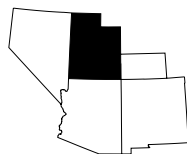


# Utah



Shhh, don't tell. We wouldn't want word to get out that this oft-overlooked state is really one of nature's most perfect playgrounds. In Utah you can raft, rock climb, rappel; fish, float, boat; ride a horse, ride a four-wheeler, ride a snowmobile; go off-road, off-trail, off-piste... More than 65% of the lands are public, part of 12 national parks and monuments, 41 state parks, six national forests and numerous wilderness and recreation areas.

In the southern red rock country, you can hike beneath spires and arches that seem to defy gravity, and past water- and wind-sculpted sandstone that resembles art. High above Salt Lake City, mountain bike the forested Wasatch Mountain slopes in summer and swoosh down world-class ski runs in winter. Further east, explore the ancient dinosaur digs and rock art sites. You don't even have to get out of your car for stunning vistas in Utah (though you should): scenic byways and backways lace the state.

The enticing land was also what drew the first Mormon pioneers to the territory in the mid-1800s; church members today make up 60% of the extremely polite population. Small rural towns can be quite conservative, but the rugged beauty has attracted outdoorsy independent thinkers as well. You're as likely to encounter a 1970s VW bus with a kayak on the top as a family minivan with a gaggle of clean-cut, formally dressed children spilling out.

So pull on your boots or rent a jeep: Utah's wild and scenic hinterlands are waiting to be explored. But that's just between you and me.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### ■ **Most Outrageous Adventures**

Moab outfitters (p428) can arrange enough adrenaline for the most avid rafting, off-roading and slickrock mountain-biking junkie

### ■ **Best Spot for Solitude**

Get your 4WD in gear to explore ancient Native American lands southeast of Natural Bridges National Monument (p419) – darkest night skies in the lower 48

### ■ **Easiest to Reach Jaw-Dropping Viewpoint**

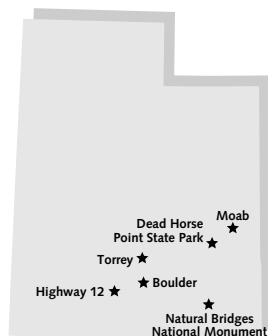
Dead Horse Point State Park (p426) overlooks serpentine river canyons, with 2-mile-high mountain ranges looming on the horizon

### ■ **Hippest Small Towns**

The tiny nearby towns of Torrey (p446) and Boulder (p448) have more than their fair share of liberal thinkers, and two great restaurants

### ■ **Top Scenic Drive**

Utah Hwy 12 (p448) curves past plummeting red rock canyons, giant cream-colored domes and deep-green alpine forests



## History

'This is the place!' Brigham Young exclaimed when he and Mormon pioneers arrived in Salt Lake Valley in 1847. Part of Mexico until 1848, Congress created the Utah Territory in 1850, named after the Native American Utes. Church leader Brigham Young, the first governor, encouraged believers to spread out and set down roots. (One group was so determined that it lowered its wagons by rope through a hole in the rock to continue on an impassible mountain trail; see p452.) Inevitable conflicts with the Utes arose, but in general, Mormon policy was to try to coexist and convert.

The first five petitions for statehood were rejected because of the Mormon practice of polygamy. A tense situation was suddenly settled in 1890 when church president Wilford Woodruff discontinued plural marriage as the official practice. (For more on polygamy, see p49.) About the same time, Utah's rugged country served as the perfect hideout for notorious Old West bad men, such as native son Butch Cassidy, and the last spike of the first intercontinental railroad was driven here.

Throughout the 20th century the influence of the Mormon Church, today called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), was pervasive in state government. Though it's still a conservative state, there's evidence that LDS supremacy may be waning – only about 60% of today's population claims church membership (the lowest percentage to date). The urban/rural split may be more telling for future politics: about 75% of state residents now live along the urbanized Wasatch front surrounding Salt Lake City.

## Climate

The state has a high-mountain-desert climate with four seasons; its average elevation is 6100ft. But before you make assumptions about temperature, check the elevation of the town you're traveling to. It's no surprise that the ski mountain resorts such as Park City are cooler than the desert valley towns such as St George. But Bryce Canyon National Park (8000ft at rim level) can be 10°F to 20°F cooler than the valleys of Zion Canyon National Park (4000ft), just 1½ hours away. Salt Lake City's average temperature is 28°F in January and 80°F in July. Fog blankets the valley around Salt Lake for extended periods in winter (to rise above the gray gloom, ascend the mountains). Evaporation from the nearby Great

Salt Lake helps generate the 500in of snow that falls on the Wasatch Mountain front in winter.

## Time Zone

Utah is on Mountain Time (seven hours behind GMT) and observes daylight saving time.

## Information

Utah is pretty much a nonsmoking state. All lodgings are required to have nonsmoking rooms, and even most bars are smoke-free (exceptions are noted in the text). At campgrounds, 'tent sites' require a little walking, while 'campsites' are pull-up spaces suitable for trailers or tents (no electricity). Many grounds in the arid south do not have showers. 'Camping cabins' require you to bring linens, other cabins don't.

**Natural Resources Map & Bookstore** (Map p481; ☎ 801-537-3320, 888-882-4627; www.maps.state.ut.us; 1594 W North Temple St, Salt Lake City)

**Public Lands Information Center** (Map p481; ☎ 801-466-6411; www.publiclands.org; 3285 E 3300 South St, Salt Lake City; 🕒 10:30am-7pm Tue-Sat) Inside REI's Salt Lake City store, this is a central source of information for all public lands (state parks, Bureau of Land Management sites, Forest Service Wilderness Areas) in Utah. Books and maps sold online.

**US Geological Survey** (USGS; ☎ 303-202-4700, 888-275-8747; www.usgs.gov) The best topographic and satellite maps; order by phone or online.

**Utah Avalanche Center** (www.avalanche.org/~uac) Snow and weather reports.

**Utah Public Library** (http://pioneer.utah.gov)

**Utah Travel Council** (Map p483; ☎ 800-200-1160, bookstore 801-538-1398; www.utah.com; Council Hall, 300

### FAST FACTS

**Population** 2,550,000

**Area** 82,144 sq miles

**State nickname** Beehive State

**Website** www.utah.com

**Sales tax** 4.65%

**Average temps low/high** Park City Jan 7/30°F, Jul 44/71°F; St George Jan 27/54°F, Jul 68/102°F

**Salt Lake City to Las Vegas, NV** 687 miles, 11½ hours

**Salt Lake City to Grand Canyon, AZ** 515 miles, 8½ hours

**Salt Lake City to Durango, CO** 394 miles, 6½ hours