

Hiking the Bright Angel Trail

GRAND CANYON RAFTING



Rivers & Oceans



The Bright Angel Trail is a multi-use trail for day-hikers, backpackers, mule rides, and guests starting or ending their Grand Canyon whitewater rafting river trips. It stretches from the South Rim of Grand Canyon and descends 4,420 feet below to the Colorado River.

The trail offers breathtaking panoramic views of the Canyon while surrounding hikers with massive cliffs and abundant plant and wildlife.

While many travelers find hiking the Bright Angel Trail adds an extra dose of excitement to their adventure, the experience may not be suitable for everyone.

If you are interested in booking an Upper or Lower Grand Canyon rafting trip, it is important that you are aware of the **required** hike in or hike out of one of Grand Canyon's deepest points. This guide is to help you decide if hiking the Bright Angel Trail is the right option for you.

QUICK FACTS

Distances

- South Rim (Bright Angel Trailhead) to the Colorado River at Pipe Creek Boat Beach: 8.0 miles
- South Rim (Bright Angel Trailhead) to the Colorado River at Phantom Ranch Boat Beach: 9.5 miles

Rest Stations with Potable Water (starting from the top)

- Mile-and-a-Half Resthouse (*only available from mid-April to early-October*): 1.6 miles
- Three-Mile Resthouse (*only available from mid-April to early-October*): 3.1 miles
- Indian Garden Campground: 4.8 miles
- Phantom Ranch Boat Beach: 9.5 miles

Trailhead Access

- If you are hiking in to a river trip, you will access the Bright Angel trailhead just west of the Bright Angel Lodge.
- If you are hiking out from your river trip, you will start from either the Phantom Ranch Boat Beach or the Pipe Creek Boat Beach.





PACKING LIST

Below is a packing list of gear we recommend for your hike on Bright Angel Trail. Please remember that this hike is extremely strenuous and you will be required to carry everything you pack for your river trip during the hike. Being mindful of packing only the essentials will make for an easier and more enjoyable hike. If in doubt, leave it out.

HYDRATION COMPATIBLE BACKPACKING PACK

A 30-40 liter backpacking pack is essential for carrying everything you bring for your trip. Clothes, toiletries, and anything else you bring will be stowed on your back as you hike in or out of the Canyon. The [Osprey Exos 48](#) pack is a perfect lightweight pack that can hold all of your things. It is designed to be compatible with a hydration reservoir (we recommend at least 3 liters), making it perfect to stay easily hydrated. While there are water stops along the path, it is always essential to have a back-up water reservoir to avoid dehydration.

HIKING SHOES/BOOTS

Lightweight, durable hiking shoes or boots are the key for optimal comfort during your hike. The [Ariat Skyline Mid GTX boots](#) are lightweight but offer the stability and support needed for a strenuous trek. The [Brooks Cascadia 12](#) are a more lightweight, flexible option that still provides optimal support and protection. Be sure to break in your shoes or boots prior to your hike to avoid unnecessary blisters and uncomfortable sore spots.

TREKKING POLES

[Trekking poles](#) are ideal for enhancing stability and extra support on the trail, especially for hiking in. Poles with a collapsible feature are an added advantage because they can easily be folded up and packed away.

HAT AND BUFF/BANDANA

Sun protection is crucial to avoid sun burns and overheating on your hike. In addition to sunglasses, having a [wide brimmed hat](#) is perfect for shading your face and neck from the sun, while still being light and breathable. Another added option is to wear a [buff](#) or bandana, which can be used for neck protection from the sun and can also be soaked in water to provide cool relief.

CURRENT PHYSICAL FITNESS

Being mentally and physically ready is a necessity for hiking the Bright Angel Trail. The trail is 8.0 - 9.5 miles long, with an elevation change of nearly 4,500 feet. You should be prepared to hike for six to eight hours, while carrying everything you pack for your trip, along with necessities such as water, gear, and snacks.

While hiking the Bright Angel Trail may seem a daunting endeavor, it is considered a rite of passage to some and can leave you with a great sense of personal accomplishment. If you can answer yes to the following checklist, get ready to dust off your hiking boots and gear up.

- *I am in good health.*
- *I am in good physical shape - I exercise regularly and I can walk 10 miles without an issue.*
- *I am capable of carrying my own personal pack, weighing between 20-30 pounds, and at least two liters of water.*
- *I am willing to take the hike seriously. I will train and condition for the hike, pack lightly, and eat and drink properly during the hike.*
- *I think hiking the Bright Angel Trail will be fun and I am up for the adventure!*

If you are considered out of shape, do not exercise regularly, have a heart condition, joint problems, asthma and/or are severely afraid of heights, we recommend considering a Grand Canyon rafting trip that does not require a hike in or out of the Grand Canyon.





TRAINING AND CONDITIONING

If you actively engage in some sort of physical exercise or activity every day and can easily walk 10 miles, then you should be able to complete this hike.

However, the more effort you invest into physically preparing for hiking the Bright Angel Trail, the more worthwhile your experience will be.

Please Note: We strongly encourage always consulting with a medical professional before starting any fitness plan or training.

RECOMMENDED TRAINING TIPS

DO

- Start preparing at least 12 weeks before your trip to ensure enough time for your body to become acclimated to such vigorous exercise.
- Pick a trail to hike that has significant elevation changes and extended periods of hiking through steep uphill and downhill grades.
- Exercise outside in a variety of different elements to prepare for unexpected weather.
- Regularly practice hiking with your trekking poles to gain confidence and familiarity when using them.
- Go hiking at least three times per week.
- Hike 10 or more miles bi-weekly for optimal conditioning.
- Mix up your fitness routine with other forms of aerobic exercise, such as biking and swimming, for extra cardiovascular health and strengthening.
- Engage in resistance training and weight lifting to build the strength and balance needed for a vigorous hike.
- Create a training and conditioning schedule with active recovery days. A cardio-focused routine, 4-6 sessions of endurance training, along with 2-3 sessions of resistance training per week is ideal.
- Remember to stretch! Tight and tense muscles are super uncomfortable and can be eased with regular stretching. Be sure to incorporate dynamic and static stretches for optimal muscle recovery.



DO NOT

- Base your regular exercise routine in a climate controlled gym. It can affect your cardiovascular endurance and strengthening – be sure to get moving outside!
- Rely purely on an elliptical or treadmill for strength. Hiking on a trail will give your muscles time to become familiar with hiking on uneven terrain.
- Rely only on walking on flat, paved sidewalks for training. Uneven terrain with uphill and downhill inclines will be the most beneficial to strengthen your cardiovascular system.
- Think that just a few weeks to train is enough. Be sure to start preparing at least 12 weeks in advance.



HIKING IN VS. HIKING OUT

HIKING IN TO A LOWER CANYON TRIP

- On average, the hike in takes between 3-5 hours. You will start the hike between 4:30 a.m. and 6:30 a.m. to make sure you have plenty of time to reach your river trip on time.
- You are instantly rewarded with spectacular views of the Grand Canyon as you hike down into it.
- The constant decline can be harder on knee joints and small balance muscles.
- Downhill hikers can frequently experience “jello legs”, meaning that the legs become wobbly and unstable. This is due to lactic acid buildup from muscles hard at work.
- Downhill hiking can increase a sense of instability and legs can feel tired after hours of strenuous exercise.
- The steady decline in elevation generally helps with higher elevation health issues.
- You will need to provide your own snacks and water for your hike in. We recommend hearty food like sandwiches, power bars, crackers, cheese, and fruit. Electrolyte supplement drinks are also recommended to replenish electrolytes.
- Because you will start down the trail in the early morning, you will need to stay on the South Rim of Grand Canyon the night before the trip.
- You will have access to potable water at three different stops along the trail.
- You will be accompanied by a hiking guide.





HIKING OUT FROM AN UPPER CANYON TRIP

- On average, the hike out takes between 4-6 hours and you will typically start your hike between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m.
- The constant steep climb can be harder on the lungs and cardiovascular system.
- You will be utilizing larger muscle groups, such as the quadriceps and glutes.
- You will gain an increased sense of stability as you hike up.
- You will be more acclimated to the environment after your trip on the river.
- Your river guides will provide you with lunch and plenty of snacks to get you through the day.
- Your guides will help educate you about the signs of dehydration, heat stroke, and hyponatremia. All bodies respond to physical activity in different way and knowing how to handle different situations is a powerful tool for Grand Canyon hikers.
- You will have access to potable water at three different stops along the trail.
- You will be accompanied by a hiking guide.





HIKING ETIQUETTE

- Uphill hikers have the right of way. Hiking uphill requires more cardiovascular endurance and they often have a smaller field of vision. If you are a downhill hiker, slow down and yield to those hiking uphill. Be sure to move to the non-cliff side of the trail to let uphill hikers through.
- Mules have the right of way. Always step to the side of the trail, away from the edge, and remain quiet and still to avoid spooking the mules. Yielding to mules along the trail keeps everyone safe.
- If you need to pass another hiker in front you, be sure to announce your approach with a simple “hello” or friendly greeting. Most people may be caught off guard without a warning beforehand. Please note that some travelers may not speak English and may not understand you.
- If you are hiking in a group, remember to hike single file and try not to take up more than half of the trail space to allow for others to hike safely.
- Follow the “leave only footprints” rule and carry all trash and disposables with you in resealable plastic bags – we want to keep the Grand Canyon beautiful!
- Don’t collect souvenirs. We know that the Grand Canyon is full of beautiful wildlife, vegetation, and geological formations. However, it is illegal to remove anything from the Canyon and it can be extremely harmful to the environment. If you must record anything, a picture is worth a thousand words without any detrimental impact.



Are you ready for adventure?

We hope this guide helped you gain a better understanding of the strenuous but rewarding Bright Angel Trail and if it is the right option for you. 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, Jonathan Fox, Paul Hudson

