded yes and quickly changed the subject. Seeing the movie counts... and the spectacle's probably overrated anyway, right? Wrong.

Fast forward eight years and I'm back standing on the very same edge, only instead of a visibility whiteout, I'm experiencing a verbal one. The same speechless awe accompanied me when I stood on the craggy cliffs of Big Sur looking down at the crashing Pacific or in India seeing the Taj Mahal in the foggy distance for the first time or while on a remote island in Fiji staring up at the North Star.

We've all been on the edge before: the edge of reason or love; the edge of glory or greatness. And somehow standing on this literal edge is bringing all of those *edgy* feelings to the surface. It's what makes us go to the ends of the earth to seek out Everest and the Great Wall and the Mona Lisa, because meeting them in person is infinitely greater than a postcard introduction. The gravity, the grandiosity, the greatness is something you have to behold *in situ*.

There aren't too many edges you can stand on and truly be humbled by Mother Nature's audacity. And the Grand Canyon may be the grandest of them all.



**STAY:** [Yavapai Lodge](#) just had a facelift. The newly remodeled main lodge, now managed by Delaware North parks and resorts, got a mid-century modern ski lodge-like upgrade—picture roaring fireplaces and cozy common areas—while the sleeping quarters keep the rustic charm of the original motel-style lodgings. What hasn't changed is its primo location. Surrounded by juniper trees and piñons, the South Rim mainstay

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is only a mile walk from the canyon's South Rim.

**EAT:** [Yavapai Tavern](#) has the best burger selection this side of... well, the Grand Canyon. Burgers are stacked high with basics and fancy fixins. Even the flavor combos that make you go *hmmm* (a patty with peanut butter, marinated carrots, jalapeno, bacon and grilled pickles?) will have you sighing in delicious delight. Oh, and their Brisket Mac & Cheese is epic too!

**DO:** One of the joys of the Grand Canyon is the countless ways to see its majesty. Yes, standing at any of the lookouts and gazing down is a given, but hiking to the bottom and looking up is just as spectacular (try [Bright Angel Trail](#), an 8-mile decent). Or climb to the top of [Desert View Watchtower](#) on the South Rim, a Mary Jane Colter-designed historic landmark constructed in 1932. The extra 70-feet adds a vertigo-like vantage point to the abyss below. The [Pink Jeep Tour](#) is touristy, but the guides are masters of fun facts that add more color and context to the Canyon's many layers. Save the best for last: Get a bird's eye view of the Canyon via [helicopter](#), an absolute must that's better than any roller coaster in the world.