



3 Day Grand Canyon Itinerary

Day 1: Drive from Phoenix, Check into Yavapai Lodge, and Watch the Sunset at Moran Point

Drive from Phoenix

If you're flying in from out of state, Phoenix Sky Harbor is the nearest major airport. You'll definitely want to rent a car for this itinerary, and we had a great experience renting through [Sixt](#).

This family-owned company was founded in Germany in 1912 and is considered the oldest and largest rental car company in Europe. Sixt brought its signature premium rental experience to the U.S. in 2011, and we were impressed with the excellent customer service and quality selection of vehicles.

It takes about 3½ hours to drive from Phoenix to the Grand Canyon, but there are several stops along the way that I recommend if you have extra time. A few of our favorite road trip stops include [Jerome](#), [Prescott](#), [Sedona](#), [Flagstaff](#), and [Williams](#). Each destination offers something unique and makes for a fun way to break up the drive.

Check into Yavapai Lodge

We stayed one night at [Yavapai Lodge](#), and we loved the convenience of staying right inside the park.

This historic lodge was built in 1958 as part of "Mission 66", a 10-year National Park Service initiative to expand park lodging and modernize visitor infrastructure between 1956-1966.

Yavapai Lodge has undergone several renovations since first opening. The most recent was in 2019, when the rooms were updated with new furniture, bedding, and air conditioning units. We found the rooms to be clean and comfortable, and the location inside the park is hard to beat.

Dinner at Yavapai Tavern

We grabbed dinner at Yavapai Tavern, the on-site restaurant at Yavapai Lodge.

We ordered tacos, a Southwest bowl, and chips and queso. The food was great, and the restaurant has a cozy, casual atmosphere with both indoor seating and a lovely outdoor patio.

Sunset at Moran Point

There are several incredible spots to watch the sunset at the Grand Canyon, but Moran Point has always been my favorite.

This scenic lookout point is located on Desert View Drive, about a 20-minute drive from the visitor center.

There is a decent-sized parking lot and plenty of scenic spots to admire the view. This is also one of the few overlooks where you can get a clear view of the Colorado River winding through the canyon below.

I recommend arriving about a half hour before sunset so you have time to experience golden hour before the sun begins to dip below the horizon.

Watching the ever-changing light as the sun slowly slips behind the canyon's dramatic layers and folds is truly a spectacular sight.

After sunset, we headed back to Yavapai Tavern for a little dessert. We enjoyed chocolate torte and tiramisu around the fire pits while listening to the crickets chirping in the evening air. It was a deliciously nostalgic summer night and the perfect way to wrap up our first day at the Grand Canyon.

Day 2: Sunrise Hike, Grand Canyon Village, Rim Trail, Desert View Watchtower, Check into The Squire at Grand Canyon

Sunrise Hike

The South Kaibab Trail to Ooh Aah Point is arguably the best sunrise hike in the Grand Canyon, and it's one of my absolute favorites.

If you're visiting between mid-May and mid-September, you'll need to take the shuttle bus to reach the South Kaibab Trailhead. One of the advantages of staying at Yavapai Lodge is that it's just a few minutes from the shuttle bus stop at the Visitor Center, making it easy to get an early start.

The Hikers Express shuttle bus departs daily from the Visitor Center at 4:00, 5:00, and 6:00 am. We arrived at the visitor center at 4:50 am, which gave us enough time to park and walk to the bus stop. We then took the orange shuttle route to South Kaibab and were on the trail by 5:10 am, which was perfect for a 5:40 am sunrise.

The view from the rim is spectacular, but there's something completely different about getting below the rim and experiencing the canyon from within. It's an experience I think everyone should have at least once in their lifetime!

As we descended the steep switchbacks, the canyon was bathed in the early morning glow. It was so peaceful and beautiful.

The hike to Ooh Aah Point is only one mile, and it's one of the best places in the park to watch the sunrise. The way the morning light slowly illuminates the deep canyon walls is absolutely magical.

After watching the sun rise, we continued down the trail to Cedar Ridge. This adds about 1.5 miles to the hike for a total of 3.4 miles round trip and nearly doubles the elevation gain to 1,181 feet, but we thought it was worth the extra effort.

There was just something special about hiking deeper into the canyon as the morning light danced across the colorful layers of rock.

For more adventurous hikers, the South Kaibab Trail continues to Skeleton Point (6.1 miles round trip) and Phantom Ranch (14.8 miles round trip). It also connects with the North Kaibab Trail for the iconic Rim-to-Rim hike, which is 21.4 miles one way.

If you only do one hike at the Grand Canyon, make sure it's this one, and make sure you do it at sunrise!

Yaki Point

After the hike, we took the shuttle bus to the next stop at Yaki Point. Since you can only reach this overlook by shuttle bus during the summer months, it is not nearly as crowded as the other lookout points.

It was a pretty and peaceful spot to walk around and enjoy the view before heading back to the visitor center.

While you're at the visitor center, take time to check out the exhibits and learn more about the Grand Canyon's geology, history, and wildlife. Plenty of helpful information is posted around the center, and the park rangers are always happy to answer questions and offer recommendations.

Grand Canyon Village

Set aside a few hours to explore Grand Canyon Village and experience a fascinating piece of the park's history.

The Grand Canyon began attracting tourists in 1901 with the arrival of the first steam-powered railway. Hotels, shops, and other businesses soon began popping up along the rim, and in 1919, the Grand Canyon was officially designated a national park.

Today, Grand Canyon Village continues to welcome visitors from around the world, with historic buildings, shops, restaurants, and viewpoints spread along the South Rim.

El Tovar Hotel was one of the first hotels built on the South Rim. It was also the first luxury hotel, featuring modern amenities like electricity, hot water, and fine dining. Today, guests can still enjoy dinner at the upscale El Tovar Dining Room, or at least just step inside the lobby to

admire the beautiful historic architecture and décor.

The Hopi House is another unique stop. This historic building was designed to resemble a traditional Hopi pueblo and houses a gift shop featuring beautiful handcrafted Native American art, jewelry, pottery, and other goods.

Just down the rim, you'll find Lookout Studio. This stone building perched on the rim was designed by renowned architect Mary Colter. Step inside and you'll find a small gift shop that offers incredible views of the canyon.

Verkamp's Visitor Center is also worth a quick visit. It features exhibits about the park's history, a visitor information desk, and a gift shop where you can pick up souvenirs.

A few other notable historic sites in Grand Canyon Village include Grand Canyon Depot, Bright Angel Lodge, and Kolb Studio. Even if you don't have time to explore each one, it's worth wandering along the rim and popping into a few of these historic buildings.

The Bright Angel trailhead is also located in Grand Canyon Village. This is one of the trails you can take to the North Rim for the Rim-to-Rim hike, but it's a beautiful trail if you want to hike just a portion of it.

There are several places to grab a bite to eat in Grand Canyon Village, but after our morning of exploring, we decided to head back to Yavapai Tavern for lunch.

Walk a Portion of the Rim Trail

The Rim Trail is a 12.8-mile mostly paved trail that stretches from the South Kaibab Trailhead to Hermit's Rest. You don't need to walk the entire trail to enjoy it. In fact, it's easy to access from Grand Canyon Village, and I highly recommend walking a portion of it to take in the incredible views along the South Rim.

One of my favorite stops along the way is Yavapai Point & Geology Museum. Yavapai Point features an observation deck with panoramic views stretching across both the eastern and western sections of the canyon, which makes it a popular spot to watch sunrise and sunset.

Inside the Yavapai Geology Museum, you'll find fascinating exhibits and displays explaining the geological forces that shaped the Grand Canyon over millions of years. It's a great place to gain a deeper appreciation for the landscape you can see outside the wall of windows.

Mather Point is another popular viewpoint, especially at sunrise. It can be easily accessed along the Rim Trail by the visitor center and offers an expansive view of the canyon.

Be sure to also look for the Trail of Time, a 1.3-mile section of the Rim Trail between the Yavapai Geology Museum and Grand Canyon Village. This unique interpretive trail features interactive exhibits and informational markers that walk you through the geological history of the Grand Canyon. One of the coolest parts is that you can actually touch a sample of some of the oldest known rock in the canyon, dating back more than 1.8 million years!

Drive to the Desert View Watchtower

I've visited the Grand Canyon quite a few times, but this was my first time visiting the Desert View Watchtower, and it was so cool!

It takes about 35 minutes to drive to the watchtower from the visitor center, but it's a beautiful drive along Desert View Drive with incredible viewpoints along the way.

The Desert View Watchtower was designed by Mary Colter and completed in 1932. She drew inspiration from Ancestral Puebloan structures when designing the 70-foot-tall stone tower. The interior features colorful murals depicting Hopi legends, and the ground floor was designed to resemble a traditional kiva.

You'll need a timed ticket to access the tower. Tickets are free and can be requested on-site. Self-guided tours depart every 20 minutes, but space is limited, so you may have to wait for the next available time.

The four-story tower features a spiral staircase and walkways that wrap around the interior walls, giving you a unique perspective as you make your way to the top. The top floor serves as an observation room, with windows and telescopes offering spectacular views of the canyon and the Colorado River below.

On your way back to the parking lot, stop at the Desert View Trading Post and enjoy a scoop of ice cream while sitting on the porch rocking chairs. It hits the spot on a hot day!

Check into The Squire at Grand Canyon

We enjoyed staying inside the park at Yavapai Lodge, but we also wanted to experience the amenities at [The Squire at Grand Canyon](#). This Holiday Inn Resort is located in Tusayan, just a five-minute drive from the Grand Canyon's South Rim entrance.

After checking into our spacious room, we enjoyed dinner at the Desert Lounge + Grill. We were so impressed with each dish. The food was delicious, and the presentation was beautiful.

We spent the evening unwinding at the hotel, which felt so nice after a long day. We relaxed at the pool, played lawn games, enjoyed complimentary s'mores, and hung out at the arcade.

They also have a dive-in movie at the indoor pool on select nights, which is fun for kids. With so many activities and amenities, The Squire is a great option if you want to combine your Grand Canyon adventure with a little downtime, especially for families.

Day 3: Full-day E-bike Rental and Sunset Hummer Tour

Full-day E-bike Rental

The Squire has an e-bike rental shop conveniently located on-site, so we decided to book a full-day rental and explore the Grand Canyon by bike. We had the best time, and it ended up being one of our favorite experiences of the trip!

The park has an amazing network of bike trails, and we loved riding through the forest paths that connect Tusayan to the South Rim.

Once we reached the rim, we headed east on the Hermit Road Shuttle Route. From mid-May through mid-September, this road is restricted to shuttle buses and bikes, which means the viewpoints are significantly less crowded than many other areas of the park.

It's so beautiful riding right along the rim, and we loved the freedom of having a bike and stopping wherever and whenever we wanted.

There are nine shuttle stops along the route, and we stopped at several of them along the way. Bright Angel Trail Overlook offers an incredible view of the iconic Bright Angel Trail as it winds its way down into the canyon.

Powell Point has sweeping panoramic views and also serves as a memorial to John Wesley Powell, the explorer who led the 1869 river expedition through the Grand Canyon.

Hopi Point, Mohave Point, and Pima Point are also worth stopping at for spectacular views of the canyon and the Colorado River, while The Abyss offers a dramatic, up-close look at the sheer canyon walls.

At the end of the road is Hermit's Rest, the westernmost viewpoint on the South Rim and the final stop along the route.

It was designed in 1914 by Mary Colter as a rest stop for Grand Canyon visitors. It was made to look like a rustic pioneer cabin and houses a gift shop and snack bar. It's the perfect spot for a snack break with a view before heading back.

Restrooms and a water refill station are also available at Hermit's Rest.

We ended up riding about 22 miles, which took us roughly 4 hours with all of our stops. We mostly kept the pedal-assist setting at 1 or 2 to conserve battery life. If you're worried about running out of battery, you can lock up your bike at one of the shuttle stops and take the shuttle bus for the remainder of the route.

Exploring the Grand Canyon by e-bike was such a fun and unique way to experience the South Rim, and I highly recommend adding it to your itinerary!

Sunset Hummer Tour

After relaxing at the hotel for a few hours, we headed out for a sunset [Buck Wild Hummer Tour](#).

It was so much fun cruising around the park in a former military Humvee and stopping at some of the best viewpoints along the South Rim. I also loved learning interesting facts, history, and stories about the Grand Canyon from our knowledgeable guide.

Our guide took us to several different locations, but Grandview Point was one of my favorites. It's the highest point on the South Rim, and we arrived just in time for golden hour. The canyon was absolutely beautiful in the soft evening light.

From there, we headed to Moran Point for sunset. This is my favorite place to watch the sunset in the park, so I was excited that we got to experience it twice on this trip. No two

Grand Canyon sunsets are ever quite the same, and the experience feels different every time!

We made it back to the hotel just in time for another delicious dinner at the Desert Lounge + Grill before they closed.

The next morning, we packed up and headed home after an incredible weekend at the Grand Canyon. We've visited countless times over the years, but this trip reminded me that there's always something new to experience. I hope this guide helps you plan your own memorable getaway to one of the most beautiful national parks in the U.S.!