

Tauck World Discovery: Spirit of the Desert: The National Parks of the Southwest

Day 1: Arrive Grand Junction

Tour begins: 6:00 PM, Red Cliffs Lodge. A transfer is included from Grand Junction Regional Airport to Utah's Red Cliffs Lodge. A transfer is included from Grand Junction Regional Airport to Red Cliffs Lodge in Moab, Utah. The "Spirit of the Desert" defies just one single definition. It's the spirit of the moment, a mood, a feeling harmonious with nature yet transcendent of earth and sky. It moves the senses to create, the mind and soul to soar, adventurers to be bold. And, starting tonight, you will become part of its amazing story. Learn about the days ahead through filmed vignettes by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, who explains: "If you really want to witness the national parks when they're most beautiful, you want to see them at sunrise and sunset - the times when we typically shot most of the footage for our film. Nothing quite compares to those parts of the day. From 10 am to 3 pm, standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon is certainly awe-inspiring; but standing on the rim as the first rays of light hit the canyon, or when the last rays of a sinking sun move through it, is an experience beyond words." In the vignette, Dayton introduces the "Dawn Patrol" and "Sunset Scouts," independent explorations that take place at these optimum times of the day; mostly optional, they create an emotional connection to the parks that deepens your appreciation of all they offer. Following pre-dinner drinks featuring hot and cold canapés, join us for a "cowboy cookout" dinner at Red Cliffs Lodge as Tauck's comprehensive national parks featuring the Grand Canyon vacation begins.

Day 2: Arches National Park... sandstone arches, then a float trip on the river

This morning's Dawn Patrol rewards with views of the sun's rise over the Windows section of Arches National Park, a series of fascinating natural sandstone arches. Take a guided float trip along the Colorado River*; rock towers, colors and light reflect upon the water like mirror images. Dinner is at your leisure at the lodge followed by an optional Sunset Scouts walk.

Day 3: The desert from a Navajo perspective... and inspiration at Canyonlands National Park

You have the option this morning of joining your Tauck Director for a trip to enjoy spectacular views of Book Cliffs, Arches National Park, Colorado, and the La Salle Mountains... and perhaps see some dinosaur tracks! Late morning, a member of the local Navajo tribe speaks about the Navajo perspective on these sacred canyonlands and their history here. Depart for some fun exploring in the town of Moab, then on to Canyonlands National Park. Sightseeing ends with a picnic dinner and inspiring views of desert splendor at Dead Horse Point.

Day 4: Flying over Capitol Reef National Park and on to Bryce Canyon National Park

Go on an optional Dawn Patrol or visit the Film Museum at your lodge (both on your own), before this morning's dramatic aerial tour over Capitol Reef National Park. Fly along the Waterpocket Fold Capitol Gorge, a 100-mile-long basin of colorful cliffs, soaring spires and graceful arches. End the day at Bryce Canyon National Park with time for a walk or joining in on a ranger's talk.

Day 5: Bryce Canyon and Zion, plus a talk on "singaways"

Morning sightseeing includes a hike along Bryce Canyon rim or down to the base of the valley to take in views of Bryce's remarkable hoodoo terrain of these oddly shaped pillars of rock. Depart midday for Zion where Ryan Paul, Curator of Frontier Homestead State Park Museum, entertains with a lecture on "singaways" and a history of the national park lodges.

Day 6: Striking images on a full day in Zion

Zion's striking sandstone cliffs change in color from light cream to pink and red throughout the day; see them on a drive by tram through Zion Valley with short walks to sites like Weeping Falls and

Court of the Patriarchs. Late afternoon, historian and author Alfred Runte, who appeared often in "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," speaks on the history of the railroads in the national parks.

Day 7: Pipe Spring National Monument and on to the North Rim of Grand Canyon National Park

Leave Zion; en route to the Grand Canyon, a guided tour at Pipe Spring National Monument shares stories of the native Paiute Indians and Mormon pioneers. Continue to the Grand Canyon's less crowded North Rim for an afternoon's introduction to the spectacular views from 8,800+-ft.-high Point Imperial.

Day 8: Exploring the Grand Canyon

A Dawn Patrol takes in the fantastic North Rim - and remember, sunrise comes pretty early! Naturalist John Muir remarked: "The dawn, as in all the pure, dry desert country is ineffably beautiful; and when the first level sunbeams sting the domes and spires, with what a burst of power the big, wild days begin." The day is free to explore as you please; optional activities include ranger programs, hikes, or a mule ride into the canyon. Or simply sit for a spell in the Adirondack chairs on the porch...

Day 9: Flightseeing from the Grand Canyon to Las Vegas

A final Dawn Patrol takes in the spectacular sunrise, at your own pace, from the North Rim of the canyon. The last of our vignettes features reflections by Ken Burns about our own private memories of the national parks - these memories are not about the "views," but instead they are the memories of those you shared the views with. Dayton Duncan's vignette explains how the parks belong to all of us, and the need to continue to help to protect them for future generations. The most fitting farewell to the Southwest and this Grand Canyon vacation is a flightseeing trip from Kanab over the western regions of the Grand Canyon to Las Vegas for your return home. Join us tonight for a farewell reception and dinner at your Four Seasons hotel.

Day 10: Journey home

Tour ends: Las Vegas. Fly home anytime. A transfer is included from Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas to Las Vegas McCarran International Airport. Checkout time is 12:00 noon. You should allow two hours for flight check-in at the airport.