

EXPLORE!



Western USA National Parks Explorer
17 days

USA - Trip code YG

Western USA National Parks Explorer

From the vast landscapes of Yosemite and Zion National Parks to the lively cities of San Francisco and Las Vegas, this is a journey through some of the many highlights of America's southwest. Each day takes us through mindblowing scenery, from marvelling at the Grand Canyon and discovering the spectacular rock formations of Bryce Canyon, to standing on the Golden Gate bridge and walking the trails at Yosemite. We also head out to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mesa Verde, home to some of the best preserved cliff dwellings in the world, and bask in the rosy sunset glow over the 2000s arches and towering spires of Arches National Park.

Trip highlights

- ★ **San Francisco** - Explore the city highlights including the Golden Gate Bridge
- ★ **Yosemite National Park** - Fabulous scenery of the world's first protected area
- ★ **Bryce Canyon** - Discover the remarkable multi-coloured landscape of the ancient rock formations
- ★ **Monument Valley** - Visit the iconic and majestic vistas of Monument Valley and the surrounding Navajo Lands
- ★ **Grand Canyon** - Discover one of the planet's greatest natural wonders
- ★ **Las Vegas** - America's surreal and extravagant playground

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

8 - 13

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in San Francisco

Join tour San Francisco and check-in at the hotel. Hugging the shores of San Francisco Bay, the city has a fascinating mix of culture, commerce and character that cannot fail to charm.



Accommodation: Serrano Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Sightseeing tour including the Golden Gate Bridge, free afternoon

Today is spent exploring some of the city's highlights as we wander its famous streets, taking in the delightful Victorian architecture of Alamo Square and the colourful eccentricity of Haight Ashbury, San Francisco's once thriving 'hippie district' of the 1960s. We'll also drive up into the elegant Twin Peaks district of the city to enjoy some of the stunning views across the city and the bay (weather dependant), before moving on to the Golden Gate Bridge and finally the eclectic bustle and resident sea lions of Fisherman's Wharf. The afternoon has then been left free to continue exploring at your own leisure, perhaps paying a visit to Lombard Street and Coit Tower, before returning by the city's famous cable cars back to Union Square and Market Street. This evening there is the option to walk to Chinatown, taking in the palm lined Union Square with its famous department stores, as we make our way into the labyrinthine chaos of the largest Chinatown outside of Asia.



Accommodation: Serrano Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 3 - Transfer to Yosemite National Park, walks in the park

This morning we leave San Francisco behind and drive east, heading through the fertile landscapes of Stanislaus County towards Yosemite National Park, passing the highly productive agricultural region of the Central Valley, where numerous orchards and vineyards line the roads. As we climb into the Sierra Nevada, we begin to witness the fabulous natural beauty of Yosemite National Park, a region which in 1864 became the first protected land in the world, a landscape which caused one of the first white men to see it to gasp in admiration. As we arrive in the valley, the towering presence of the two most demanding peaks of the park will be visible - Half Dome (the sheerest cliff in North America) and the vast granite bulk of El Capitan (twice the size of the Rock of Gibraltar) - both of which attract serious rock climbers from all over the world. The central valley is a mere 20km long by 5km wide but is hemmed in on either side by dramatic 2km-high sheer cliffs, its cascading waterfalls and skyline of jagged pinnacles and smooth domed granite presenting an awe-inspiring backdrop. We spend some time visiting various viewpoints in the valley this afternoon, depending on the seasonality and which roads are open. We may take a walk to the base of Yosemite Falls (739m), the highest waterfall in the States, and Bridalveil Falls, before continuing to follow the course of the Merced river to our final destination in Mariposa, just outside the park boundaries.



Accommodation: Mariposa Lodge (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 4 - Explore Yosemite National Park on foot

More than 90% of Yosemite is designated wilderness area and today we will take the opportunity to explore it in a little more depth. Away from the main tourist areas of the Yosemite Valley the park is filled with a myriad of options to make the most of its spectacular natural charms. One possibility is a drive up to Glacier Point then hike along the Panorama and Mist Trail back down into the valley (a challenging walk of some 4-6 hours). The hike takes in an ever-changing tableau that includes the impressive cascades of Nevada and Vernal Falls, as well as some breathtaking views of Half Dome and the High Sierras. There are a number of other possibilities available, some scenic cycling options or a relaxing day along the riverbanks. As well as some of the most beautiful mountain landscapes on earth, the park is filled with a variety of wildlife too, including hummingbirds, deer and of course the ever present black bears, ensuring you a captivating encounter whatever you choose to do. It is not possible to do all the options, so your Tour Leader will explain the possibilities and you can choose the ones that interest you most. Options will also be affected by the weather.



Accommodation: Mariposa Lodge (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 5 - Travel to Bakersfield via Mariposa Grove

Leaving the park this morning we plan to drive to Bakersfield via Mariposa Grove, a grove of giant Sequoia trees with some excellent walking trails. One of the most famous trees in the park has a hollowed out base over the route of the path, allowing us to literally walk right through the tree. After enjoying our time here, we head off to the town of Bakersfield, in the heart of Southern California's vast oil fields.



Accommodation: Four Points by Sheraton (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 6 - Journey through Death Valley to Las Vegas

Starting early to avoid the heat, we descend into Death Valley today, one of the lowest and hottest places on earth. After taking breakfast in Stove Pipe Wells (at own expense), we then journey into the heart of one of the most remarkable settings on earth, where the marbled rocks, salt pans and black mountains provide us with an incredible backdrop. In marked contrast we end our day in Las Vegas, America's extraordinary desert playground, where exploding volcanoes share centre stage with Venetian canals and ancient pyramids. This evening we have some free time to explore this unique city.



Accommodation: Golden Nugget (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 7 - Head to Zion National Park, afternoon to explore

This morning we will head to Zion National Park to get there just after lunch. Zion itself was established as a national park in 1919 and can boast an impressive array of natural credentials, encompassing some 8 geological formations, 4 major vegetation zones and a landscape that has been carved and honed by the Virgin River over a million years. This afternoon we will perhaps take a walk along the Watchman's Trail or a visit to Emerald Lakes. The position of the park, at the meeting of the Colorado Plateau, the Great Basin and the Mohave Desert means the region is rich in a vast diversity of flora and fauna that range from desert bush to Ponderosa Pine, cottonwood to red birch. Wildlife includes elk and mule deer, coyotes and black bear and turkey vultures and majestic golden eagles. This evening you may wish to visit the IMAX cinema. We will be staying in Springdale nearby.



Accommodation: La Quinta Inn (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Swimming pool available

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: None

DAY 8 - In Zion National Park, walks include Angel's Landing or the Narrows; drive to Bryce Canyon

This morning we will continue to explore this magnificent creation, paying a visit to its impressive visitor centre. We will then take the shuttle bus to the start of the walks. You may wish to walk up to Angel's Landing, to take the meandering hike up to one of the most spectacular viewpoints in Zion, a journey of some four hours that affords us some quite breathtaking views down across the valley (please note this is considered challenging). Alternatively you may wish to walk in the Narrows to enjoy a unique walk along the river (walking quite literally in it at some junctures), a return journey of around three hours, most of which is flat but will (depending upon the season) require negotiating the riverbed and waist high water in parts. Those looking for more arduous treks might like to try the hike up to Observation Point (approximately 5hrs return). Your Tour Leader will outline the options to you and you can choose which you want do, it is not possible to do every walk or activity on offer. Later, we drive to Bryce Canyon, travelling via Buffalo and Mt Carmel Junction.



Accommodation: Bryce View Lodge (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Swimming pool available

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: None

DAY 9 - Early morning at Sunrise Point; continue to Capitol Reef National Park

Bryce is without doubt one of the natural highlights of the journey, as we enter a world of surreal formations of multi-coloured sandstone that are steeped in the legend of the Paiute Indian legend has it that the sandstone 'hoodoo's' of Bryce are in fact the petrified followers of the Coyote God, turned to stone as they stood listening to his angry tirade. The reality is somewhat less dramatic, with water playing the main part in the creation of these remarkable landscapes; the constant freezing and thawing and the violent summer storms causing the soft rocks to erode and split into the towering pillars that litter the floor of its great amphitheatre. This morning we see Bryce at its most radiant, in the golden hues of sunrise as we drive up to Sunrise Point to watch the dawn break across the landscape. This afternoon we will explore something of the myriad colours and shapes of this fairytale realm, hiking along the Navajo Loop, or taking in the grandeur of the Queen's Garden. As you look out across the pink, orange and red spires it is easy to sympathise with Ebenezer Bryce, a Mormon farmer who is best remembered for the profound words. 'Well it's a hell of a place to lose a cow!' In the afternoon we drive to Capitol Reef National Park, where we can stop and take a short hike. Capitol Reef encompasses a landscape of coloured sandstone cliffs, twisting canyons, monoliths and spires. From here we then drive to Moab, the largest town in south-eastern Utah.



Accommodation: Red Stone Inn (or similar)

 Standard Hotel

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: None

DAY 10 - Hikes in Arches National Park

Located a short distance from Moab is Arches National Park, home to the world's largest concentration of natural sandstone arches. With over 2000 arches, giant sandstone fins, balancing rocks and towering spires, the park provides a unique setting for today's hike. We take in the Devil's Garden, a strenuous four-hour trek that takes us through a landscape littered with arches. We also enjoy a more gentle walk around The Windows Loop (approximately 1.5 hours), before returning to Moab for a free afternoon. We then head back to Arches to walk to Delicate Arch for sunset (2 hours). Probably one of the most photographed arches in the American southwest, Delicate Arch, with its backdrop of the snow-capped peaks of La Sal, provides the perfect setting for our late afternoon hike. After our walk we then head back to Moab for the evening.



Accommodation: Red Stone Inn (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 11 - Drive to Monument Valley via Horseshoe Bend

Today we drive to the town of Page, via the Navajo Reservation, the biggest in the country, founded in 1888 to provide a protected region for the Navajo people. The Navajo Nation constitutes the largest tribe left in the United States, the last survivors of a people who were decimated by the arrival of the white man and his rapacious quest for land and gold. Monument Valley, our destination this morning, lies within the heart of this vast tribal area and in spite of its familiarity through the exposure by Hollywood, nothing can truly prepare you for the sheer grandeur and spectacle of this incredible setting. Isolated monoliths, sandstone pinnacles and towering spires rocket skywards, as much as 1000m above the desert floor, the warm embrace of the late afternoon colours altering the landscape's appearance as the sun dips towards the horizon. We offer you the chance to take an optional guided jeep tour of the valley with a Navajo guide, affording a closer exploration of this compelling land before we head on to our nightstop in Page. Time-permitting, we may have time for a short walk to Horseshoe Bend, with its lookout point over the eponymous river bend.



Accommodation: Quality Inn (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 12 - Head to the Grand Canyon with sunset at Yavapai Point

This morning we have the option to visit the famous Antelope Canyon, a beautiful peach-gold coloured canyon formed by the force of flash floods coming from the plains above, or otherwise spend time at the enormous Lake Powell, with its scenic azure waters. In the late morning we continue our remarkable journey, heading towards the southern rim of the Grand Canyon, where we arrive this afternoon. Once described by Theodore Roosevelt as 'the one great sight every American should see', the canyon extends some 277 miles from east to west, from the western edge of the Navajo Reservation, to the Nevada border around Lake Mead. Reaching a depth of 1600m the canyon's floor is littered with some of the oldest rocks on the planet and as we take in the views from the Grand Viewpoint and Yavapai Point, we gaze out across a land that has taken over 2 billion years to create.



Accommodation: Red Feather Lodge (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 13 - Free day at the Grand Canyon

Today has been left free to make the most of this natural wonder at your own pace. You may want to follow the path down from the South Rim into the canyon itself, walking down to Indian Gardens and maybe even heading out to Plateau Point for some incredible views down onto the Colorado River below. Those not wishing to undertake the walk in and out of the canyon might prefer to take a helicopter flight over the canyon, or make use of the park's shuttle service to explore something of the rim, enjoying the vast panoramas from the crest of this remarkable setting. Sunsets at the Grand Canyon present an altogether unforgettable experience, with the possibility of condors circling on the thermals above to add to the majesty of the moment.



Accommodation: Red Feather Lodge (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 14 - Drive to Las Vegas via Route 66

Today we drive along one of the most historic highway in America, the famous Route 66, a road that during its lifetime has been called the 'Main Street of America' and the 'Mother Road'. Over 200,000 people travelled this route during the 1930s to escape the Dust Bowl of the Depression years and hopefully find a new life in California. A shadow of its former self, the road nonetheless is rich in Americana and its architecture still affords us a rare insight into a time long past and we will travel via the town of Williams before reaching our final destination amidst the bright lights of Las Vegas. Vegas presents us with America in all its flamboyant excess, a desert city that is surely one of the most surreal and extravagant destinations anywhere on earth, let alone the United States. The rest of the afternoon and evening is free to explore this unique location, where you can watch exploding volcanoes and pirate battles, cruise the canals of Venice and take a rollercoaster ride across the New York skyline. Still the most breathtaking view over the city is to be had from the top of the 1149ft Stratosphere Tower, the tallest freestanding observation tower in the United States and you can follow this up with an evening in the gaming rooms and slots of the world famous Caesar's Palace.



Accommodation: Golden Nugget (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 15 - Trip ends Las Vegas

The tour ends in Las Vegas this morning.

 Meals Provided: None



What's included?



Transport

Maxiwagon



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader / Driver



Accommodation

12 nights standard hotel
2 nights premium hotel

Trip information

Country information

USA Holidays & Tours

Climate

There are great variations in the altitude and terrain of the areas visited and this is reflected in the temperatures. Desert areas can be extremely hot in the summer months (49°), though temperatures can drop dramatically at night. The mountains are cooler and wetter especially in the north of the Rockies. At the beginning and end of the season there may still be some snow around in the high passes and it can be cold, whereas in mid-summer the day time temperatures can soar.

Time difference to GMT

-9

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Christian

Language

English

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

There are a number of exciting optional excursions you can do on tour. These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract. Page - Antelope Canyon jeep excursion US\$ 45; Boat excursion US\$ 45. Monument Valley - Jeep excursion US\$ 45-75 including dinner. Grand Canyon - Helicopter overflight approximately US\$ 254-284; IMAX cinema US\$ 13. San Francisco - If you want to visit Alcatraz, we strongly recommend that you book your tickets in advance, especially during August. Please visit www.alcatrazcruises.com for tickets. Las Vegas - Limousine ride US\$ 150 per hour (between 13 people). Moab - Float trip US\$ 55; Jet Boat US \$80 for 1/2 day; Hummer sunset tour US \$90

Clothing

Pack for hot conditions for June, July and August departures. For departures earlier and later in the year, the weather can be cooler, especially at night in the desert so make sure you bring some warmer layers including a fleece. Include a long sleeved shirt and warm trousers. Also a lightweight waterproof jacket, swimwear and a sun hat.

Footwear

Lightweight walking/hiking boots with good ankle support, trainers and/or sandals for travelling.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

Bring only the bare essentials - one main bag plus a small daypack for walking and for personal items. Main luggage cannot be accessed during the day. Soft luggage is more practical. Bring plastic bags to keep things dry. Laundry facilities are available at various points during the trip.

Equipment

Bring a water bottle (3 litre capacity), high factor sunblock, plastic bags to keep things dry and a (head) torch and a towel. You may find a walking pole useful and insect repellent especially in June and July.

Tipping

Explore leader

Tour Leader: At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

In North America tipping 15%-20% is a recognised part of life across the service industry, including restaurants, activity suppliers, taxis and guides. Local staff will look to you for personal recognition of particular services provided. Unlike other Explore trips, during our trips in North America our Explore leaders will not operate a tips kitty. However, they will be more than happy to provide guidance throughout the trip on who to tip when and to suggest appropriate amounts.

Country Information

USA Holidays & Tours

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£15

Dinner price

£21

Beer price

£Varies for different towns, average £4.00

Water price

£1.1

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

USDollars.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Bring your money in US\$ cash.

Where To Exchange

Banks or 'Forex' offices in main towns/cities. Your tour leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

Widely available.

Credit Card Acceptance

Widely accepted just about everywhere.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Maxiwagon

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

USA: (Including those in transit) Citizens of the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and passport holders from several EU countries can enter the United States under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). You must apply online for an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), here <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov> no later than 72 hours prior to travel. Travellers who have not registered before their trip may be refused boarding. You must have an electronic passport with a digital chip containing biometric information about the passport owner. UK passports which are biometric feature a small gold symbol (camera) at the bottom of the front cover. If you have visited Libya, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria or Yemen since March 2011 or are dual nationals of these countries, you cannot

travel with an ESTA. If you are a citizen of a country not included in the VWP you cannot apply for an ESTA. In both cases, you will instead need to apply for a visa from the nearest US Embassy or Consulate. If you are unable to provide a valid visa before boarding flights to the US, or entering via another method, you may not be permitted to travel. Please note for your ESTA application you will be required to supply Point of Contact information. Explore's USA contact information will be listed on your final documentation which you will receive approximately 3-4 weeks before departure. If you are leaving for the USA before this, please call the Explore team to get this information. (This is not necessary if only transitting through the USA) I-94 - This is only required for completion if entering the USA by land through an official border crossing. For anyone entering by air or sea, you will be advised about this form during your journey if applicable. The i94 is a history of entries and exits to the US. You can get this for free online here: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/#/home>. Each i94 accessed is only valid for border crossing for 7 days after printed. Entry requirements for the USA can change regularly, therefore, please ensure you have the most up to date information before you travel by checking the US embassy website. Visa applications - <http://london.usembassy.gov/niv/apply.html>

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Non refundable permits

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Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.
