



Canyonlands preserves a wilderness of rock at the heart of the Colorado Plateau. Water and gravity, this land’s prime architects, cut flat layers of sedimentary rock into hundreds of canyons, mesas, buttes, fins, arches, and spires. At center stage are two canyons carved by the Green and Colorado rivers. Surrounding

A Wilderness of Rock



the rivers are vast, very different regions: Island in the Sky to the north, The Maze to the west, and The Needles to the east. They share a primitive spirit and Wild West atmosphere. Few people knew these remote lands and rivers well when the national park was established in 1964. Only Native Americans, cowboys, river explorers, and uranium prospectors had dared

enter this rugged corner of southeastern Utah. Canyonlands remains largely untrammelled—it’s roads mostly unpaved, trails primitive, and rivers free-flowing. Bighorn sheep, coyotes, and other native animals roam its 527 square miles. Canyonlands is wild America.

Island in the Sky



Shafer Canyon from The Neck, Island in the Sky

Views from Island in the Sky reach from the depths of the Green and Colorado rivers to the mountaintops and above. Across canyon after canyon they stretch to the horizon 100 miles distant. Island in the Sky—a broad mesa wedged between the rivers—is Canyonlands’ observation tower. From it you see vistas of dimensions hard to comprehend. Closest to the mesa’s edge is the White Rim, a nearly continuous sandstone bench 1,200 feet below the Island. Another 1,000 feet beneath White Rim are the rivers, shadowed by sheer canyon cliffs. Beyond them lie The Maze and The Needles.

Outside the park, three mountain ranges break the land’s flat-topped pattern. To the east rise the La Sal; to the south the Abajos; to the southwest the Henrys. Rain that skips Canyonlands’ arid soil keeps these mountains mantled in forests of pine and fir. At Island in the Sky, vegetation is more sparse. Fields of Indian rice-grass and other grasses and pinyon and juniper forests survive on fewer than 10 inches of rain a year. Coyotes, squirrels, and ravens, hawks, and smaller birds share these lands’ food. Cattle and horses once grazed here; abandoned water troughs and fences recall those bygone days.

Rocky ledges leading down to and below White Rim are favored habitat for desert bighorn sheep. From the Island in the Sky mesa these sheep look like tan, fly-sized specks. Only the sharpest observers spy them. Trails around Island in the Sky are good places to see wildlife, especially at dawn or dusk and in cooler months. Trails lead to striking vistas, arches, and other remarkable geological features. Geologists might single out Upheaval Dome as the oddest geologic feature at Island in the Sky. At 1,500 feet deep, it looks like a crater rather than a dome. How was it formed? A recent theory suggests that the cause was indeed a meteor strike. Whatever its origin, today’s landform of a jagged-edged crater is the result of erosion.

**Explorations** From US 191 take UT 313 south to Island in the Sky. A paved road continues across the district. *Facilities:* visitor center, 4-wheel-drive roads, self-guiding and primitive trails, developed campground, primitive campsites (backcountry permit and fee required), picnic areas, overlooks, roadside and trailside exhibits, ranger talks and programs (seasonal), and commercial tours from nearby towns. Water is available year-round at Island in the Sky Visitor Center; entrance and camping fees are charged.

The Maze



Horseshoe Canyon pictographs

The Maze is Canyonlands at its wildest. One of the nation’s most remote areas, The Maze itself is a 30-square-mile puzzle in sandstone. Nearby are the Land of Standing Rocks, Ernie’s Country, The Doll House, and The Fins, which offer oddly shaped towers, buttes, and mesas. Travelers to this wilderness of broken rock, scant water, and stunted junipers find solitude, silence, and challenges that call for self-reliance.

The 600-foot descent into the canyons of The Maze plunges you into this country’s heart. To the northwest, Horseshoe Canyon Unit contains some of North America’s most significant pictographs. The Great Gallery, the best known of Horseshoe Canyon’s panels, includes life-sized figures left by Archaic people over 2,000 years ago. Also impressive are spring wildflowers, sheer sandstone walls, and mature cottonwood groves along the intermittent stream in the canyon bottom.

**Explorations** From UT 24 or 95 take the 2- and 4-wheel-drive routes east to The Maze. *Facilities:* 4-wheel-drive roads, primitive hiking routes, primitive campsites (backcountry permit and fee required), overlooks, and commercial tours from nearby towns. No water is available.

The Needles



Desert four o’clocks

Contrasting names at The Needles reflect how diverse this land is: Devils Kitchen and Angel Arch, Elephant Hill and Caterpillar Arch, Gothic Arch and Paul Bunyans Potty. Its landforms of sculptured rock spires, arches, canyons, grabens, and potholes startle you. The Needles—rock pinnacles banded in red and white—are dominant. Earth movements fractured the rock, and flowing, freezing, and thawing water eroded it into today’s jumbled terrain.

Grassy meadows, like the 960-acre Chesler Park, contrast with The Needles’ bare rock. Arches lend the region an unusual touch. Like Arches National Park, The Needles boasts a fascinating collection of natural rock spans. Druid Arch, in upper Elephant Canyon, stands over 100 feet high. On the other hand, Wooden Shoe Arch has only a small tunnel-like opening. Other arches have caterpillar and wedding ring shapes.

Most arches lie hidden in backcountry canyons as the rich rewards of long hikes or trips by 4-wheel drive to see them. The Grabens can also be reached by 4-wheel drive. To get to these vertical-walled, grass-carpeted valleys, you must negotiate Elephant Hill—its steep inclines and sharp switchbacks test the skills of even the most accomplished drivers. Past The Grabens, roads and trails lead to Confluence Overlook, 1,000 feet above the Green and Colorado rivers.



Ancestral cultural site near Horse Canyon

Over millennia, Indigenous people from many ethnic and language groups lived or passed through here. They hunted deer and bighorn sheep; gathered native seeds, fruits, and roots; or grew corn, squash, and beans. They traveled and traded objects and ideas. You can see their traces in all but a few canyons at The Needles.

They recorded and communicated information on cliff walls as petroglyphs pecked into stone or pictographs painted with mineral pigments. Many of their stone and earthen dwellings and storehouses are well-preserved. The design of some structures (above) resembles that of the great stone pueblos of Hovenweep and Mesa Verde in Colorado, suggesting connections with those cultural groups. These sites are not ruins; they are places important to Indigenous cultures. Looters have taken many pots, tools, and other items made by ancestral peoples. Please leave all artifacts undisturbed.

**Explorations** From US 191 take UT 211 west to The Needles. The paved road continues into the park. *Facilities:* visitor center (seasonal), 4-wheel-drive roads, self-guiding and primitive trails, developed campground, primitive campsites (backcountry permit and fee required), overlooks, campground programs (seasonal), and commercial tours from nearby towns. Water is available year-round. Entrance and camping fees are charged.

Above: Green River Overlook at sunset © TOM TILL

The Rivers



Rapid Ten in Cataract Canyon

John Wesley Powell wrote his impressions of this region on his pioneering boat trip down the Green and Colorado rivers in 1869. “We glide along through a strange, weird, grand region. The landscape everywhere, away from the river, is of rock.” Over 100 years later these rivers still run wild.

Above their confluence, the Green and Colorado meander through sheer-walled canyons. Below it the combined waters start on a 14-mile rush through Cataract Canyon rapids. One of the nation’s most treacherous whitewater stretches, it rivals any in the Grand Canyon. The rivers’ dual personalities satisfy both those content with a quiet float and those eager for a challenging river run.

The rivers attract varied wildlife. Deer, beavers, bobcats, and migratory birds find shelter in the riverside cottonwoods and willows. Hanging gardens of maidenhair fern, monkeyflower, and columbine cling to 1,200-foot cliffs along water seepage lines. A lazy pace is best for watching life along the rivers. Cliffside stone structures and ancient rock markings are scattered along the rivers. Enjoy but don’t destroy this cultural heritage.

**Explorations** Boating is popular above and below The Confluence. Permits and fees are required for all river trips. River access is near the towns of Green River and Moab. Guided whitewater trips are available. Self-guiding flat-water canoe trips on the river are also popular.



Mesa Arch, Island in the Sky



Exploring Shafer Trail, Island in the Sky



Prickly pear cactus



Chesler Park, The Needles



Bighorn sheep



Green River at Fort Bottom

Travel Information for Your Enjoyment and Safety

“Come to our wilderness but be ready to rough it,” advised Canyonlands’ first superintendent Bates Wilson. That’s still good advice. Be sure to stop at the Moab or Monticello information centers or any park visitor center or ranger station. All park offices offer brochures, hiking and driving guides, books, topographic maps, and park conditions reports. They also post the activity schedule. Service animals are allowed. For firearms regulations check the park website.

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| <b>Climate</b> The region has hot summers, pleasant spring and fall months, and cool winters. Low humidity offsets summer heat. Precipitation is scant, mostly late summer to early fall thunderstorms. Snow falls in winter. Temperatures are: |                |
| <i>Summer</i><br>day: 80–100°F                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | night: 50–60°F |
| <i>Spring, Fall</i><br>day: 60–80°F                                                                                                                                                                                                             | night: 20–50°F |
| <i>Winter</i><br>day: 30–50°F                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | night: 0–20°F  |

**To Explore on Your Own** *By Road* Paved and 2-wheel-drive dirt roads at Island in the Sky and The Needles lead to natural features, overlooks, trailheads, picnic areas, and developed campgrounds. The 4-wheel-drive roads offer trips from a day to longer than a week. You can drive White Rim Road’s over 80 miles in two days or explore for many days. Primitive campsites are along many roads. A backcountry permit and fee are required for overnight trips. Always carry food, water, and tools for emergencies. In remote areas, travel with a second vehicle. Vehicles and bicycles must stay on designated roads.

*By Trail* Short walks and long hikes lead to some outstanding features. Short trails (most under one mile) at Island in the Sky and The Needles lead to overlooks, arches, geologic features, and cultural sites. Some offer wayside exhibits or brochures at trailheads or visitor centers. Longer trails penetrate wilder regions. Trails are generally primitive, rugged, strenuous, and

marked only by rock cairns. *Do not hike alone.* Stay on trails. Carry a map and plenty of water. Camping requires a backcountry permit.

*By River* Motorboats, rafts, and canoes can navigate either the Colorado and Green rivers’ quiet upper waters or Cataract Canyon’s tumultuous rapids. Boat launches are north of the park near the towns of Moab and Green River. Takeout is generally by jet boat shuttle from The Confluence (for flatwater trips) or Hite on Lake Powell. *There are no services along the river.* Permits are required for all trips through Cataract Canyon and overnight flatwater trips.

**Guided Tours** Commercial tour guides in nearby towns offer 4-wheel-drive and mountain bike tours, hiking trips, and river float trips year-round. Tours vary widely for the area covered, length, cost, and amenities. Reservations are usually required. Contact the park for a list of National Park Service concessioners.

**Campgrounds and Picnic Areas** Two campgrounds are open year-round, first-come, first-served. Both have picnic tables, grills, and toilets. The Needles Campground has water, and some individual and group sites can be reserved online. The Island in the Sky Campground has no water.

Primitive campsites (no water) are along some 4-wheel-drive roads and other remote areas. Backcountry permits and fees are required for primitive camping. Picnic areas at Island in the Sky have tables, grills, and toilets but no water. Picnic areas at The Needles have tables only.

**Fees, Permits, and Reservations** Entrance fees are charged at Island in the Sky and The Needles. *All overnight backcountry stays require permits (fee charged),* including mountain-bike or 4-wheel-drive camping and river trips. *Day-use permits (fee for online permits)* are required for vehicles, bikes, and horses on White Rim, Elephant Hill, Lavender Canyon, and Peekaboo/

Horse Canyon roads. Permit reservations are recommended; see the park website. Backcountry staff answer questions and assist with trip planning at canyres@nps.gov or 435-259-4351 (weekdays 8 am to noon, mountain time). Visitor centers only issue a limited number of permits.

**Safety** **Be prepared for heat! Take one gallon of drinking water per person per day. Avoid overexertion.** • Use extreme caution at overlooks and all cliff edges. Slickrock surfaces can be icy in winter. • It is easy to get stranded. Stay with companions in the backcountry. If you are lost, stay where you are. Wandering endangers your life and makes finding you difficult. • Flash floods occur without warning. Never camp in a dry wash or drive across a flooded area. • Avoid overexposure to cold, wet conditions that can lead to hypothermia. • Lightning is a serious threat. If a thunderstorm is near, avoid overlooks; get back in your vehicle and close the windows.

**Regulations** Pets must be leashed at all times and are prohibited on trails (even if carried), at overlooks, in buildings, and in the backcountry (even in vehicles). • Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features. Do not pick flowers, collect rocks, or disturb wildlife. • Help preserve Native American structures, rock markings, historic sites, and other artifacts. Leave them undisturbed. Report suspicious behavior to a ranger. • Do not walk or climb on arches. • Stay on trails to protect fragile desert soil. • Vehicles and bikes must remain on designated roads. • Launching, operating, or landing remotely piloted aircraft like drones is prohibited. • ATVs and OHVs are prohibited.

**Accessibility** We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

**Emergencies call 911**



# Exploring the Wild Canyonlands

**Travel Advisory** This map shows the park's prominent features, main roads, trails, and visitor services. Services are limited.

Drinking water is available year-round at Island in the Sky Visitor Center but not at the campground. At The Needles, water is available year-round at the visitor center and March–October at the campground. Water is not available at The Maze. Drink one gallon of water per person per day in this semiarid climate.

Food, gasoline, stores, and lodging are not available anywhere in the park. Find full services in Moab, Green River, Hanksville, Monticello, and other nearby towns.

Stop at a visitor center to check on park road and trail conditions. Detailed maps and guides to the 4-wheel-drive roads and hiking trails are available. Ask a ranger for information about park road conditions. **Weather can make unpaved roads impassable.**

A regular passenger vehicle can negotiate unpaved 2-wheel-drive roads; 4-wheel-drive roads are too steep, rocky, rough, sandy, or hazardous for 2-wheel-drive vehicles. **All motor vehicles and bicycles must stay on roads. They are not allowed on any hiking trails. ATVs and OHVs are prohibited in the park.**

Pets must be leashed at all times and are prohibited on trails (even if carried), at overlooks, in buildings, and in the backcountry (even in vehicles).

**More Information**  
Canyonlands National Park  
2282 Resource Blvd.  
Moab, UT 84532-3298  
435-719-2313  
[www.nps.gov/cany](http://www.nps.gov/cany)  
Use the official NPS App to guide your visit.

Canyonlands is one of over 425 parks in the National Park System. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

**National Park Foundation.**  
Join the park community.  
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