



Utah *Unlimited*

Hoodoos at Bryce Canyon
National Park (DepositPhotos)



Explore Utah's five national parks on the way to and from the Grand Canyon and you'll find that opportunities for adventure are endless.



Map by Peter Sucheski

Red rock arches silhouetted against a bluebird sky. Mighty rivers winding their way through steep canyons. Aspen leaves quaking in a mountain breeze. This is Utah, where public lands comprise 70% of the state. It's a nature lover's dream with plenty of space to find solitude and soak in the quiet beauty of the desert and mountains. On this breathtaking route, you'll explore six national parks along with countless national monuments, state parks and other public lands in between.

This road trip takes you from the historic town of Helper south to the red rock country of Moab—where Arches and Canyonlands national parks display some of the most stunning rock formations and incredible whitewater in the West. Continue south and drive through the classic views of the Navajo Nation's Monument Valley before winding your way west to the Grand Canyon's North Rim, forever changed by wildfire in 2025. Back in Utah, explore stunning views in Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks, and natural beauty in Cedar Breaks National Monument.

Finally, head north towards Torrey, Utah, to check Capitol Reef, the last of the state's national parks, off your bucket list. Between the ochre-colored rock, the impossibly blue skies and the snowcapped peaks, you won't be able to take your eyes off the view.



Where History Meets the Stars

The Carbon Corridor is home to a dark sky community and the world's longest outdoor art gallery. Stargaze by night, immerse yourself in arts and culture by day.

By Amelia Arvesen

For those willing to follow their curiosity, Utah's Carbon Corridor is a gold mine for discoveries, not just a place to drive through. To get to the small towns of Helper, Price and Wellington requires exiting Highway 6 or U.S. Route 191, but visitors will find it's worth the extra stop for the starry night skies and rich historic significance. We've picked out the spots you can't miss.

By night, Helper is illuminated by starlight. Photographers from all over the world visit to capture long-exposure shots of the Milky Way and constellations in this designated International Dark Sky Community. Pack a reclining chair and blankets to stay cozy, and head west of town to **Scofield State Park** where you can see the moon reflected in the reservoir. South of Helper by less than two hours, other prime spots for stargazing include the **Huntington Eccles Canyon National Scenic Byway**, **San Rafael Swell** or **Goblin Valley State Park**.

By day, Helper's Main Street comes alive with art galleries, antique shops, eateries and the **Helper Museum** where you can learn more about the town's mining history and namesake "helper engines." Quench your thirst at **Helper Beer** with a sampler



of the Mindset Extra Pale, Mexican Lager and other award winning brews. Then pick up a postcard, candle and other souvenirs at **Helper General** or from local artist Ben Steele at **Beg, Borrow and Steele Shop**.

For more art, the 46-mile-long **Nine Mile Canyon** just outside Wellington is often referred to as the "world's longest outdoor art gallery." Marvel at the spectacular pictograph rock art etched or painted on the canyon walls by the Archaic, Fremont and Ute people who have lived there for thousands of years. Enjoy a packed lunch at the Cottonwood Glen or Daddy Canyon picnic areas along the way—or stay after dark to gaze at the same stars that guided the area's first people.

Between Helper and Wellington, Price is now the largest town along the Carbon Corridor with a population of 8,200. One of the must-see stops is the **Utah State University Eastern Prehistoric Museum**, which houses fascinating fossils, dinosaur



skeletons and detailed origin stories from the Fremont people. Exhibits are dedicated to paleontology, archeology and geology. After your history lesson, order a handspun shake and all-natural Angus beef burger from the retro drive-in **Sherald's Frosty Freeze**, or indulge in a Pepperoni Pizza Burger at **Club Mecca** on Main Street.

For an overnight experience to keep the fun going, book one of the unique units at the newly restored **Newhouse Hotel** in Helper. Bare brick walls and intricate tilework preserve the building's history, dating back to 1921. For a more rustic stay or if you're road tripping, the **Castle Gate RV Park** in Helper has RV and tent sites as well as cozy cabins that sleep four or six.

Learn more at CarbonCorridor.com.

PHOTOS: Milky Way, Helper Museum, Nine Mile Canyon 'Owl Panel Scene' (Images courtesy of Steve Maxfield / Carbon County Office of Tourism)



Desert Solitaire

By Mikaela Ruland

Moab is home to two of Utah's most stunning national parks: Arches and Canyonlands. The entrance to Arches National Park is located just 10 minutes from downtown. And, true to its name, the park is full of incredible arches and other wondrous and unique rock formations made of Moab's ubiquitous sandstone. Don't miss a hike to the park's most famous feature, Delicate Arch, which is depicted on Utah's license plate. The 3-mile hike is popular, so start early in the day. Another incredible hike is Fiery Furnace, a trail-less area of the park that requires a permit, or a ticket on a ranger-led excursion, to visit. Devils Garden is the only campground. Arches requires timed-entry reservations most days April through October.

Canyonlands National Park is divided into three distinct districts. The most popular, Island in the Sky, is a 40-minute drive from downtown Moab. From here, you'll be up above its namesake canyons and can take in stunning views. The half-mile Mesa Arch Trail is worth a quick trip for expansive vistas through one of the park's most popular arches. To experience being in the canyons, drive an hour and 20 minutes south to the Needles District where you can hike amongst incredible rock formations. There are tons of intersecting paths in this area of the park, but Chesler Park Trail is a favorite. The third district is The Maze, a remote area west of Moab that isn't recommended for first time visitors. Canyonlands has one campground in Island of the Sky and one in the Needles District.

Delicate Arch at Arches National Park (DepositPhotos)

Red Rock Butte sunset at Canyonlands National Park (iStockphoto)



MOAB, UT

Pedal & Paddle in Paradise

Mountain bike through stunning canyon country and raft some of the nation's biggest whitewater on a combination ride and raft trip.

By Mikaela Ruland

For some, gazing down at the rivers and sandstone cliffs of Canyonlands National Park from the Island in the Sky viewpoints is enough. For others—those who aren't afraid of sore muscles and getting dirty—it only scratches the surface. If you fall into the second category and are eager to explore this incredible park more deeply, a mountain bike trip on Moab's most famous route, the White Rim Trail, is a must.

This double-track, four-wheel-drive road and mountain bike trail covers 77 miles of Canyonlands' magnificent scenery. Choose from a three or four-day trip with Holiday River Expeditions, and you'll ride

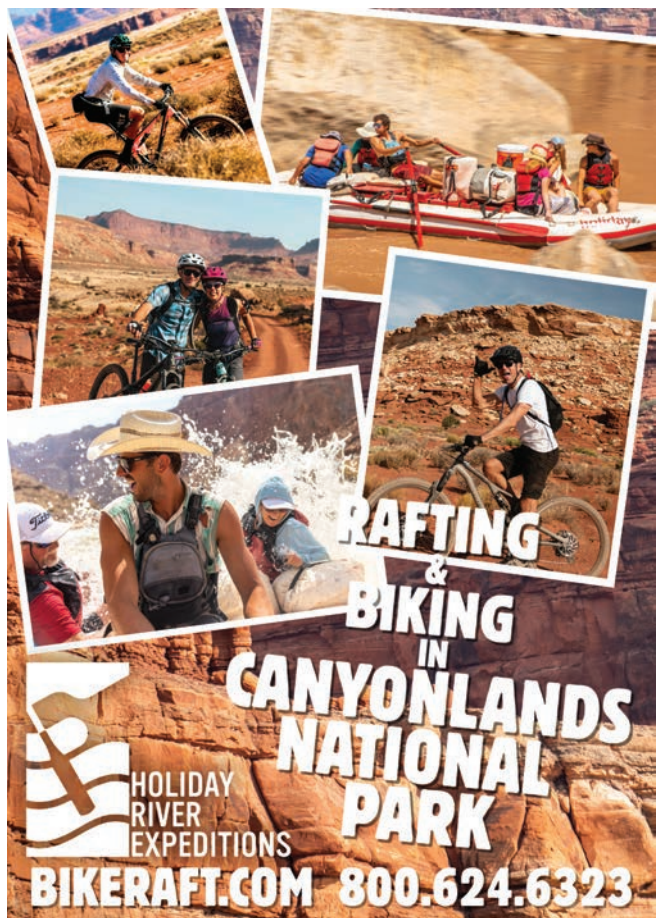
the entire sandstone and gravel trail with a small group and knowledgeable guides. The trip is supported by a four-wheel-drive van that carries water, camping supplies and food so that you can focus on having an awesome ride.

The trail can be ridden either counter-clockwise or clockwise depending on permits. Either way, the trip will start with a fun downhill section (often the famous switchbacks of Shafer Trail) and end with a steep climb that will get your heart pumping. The route in between is often very gentle, with a few more technical climbs and descents thrown in.

There's no shortage of stunning views along the trail from sandstone arches and towers to biking along the picturesque Green River. Opportunities for side hikes and exploration on this trip abound, and at the end of each day a gourmet dinner is prepared for you to enjoy while taking in gorgeous sunsets and starry skies.

Go even deeper into the park with a combination mountain bike and raft trip through Cataract Canyon. After biking 65 miles on the White Rim, you'll spend two days rafting down the placid waters of the Green River before hitting the confluence with the mighty Colorado. From here, you'll experience Class II-V rapids, including some of the biggest waves in North America. You'll raft the same waters as John Wesley Powell, falling asleep to the sound of the river at night and exploring side hikes along the way.

Learn more at BikeRaft.com.



Don't Bust the Crust

By Mikaela Ruland

While the deserts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah may seem barren at first glance, these places are full of life, right down to the dirt underneath your feet. Cryptobiotic or "living soil" covers many of the deserts in the Southwest. Cyanobacteria is dormant when dry but when wet, these tiny organisms move through the soil and leave sticky fibers behind that create a thick, erosion-resistant layer. It works like a sponge and is great at absorbing and storing water in the dry desert. Lichen, moss and other organisms grow on this mat and form a living crust.

Cryptobiotic soil is the reason this arid part of the country isn't just sand dunes. The crust keeps sediment from washing or blowing away and helps plants access water even in dry conditions. The black, bumpy crusts you might see when hiking in the desert can be thousands of years old. One footstep or tire track, however, can kill it immediately and be devastating for the desert ecosystem.

Learn to identify cryptobiotic soil and always stay on the trails or walk on rocky or sandy ground instead of the dirt. Take care not to drive off road and risk damaging the landscape.



Two rocking chairs that survived the Dragon Bravo Fire when it destroyed Grand Canyon Lodge. The remains of the lodge are visible in the background. (NPS Photo/Matt Jenkins)

The Year the North Rim Burned

On July 12, 2025, the Dragon Bravo Fire exploded, devastating much of the North Rim.

By Mikaela Ruland

As we head to press in September 2025, it's hard to know what next year will look like for visitors hoping to see Grand Canyon's iconic North Rim. Following a lightning strike in dry, summer conditions, a wildfire engulfed the canyon's higher rim in flames, destroying pretty much everything. The historic Grand Canyon Lodge, built in 1937, was one of approximately 70 buildings lost. Others included the visitor center, gas station, a wastewater treatment plant, an administrative building, employee housing and

numerous historic cabins. The North Rim Campground also burned.

Miraculously, everyone was evacuated and nobody was injured, but the North Rim closed early for the season and the fire still burns, making it unclear what visitation will look like on this side of the park next summer. One thing is for certain: It will be different.

Sitting at 8,000 feet, the ponderosa pine covered North Rim once offered visitors a cooler and quieter national park experience.

Less than 2% of Grand Canyon's visitors ever made it to this part of the park, open seasonally from mid-May to mid-October. Those who did venture to the rim closest to the Utah border were rewarded with equally stunning views and hiking trails as their South Rim counterparts, with a more peaceful atmosphere.

As of publication, it's too early to tell if the North Rim will open for day-use visitors in 2026. The fire severely impacted infrastructure, trails and utilities, plus damaged Highway 67, the only road that accesses this part of the park. As crews work to stabilize the area and begin plans to rebuild visitor facilities, infrastructure, the lodge and campground, more details will be announced. Check nps.gov/grca for updates. The South Rim remains open and unaffected.

Another consideration following the fire is inner-canyon access and stability. The North Kaibab Trail, leading to Phantom Ranch and the Colorado River below, was damaged and will require extensive maintenance to address rockslides. Burn scars are prime territory for flash floods and debris flows, so the National Park Service is also working on increased safety measures at the bottom of the canyon before reopening access from South Rim trails, along with Phantom Ranch and Bright Angel Campground. South Rim access to the inner canyon is expected to return in November 2025.

The park's fundraising partner, Grand Canyon Conservancy, is accepting donations to the Grand Canyon Disaster Recovery Fund at GrandCanyon.org.



KANAB, UT

Utah's Best Kept Secret

Base out of Kanab to enjoy magical landscapes, fantastic food and local charm a stone's throw from Zion and Bryce Canyon national parks. Here are four reasons to explore.

By Mikaela Ruland

Otherworldly Landscapes

Some of the world's most mesmerizing scenery is just a quick drive from downtown Kanab. While it's worth applying for the permit lottery for the famous, candy-striped rock formation known as The Wave, don't get your hopes up. Instead, head to White Pocket, an equally beautiful formation made up of deep red rock splashed with contrasting white. You won't need a permit to explore White Pocket, but you will need a four-wheel-drive vehicle. To feel like a kid again, bring the family to Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park, where a gorgeous field of rose-colored sand dunes offers opportunities for hiking, riding ATVs and sand sledding. You can rent sand sleds and sand boards at the state park office.

Incredible Food

For small-town Utah, Kanab has a truly incredible culinary scene. You'd be missing out if you didn't have at least one meal at Wild Thyme Cafe. This spot uses organic ingredients, with dishes like Pistachio Chicken and slow-braised, char-grilled pork ribs. Another Kanab favorite is Se-go, where Chef Shon Foster cooks an upscale menu of eclectic small plates. Think foraged mushrooms with butter and sage, duck lo mein, and elote fritters.



Expert Guides

There are near infinite places to explore in this corner of the world and trying to plan your own excursions can be daunting. Instead, book everything from slot canyoneering to horseback riding to hiking with a local guide. With a pro, you won't have to worry if your vehicle will make it down a sandy four-wheel-drive road, if you have the proper gear or if you know how to navigate confusing desert terrain. Not only is exploring with a guide often safer and less of a planning headache, but you'll get to see parts of Utah you wouldn't have stumbled upon on your own. Check out East Zion Adventures for canyoneering and slot canyon tours, Kanab Tour Company for ATV and hiking tours and Roam Outdoor Adventure for a wide range of tours including a Via Ferrata. You can also combine your Roam tour with a glamping stay at Cave Lakes Canyon Ranch.

Small Town Charm

While Kanab is a great place to visit, it's also full of wonderful locals who call the town home. Take the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, the largest no-kill shelter in the country. This big sanctuary nestled among red rocks houses up to 1,600 dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, pigs and more. Take a tour to see their work or volunteer for the day. You might just end up bringing home your new best friend. If you have your pet with you, be sure to stay at Best Friends Roadhouse and Mercantile Hotel in Kanab. It's a super pet friendly experience with modern built-in cubbies for pet sleeping, dog-washing stations and a gorgeous, light-filled gift shop where complimentary breakfast and coffee are served. Your stay helps support the sanctuary.

Learn more at VisitSouthernUtah.com.

PHOTOS: Coyote Buttes North, Toadstool Hoodoos (Courtesy of Kane County)

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Zion Top 6

From (literally) breathtaking hikes to pretty waterfalls and scenic drives, these are the activities that should be on your bucket list.

By Mikaela Ruland

Iconic view of the Virgin River in Zion National Park.
(Getty Images)



1

Go for a Hike

Hiking in Zion can be as easy or as challenging as you're up for. Take a mellow, stroller friendly walk on the paved, 3.5-mile roundtrip Pa'rus Trail, see waterfalls along the variable mileage Emerald Pools Trail for a moderate adventure, or try your luck at the Angels Landing lottery to hike one of the park's most adrenaline-inducing routes. And that only covers Zion Canyon. Head to less visited areas of the park to find more trails and fewer hikers on them.



2

Wade Through a Slot Canyon

Make sure to pack your water shoes because getting wet is unavoidable on this kind of adventure. Zion's ubiquitous red canyons were formed over millions of years by flowing water, and while many park paths skirt the Virgin River and its tributaries, there are a few routes that use these waterways as trails. It's the perfect way to cool down on a hot summer day. The Narrows is the most popular route, following the Virgin River upstream through towering canyon walls decorated with waterfalls. Day hikers can go up to 5 miles.



3

See a Waterfall

This red rock landscape is dotted with stunning waterfalls whether it's Mystery Canyon Falls along the Narrows that you'll have to wade through the Virgin River to access, or the delicate cascades tumbling into Emerald Pools in Zion Canyon that can be reached via a short hike. Add at least one waterfall to your itinerary, if not several.



4

Ride a Bike

Bring the bikes when you visit Zion, or rent from Zion Outfitters in Springdale. While you can't mountain bike inside the park, there are 7.5 miles of pavement that wind through the canyons, giving you a different perspective. And the best part? It's car free. Start at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center and take the paved Pa'rus Trail 1.7 miles to where it merges with Zion Canyon Scenic Drive, closed to regular traffic in the summer months. Bike all the way to the end for a 15-mile roundtrip adventure, or hop on the free shuttle bus, equipped with bike racks, if you get tired.



5

Go on a Scenic Drive

From the Zion Canyon Visitor Center, drive through the Zion-Mount Carmel Tunnel and cruise 16 miles to the park's east entrance. You'll wind along Pine Creek, past Checkerboard Mesa and have plenty of opportunities to stop at various pull-outs and trailheads to sightsee or hike. Watch for bighorn sheep as they can often be spotted in this area. For another beautiful scenic drive, head to the Kolob Canyons area of Zion, a remote region 40 minutes north of Zion Canyon that most park visitors totally miss.



6

Go Stargazing

If you have a campground reservation, you're in for a treat. Zion is an International Dark Sky Park, meaning its night skies are some of the darkest in the world. All you have to do is look up to see a truly breathtaking amount of stars. Plan your visit with an annual meteor shower like the Perseids in August or the Geminids in December to see shooting stars galore. Make sure you choose a clear night near the new moon for the darkest skies. Not camping? Stick around anyways to see the show.

PHOTOS: Hikers on Angels Landing trail (Getty Images), The Narrows (Saurabh Ray), Emerald Pools Trail waterfalls (Getty Images), biking Pa'rus Trail (Getty images), Bighorn at Checkerboard Mesa (Megan Huizenga), 'Bonsai Tree' view of the Milky Way (Larry Kraus)



Stay Cool

From prolific wildflowers at an uncrowded national park to a Shakespeare Festival, this high-altitude town is a must visit.

by Mikaela Ruland

Sitting at more than a mile high in elevation, Cedar City is one of Utah's coolest towns—both literally and figuratively. Higher than much of the surrounding region, you'll still find chilly nights and pleasant days, even in the height of summer. Mix that with an incredible arts scene and close proximity to amazing wilderness and outdoor recreation, and this mountain town is worth putting on your radar.

While visitors flock to Utah's five national parks, a fraction of the crowds make it to the breathtaking Cedar Breaks National Monument. Climb up to 10,000 feet along a 30-minute drive from downtown Cedar City

to see this natural amphitheater filled with hoodoos and other rock formations across the color spectrum. Stop at the new visitor center at Point Supreme before walking the 2-mile paved trail along the rim to Sunset Overlook. Visit in mid-July for the best display of the park's famous wildflowers. Just north of the monument, Brian Head Resort is a great place to hit the slopes in the winter, but it's also a summer recreation paradise when the snow melts. Open Friday through Sunday in the summer, you can ride the chairlift to hit the resort's bike park, go for a hike, or admire the views. Mountain bike rentals are available on site and trails range from easy/moderate to expert.

Head downtown to see the annual Tony Award winning Utah Shakespeare Festival. Running from June to October each year, you'll find indoor and outdoor theatrical performances all summer long ranging from Shakespeare's dramatic works to modern shows, all in the extremely walkable downtown area. Grab a drink at IG Winery beforehand, and dinner at The Pub Spirits + Craft Kitchen, which utilizes locally sourced

ingredients in burgers, pasta, salads and more. Looking for an alcohol-free option? Utah is well known for its "dirty sodas", a carbonated drink doctored up with cream, fruit juices and flavored syrups. Try one at Soda Nerd. While downtown, don't miss the Southern Utah Museum of Art, which is a work of art itself. Designed by an acclaimed architecture firm, you'll want to spend some time admiring the building before heading inside to check out works from local artists like Maynard Dixon and Edith Hamlin, as well as well-renowned artists from around the world. The best part? It's free.

Twenty minutes north of downtown, you'll find more of Cedar City's arts scene—this site, however, is much older. Parowan Gap Petroglyphs are astonishing and highly accessible (it's just off the road) panels featuring ancient art pecked into the rock spanning at least 1,000 years. Remember that these sites are extremely fragile. Don't disturb the rocks or touch the petroglyphs, as oils from your skin can damage them.

Learn more at VisitCedarCity.com.



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Sandstone rocks at Devils Garden
(Courtesy of Bryce Canyon Country)

A Convergence of Wonder

Explore hidden gem state parks, take a scenic drive and get off the beaten path in towns like Tropic, Boulder and Escalante.

By Susanna Klingenberg

Ninety-six percent of the region between Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef is undeveloped public land, but when you follow Scenic Byway 12 into towns like Boulder and Escalante, you'll know you're in good hands: This increasingly diverse and tight-knit county takes its hospitality seriously. With its high elevation and cooler climate, this region makes for a perfect summer road trip when other parts of the Southwest are too hot.

Its most recognizable feature is Bryce Canyon National Park, famous for having Earth's largest concentration of hoodoos—irregular rock spires that seem to defy gravity. View the surreal geological landscape via a rim hike or by trekking down into the canyon. “When I take visitors there, they sometimes forget

to breathe,” says Falyn Owens, executive director of Bryce Canyon Country. “It’s just an otherworldly experience.”

The views continue when the sun sets: in 2019, Bryce Canyon was designated a Gold Tier International Dark Sky Park. Grab a headlamp and hike to a viewpoint or join a night sky ranger program.

Check out less visited, but every bit as impressive, state parks like Kodachrome Basin, named for its photogenic vistas. It's best known for the colorful layers of sandstone that preserve 180 million years of geologic change. Escalante Petrified Forest State Park, located along Scenic Byway 12, wows visitors with its slabs of colorful mineralized wood—a reminder of just how old the landscape really is. At Anasazi State Park, explore the remains of an Ancestral

Puebloan community, believed to have been occupied from 1160 to 1235 A.D. And back on Scenic Byway 12, drive right through two red rock arch tunnels in Red Canyon National Forest. Savor the quiet with an easy 0.9-mile hike on Buckhorn Trail to Red Canyon Overlook.

Spend a few days on Scenic Byway 12, connecting Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef national parks, and visit the small towns along the way. Tropic, for instance, is known as a quiet, low-key stop while Boulder, with only 500 residents, boasts Hell's Backbone Grill, which was twice selected as a James Beard Award semifinalist.

Strike out into the wild at Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, with its plummeting slot canyons and soaring sandstone cliffs. Don't miss Devil's Garden Trail, an easy 1.9-mile hike brimming with rock arches and spires. Though the monument has plenty of evidence of human history, this area is deliberately kept wild: You won't see much signage. Hire a guide if you plan to explore off marked trails.

Learn more at BryceCanyonCountry.com.



Capitol Reef National Park (DepositPhotos)

Remote Beauty

Take in Utah's stunning color palette in and around this solitude-filled national park.

By Mikaela Ruland

Capitol Reef National Park greets visitors with breathtaking monoliths rising from the desert floor, sheer cliffs and colorful sandstone. Even better? There are fewer crowds than many of Utah's other national parks. Get a jumpstart on your day exploring the park at Dark Sky Coffee in Torrey, Utah, which has a drive-thru so you can hit the road faster. Grab a box lunch at Chuckwagon Deli to eat in the park.

While there's so much to see and do in Capitol Reef, locals suggest planning an entire day to drive the Cathedral Valley

Loop. This remote part of the park promises solitude and will wow you with its stunning formations. High-clearance vehicles are required. Not traveling in an adventure rig? Rent a Jeep or book a tour with a local outfitter.

More accessible is Fruita, the preserved settlement from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Located just east of the visitor center, you'll find a homestead, which now sells gifts and pies, a one-room schoolhouse and apple, peach, pear and cherry orchards where you can harvest ripe fruit on trees with "U-Pick Fruit" signs and self-pay for your bounty.

Capitol Reef is just the beginning of what this scenic part of Utah has to entice.

"Our landscape offers remarkable diversity," says Capitol Reef Country director Nycole Durfey. "Within just a few minutes, visitors can experience the striking gray, blue and purple tones of the Bentonite Hills, often likened to the surface of the planet Mars,

the iconic red rock formations of Capitol Reef, and the lush, green forests that complete our unique scenery."

You'll find yourself wondering if you've been transported to another planet when you visit Goblin Valley State Park outside of Hanksville. The soft sandstone in this park has eroded into bizarre formations that some say resemble goblins.

For more breathtaking views, drive Scenic Byway 12. It spans 124 miles, traveling through some of the most diverse and ruggedly beautiful landscapes between Bryce Canyon and Capitol Reef.

"It should be its own national park," says Durfey. "The views seem to go on forever."

For dinner, head to La Cueva which serves Mexican fare including local favorite Alambre—thinly sliced beef and chicken grilled with vegetables and cheese.

Learn more at CapitolReef.org.

IT'S NOT JUST THE THINNER AIR THAT'LL TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY...

The views aren't bad either. As a high-altitude park with cooler weather and staggering vistas, you can catch your breath one stunned gasp at a time. brycecanyoncountry.com



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