

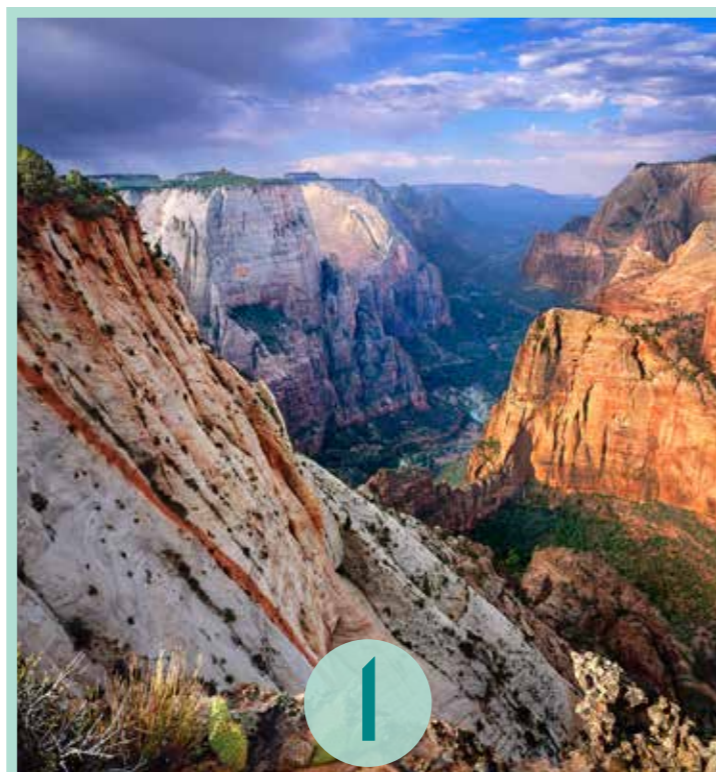
# of the BEST

## ADVENTURES IN SOUTHERN UTAH

Utah is known for its national parks, but those aren't the only draw, finds **Tamara Hinson**

**S**outhern Utah is a magnet for adventurers. Not only is it home to all the state's national parks – Arches, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Canyonlands and Capitol Reef – but history buffs can ponder the meaning of ancient petroglyphs, adrenaline junkies can fly down towering sand dunes, and wannabe cowboys can go on a horse-riding adventure.

But there are lesser-known gems, too: crowd-free state parks, hidden valleys full of ancient ruins and wind-bashed rock formations that rival those of Monument Valley. Here are some of the highlights.



### FLY OVER ZION

Concerns about overcrowding in popular national parks – including Zion – are behind a drive to switch-sell visitors to southern Utah's state parks, but if clients insist on visiting Zion, then suggest viewing it from the air. Zion Helicopters' panoramic flights travel along the edge of the park (flights overhead aren't possible due to air traffic restrictions), starting from a base near the town of Virgin, and providing breathtaking views over the Virgin River Valley, The West Temple sandstone summit and the Crater Hill cinder cone. Fancy a different kind of adrenaline fix? Later this year, a network of four ziplines stretching 3,500ft is to open near Zion Canyon.

**Book it:** A 15-mile Zion Panoramic Flight starts at \$70 for 12 minutes. [zionhelicopters.com](http://zionhelicopters.com)

PICTURES: David Peñir; Matt Morgan; HeyKelley; Shutterstock; Sandra Salvas/Visit Utah



### SPEED DOWN A SAND DUNE

Coral Pink Sand Dunes State Park looks like nowhere else on Earth – a red-tinted maze of shifting sand dunes believed to be at least 10,000 years old, speckled with ponderosa pine trees and wild flowers. An all-terrain vehicle (ATV) tour is the perfect way to see the park – you'll learn how the dunes are formed, spot salamanders or coral pink tiger beetles, then clamber up the side of a dune before flying back down at phenomenal speed. Braver travellers can take the wheel of their own ATV. A range of excursions are available, including night tours that finish with a fireside stop-off for s'mores.

**Book it:** The hour-long Sand Dune Paradise tour starts at \$90 for ATV drivers and \$45 for passengers. [coralpinkatvtours.com](http://coralpinkatvtours.com)

### top tip

Get ideas for easy, pre-planned itineraries and download a detailed Utah Travel Guide at [visitutah.com](http://visitutah.com)

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#### CAMP OUT UNDER CANVAS

Let's get one thing straight, if you're going to sleep under canvas, you might as well do it with Under Canvas Zion. But you can banish all thoughts of sagging tents and deflating blow-up beds – spend the night here and you'll do so in a wood-floored tent with a log-burning stove, hot shower, full-sized bed and a flushing toilet. You'll be staying in one of the most dramatically beautiful areas of southern Utah, right on the edge of Zion National Park, and activities include mountain bike excursions, hot-air balloon rides, fly fishing, 4x4 safaris and helicopter tours.

**Book it:** Safari tents cost from \$169 per night. [undercanvas.com](http://undercanvas.com)



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#### HIKE UP PETRIFIED SAND DUNES

You'll find some of America's most spectacular examples of petrified dunes – in the rock-solid, turned-to-stone sense – in southern Utah's Snow Canyon State Park, a 3,000-hectare reserve filled with frozen lava flows, sandstone cliffs and the weird, wonderful moqui marbles. These are clumps of sand that have developed a tough, iron-oxide shell over millions of years, giving them the appearance of large, round marbles. The park, which had a starring role in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, has several campsites with hook-ups for camper vans.

**Book it:** The Utah Office of Tourism site has details and directions for hiking trails through Snow Canyon State Park. [visitutah.com](http://visitutah.com)



## DESTINATIONS

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### SADDLE UP IN ZION NATIONAL PARK

Time to perfect your best yee-haw. A horseback exploration of southern Utah's cowboy country offers a new perspective of this beautiful part of the Beehive State. Sign up for one of Blue Sage Adventures' horse-riding excursions and you can opt for hacks along the southern edge of Zion National Park, or channel your inner cowherd with lessons in horsemanship and cattle driving. Blue Sage Adventures works closely with Under Canvas Zion – a perfect pairing for aching cowboys and cowgirls who dream of dozing off in a pioneer-style tent after a day in the saddle.

**Book it:** From \$75 per hour.

[bluesageadventures.co](http://bluesageadventures.co)



"Utah is perfect for adventurous clients who love the outdoors. Its national parks are home to stunning desert landscapes, sculpted sandstone formations, waterfalls and hanging gardens. Clients should be reminded that as well as the state's famous sights, there are plenty of lesser-known but just as spectacular state parks, such as Goosenecks State Park and Snow Canyon State Park."

**Andrew Turner,**  
head of trade sales,  
Intrepid Travel



PICTURES: Shutterstock

### FIND ANCIENT FOSSILS AT PEEK-A-BOO SLOT CANYON

There are slot canyons all over southern Utah, but Peek-a-boo is both easily accessible and filled with geological oddities, such as the tiny, white star-shaped marks you'll see on the canyon's walls. Formed from fossilised chunks of seaweed, these are a reminder that this sandy canyon was once deep below the Pacific Ocean. Peek-a-boo is best explored on a guided tour – even the lightest rainfall can dramatically increase the risk of flash floods and a guide will point out easily missed gems, ranging from tiger-striped lizards to moqui holes – the steps Native Americans made in the rock to access nooks used to store food.

**Book it:** Three-hour guided tours with Forever Adventure Tours cost £87 per person.  
[foreveradventuretours.com](http://foreveradventuretours.com)



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**VISIT A 1,000-YEAR-OLD HOME**

One of Utah's top archaeological gems is near the banks of the San Juan River. The area is dotted with reminders of its past, whether it's petroglyphs depicting well-endowed animals or deep grooves worn into the rock by wagons. But the most famous site is the River House Ruin – an ancient pueblo dwelling in a cliff nook made up of several rooms that was probably inhabited by Ancestral Puebloans between the year 900 and the late 1200s.

**Book it:** A guided half-day 4x4 River House Ruin excursion costs \$ 109 per adult or \$89 for under-15s. [riversandruins.com](http://riversandruins.com)

PICTURE: Matt Morgan, Sandra Solvas/Vist Utah

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**DINE OUT IN SPRINGDALE**

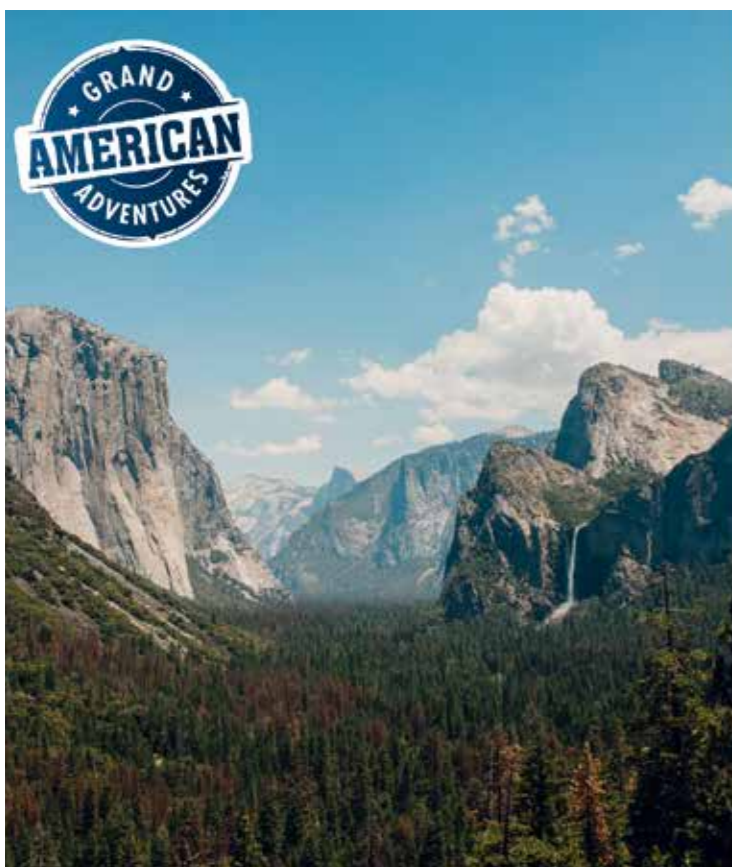
A beautiful and rather well-off town on the edge of Zion National Park, Springdale has wide-ranging appeal as a popular base for those venturing into Zion and as a magnet for foodies. Springdale's top places to eat include Rosita's, a Mexican restaurant set up by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, and the King's Landing Bistro, run by Thomas King, ex-executive chef of Le Cirque in Las Vegas's Bellagio hotel. The town's highlights include the OC Tanner Amphitheater, an open-air venue with a backdrop of Zion's rust-red cliffs, and its downtown area, which is packed with independent boutiques, restaurants and bars.



**BOOK IT**

**Intrepid Travel's** eight-day Utah Parks Circuit takes in Zion, Bryce Canyon, Moab and Monument Valley. It starts at £840, which includes accommodation (camping and hotels), transport and selected meals and activities. [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com)

Highlights of **North America Travel Service's** 11-day Utah's Canyonlands package are Salt Lake City, Moab, Dead Horse Point State Park, Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon and Monument Valley. Prices start at £2,509, including accommodation and direct flights from the UK. [northamericatravelservice.co.uk](http://northamericatravelservice.co.uk)



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