

ARIZONA

GRAND CANYON, MONUMENT VALLEY, FLAGSTAFF & SEDONA



After the buzz of Las Vegas in Nevada, we headed for some relative peace & quiet and the spectacular scenery of Arizona. Our goal was to see The Grand Canyon and Monument Valley. We stayed in the beautiful town of Flagstaff, which was to be our base for this adventure.

Arizona is the 6th largest state and joined the Union in 1912, previously being held by Spain before being passed onto an independent Mexico and then ceded to the United States after the Mexican-American war (1846-1848). Hence, you will note a bit of a Mexican influence.

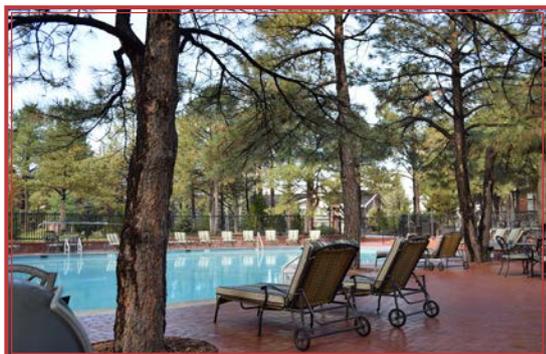
Flagstaff is billed as the gateway to the Grand Canyon and is the closest town to this sightseeing Mecca. It appeared to be the most centrally located large town for what we wanted to do. Flagstaff is a mountain town, sitting 7,000 Ft. above sea level. We stayed at the Little America Hotel and it was lovely. The rooms were

very comfortable; the dining area was great – with really good food. The property also included a gift shop, a small exercise room, a children’s playground, walking trails and a heated outdoor pool and spa, all set within



some very picturesque grounds, with some amazing pine trees. This place would be spectacular in wintertime in the snow!

From my early research it appeared that people did not normally combine a trip to Grand Canyon with a trip to Monument Valley. It seemed to be you did one or the other (most seem to do Grand Canyon as a side trip from Las Vegas) – but we came a long way and not likely to come back – we wanted to see as much as possible, even if it was in a tight time-frame. We stopped in at the Grand Canyon on the way to Flagstaff (due to time constraints), so we only had an hour or two. I would not recommend this – a full day here (at least) is required for a much better experience and appreciation of the area. The drive between Grand Canyon and Flagstaff is about 1.5 hours or a little over 2 hours if you choose to take an alternate route and drive along the South Rim (if you have the time – I would recommend that).



Poolside - Little America Hotel

Grand Canyon:



Grand Canyon!

Most people will recognise the Grand Canyon as a huge hole in the ground in America, made up of layers of spectacularly coloured red rock. The Grand Canyon has been carved out over millions of years by the Colorado River in the North-Western corner of Arizona, and currently measures 1 mile (1.6km) deep, 18 miles (29km) wide and winds along 277 river miles (446km).

There are nearly 40 rock layers forming the walls of the Grand Canyon, mainly various layers of shale, limestone and sandstone.

<http://www.nps.gov/grca/index.htm> is a great resource if planning a visit.

No matter how many photos you see of the Grand Canyon, nothing will compare to being there and experiencing the majestic magnificence of this vast marvel of nature! It will take your breath away and bring tears to your eyes (well, it had that effect on me anyway). The colours are amazing – so many different shades of red and brown. It was truly awesome and maybe a little humbling. You cannot under-estimate the size of Grand Canyon – it is HUGE! If

you can tear your eyes away from the glory of the Canyon itself, there are some interesting flora and fauna to observe. We were lucky enough to see an elk who commanded a great deal of attention when she came by the Visitors Centre for a drink!



Thirsty Elk

We also had to stop on the drive out of the park for a larger, antlered elk crossing the road: it was amazing!



Beware the Elk

We only had time to visit the most accessible and popular area of the South Rim of the canyon, but there is so much more to see, and so much else on offer. There are free shuttle buses that drive along the South Rim with various stops where you can get off and explore and then hop back on the next bus that comes by. These buses also go into the Grand Canyon



South Rim Map

Village and to the Visitors Center. You can also drive yourself; there are a few drivable roads throughout the park. Alternatively, it is possible to hire a bike and explore yourself, or you can take a guided tour.

Of course, you can also take guided tours into the canyon on a mule, go hiking, do a Jeep tour, a kayaking tour or even an air tour and take in the scenery from above!

The Visitors Centre has some interesting information on display and there is, of course, a gift shop for you to pick up a souvenir.

The South Rim is open all year, however, if you want to visit the North Rim – it is more remote and more difficult to get to - it is only open from May to October. The entrance fee into the Grand Canyon National Park was \$25 (for a single vehicle). If you enter on foot or bike, it is \$12 per person.

Monument Valley:



Monument Valley from Utah border

Many people will recognise Monument Valley as the backdrop in many a Western movie. Monument Valley lies along the Arizona/Utah border and is as equally spectacular as the Grand Canyon. The

drive from Flagstaff is long (about 3 hours), so get up early and enjoy as much of it as possible. The landscape along the way to Monument Valley is attention-grabbing and fascinating, with many interesting formations to catch your eye. You will also likely see various native Indian vendors set up along the roadside selling mainly jewellery, which is very good and not at all expensive. Unlike the drive to the Grand Canyon (where you can't see anything until you enter the park), you can see your destination approaching, magically drawing you along into its heart.



If you didn't want to drive, you could alternatively opt to stay at one of the few Monument Valley hotels or a camp-ground within the Navajo Nation Tribal Lands.

Monument Valley Tribal Park covers an area of almost 91,700 acres and is located within the 16 million acre Navajo Reservation (so it is not a US National Park). The Navajo for Monument Valley is: *Tsé Bii' Ndzisgaili*, meaning valley of the rocks.

The entrance fee to the park is \$20 (1 car, up to 4 people) and once you are through the gate you can either drive your own car (4 wheel drive recommended) around the rather

rough dirt road that loops through the park or you can join a Jeep tour. The Jeeps are open, the road is rough, it can be breezy, and the place is very dusty, so expect to be jolted about a bit and covered in red dust by the time you get back, however, the adventurous type might enjoy this! The drive through the valley will take approximately 1.5 - 2 hours (or longer). There are designated areas where you can stop, get out and walk around a little. Some of the stops have local craft stalls where you



Stall holders in Monument Valley Park

can buy a souvenir. Needless to say, there are plenty of fabulous photo opportunities. (For the really keen photographers, you can take a guided sunrise or sunset tour - that would be absolutely spectacular!). The park has a very good Visitor's Center, with various displays and information about the area, has somewhere to get something to eat & drink, restrooms and of course, a large gift shop. From the visitors Center you get a fabulous panoramic view of the "Mittens" of the



Mittens - from Visitors Center

valley.

The great 'monuments' of the valley are principally composed of vertically jointed slabs of sandstone, which is covered by layers of shale and siltstone. The valley has many fabulous examples of the various stages of erosion that has shaped this iconic site. The stages of erosion are: Mesa (1st stage) - a large rock



Rain God Mesa

formation that is flat on top, Butte (pronounced bee-ute) is the 2nd stage of erosion and more irregular looking, and the final stage is a Spire, where the



The Totem Pole (far right)

bottom layer of Organ rock remains holding up the sandstone (e.g. Totem Pole). These structures are big - some as tall as 1,000 Ft (300m). The valley floor is siltstone and the red colour comes from the exposed iron oxide of the weathered siltstone.



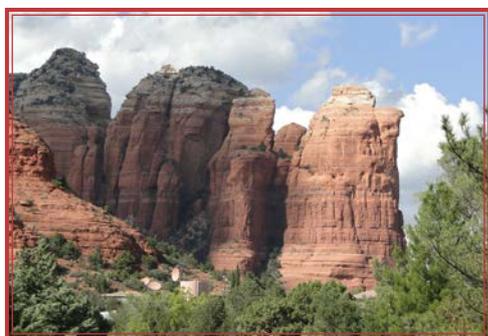
Both The Grand Canyon and Monument Valley are magnificent examples of how spectacular nature can be, even in a desert. We definitely could have spent more time in these places. It would have been great to experience a little more of the native cultures as well as seeing and drinking in more of the scenery. If you get the opportunity, stay a week to take in the amazing, barren beauty of the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley!

Sedona:

Our final destination in this part of the country was Sedona.



Originally we had not intended to visit here and we were going to have our final day back in Vegas, but the area deserves an extended stay, so we organised an extra night in Flagstaff. The extra time allowed us to visit the picturesque town of Sedona (an hours drive south), a town we had heard much about, with some more red mountainous sandstone structures. The drive is



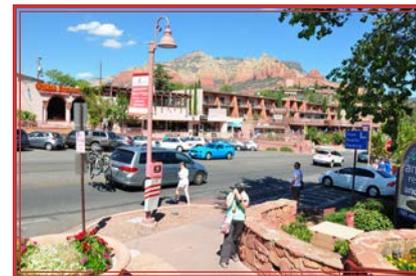
The Coffee pot - Sedona

picturesque, through mountainous, wooded country along a winding road.



The winding road to Sedona

Uptown Sedona has a lovely village-like atmosphere, with art galleries, eateries, and a vast variety of intriguing shops. We had lunch at a Mexican Cantina, sitting outside under huge yellow umbrellas, with misting fans



Sightseeing in Sedona



Taos Cantina

keeping us cool while we enjoyed the wonderful scenery. Sedona was a great, relaxing day out.



Andy & Cate at Sedona!

Sedona is an alternative place to stay for visiting the Grand Canyon and Monument Valley with several tours operating from here, but it is a bit further away.