

Utah: Bryce & Zion Canyons

Tour-Only Itinerary

Traverse unique landscapes while taking in stunning scenery on a Utah hiking trip through two national parks. Marvel at Bryce's perpetually-balanced hoodoos and swooping natural arches, then travel to Zion to explore slot canyons and hanging gardens. Witness a myriad of colors – red earth, orange stone, pink rocks, and green ponderosa pines, and listen for the chatter of swallows as you stop to cool your feet in moss-lined pools. Take in stunning natural beauty amid an unforgiving setting of wind-polished stone and quick-flowing waters. Your Bryce Canyon hiking tour takes you past otherworldly rock formations and through winding canyons, while in Zion National Park 2,000-foot cliffs host an incredible variety of flora and fauna. In both parks you'll discover sweeping vistas unlike any on Earth.



Highlights

From the edge of the rim, descend into the heart of Bryce Canyon on foot, observing natural amphitheaters and unique rock formations as you go

Explore the frontier beauty of Springdale, your home for three nights, and admire the local art inspired by Zion's soaring backdrop of multicolored sandstone

With expert guides, discover how the Ancestral Puebloans thrived in Zion's extreme climate, and perhaps spot their ancient rock art during your hike

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided - Full Walking Adventures, rated moderate, walking an average of 2 to 8 miles per day, with occasional options. While this is not a mountain-climbing tour, there are daily ascents and descents. This tour is not recommended for those who suffer from severe vertigo or a fear of heights, although this terrain may be easily omitted. The ascents and descents are gradual as opposed to very sharp and steep, and our pace is generally slow, approximately 2 miles per hour. The highest elevation during the trip is about 9,000 feet. The trails are a combination of dirt and paved paths; some are wooded and others are quite open and exposed. Proper sunscreen and head protection are necessary. Classic canyon walking and scenery are included in Bryce and Zion.

DAY 1

Arrival in St. George

Snow Canyon; 2-3 miles, easy to moderate. Transfer to Bryce Canyon National Park. Fairyland Rim Trail; 3 miles, easy to moderate

Your guide(s) will meet you at the Inn on the Cliff at 8:00 a.m. in the lobby. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking. Upon meeting your guides in St. George, you travel north to the day's final destination of Bryce Canyon National Park, with several stops en route to break up the approximate two-and-a-half-hour drive. The drive follows the course of the Virgin River—rising almost 8,000 feet from its terminus at Lake Mead to its origin at Navajo Lake on the Colorado Plateau—the greater geologic area that includes not only Bryce and Zion Canyons, but also the Grand Canyon. Your morning walk in Snow Canyon, located in the 62,000-acre Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, offers your first glimpse of the colorful sandstone cliffs, once ancient sand dunes that have been sculpted over time by the wind and rain.

Next is a stop at Kolob Canyon, in the upper portion of Zion National Park, where you enjoy a picnic lunch. At an elevation of over 6,000 feet, you look over the lower parts of Zion, established as a national park in 1919, with the addition of this Kolob portion in 1956.

Continuing the drive to Bryce Canyon, you disembark your van at Fairyland Point, for the walk along the Fairyland Rim trail that brings you on foot to Bryce Canyon Lodge—your home for the next two nights. Panoramic views of Bryce Canyon are a magical introduction to this area, as you walk past the red, orange, and white hoodoos, fantastic rock spires glowing in the afternoon light, and underneath Ponderosa pines. In the distance, you have views of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Aquarius Plateau, and Navajo Mountain. You may choose to shorten the walk, or arrive by van to your 1920s park lodge, a National Historic Landmark. Its privileged location within the park provides unlimited access to the spectacle of Bryce Canyon's rim and a crystalline night sky. You gather for dinner at the rustic-yet-elegant main lodge.

Accommodation: Bryce Canyon Lodge, Bryce Canyon National Park

DAY 2

Bryce Point to Sunset Point

3-4 miles, moderate, 700-1,000-ft. elevation gain; Queen's Garden Loop and Navajo Loop; 3 miles, easy to moderate, 500-ft. elevation gain; 1 mile, easy. Shorter option: Bristlecone Loop via Rainbow and Yovimpa Points; 1 mile, easy

After a hearty breakfast in the lodge's dining room, you start today's walk on the rim of the canyon, with spectacular views from Bryce Point of Bryce Amphitheater and the Paria River Valley beyond. Passing multicolored limestone rock formations, both surreal and whimsical, you descend gently into the heart of the canyon, also walking through a stand of bristlecone pines—the park's oldest living trees, said to date back over 2,000 years. You ascend gradually out of the canyon on the Navajo Loop through the "Wall Street" formation, between massive orange limestone fins—resulting from an ancient lakebed, now providing cooling shade—and continue on for a view of Thor's Hammer.

This afternoon, choose from two distinct walking options: the longer, the Queen's Garden Loop (named for a hoodoo that looks like Queen Victoria in profile) and Navajo Loop, begins and ends at your lodge, descending to the canyon floor, passing the Twin Bridges, and bringing you into Bryce Amphitheater before rising gradually.

The shorter option is reached via a 20-minute drive to Bryce's southern point at an elevation of 9,100 feet. This easy walk beginning on the canyon rim offers tremendous views for hundreds of miles in all directions: to the north are Bryce's 14 amphitheaters; northeast, the red and orange cliffs of the Aquarius Plateau; to the east, the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, one of the world's greatest sources of dinosaur fossils; and to the south, the North Rim of the Grand Canyon is visible. This evening, you linger over refined Western fare, perhaps a grilled steak or Alaskan salmon accompanied by a Utah microbrew, at the historical lodge dining room.

Accommodation: Bryce Canyon Lodge, Bryce Canyon National Park

DAY 3

Transfer to Zion National Park

Optional sunrise walk: Bryce Point to Sunset Point; 2 miles, easy; Canyon Overlook Trail; 1 mile,

moderate; Emerald Pools Trail; 3 miles, easy to moderate

Early risers may wish to join the guides for a serene sunrise walk and catch the morning rays rising over the Aquarius Plateau, bathing the hoodoos in warm hues. After breakfast, you transfer to Zion National Park, stopping along the way to walk the Canyon Overlook Trail, offering expansive views of Pine Creek Canyon, the East Temple, and the west side of Zion.

The entrance to Zion Canyon is breathtaking. You emerge from the historic Zion-Mt. Carmel Tunnel, which was cut laboriously through 1.1 miles of sandstone, and descend into Zion's main canyon, carved out of wind-blown sandstone by the Virgin River. It is a true natural wonder, not only due to its unique geology and stunning scenery, but also for the incredible variety of flora and fauna—from peregrine falcons to the desert bighorn sheep and the Zion snail, found nowhere else on Earth. In addition to its rich natural history, the canyon contains evidence of human history extending back 2,000 years to the Ancestral Puebloans, as well as the Paiutes of 800 years ago.

The Emerald Pools Trail offers an easy to moderate walk to several pools and underneath a cool waterfall. Depending on the season, the falls can be either a steady stream or slight trickle. The vegetation around the pools offers an oasis of shade in the surrounding desert cliffs.

Your home for the next three nights is an inn resort along the Virgin River, in the charming town of Springdale. After some time to unpack and freshen up in your spacious room, you venture out for dinner at a favorite local restaurant.

Accommodation: Desert Pearl Inn, Springdale

DAY 4

Echo Canyon

4 miles, moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation gain; or Echo Canyon plus Observation Point, 8 miles, challenging, 2,000-ft. elevation gain

After breakfast in a nearby café, you begin today's walk to Echo Canyon, a beautiful slot canyon with gorgeous carved curves of orange sandstone, that offers incredible views of Cable Mountain soaring

overhead. Beginning with a few uphill switchbacks, the paved trail continues to climb about 1,000 feet up to middle Echo Canyon, with its pools and undulating slickrock, a marvel of nature's artistry. Because of time constraints you will need to decide this morning whether to opt for the additional afternoon walk to Observation Point or to turn around at Echo Canyon for a more leisurely return to the inn.

Following a picnic lunch at Echo Canyon with spectacular views over Angel's Landing and into the Narrows, those that choose to walk to Observation Point, one of the most remarkable hikes in the area, will climb the smooth, wide and mostly paved trail all the way to the rim of Zion. Know that you will be rewarded for your decision with stunning views of the entire canyon.

The rest of the afternoon is yours to enjoy by relaxing at your inn's inviting swimming pool and hot tub, or by taking advantage of the visitors' center at Zion National Park. This evening, you return to Springdale for dinner on your own, with your guides offering many suggestions, ranging from outdoor cafés to fine-dining restaurants.

Accommodation: Desert Pearl Inn, Springdale

DAY 5

Scout's Lookout Riverside Walk

2 miles, easy; Scout's Lookout and West Rim Trail view point, 5 miles, moderate, 1,500-ft. elevation gain; or the Narrows, 3-5 miles, moderate, water-level dependent, optional*

After breakfast, you set off from the Grotto trailhead on a moderate walk to Scout's Lookout (elevation gain of 1,300 feet). A winding trail leads from the valley floor through a series of switchbacks into Refrigerator Canyon, where, as its name implies, you are sheltered and cooled from the desert sun. You continue through Walter's Wiggles, closely cut switchbacks leading to the spectacular Scout's Lookout. The park unfolds below, with views of the Virgin River and canyon walls.

From here hike a few hundred feet farther up the West Rim, where you share a packed trail lunch with your companions under a ponderosa pine on top of the world. Everyone will descend the same route to the river in the early afternoon.

This evening, you venture into lively Springdale for a celebratory farewell dinner at a favorite local restaurant serving fresh, innovative cuisine.

*Note that close-toed walking shoes/boots with good traction are highly recommended for walking in the Narrows. River boots and dry pant rentals are available, at your own expense.

Accommodation: Desert Pearl Inn, Springdale

DAY 6

Red Cliffs Archaeological Site

2 miles, easy to moderate

After breakfast, a final walk takes you through the Red Cliffs Archaeological Site. The Ancestral Puebloans (formerly known as the Anasazi) lived here from 600 to 1200 AD, and it is thought they left the region in search of the permanent water source of the Rio Grande, where their descendants, the modern Pueblo Indians, live today. The hilltop site contains the rectangular and circular ruins of numerous habitation and storage rooms, and likely provided clear views of enemies and game. Below were the flatter areas for farming corn, squash, and beans, and the water source at the cottonwood-lined Quail Creek. It's still possible to find 1,000-year-old pottery shards on the ground, underneath the red sandstone cliffs. After the walk, you enjoy lunch at a lovely restaurant in Ancestor Square in St. George, Utah, which features locally grown organic fare with Southwest flavors. After lunch, a complimentary transfer is provided to the St. George Regional Airport arriving at approximately 2:00 p.m. or to the Inn on the Cliff arriving at 2:30 p.m.

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 1 dinner	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓