Welcome to Grand Canyon’s Backcountry

Congratulations on obtaining a permit to camp overnight in one of Grand Canyon National Park’s most popular hiking areas. Hiking in the Grand Canyon is a truly unique experience. Moments after leaving the comfort of your vehicle or hotel room, you are thrust into a beautiful and rough terrain full of challenges, discovery and wonder.

The Grand Canyon is a land of contrasts: at once harsh yet verdant, merciless yet beautiful, surrealizing yet awe-captivating. Done right, a hike into the Grand Canyon can be a life-changing experience that you will remember fondly for the rest of your life; done wrong, you may find yourself at the bottom of the canyon dreading your climb back up. Remember, if you hike in you must hike out.

The Grand Canyon National Park Backcountry Information Center developed this brochure with the first time Grand Canyon hiker in mind. Our aim is to assist you in Hiking Smart, to help you take responsibility for your safety and to aid you in planning and preparing successfully for your hike in any season. Let us help you make your Grand Canyon hike a success.

Leave No Trace

Plan Ahead and Prepare

All hikers must obtain a backcountry permit before starting their hike. Be prepared to remain on itinerary at all times.

Know your route. Take note of elevation loss and gain, mileage, water sources and campsites.

Be prepared to carry up to 4 liters of water, depending on the trail and time of year. Keep your pack light but bring gear that suits the weather conditions. Pack weight should not be more than 35-20% of your body weight.

Wash and review the Hiking Grand Canyon, Prepare for Backpacking video, available at www.nps.gov/grca and upon request.

Dispose of Waste Properly

Pack out all trash. Trash includes not shells, fruit peels, dropped food, cigarette butts and bandages.

Use toilets where available. If you are not near a toilet, walk 75 steps off the trail and dig a 4-6 inch hole. Bury your waste and pack out toilet paper. Do not bury or burn toilet paper.

Everything you pack in you must pack out. Do not leave any gear, food, or trash behind.

Leave What You Find

Leave the wildflowers. Leave the rocks. Leave everything for the next hiker to enjoy.

Respect Wildlife

Leave the wildflowers. Leave the rocks. Leave everything for the next hiker to enjoy.

Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Cutting switchbacks causes erosion and sends rocks down on hikers below.

Camp only in designated sites. Do not camp at-large or along the trail.

No campsites allowed. Pack a stove for hot food and bring gear to keep you warm.

Be Considerate of Others

Preserve the natural quiet. Keep your voice low while on the trail and at camp.

Yield to uphill hikers and always yield to mules.

Preserve the natural quiet. Keep your voice low while on the trail and at camp.

Hike Smart

Timing is Everything

During hot weather, start your hike well before dawn or after 4:00 p.m. During colder weather, remember that daylight hours are short. Plan accordingly.

Keep Cool: Summer Hiking

Start your hike before sunrise and rest in the shade between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Hike wet to stay cool and wear a wide brimmed hat and sunscreen.

Keep Warm: Winter Hiking

Dress in layers. Hiking will raise your body temperature, but you will feel the chill when you stop to rest.

Cover your extremities. Wear a warm hat, gloves and wool socks. Keep extra dry clothes on hand.

Eat often to keep your body warm and fueled.

Balance Food and Water Intake

Eat twice as much as normal, particularly salty foods.

Drink throughout the day. Do not wait until you feel thirsty before you drink.

Check your urine. You should be urinating regularly, and the color should be pale yellow, not clear or dark.

Restore Your Energy

Hike at a pace that allows conversation.

If you start to feel nauseated, dizzy, or disoriented, immediately rest, eat and drink until you feel 100% better.

Take Care of Your Body

Check for beginning blisters and immediately treat with moleskin and trade socks.

Use existing path to lessen the impact on trails and ankle.

Wash your hands to prevent illnesses. If water is not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

For more Leave No Trace, Hike Smart, seasonal hiking tips, closures, road and trail information and podcasts, visit www.nps.gov/grca
Advance Preparation - Season by Season

Spring and Autumn
March and April, October and November

What to Expect
Average temperatures at the river: high 70° F/21° C, low 50° F/10° C. Average temperatures at the rim: high 52° F/11° C, low 27° F/-3° C.
High winds in March and April.

Spring and Autumn Hiking Tips
Spring and autumn weather can be unpredictable. Be prepared for all weather conditions.
Be prepared to hike in the spring and early summer in autumn. Check conditions and wear appropriate clothing.
Check on seasonal water availability along the Bright Angel and North Kaibab Trails. Stormwater is generally available May–September.

Windy days can leave you quickly dehydrated. Drink plenty of water even on cooler temperature days.
Remember that hypothermia can occur in 50° F/10° C weather and hot illness in 80° F/27° C weather. Listen to your body, check weather forecasts, and plan appropriately.

Taking Care of the Canyon

Before You Hit the Trail...
Check last minute weather forecast and adjust plans accordingly. Everyone should feel well and ready for the hike. Anyone not feeling well should postpone their hike.

Check that your pack is properly equipped with medication, first aid kit, and backup water purification.

Learn your hiking party with a family member or friend who will notice if you are overdue.

Hydrate, eat a good meal and get a good night’s sleep.

While You are at Camp...
Choose a campsite. Sites are first-come, first-serve. Group sites are reserved for parties of 7 or more hikers.

Tent sites only allow food, utensils, and plates in the food storage cans located at each campsite. Keep the lid locked to prevent the food from spoiling and losing the food. Remember to keep water in a portable container if you want to refill it at the campsite.

Hanging your food is a viable option in the area.

Attach your backcountry permit in a visible location. Attach the permit to your backpack for your hike out.

If you are getting an early start, remember to maintain a quiet camp and let your fellow campers continue to sleep.

Remove everything from the food storage cans and place them upside down on the picnic tables. This prevents small animals from getting trapped in the food storage can.

Check the campground bulletin boards for any trail and water updates.

When You Leave Camp...
Clean up your site. Do not leave any trash, gear, or extra food. Check your sites for microtrash. Look for dropped crumbs, bandages, twist ties, toothpicks, etc.

Remove everything from the food storage cans and place them upside down on the picnic tables. This prevents small animals from getting trapped in the food storage can.

If you are getting an early start, remember to maintain a quiet camp and let your fellow campers continue to sleep.

Check the campground bulletin boards for any trail and water updates.

Attach your backcountry permit to your backpack for your hike out.

Hiking Map: North Kaibab, South Kaibab, and Bright Angel Trails

North Kaibab Trail
North Kaibab Trailhead: EL 8241 ft / 2512 m

Elevation Change  | Mileage Change
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Trailhead to Supai Tunnel | 1441 ft / 440 m
Supai Tunnel to Roaring Springs | 1580 ft / 482 m
Roaring Springs to Pumphouse Residence | 620 ft / 189 m
Pumphouse Residence to Cottonwood Campground | 520 ft / 158 m
Cottonwood Campground to Ribbon Falls | 360 ft / 110 m
Cottonwood Campground to Bright Angel Campground | 1600 ft / 482 m
Trailhead to Cottonwood Campground | 4161 ft / 1268 m
Trailhead to Bright Angel Campground | 3761 ft / 1147 m

Be Prepared: No Water on South Kaibab Trail.

Be Prepared: 1 1/2 mi and 3 Mile Resthouses are seasonal water sources. Check availability.

South Kaibab Trail
South Kaibab Trailhead: EL 7260 ft / 2213 m

Elevation Change  | Mileage Change
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Trailhead to Cedar Ridge | 1140 ft / 347 m
Cedar Ridge to Skeleton Point | 900 ft / 274 m
Skeleton Point to Tip O’Fly | 1220 ft / 372 m
Tip O’Fly to Bright Angel Campground | 1020 ft / 313 m
Trailhead to Bright Angel Campground | 4780 ft / 1457 m

Be Prepared: No Water on North Kaibab Trail.

Bright Angel Trail
Bright Angel Trailhead: EL 6860 ft / 2093 m

Elevation Change  | Mileage Change
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Trailhead to 1 1/2 Mile Resthouse | 1131 ft / 345 m
1 1/2 Mile Resthouse to 3 Mile Resthouse | 981 ft / 299 m
3 Mile Resthouse to Indian Garden Campground | 948 ft / 289 m
Trailhead to Indian Garden Campground | 3360 ft / 1033 m
Indian Garden Campground to River Resthouse | 330 ft / 103 m
River Resthouse to Bright Angel Campground | 0 ft / 0 m
Trailhead to Bright Angel Campground | 4800 ft / 1533 m

Be Prepared: 1 1/2 Mile and 3 Mile Resthouses are seasonal water sources. Check availability.

Winter
December through February

What to Expect
Average temperatures at the river: high 30° F/-1° C, low 15° F/-9° C.
Average temperatures at the rim: high 35° F/1.6° C, low 19° F/-7° C.
Cold and wet with snow storms on the rim in the canyon.

Winter Hiking Tips
Wear synthetic or wool layers to keep moisture away from your skin and keep you warm, even when wet.

Keep a set of dry clothes and extra hands in case you get wet and cold.
Your body needs fuel to keep you warm. Eat nourishing foods often. Bring warming foods like soups, tea, cocoa and snacks.

Bring appropriate gear. Pack waterproof layers, a tent, stove and cold weather sleeping bag.

Remember that wind chill can make a cold day bitterly cold. Wear windproof layers on windy days.

Be aware of the signs and symptoms of hypothermia. Symptoms include uncontrollable shivering, confusion and exhaustion, even after rest.