

EXCURSIONS

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Las Vegas is the antithesis of a naturalist's vision of America. Yet it's near some of the Southwest's most spectacular attractions. Beautiful Red Rock Canyon is just outside the city limits. Also within easy striking distance of Las Vegas is the imposing Hoover Dam, the cool oasis of Lake Mead and brilliant Valley of Fire State Park. The alpine forests of Charleston Peak are less than an hour's drive away, too.

For those with more than an afternoon to spare, more natural wonders beckon. Just over the California state line is the geological playground of Death Valley. Longer drives bring you to Arizona's famed Grand Canyon or into Utah's own canyon country at Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks. You could visit any of these parks in an excruciatingly long day trip. But overnighting in the desert to see the sunset today and sunrise tomorrow, when the pastel-colored palette of the landscape shows off exquisite hues, is an opportunity you shouldn't miss. Otherwise, a time-saving option is to take a flightseeing tour by plane or helicopter, which is easily done from Las Vegas.

This chapter provides you with essential information for getting away from the neon of the Strip into this almost indescribable country. More in-depth coverage of all of these places can be found in Lonely Planet's *Southwest USA*, *Grand Canyon National Park*, *Zion & Bryce Canyon National Parks* and *California* guidebooks.

Day trips to destinations like Red Rock Canyon or Hoover Dam can be done at the spur of the moment, as long as you've got your own transportation (for rental cars, see p237). For overnight trips, such as to the Grand Canyon, advance reservations for accommodations are essential. Check the weather forecast before heading out of town by contacting the [National Weather Service](#) (☎ 702-736-3854; www.wrh.noaa.gov/vef/). If you forgot to pack outdoor gear and clothes, stop by [REI](#) (p124) southeast of McCarran International Airport in Henderson or [Desert Rock Sports](#) (p124) in suburban Summerlin, near Red Rock Canyon.

THE BEST DAM DAY TRIPS

To get the most bang out of your day in the desert, start off early in the morning to make a grand loop east of the city and back again. Stop off in old-fashioned [Boulder City](#) (p224) en route to magnificent [Hoover Dam](#) (p223), then backtrack and slowly wind north beside the shores of [Lake Mead](#) (p224), timing your drive perfectly to finish up in [Valley of Fire State Park](#) (p225) in the golden hour before sunset.

If you don't want to make a whole dam day of it, head west instead to [Red Rock Canyon](#) (p221), which is surprisingly close to the Strip. Spend a cool morning or late afternoon horseback riding, mountain biking or just driving the scenic loop through this national conservation area. Kids may like hokey [Bonnie Springs](#) (p222) nearby, while the whole family can enjoy picnicking at [Spring Mountain Ranch State Park](#) (p222). Mountain bikers should detour to [Blue Diamond](#) (p222) for single-track trails.

BIGGER IS BETTER

Ooh, baby: it doesn't get much more impressive than [Grand Canyon National Park](#) (p217). The national park is split by the Colorado River,

which means you've got two choices: visit either the [South Rim](#) (p217) or the [North Rim](#) (p219). Just make sure you decide which way to go before leaving Las Vegas.

To visit the exceptionally popular South Rim, cross over [Hoover Dam](#) (p223), then take US 93 southeast to Kingman. Follow I-40 east to Williams, then head north to Grand Canyon Village. If you're not in a hurry, take scenic [Route 66](#) from Kingman to Williams via Seligman, passing [Grand Canyon West](#) (p220) on Native American tribal lands.

A more action-packed, multiday trip option heads northeast from Las Vegas to St George, Utah, the jumping-off point for trips to the Grand Canyon's remote North Rim in Arizona, as well as Utah's own [Zion National Park](#) (p226) and [Bryce Canyon National Park](#) (p229).

ESCAPING THE CROWDS

Almost everyone who takes a day trip outside Las Vegas visits Hoover Dam, Red Rock Canyon or the Grand Canyon. To escape the crowds, you can still visit the same spots but make lesser-known detours along the way, like detouring to [Boulder City](#) (p224) en route to Hoover Dam. En route to the Grand Canyon,