



Hiking the Canyons

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Our Expedition Team of 10 Venturers and four Scouters flew from Toronto Pearson International Airport to Las Vegas on June 30. Our plan was to hike in three different areas in the American Southwest. The planning and training for this trip took almost a year, but it was worth it in the end. We spent hours climbing hills and outdoor staircases with packs, but it was definitely worthwhile. Hiking the canyons was very demanding, mentally and physically. The hot sun and steep canyons took a toll, but the training we had put in in preparation gave us the strength needed to be able to hike the trails and take in the views we wanted.

When we arrived in Las Vegas, we were immediately startled by the heat of the desert. In the city, it was approximately 40°C. The first two days of the trip were laid back: grocery shopping, sorting gear, staying at an Airbnb. We even walked around Las Vegas, looking at the big hotels, and we went to a local pool for a swim, to cool off from the desert heat, and watched a water fountain show at the Bellagio Hotel. After our stay in Las Vegas, we headed out to Hoover Dam for a historical tour, then to our first canyon: [Grand Canyon](#).

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We were super excited to finally take on the trails we had been training for. Our first trail, Widforss Point, had some amazing views and was not too difficult. It was a great first hike, but the best was yet to come. We saw just how massive the Grand Canyon was: the other end of the canyon went all the way to the horizon! After our first hike, we were already amazed, but the following day we hiked the North Kaibab Trail, which went to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

This trail was the most difficult hike of this trip: it was steep, with plenty of switchbacks, and an overall elevation change of 800m. We stopped in a small cave for lunch and enjoyed a great view of the canyon. We decided to turn back at that point, instead of completing the last 3 or 4 km of the trail, since the sun was rising overhead, and there was a real risk of heatstroke or heat exhaustion if we went too far into the canyon. We hiked back up in the 40°C heat, with the sun beating down on us. We had to constantly wet our shirts and hats to keep cool, and drink often. After the long hike up, we were all dirty and exhausted, but we were proud to have completed the hardest hike we have ever done. That evening, after food and rest, we met to discuss the day and made the decision to start getting up at 4:30 a.m. to beat the incredible afternoon heat. The following day, we packed up again and headed out to Bryce Canyon.

After the 5-hour drive to [Bryce Canyon](#), we relaxed in our campground for the rest of the day. Our next hike was the Fairyland Trail and Sunrise Point trail (15km with 379m in elevation change). As planned, we woke up early so we could see the sunrise over the hoodoos—some impressive and towering natural rock formations—and to beat the heat by completing the trail before noon. It was only 15°C when we started, and 24°C when we finished. The hike went up and down many hills, and the views were incredible. The canyon was immense and spectacular; at the end of the hike, we could see the trail we were hiking, and it seemed so far away. After lunch and a break at the campsite, we completed the Navajo Trail hike in the evening, where we were able to walk through the hoodoos. It felt like a big maze, with the giant structures making us weave through them. The next day, we woke up a bit later, at 6:00 a.m., to hike multiple trails: Queen's Garden, Peek-A-Boo Trail, Rim Trail and ending at Sunrise Point, with a total distance of 11km. The trails wound in and around the lower part of the canyon, and we saw many natural rock formations, like Tower Bridge and the Queen's Garden. We finished our morning hike by walking around the upper edge of the canyon and admiring beautiful, scenic landscapes that were much prettier than the rugged landscape of the Grand Canyon. The day concluded with everyone going to bed early since we were all exhausted.

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It turned out our favourite destination was the last of the trip: [Zion National Park](#). The national park was not very far from Bryce Canyon, and we arrived at the campground after a short drive. It was located at the bottom of a canyon; we were surrounded by mountains. Because of the way canyons and rough terrain influence solar heating and air circulation, the bottom of the canyon stayed warm all the time, so part of the group slept outside (under the picnic shelters) to stay cool. The next day, we went to hike up the Angel's Landing trail. We woke up again at 4:30 a.m. to be the first on the canyon shuttle, which brought us to the hike. Angel's Landing, the apex of the trail, was extremely narrow (a couple of metres wide) and very steep with a 300m drop on either side. We stopped before the final kilometre to be safe, as there have been 17 deaths on this portion of the trail. Some of us were disappointed we couldn't finish the hike, but we understood it was safer to turn back. We still got an incredible view of the canyon, and we continued to the next trail, the Emerald Pools Trail. We saw three pools fed by a small waterfall coming from the top of a curving cliff high above.

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The next day, we set out for our final hike, considered by most of our group to be the best hike they have ever been on. It was a replacement for our original plan of tubing down the canyon, which was cancelled due to the low water levels. The Narrows hike was unlike any hike we had ever done. The trail was in a 500-metre-deep slot canyon. It was carved out over time by the Virgin River, and there was flowing water that went up to the ankles in some areas, up to the waist in others. There was even a small area that was deep enough for us to jump into from rocks and swim. There is always a risk of flash floods in the canyon, so we had to meet with guiding staff and go through some training before we were allowed into the area. The National Park Service closely monitors the weather up on the plateau and closes the hike if there is any chance of rain. This was all a little bit scary, but as we ran, swam and walked through the slot canyon, we loved the hike more and more. The cold water kept us cool the entire time, and the views were breathtaking. On the way back, some members of our group (including myself), were led by Scouter Steve through an amazing obstacle-course-like canyon, which was incredibly fun and memorable. After an incredible 16km of out-and-back hiking in water all day, we arrived back at our campground and rested for the remainder of the day. We returned to Las Vegas the next day and flew home.

All in all, this trip was one of the most challenging, exciting, fun and memorable two weeks of our lives. We will never forget this amazing trip, and we would instantly do it again if we had the chance.