

The grand canyon railway

Life



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One interesting feature of the southwestern United States is the area known as the "Four Corners," the only place in the United States where four states meet at one point. Within the 130,000 square miles of the Colorado Plateau in this region lie many wonders of nature. The plateau contains eight national parks, twenty national monuments, as well as numerous other nationally designated areas and huge tracts of national forests. This wealth of natural features and the cultures of the various Native American tribes in the region have made the area an important destination for tourists, especially those interested in natural history and culture.

The "crown jewel" for this region is generally considered to be the Grand Canyon, one of the seven natural wonders of the world. This wonder of nature is 190 miles long, one mile deep, and between 4 and 18 miles wide. The Grand Canyon covers 1,900 square miles of the Colorado Plateau and is home to 1,000 species of plants, 250 species of birds, and 70 species of animals. A number of Native American tribes are found in the region of the Grand Canyon, including the Hualapai, Hopi, Navajo, and Havasupai (who live on the floor of a side canyon). The principal attraction to visitors is the sheer size and beauty of the canyon itself.

The walls of the Grand Canyon are made up of many layers of rock, with widely varying textures, colors, and hues. This panorama of nature changes by the season, weather, and time of day. Generally, the morning and late afternoon offer the most striking views for visitors to the canyon. The South Rim in Grand Canyon National Park (Grand Canyon NP) is open year-round, whereas the North Rim (also in the park) is closed in winter. In the summer

months, Grand Canyon NP becomes quite crowded with visitors and motor vehicles.

Consideration is being given by the National Park Service to ban vehicles from the park and move visitors around the park by shuffle buses. Williams, Arizona, serves as one important "jumping off" point for visitors traveling to Grand Canyon NP, with the South Rim of the canyon only fifty-nine miles north of the town. Williams is closely identified with travel to the canyon and has even registered the trademark "The Gateway to the Grand Canyon," which no others may use.

At an elevation of 6,800 feet, Williams, by itself, has many attractions in the town and surrounding area such as lakes for swimming and fishing, horseback riding, and a downtown listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The surrounding Kaibab National Forest in the vicinity of Williams offers opportunities for camping, fishing, and hiking for both visitors and residents alike. The town has for many years been an important transportation hub for both rail and highway. Williams is closely identified with Route 66, also known as the "Mother Road," that connected Chicago, Illinois and Santa Monica, California, long before the interstate highway system was developed.

Williams has the last stretch of the original Route 66 bypassed by the interstate system (in this case, I-40). Even before highways became highly developed, Williams has served as a railroad terminal (since 1882) for the forerunners of the Atchison, Topeka, & the Santa Fe Railroad (Santa Fe) the latter continues to serve the town today with freight-only service. The most

popular way for visitors to get from either Williams or Flagstaff (thirty-two miles to the east) to Grand Canyon NP is by motor vehicle, although the pending restrictions on vehicles might be expected to change this somewhat.

An attractive alternative for some visitors is to travel between Williams and the Grand Canyon by rail. The Grand Canyon Railway (GCRy) offers this option with one round-trip per day. This rail service, which operates purely as a tourist railroad, began operations in September 1989 and has provided daily service since that day (except for December 24 and 25). Historically, rail service on this line began much earlier but passenger service was abandoned in the 1960s due to economic pressures from the automobile.

Freight service from the Santa Fe was abandoned in 1974, with no work performed on the track between Williams and the Grand Canyon until 1989. The work to get the GCRy running was monumental, because all engines and passenger cars had to be acquired and completely rebuilt. In addition, the depot at Williams and the adjoining Fray Marcos Hotel were in need of substantial refurbishing. In the depot, operating offices, ticket offices, a waiting room, and souvenir shop are found. All of this work was accomplished in a period of seven months to be ready for the September 1989 opening.

Today, the GCRy provides an interesting and nostalgic way for visitors to travel to the canyon. During the summer months, daily round-trip rail service is provided by steam locomotive, and in the winter diesel locomotives are used due to the severity of weather conditions. For all service, passengers

travel in railcars that date from 1923 and are reconditioned to approximate that time period. Departure from Williams is at 9: 30 A. M. and arrival at Grand Canyon NP is at 11: 45 A. M. , in the center of the park's historic district at the 1910 Grand Canyon Depot.

The train departs from the Grand Canyon at 3: 15 P. M. and arrives back in Williams at 5: 30 P. M. Nonsmoking is allowed on the train in " any of the railcars. Reservations can be made by calling a toll-free number, 1-800-THE TRAIN. Information about the train ride, but not reservations, is available on the railroad's website, [www. thetrain. com](http://www.thetrain.com). Different classes of service are offered to travelers, depending on the fare paid and the car in which a passenger rides. The basic coach service is priced " at \$49. 50 per adult and \$19. 50 per child.

Snacks are available for purchase; Diet Coke and Coke are complimentary in this class, with the latter served in GCRy keepsake bottles. Club Class, which includes the availability of alcoholic beverages and complimentary coffee and pastries in the morning, is priced at an additional \$14. 50. The Coconino Main Class provides recliner chairs, a full continental breakfast, appetizers and champagne in the afternoon and the availability of alcoholic beverages for an additional \$49. 50 per person. Coconino Dome Class represents a further upgrade.

The service level is the same as Coconino Main Class, but passengers ride in an upper level enclosed dome which provides unsurpassed views of the surrounding landscape. The highest class of service, Chief Class, is provided in a railcar with an open-air rear platform; complimentary continental

breakfast, coffee, tea, and juice are provided in the morning and champagne and appetizers in the afternoon. This class of service is priced at an additional \$64.50 per person. For all classes, the entrance fee to Grand Canyon NP is an additional charge.

Oilier services are also available from the GCRy for additional charges. Continental breakfast is served in the terminal for \$5.95 per person until the train departs. Narrated motorcoach tours of the South Rim of the Grand Canyon are available from the Fred Harvey Transportation Company (the concessionaire for Grand Canyon NP) of varying lengths, some of which include lunch. Packages are available which may include one or two nights at the Fray Marcos Hotel in Williams and one night at a hotel in Grand Canyon NP.

During the ride from/to Williams many natural and man-made venues can be seen. There is formal narration for some of these venues and a printed guide is available for purchase, which describes these sights and provides a history of the GCRy. Interestingly only a very limited view of the Grand Canyon is available from the train just as it arrives at and departs from the park. In Coach Class, each railcar has an attendant who serves beverages (Coke and Diet Coke), goes around with snacks for sale, and engages in conversations with the passengers.

During the summer, many of these attendants are college students on break from their studies. The Grand Canyon Railway uses costumed performers in a number of different ways to simulate an earlier time period. Before the train departs from Williams, performers stage an "Old West" gunfight, just

as was found some 100 years ago, Performers also move among the railcars: often singing songs of the " Old West, during the trip to the Grand Canyon. Passengers are encouraged to sing along with the performers.

All of the performers are costumed in the ' type of dress found at the " turn-of-the-century. " On the return trip, the activities are slightly different. A group of performers stage a train robbery, just as was found during earlier times in the southwestern United States. Passengers are included in portions of the action, but none are actually robbed. Eventually, the sheriff captures the train robbers and takes them away to be put in jail. Passengers, especially younger children, enjoy this activity, which makes the trip back to Williams seem much shorter than it actually is.

The other activity that some engage in is to take a nap, because many are tired due to their activities at the high altitude and in the low humidity of the Colorado Plateau. A recent survey conducted by the GCRy found that many passengers rate their train trip experience as excellent. Perhaps just as important, these passengers say that they would recommend the GCRy trip to friends. Additionally, the most satisfied passengers were likely to return again.

Passenger satisfaction derives from the varied experiences received during the round-trip ride and the Grand Canyon itself which the latter experience not under control of the GCRy but rather the National Park Service. ? This case was prepared by Dr. Fredrick M. Collision and is intended for classroom use. The situations portrayed here do not imply either effective or ineffective management on the part of the Grand Canyon Railway. The case was written

based on published materials of the railroad, the National Park Service, the, Williams-Grand Canyon News and the author's personal experience.