

Frequently Asked Questions

GRAND CANYON RAFTING



Rivers & Oceans



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BASICS

Commercial multi-day Grand Canyon rafting trips run from early April through late October. Trip lengths last from 3 to 16 days depending on the type of watercraft you choose and the put-in and take-out points of your trip.

To read more about the different types of whitewater boats available for your trip, please see our [Grand Canyon Rafting Types of Whitewater Boats](#).

The price of most expeditions includes meals, non-alcoholic beverages, and all your camping gear. Some companies also include pre/post trip transportation, meals, and pre/post trip lodging.

Each outfitter has their own guidelines and protocols; however, each company is licensed by the National Park Service, which guarantees the highest level of safety and service. The company that you choose will most likely depend on which one has the trip offering that best fits your schedule and interests.





BEFORE

What to Bring

You will receive a detailed packet of information pertinent to the specific outfitter that you have chosen.

How to Pack

All outfitters will provide you with dry bags for your river trip. You will receive one large dry bag for your sleep kit and duffel and one smaller dry bag for day use. You can think of how you pack on the river as you do for a plane trip with your large dry bag as your check in luggage and your day dry bag as your carry on. Your large dry bag will only be available in camp. Your day dry bag will be available at all times during the day.

Attitude & Responsibility

For any rafting expedition a flexible attitude is necessary. Each day brings different and sometimes unforeseen situations. Grand Canyon presents its own set of unique conditions, from the peacefully sublime to the ferociously thrilling.

You may find that you are required to step of outside your normal comfort zone, but to get the most out of your trip, your willingness to move beyond the ordinary is key. You will be immersed in the varying elements of nature with no set routine, but after several days you may find you have your own rhythm.

After many days spent on the river experiencing the heart-pounding excitement of large rapids, great hikes, breathtaking scenery, sleeping under the stars, pristine wilderness, serene stretches of river, the power of the elements – wind, sun, rain, heat and cold, you will be exhausted. This is a vacation that you will return from tired, dirty, and fulfilled.





ON THE RIVER

Guides

The National Park Service requires Grand Canyon River Guides to have specific job qualifications and safety certifications. At a minimum, all guides are required to have WFR (Wilderness First Responder) Certification and a Backcountry Food Handler's License.

Guides must not only satisfy the job qualifications and certifications for Grand Canyon National Park, but must possess a multitude of skills. Your guide will also serve as a naturalist, historian, boatman, geologist, psychologist, counselor, entertainer, cook, mechanic, sanitation expert, logistics coordinator, and medical technician to name just a few. Furthermore, they must have the ability to safely operate and maintain a raft and all other equipment over the course of upwards of 250 river miles for up to 2 weeks.

To lead a successful whitewater trip, each guide needs to possess a genuine love and respect for the great outdoors; a deep interest in the geology, natural and human history of Grand Canyon; and a true passion and ability to share and communicate this knowledge.

Prospective Grand Canyon River Guides spend three to five years perfecting their Colorado River rafting skills under the guidance of veteran trip leaders before earning the position of "Trip Leader". It takes a very special and passionate person to be a successful guide on the river and in Grand Canyon. There is always a wait list to recruit the very best from around the world. No matter which outfitter you choose, your guides will be dedicated and talented professionals who work 5 to 9, not 9 to 5.





Average Day

Grand Canyon rafting trips are expeditions through a very remote area so each day varies, but on average you'll spend three to five hours rafting the river. The rest of the time is spent hiking and exploring side canyons, eating meals with your group, or just relaxing in camp. Your guides will tailor each trip to the season, group abilities and interests, and weather conditions to give you the best experience possible.

Your guides will talk about the Canyon's natural and cultural features during hikes, at sites of interest, in camp, and while on the boat. These impromptu lessons will bring the Canyon to life and provide a richer context to your experience.

Grand Canyon Hikes

Some of the highlights of your rafting trip may be off the water, as you discover hidden places on side hikes within the Grand Canyon. You may have one hike a day, up to three shorter hikes, or you may even lay over (spend more than one night at the same camp) and take the whole day to hike and make up river miles the next day.

The easiest hikes are no more difficult than negotiating a few yards of beach sand or stepping over a few rocks. Others may be several miles long over rough trail, climbing steeply up a hot hillside, requiring the use of both hands over awkward boulders or demanding caution as you totter on a narrow trail above a steep cliff. Guides are happy to help novices with hand and footholds and reassurance. Once the river trip is under way, all side canyon hikes are optional and you can choose to relax in camp instead.





Camping

Grand Canyon river trips are expeditions, not tours – there are no assigned camp sites. After a full day of rafting and hiking, the guides will find a place to camp for the night. Some sections of the Canyon have generous big beaches; on other sections of the river the camps may be sparse and smaller.

Upon arrival at camp, the trip leader will announce where the kitchen and toilet(s) will be set up. All passengers will form a “bucket line” to pass the gear off the boats and up to the beach. This includes all your personal gear, the kitchen, and community camping gear. Once the boat is unloaded, the guides will set up the kitchen and community camping gear, while you set up your own personal camping area. Soon after setting up camp, the guides will begin to cook dinner. This is often a good time to write in your journal, read a book, or take a refreshing bath or “power nap.” Those who want to help with camp chores are always welcome!

The guides will wake you early in the morning with a call for “coffee”. When you hear the breakfast call, it means time to come to the kitchen area. After eating your breakfast, you will have a chance to pack your personal camping gear. The guides will break-down the kitchen and start to load the rafts. You may carry your gear to the beach area in front of the boats and when the guides have secured the deck, they will ask everyone to form a bucket line once more to help load the raft. Once all of the gear has been loaded and stored securely, you will board the rafts for another fantastic day of rafting and hiking.





Meals

At the beginning and end of each day, your guides will cook you a fresh breakfast and dinner that will provide you with the nutrition you need to remain healthy and happy on your trip. Grand Canyon guides shine when it comes time to cook and you will find that nothing tastes better than beginning your day with some cowboy coffee and ending your day with a freshly made Dutch oven dessert. For lunch, most outfitters provide a build-your-own sandwich bar with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and snacks to keep you going throughout the day. Top of the line coolers keep food fresh for 16 days or more.

Dietary Restrictions or Food Allergies

With advance notice, all the outfitters are prepared to satisfy a participant's specific dietary needs. If you have any severe food allergies, please contact your outfitter before your trip to come up with a plan of action for your meals.

Beverages/Alcohol

Outfitters provide a wide variety of non-alcoholic drinks on the trip. You will be responsible for bringing (or ordering) your own alcohol. Reach out to your outfitter to learn more about their policies regarding alcohol on the trip.

Drinking Water

Water is life. In the desert environment of Grand Canyon that could not be truer. You will always have access to potable drinking water throughout the day. The guides will continually stress that you drink water and will make sure you have access to large water jugs to refill your canteens from. If in doubt, drink water!

Bathroom

The outfitters bring portable toilets for solid waste, which are clean and comfortable. This facility will be available while in camp and there will be a smaller portable version that can be used during the day. As for urinating in the desert, "the solution to pollution is dilution", so the National Park Service requires guests to urinate in the river. This can be a little more difficult for female guests, so consider bringing along a two-piece swim suit or shorts instead of a one-piece suit to help make this easier. The camp toilet(s) are the first thing to go up while at camp and the last to be taken down.



Sanitation

Sanitation and cleanliness on the river is heavily emphasized by all the outfitters to prevent the spread of any illness. It is important to keep everyone healthy while traveling in a group, so portable hand-washing devices are set up in every camp and during lunch breaks.

Bathing

You may bathe in the Colorado River utilizing biodegradable soaps and shampoos (free of detergents). The Colorado River is so cold that the best method for bathing is to jump in and get wet, jump out and soap up, jump in and rinse off, and jump out and dry off! You should bathe only in calm, shallow areas near the river banks. For safety, be sure to let someone know if you go off to a secluded spot for a bath. Solar showers are a bit of a nuisance to keep track of on the raft, but you may bring one if you wish. They must be used below the high-water line, so be sure to speak to your guide before setting up.

Bathing or washing up in the waterfalls and side streams is prohibited. The soap residue is harmful to the sensitive aquatic communities in these smaller streams.

Challenge Level

Since a Grand Canyon rafting trip is an outdoor activity with continuous exposure to the elements, these trips are considered moderately strenuous. You should be an active and healthy person to best enjoy a Grand Canyon rafting trip. You are responsible for carrying your personal bags to the campsite and setting up your own camping gear. The guides will give instructions the first night to demonstrate how the camping equipment works.

As with all aspects of the trip, we encourage guests (with no medical restrictions) to participate in as many activities as possible. This includes helping the guides load and unload the rafts at camp. Some of the hikes off the river require more effort than others. The guides will try and give you a brief overview of the hike before setting out. If you would rather not participate on any of the hikes, you may remain at or near the rafts.

You will enjoy the trip more if you have prepared with some cardio exercise and are in better physical shape.



If you participate on an Upper or Lower Grand Canyon trip, please look over our [Hiking the Bright Angel Trail](#) document for more information to see if this type of trip is best suited for you.

If you have any medical questions, consult your doctor or call your outfitter to answer your questions before the trip.

Rapids

Most rivers are rated on the [International Scale of River Difficulty](#) as Class I to VI, with a VI meaning the river is impassable. However, the rapids in Grand Canyon use a different scale. The Colorado River is one of three rivers in the world rated by individual rapid on a 1 to 10 scale.

This system of rating arose due to the variety of rapids and volume of water in the Grand Canyon. These rapids are formed in a pool-drop system, which means after every rapid, there is a flat, calm section of water. On the 1 to 10 scale, flat water is rated a 1, while more technical rapids with big hydraulics, such as Granite, Hermit, Crystal and Lava Falls can be rated a 10 depending on the water level.

Weather

Depending on the day, a Grand Canyon river trip can have the full range of weather conditions – from withering heat to bone-chilling cold. It is generally going to be quite hot, but monsoon rains and/or shoulder season storms can bring the temperature down. [Click here](#) to find out more about Canyon temperatures during rafting season. [Click here](#) to find out more about the Canyon water levels.

In the Event of an Accident or Emergency

Grand Canyon river trips are operated in the backcountry and you will be a minimum of several hours away from advanced medical care. All guides are trained in wilderness first aid and some may have higher levels of emergency response training. Sometimes during a trip, injuries or the aggravation of a pre-existing medical conditions are severe enough to require evacuation from a trip.

There will be a satellite phone (for emergency use only) on every river trip. Most evacuations require transportation via helicopter and your guides will assist in navigating to an area that is safe for the helicopter to land.

Are you ready for adventure?

We hope this guide helped you gain a better understanding of Grand Canyon rafting. No matter which trip you choose, rest assured that the Grand Canyon never fails to touch the heart and inspire a deep longing to return.

Still have questions? Give us a call - we'll guide you through!

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Photos: National Park Service, John Andrew Rice, Paxon Woelber, Robb Hannawacker, Paul Hudson, Jonathan Fox

