

Written by Caly J Behymer Photographed by Randy Behymer



Two prominent national parks are located within 30 minutes of one another yet look vastly different from the other. You can find Arches and Canyonlands National Parks near Moab, Utah. Utah is home to five national parks. It's an outdoor lover's paradise. Whether you want to stand along the edge of a vast canyon or under the canopy of a sandstone arch, these two national parks have you covered. Read on for the best things to do in these two extraordinary national parks.

CANYONLANDS NATIONAL PARK



VISIT DIFFERENT REGIONS



READ THE NEWS



MESA ARCH



WHAT A GRAND VIEW



TAKE A WHITE-KNUCKLE DRIVE

5 The Canyonlands comprise three regions: Island in the Sky, The Needles and The Maze—each home to a unique geo-diversity. Island in the Sky and The Needles are easy to access with paved roads, visitor centers and hikes ranging from short and easy to long and strenuous. The Maze area of Canyonlands is remote, and all roads are unpaved. This park section is perfect for those seeking backcountry hiking over several days.

4 Technically outside Canyonlands National Park, Newspaper Rock deserves a mention. Located on State Route 211 on the way into The Needles region of Canyonlands, you can find the parking lot for this slab of rock. Here, you'll see one of the largest displays of discovered petroglyphs. They date back about 2,000 years and tell stories of those who lived in the area and passed by this rock.

3 This is one of Utah's most photographed arches, and it's easy to see why. Through the arch is a spectacular view of the canyons below. Early risers can catch an incredible sunrise as it streams through the arch's opening. Be prepared for large crowds regardless of the time of day, but it's worth capturing the views by peering through the arch.

2 The Island in the Sky region of the park is home to Grand View Point Overlook and Trail, and oh, what a grand view it is. This 1.8-mile out-and-back trail follows the canyon's rim for jaw-dropping views. The hike is relatively flat and traverses a rugged, rocky surface. Be sure to follow the trail markers, as finding the path across the hard rock can be tricky in places.

1 For those with a 4-by-4, high clearance vehicle and nerves of steel, take a drive across the Shafer Trail Road. Start at the east side of the road, where paved Route 279 ends at the Potash Boat Ramp, and the rock-and-gravel Shafer Trail begins. The road winds through private property before entering the national park. Prepare for loose gravel, driving over larger stones, deep canyon drop-offs and a 1,500-foot climb up narrow switchbacks to the top of the canyon at the end. If you have the vehicle and are brave enough to tackle this drive, you'll experience incredibly epic views.

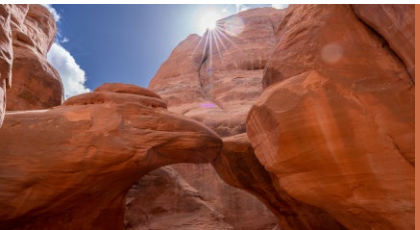


SEE SOME DRAGON EYES

ARCHES NATIONAL PARK

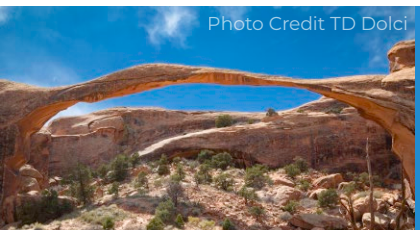
5 Though not named dragon eyes, the famed Windows Arches look like two eyes, especially from the backside. Follow the trail around the back for a completely different perspective after you've viewed the arches from the front. The hike is relatively flat, with gentle inclines and declines.

4 For a unique experience, take a short hike through the Sand Dune Arch. A brief .4-mile walk takes you back through sandstone fins surrounded by deep sand. Walking through the fins and sand, you feel like you're on another planet as you traverse the sandy terrain as it snakes through the narrow fin walls.



GET SANDY

Photo Credit TD Dolci



BEAUTIFUL LANDSCAPES



DELICATE AND MIGHTY



SEE THE FIERY FURNACE

3 No trip to arches is complete without seeing the longest arch in North America. Landscape Arch spans 306 feet, giving it its famed title. Located in the Devils Garden portion of the park, this 1.8-mile hike is flat and considered relatively easy by the National Park System. The thinnest part of the arch is a mere 6 feet, making it at risk of collapse, though experts speculate whether it could be in the next several years or decades. Regardless, it's an incredible sight and a must-do while in the park.

2 Head on a 3.2-mile hike to see the famous Delicate Arch. You may have seen this arch emblazoned across the Utah license plate before. Get your picture under the 42-foot-tall arch before heading back towards the trailhead to view petroglyphs near Wolfe Ranch. Be sure to bring plenty of water on this hike and be prepared to huff and puff as you ascend 480 feet. Not up for an up close and personal experience? You can see the Delicate Arch from the Lower Delicate Arch Viewpoint.

1 Take a ranger-guided hike through what is known as the Fiery Furnace. The guided hike twists and turns through a labyrinth maze of sandstone formations and canyons. Expect to climb, squeeze through, suspend yourself and traverse through a mystical sandstone-walled wonderland. Though hikers can request a hiking permit to hike the labyrinth unguided, most rangers suggest hiking with an experienced guide to get the most out of your experience.

With so much to see within these two national parks, you'll want to plan enough time in the area to give each it just dues.