

A (Very) Helpful Guide to Utah's Mighty 5 Road Trip

20-25 minutes



A **Utah national parks road trip** (referred to as the **Mighty 5** road trip) is not only iconic, but is often considered one of the most scenic drives in the entire world.

So buckle in, my friends, because today we are planning the ultimate Utah road trip and you won't want to miss it! Because a road trip through Utah's national parks will take you into the very heart of America's red rock country — which is **otherworldly and nothing short of spectacular**.

I took this trip last summer and learned so much during my time in Utah's national parks.

Today I'm spilling all the beans by sharing my favorite hikes, vistas and photography spots with you. I'll also cover lodging and food options, because no one likes a hungry hiker. Right? 😊

Read on for everything you need to know about the the ultimate Utah national parks road trip. I hope you enjoy!

Quick Tip: You know I'm a stickler for wearing sunscreen, remember to pack it with! I **swear by [this sunscreen](#)**, I discovered it in France and now buy it in bulk. You'll never catch me without it!





Utah National Parks Road Trip (The Mighty 5)

In this article we will cover:

- What is the Mighty 5 road trip?
- Best time to take a Utah national parks road trip
- Utah road trip one-week Itinerary
- 1. Arches National Park information
- 2. Canyonlands National Park information
- 3. Bryce Canyon National Park information
- 4. Capitol Reef National Park information
- 5. Zion National Park information
- How long does the Utah national parks road trip take?
- Mighty 5 hiking tips
- Where to start and end the Utah national park road trip



What is the Mighty 5 Road Trip anyway?

When you hear people mention the “Mighty 5 Road Trip” they are referring to **a road trip that covers all five of Utah’s national parks: Arches, Canyonlands, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef and**

Zion.

Most folks fly into Salt Lake City or Las Vegas. Upon arrival, you can either drive directly to Arches National Park or Zion National Park. We started with Arches and ended with Zion, but some folks do the reverse — the route is completely up to you!

During our trip my husband and I kept running into the same people at all of the same national parks, seems like most folks follow the same path so chances are good that you'll run into the same folks at all the parks too — it makes for some fun conversations!



Note: A lot of folks have asked if a **4x4 vehicle** is required for a road trip through Utah's national parks. We took this road trip in our Prius! So it's safe to say that the itinerary below is accessible to folks without 4x4 vehicles. Hope this helps, but please don't hesitate to reach out with question, I'm here to help!

Best time to take a Utah national parks road trip

A Utah road trip will take you deep into the heart of desert country. Theoretically, you can take this road trip any time of year, but since most of the national parks are best explored by foot, I suggest taking the Utah national parks road trip when the temperatures are mild.

As such, **I highly recommend taking your Utah road trip during the spring months (April through May) and fall (September through October)** because the temperatures are mild (warm during the day and cool at night) and there's less crowds since families don't travel as often when school is in session.

Best months to take Utah national parks road trip:

Spring: Mild temperatures during the day but chilly nights, mostly snow-free trails and semi-crowded. **Spring is my go-to season for visiting Utah's national parks.**

Summer: I would **avoid taking a road trip to Utah's national**

parks during the summer months because the crowds are as intense (kids out of school) as the summer heat (not uncommon to temperatures to hit 100°F). If you're bold enough to take the Utah road trip during summer, make sure to pack your trusty backpack and stock up on snacks and water.

Fall: As mentioned earlier, **autumn is also a great time to take the Utah national parks road trip** because the temperatures are mild during the day so you can hike to your heart's content.

Winter: Most folks assume that the desert is warm year-round, but that is not so! If you take the Utah road trip during winter you can expect snow galore and freezing temperatures. Park roads may close due to snowy conditions as well, so **I suggest skipping a Utah national parks road trip during winter.**

In sum, the best months to take a Utah national parks road trip are April thru May and September through October.



Utah National Parks Road Trip Itinerary

Mighty 5 Road Trip One-Week Itinerary

My husband films national parks for a living so we normally spend a *lot* of time exploring America's national parks. In doing so, we are able to gain a better appreciation to these natural wonders and find ourselves in a unique position to share the best these parks have to offer.

This Utah national parks road trip itinerary is no different! We will cover the spots you absolutely can't miss, in addition to our personal favorites. We actively seek solitude in national parks, so I'll be sure to pepper some tips and suggestions throughout.

- **Day 1:** Drive to Arches National Park from Las Vegas (5 hours) or Salt Lake City (3.5 hours)
- **Day 2:** Explore Arches National Park

- **Day 3:** Drive to and explore Canyonlands National Park (30-minutes) then drive to Capitol Reef National Park (2.5 hours)
 - **Day 4:** Explore Capitol Reef National Park
 - **Day 5:** Drive to and explore Bryce Canyon National Park (2 hours)
 - **Day 6:** Drive to and explore Zion National Park (1.5 hours)
 - **Day 7:** Drive back to Las Vegas (3 hours) or Salt Lake City (4.5 hours)
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How long does a Utah national parks road trip take?

Utah's national parks are glorious! As such, I **suggest spending a minimum of 7 days driving through Utah's national parks** — seriously, it would be a disservice to spend less time exploring this area!

Based on my personal experience, 7 days is the ideal length of time to absorb the best national parks in Utah. To that end, this Utah national parks itinerary spans 1,100 miles and 19 hours of driving. But I promise it's worth the effort because the memories will last a lifetime.

What's more, if your schedule is flexible (limited vacation days, I tell you!) — try to add on an extra two days and visit the Valley of Fire State Park and Escalante during your Utah road trip. There really is so much to explore in Utah, don't rush the experience!

Stop #1. Arches National Park



Arches National Park is the one Utah national park I could return to 100 times without losing an ounce of excitement — it's downright breathtaking! One thing that caught me by surprise is the size of the park (it's much smaller than I realized). As a result, most of the trails can be hiked in one day, although crowds are all but guaranteed.

Highlights: This is a great intro park for the Mighty 5 road trip

because it offers the best of everything — red rocks, massive arches, panoramic views and amazing hiking trails.

Best things to do in Arches National Park:

1. Catch sunrise at Delicate Arch (well worth the early wake up call, believe me)
2. Hike the Devils Garden trail to Landscape Arch
3. Hike Park Avenue
4. Visit Turret Arch

Time Needed: 1-2 days. Arches can be done in 1 day if you're willing to hustle through, but I personally recommend two days to catch sunset (desert sunsets are hard to beat), experience sunrise, and stargaze for a night.

Crowd Sizes: 8/10. Arches is a *very* popular national park due to its proximity to the popular town of Moab, Utah. Arches will probably be the second most crowded park you'll visit during your road trip through Utah's national parks — for good reason!

Restaurants near Arches National Park:

There's no restaurants inside of Arches National Park, so you'll need to venture out for your meals (unless you bring your own food with you). My favorite restaurant options below:

- Love Muffin Cafe (banh mi!)
- Moab Brewery (the best!)
- Moab Garage Co.
- Jailhouse Cafe

Lodging near Arches National Park:

- Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Moab
- SpringHill Suites by Marriott

Further Reading: [The 12 BEST Hikes in Arches National Park](#)





Stop #2. Canyonlands National Park



The landscape in **Canyonlands National Park** is other-worldly, so you can't afford to miss this during your grand Utah national parks adventure!

We're talking expansive stretches of deep canyons as far as the eye can see in every direction – reminiscent of the mesmerizing landscape of the Grand Canyon. (P.S. I added the North Rim of the Grand Canyon as an extension to my road trip through Utah's national parks, you can [read more here](#)).

Canyonlands National Park is sectioned off into 3 separate areas: Needles District, Maze District and **Island in the Sky District**. Of these three areas, Island in the Sky is by far the most visited due to its close proximity to Arches National Park (only 30 minutes by car).

If you're in the mood for solitude (who can blame you?), head to the Needles District of the Maze District for striking landscapes ripe for exploration and less crowds. Heads up, these areas are more remote so make sure to prepare accordingly — no one anticipates a flat tire!

Heads up: One thing that surprised me about the Island in the Sky district of Canyonlands National park is the lack of hiking trails available. Most folks that road trip through Utah's national parks swing by Island in the Sky so if you find yourself in the same boat just know that hiking options are limited. However, the viewpoints are worth writing home about!

Best things to do in Canyonlands National Park (Island in the Sky District):

- Catch sunrise at Mesa Arch (super famous spot, expect crowds)
- Visit Shafer Canyon Overlook

- Drive the Grand View Point Road
- Visit Green River Overlook

Time Needed: Based on my experience, due to the limited amount of hiking trails, I would argue that the Island in the Sky District of Canyonlands National Park is great for expansive vistas and breathtaking overlooks, but doesn't offer too much in terms of hikes. If you want to stretch your legs, I suggest hiking the Grand View Point trail (2 miles).

Crowd Sizes: 4/10. The park was not crowded at all during most of our visit. The exception being sunrise at Mesa Arch – wherein I felt like half of Utah showed up for the spectacle! Hard to blame them though, it was spectacular and shouldn't be missed. There's nothing better than a desert sunrise, is there?

Restaurants near Canyonlands National Park:

- Love Muffin Cafe (banh mi!)
- Moab Brewery (the best!)
- Moab Garage Co.
- Jailhouse Cafe

Lodging near Canyonlands National Park:

- Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott Moab
- SpringHill Suites by Marriott



Stop #3. Capitol Reef National Park





For those of you asking, my hat is from [here](#).

Of all the natural wonders we visited during our Utah national parks road trip, **Capitol Reef National Park** was the one that surprised me most. For the life of me, I can't understand why this park is so underrated. But hey! You won't find me complaining.

Highlights: We enjoyed our time at Capitol Reef National Park so much that we tacked on an extra day for a few more hikes. That's how lovely the landscape is, so if you're taking the Mighty 5 road trip, don't make the mistake of glancing over this park.

What's more, Capitol Reef National Park has historic fruit orchards — imagine visiting the park during the spring months when the blushing trees are sporting their best spring blooms.

But wait, it gets better. You know what they do with the fruit from these orchards? They make pie! Yep, you read that right. You can get a home-made pie from a little bakery by the campsite (**Gifford Farm**) with fruit from the orchards. Pies sell out quickly, so come early.

Best things to do in Capitol Reef National Park:

I LOVED every trail we hiked at Capitol Reef National Park. Sunsets and sunrises were incredible because reaching the viewpoints required little effort and provided unbelievable panoramic views of the valley floor.

- Get a slice of pie at Gifford Farm
- Petroglyph Panel
- Hickman Bridge
- Hike the Cassidy Arch Trail
- The Wash

Time Needed: 1 full day, hike every trail you can get your hands (feet?) on, you'll have a blast!

Crowd Sizes: 5/10. With fewer crowds than the other national parks in Utah, Capitol Reef was a very welcome reprieve. We only ran into 2-4 folks on each hike, we loved the lack of crowds!

Restaurants near Capitol Reef National Park:

- Slackers Pizza (the Mediterranean pizza is great!)
- Castlerock Coffee
- Capitol Burger

Lodging near Capitol Reef National Park:

- Austin's Chuckwagon
- Capitol Reef Resort

Read more: [The 7 BEST Hikes at Capitol Reef National Park](#)



Stop #4. Bryce Canyon National Park



The next stop on the ultimate Utah National Park road trip will take you to **Bryce Canyon National Park**. The hoodoo covered landscape is unbelievable and you can hike right up to these beauties to take in their imposing heights and grandeur up close.

If you're willing to brave an early wake up call, you can find some solitude before the crowds roll in. Just make sure to bring a jacket during the early morning hours because we were freezing!

Highlights: We hiked the **Navajo Loop Trail** during our visit and

holy cow – **it's easily one of our top 5 favorite hikes in the country.** I don't think I've ever heard so many people say "wow" in such a short span of time. I'm sure you'll love the trail as well, there's nothing like it!

Best things to do in Bryce Canyon National Park

- Hike Navajo Loop Trail (it's unbelievable!)
- Catch sunrise at Inspiration Point
- Check out the Ruby Inn General Store

Time Needed: One day will suffice. Bryce Canyon National Park isn't very large so the highlights can easily be seen in one day.

Crowd Sizes: 7/10. This is a very popular park and since it's on the smaller side, you're bound to run into crowds.

Restaurants near Bryce Canyon National Park:

- Ruby's Inn Restaurant
- The lodge at Bryce Canyon
- Bryce Canyon Coffee Company
- Stone Hearth Grill

Lodging near Bryce Canyon National Park:

- The Lodge at Bryce Canyon (within the park)
- Best Western at Ruby's Inn

Read: [Best Hikes in Bryce Canyon National Park](#)



Stop #5. Zion National Park





For this grand Utah national parks road trip, I'm definitely saving the best stop for last! As much as I hate to admit it, **Zion National Park is completely worth the hype**. It's no wonder that it's the [4th most visited](#) national park in America.

Highlights: We learned the hard way that the Zion Shuttle is the lifeline of this national park. We didn't book our shuttle tickets early enough and had to wait until the second day to get them. **You can't get into the most scenic portion of Zion National Park without shuttle tickets.** We selected the 7am option and avoided the crowds altogether. And even with an early morning wake up, it was completely worth it.

Learn from our mistake and book tickets for the shuttle in advance. All the information you need about the Zion Shuttle can be found [here](#).

I can't wait to return to Zion National Park and spend more time exploring this glorious natural wonder. There's no place in the world quite like it, that's for sure. Heads up: The Narrows and Angel's Landing were closed during our visit — all the more reason to return! 😞

Best things to do in Zion National Park

- Hike to Observation Point
- Explore the Narrows
- Hike Angel's Landing Trail (the most iconic hike in the park)

Time Needed: 2 full days, ride the shuttle one day and hike around the other parts of the park during the second day. Zion National Park is incredible, soak it in and don't rush the experience. You'll be thinking of this place for years to come!

Crowd Sizes: 10/10. Zion National Park is as crowded as it gets, my friends (the shuttle system tells you all you need to know about the park's popularity). Zion is incredible and people know it. Show up early (before 8am) to avoid the crowds, otherwise prepare to wait in long lines.

Restaurants near Zion National Park:

Springdale is a small charming town that abuts Zion National Park and worth a visit. It's full of restaurants and cafes. However, food options aren't very affordable, but still manageable. If you're on a budget you can pick up some food at the local grocery store and make your own meal.

- Spotted Dog Cafe
- Whiptail Grill
- Oscar's Cafe
- Deep Creek Coffee Co.

Lodging near Zion National Park:

- Zion Lodge
- Watchman Campground
- Best Western Plus Zion Canyon Inn and Suites



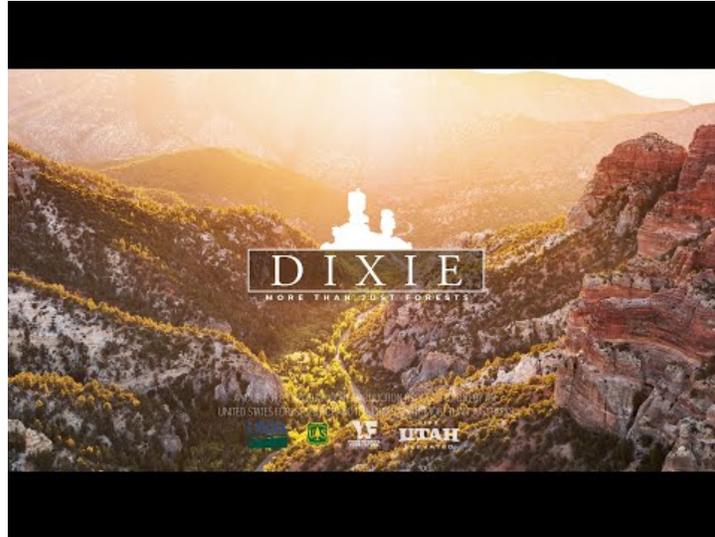
Stunning Video on Zion National Park

Here's another film my husband created, this one is about our time exploring Zion National Park, hope you enjoy!



Utah National Parks Road Trip (Video)

Want a glimpse into Utah's otherworldly landscape from the comforts of home? Check out the (award-winning) video below! It's a collaboration between my husband and the US Forest Service on the Dixie National Forest (the forest touches three of Utah's national parks). The project is called [More Than Just Forests](#), if you're interested in learning more.



Mighty 5 Road Trip Hiking Tips

America the Beautiful Pass

- All national parks charge an admission fee for a 7 day pass (typically \$30). The cheapest route is to purchase an annual pass for \$80 and you will have access to ALL national Parks for an entire year, plus 2,000 recreational sites throughout the US.

Practice Leave No Trace

- If you're unfamiliar with Leave No Trace, it's a set of guidelines to ensure you're being a good steward of the land. [You can read about the seven principals of Leave No Trace here.](#)

Water, water, water

- Never underestimate how easily you may become dehydrated in the desert. Plan for 1 gallon of water per person, per day. Water stations are available at some popular trailheads, but bring your own to be prepared.

Crowds

- Utah's national parks get millions of visitors a year. Expect crowds regardless of the month you visit. The best solution? Start early (sunrise is stunning!) to get a slight chance of solitude before the crowds start rolling in.

Temperature shifts

- We were boiling in Zion National Park, yet found ourselves freezing at Bryce Canyon. The weather is unpredictable in the desert and we weren't adequately prepared for the massive temperature shifts. Bring layers and an insulated jacket, you won't regret it!

Sunscreen, layers and hats

- The sun is intense and shade is minimal. I can't tell you how many folks I saw nursing sunburns at the end of the day. Carry sunscreen and apply liberally.
- **I swear by [this sunscreen](#)**, I discovered it in France and now buy it in bulk. You'll never catch me without it!

Stay on the trail

- Respect the abundance of life around you and stay on the trails to avoid harming fragile plants and animal habitat. Leave plants, rocks and artifacts where they are – it is illegal to remove anything from the park.

Wear hiking boots with good traction

- **These are my [hiking boots](#) and I'd sleep in them if I could.**

Hiking with pups

- **Dogs are NOT allowed on trails or overlooks.** I can't tell you how many times we've seen hikers prep their cute pups for a hike before a ranger notices and tells them dogs aren't allowed on trails – heartbreaking to watch.





Where to start (and end) the Utah national parks road trip

As with most things in life, you can start and end wherever you'd like. Didn't mean to get too deep on you there but what I'm trying to say is that the ultimate Utah national parks road trip is completely up to you!

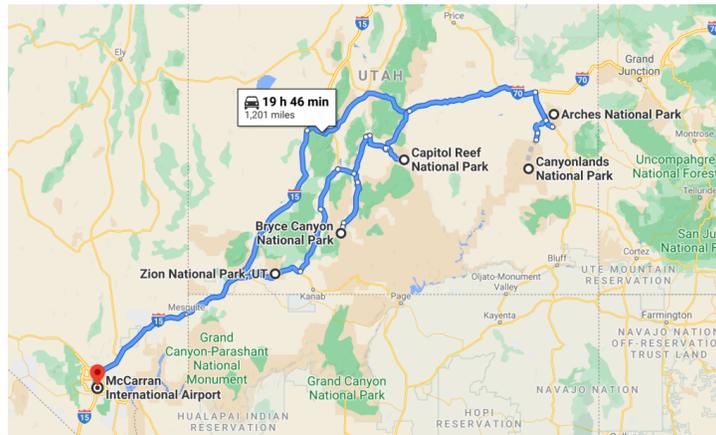
To start your grand Utah national parks road trip, there two most common airports to choose from are Las Vegas and Salt Lake City. I suggest flying into Salt Lake City because the overall route will be shorter, but some folks prefer flying into Las Vegas because flights are often cheaper and you can score a deal on rental cars.

In any case, to make your research a little easier, below is the suggested route, drive time and total mileage for for the two most common starting points for the Utah national parks road trip.

Las Vegas Airport

- Total drive time for entire trip through Utah's national parks: 20 hours
- Total mileage (excluding drives within Utah's national parks): 1,200

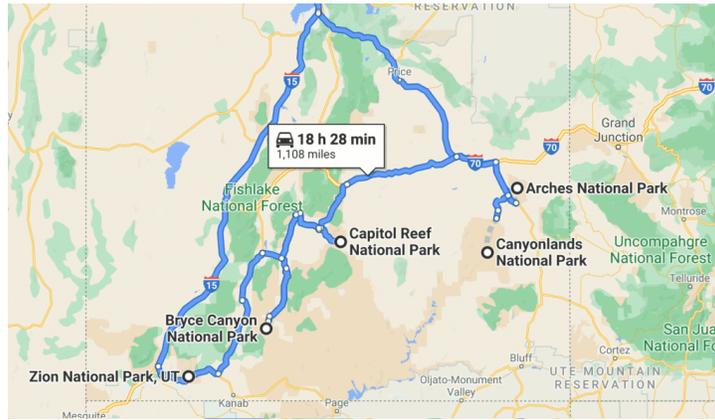
Utah National Parks Road Trip Map



Salt Lake City Airport

- Total drive time for entire trip through Utah's national parks: 18.5 hours
- Total mileage (excluding drives within Utah's national parks): 1,100





Final Thoughts on the ultimate Utah National Parks Road Trip

And there you have it, a road trip through Utah's national parks is an experience that will last a lifetime! If you feel like I missed anything or would like to add your two cents, **leave a comment below, always happy to hear from you.**

Utah national parks road trip, Mighty 5 road trip, best road trip in America, Utah road trip, Utah national parks road trip, road trip Utah, best Utah national parks, when to visit Utah national parks, best hikes in Utah, Utah national parks, Utah national parks road trip. Mighty 5, Mighty 5

Until next time,

Antonina

