

Utah's Mighty 5 Road Trip – Hiking Guide

A Road Trippers Guide to Hiking the Mighty



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Taking in the Beauty of Utah's National Parks, One Mile at a Time

After picking up your Advantage Rent A Car at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, you'll be ready to head to Utah's Red Rock Country. Carved by rivers and the passage of time, it is among our nation's most spectacular natural landscapes. With soaring canyons and towering buttes, sandstone arches and endless stretches of sky, this desert setting is ideal for endless outdoor pursuits from hiking and mountain biking to rock climbing and sightseeing.

Across the United States, there is no shortage of awe-inspiring national parks but nowhere is the wonder more concentrated than here in southern Utah where the Mighty 5 sit clustered together. The parks — Zion, Bryce, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and Arches — showcase the rugged beauty of the American Southwest and provide the perfect opportunity for an old-fashioned road trip.

Here's what you can expect on your escape to Utah's Mighty 5:

March to Zion

More than 200 million years ago, the North Fork of the Virgin River cut its way through burnt-red Navajo Sandstone to create Zion National Park. Home to Native Americans and westward pioneers, it was the Mormons who first declared the land of soaring monoliths and dramatic buttes to be Zion, a natural "temple of God."



While there are plenty of multi-day backpacking trips and strenuous hikes, you'll also find several areas off the main road that offer short treks for those of all ages and fitness levels. Here are a few of the most popular, from easy to more difficult:

Zion's Best Trails

Canyon Overlook – This short, mile-long hike weaves through a massive natural cave before rewarding hikers with jaw-dropping panoramic views.



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Emerald Pools — The upper pool of Emerald Pools Trail is a three-mile trek with shorter versions depending on where you begin. It is easily manageable for families, with paths that pass a plunging waterfall, green-tinged pools and red-rock formations.

Angels Landing – Not only is Angels Landing the most famous of the Zion routes, it is also possibly one of the most iconic hikes in the nation. While the half-day trek is rated for those in average physical condition, it can be very challenging for anyone with a fear of heights. The sheer drops and chain-assisted trails are not for the faint of heart or young families. Be sure to wear hiking boots and be prepared for some stunning views.

Observation Point — Challenging for most, this eight-mile round trip hike takes climbers more than 2,100 feet for amazing glimpses of Echo Canyon and the entire national park.

The Narrows — Hike as far as you'd like on this moderate three-to eight-mile trek upriver. Don't miss the Wall Street corridor, which brings hikers through a canyon section of rock. The trek is mostly through the Virgin River, so it's ideal for a hot summer day. The path does get crowded so make sure to plan in advance.

The Subway — This gorge got its name from the cavernous bottom that resembles a subway tunnel. The bottom-up hike travels through water on a strenuous, half-day journey that requires a permit.



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Visit the Bryce Canyon Goblins

After spending a few days in Zion, it's only a couple of hours in your Advantage Rent A Car to our next stop, Bryce Canyon National Park. The first misconception about Bryce Canyon is that it is a canyon at all. In truth, the amphitheater that was carved from millions of years of rain, snow and ice is more like a cave without a roof. Inside this magical landscape is the other myth, the one that explains the origins of the hoodoos. Also known as goblins, these stalagmite-like rock formations are said to be early Paiute Indians turned to stone for their evil deeds.

More abundant here than any place else in the world, the hoodoos sprout up from the desert floor along the Navajo Loop and Queen's Garden Trail, a 2.7-mile loop that takes hikers across stunning overlooks and through slotted canyons. Enjoy these short easy hikes or stroll along the park's rim, experience an interactive prairie dog maze at the visitor's center or finish your day at Sunset Point watching the sun paint the sky the color of red rock.

Step Back in Time at Capitol Reef

A sweeping landscape of twisted rock and boundless skies are what makes Capitol Reef National Park a favorite among locals. Pastel-colored cliffs, massive domes and hidden arches make it easy to imagine what life was like millions of years ago. This is what you should see:

Capitol Reef Scenic Byway — This 25-mile, round-trip drive takes you past the park's best scenery, including Panorama Point and Goosenecks Overlook viewing areas.

Pioneer Register – See a rock wall with the names of miners, settlers and adventurers dating back to the 1800s in this easy mile-long hike that dips from the trailhead into a slot canyon.

Hickman Natural Bridge — Pass the ruins of the ancient Fremont culture and the large white stone domes that inspired the park's name before arriving at the 133-foot bridge.

Fruita – In the green groves of Fruita, a Mormon community sits in a shaded canyon with orchards and U-pick it farms aplenty. Fruits that include cherries, apricots and pears are seasonally available.

Temples — The Cathedral Valley Scenic Backway cuts through the northern tip of the park along a desert canyon drive and features dramatic sites like the Temples of the Sun, Moon and Stars.



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Raft the Rapids in Canyonlands

Located in the heart of Red Rock Country, Canyonlands National Park sprawls over 500 square miles of colorful desert land, deep-plunging gorges and soaring buttes carved by rushing rivers. Four distinct areas provide visitors with a variety of ways to experience one of America's great national parks:

Island in the Sky — The Island in the Sky peers over the point where the Green and Colorado rivers collide. From atop the 1,500-foot mesa, visitors can see almost 100 miles in any direction. As the centerpiece of the park, the area offers numerous opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, ATV rides and sightseeing at places that include the Mesa Arch.

Needles — In the southwest corner of the park, this district boasts the Cedar Mesa Sandstone sculptures that tower over the landscape.

Maze — The least-visited section of Canyonlands is fairly remote and most-often visited only by hikers looking to overnight in the backcountry.

Rivers — The calm waters upriver from where the Green and Colorado rivers meet are the ideal spots for rafting, canoeing and kayaking. Below the confluence, you'll find the rushing rapids that pour into Cataract Canyon attracting whitewater thrill seekers. Witness the Splendid Arches

In less than an hour's drive, you'll be at Arches National Park where nature lovers and thrill seekers alike will find natural rock arch formations, carved by centuries of erosion. Arches offers a variety of hiking options for nature enthusiasts of all fitness levels. Here's a look at what there is to do and see on your visit to Arches:



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Landscape Arch — Longer than a football field, this natural sandstone arch is the longest in the world but is just eight-feet thick in some spots.

Delicate Arch — View this favorite attraction by hiking a trail that begins at Wolfe Ranch or driving to the viewing point, known to be one of the most amazing in the area.

Fiery Furnace — This geological formation is ideal for hiking, walking or catching some of the park's best sunset views.

Devils Garden Trailhead - Pass through Landscape Arch to Navajo Arch before eventually getting to the famous Double O Arch and Dark Angel.

The Windows — The entire family can hike to this section of Arches where Juniper forests frame a formation that resembles large windows.



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Keeping Safe on the Roads and the Trails

Tips for Navigating Utah's Mighty 5 National Parks

Prepare for a Driving Adventure — When picking up a rental car, opt for a 4-wheel drive vehicle that can handle the rugged terrain and unpredictable weather you may encounter on your road trip. Stop by the Advantage Rent a Car counter at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas, where you can pick up a GMC Acadia or Toyota 4Runner.

Avoid the Dark — It may seem like a good idea to drive at night to maximize daylight, but the abundance of deer, elk and other wildlife on the road can make it dangerous. Save the driving for late afternoon when there's still plenty of visibility.

Take Breaks — Most of Utah's National Parks have facilities at the visitor's center. Make sure to plan ahead.

Expect the Rain — July and August are monsoon season so be prepared for snap thunderstorms.

Layer Up - The Utah desert has summer temperatures that dip into the 50s and soar above the 90s so layers of clothing are essential.

There's an App for That — Download sightseeing apps for narration about the attractions as you drive by.

Put Your Best Foot Forward — A pair of supportive, waterproof hiking boots will help you navigate the unstable terrain and wet riverbeds.

Sun Protection - A hat, sunscreen and sunglasses are essential in the unforgiving desert sun.

Keep Quenched — Plan to drink about a liter of water per hour. Always keep a water bottle with you.

Consider an Airport Alternative — While McCarran Airport in Las Vegas is better for the itinerary because it is close to the first stop on the trip (Zion National Park), Salt Lake International Airport car rental in Salt Lake City could be just as convenient because of its proximity to the last stop on the trip (Arches National Park). Your Advantage Rent A Car options will ensure you have an enjoyable adventure no matter which airport you choose.



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Drive Times

- Las Vegas to Zion National Park: 2 hours, 30 minutes
- Zion National Park to Bryce National Park: 2 hours
- Bryce National Park to Capital Reef National Park: 2 hours, 15 minutes
- Capital Reef National Park to Canyonlands National Park: 2 hours, 15 minutes
- Canyonlands National Park to Arches National Park: 30 minutes

The journey from Arches to Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport takes about seven hours or you can head to **Advantage Rent A Car** counter in the Salt Lake City International Airport, which is about four hours away. ■