

# Understand the Grand Canyon

## **GRAND CANYON TODAY** ..... 182

Out with plastic bottles and overhead traffic, in with more Native American cultural programs.

## **HISTORY** ..... 184

The canyon's been occupied and abandoned by ancient Pueblos, explored and exploited by pioneers, and preserved by presidents, conservationists and park rangers.

## **GRAND GEOLOGY** ..... 196

Rocks 101: what you're looking at, and how it came to be over two billion years.

## **WILDLIFE OF THE GRAND CANYON** ..... 204

The Grand Canyon comprises five different life zones and a plethora of flora and fauna.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES & CONSERVATION** ... 218

The key environmental and conservation issues affecting contemporary life in and around the canyon.

## **NATIVE AMERICANS OF THE GRAND CANYON** . . 220

Modern-day tribes residing around the canyon – and how to respectfully interact with them.

# Grand Canyon Today

**Grand Canyon National Park is a point of pride for the US, and continues to be one of the country's most popular national parks for both Americans and foreign visitors. The park is also the center of a thriving local economy. But it takes a little planning to keep this destination a classic: limiting helicopter traffic, minimizing trash, controlling crowds on the busy South Rim, and fostering Native American culture, to name just a few.**

## Best on Film

**Koyaanisqatsi** (1982) In this non-narrative, nonverbal film, the Grand Canyon appears in a time-lapse – clouds passing overhead, constantly changing light and color.

**Thelma & Louise** (1991) This women-on-the-run story ends at the Grand Canyon, though the final scene was actually shot near Moab, Utah.

**Into the Wild** (2007) Seeker and wanderer Chris McCandless runs the Colorado River rapids in this true-life tale.

## Best in Print

**Hiking Grand Canyon National Park** (Ben Adkison; Falcon, 2011) Indispensable hiking guide to the canyon, with detailed descriptions and hiking tips.

**Over the Edge: Death in the Grand Canyon** (Michael P Ghiglieri & Thomas M Myers; Puma Press, 2001) Morbidly fascinating and informative survey of death in the canyon.

**Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West** (Wallace Stegner; Penguin, 1992) An illuminating look at John Wesley Powell's explorations of the Grand Canyon and his influence on US water policy.

## Tourist Boom

A 2015 report from the National Park Service estimated that Grand Canyon National Park welcomed 4.7 million visitors in 2014 – and those visitors spent \$509 million in Tusayan and other communities around the park, approximately 30% of it on lodging and another 20% on food and drink. These are significant numbers: the spending supported nearly 8000 jobs in the region and benefited the local economy to the tune of \$711 million. Not bad for an attraction that only costs \$30 per carload to enter.

## Flyovers & Water Pollution

With annual visitor numbers to the Grand Canyon nearing five million, helicopter and plane tours do brisk business. For years, environmentalists and the NPS lobbied for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to limit scenic flyovers in order to preserve a sense of serenity for other canyon visitors. In 1988 the FAA implemented flyover restrictions that limited helicopter and airplane traffic to specific corridors away from the most frequently used parts of the canyon. Scenic flyovers are also limited to certain hours of the day, and no flights are allowed below the rim except at Grand Canyon West, on the Hualapai Reservation. As a result, you probably won't notice the distant sounds of most scenic flights.

In mid-2015, the US Geological Survey released an alarming new report claiming that the levels of mercury and selenium in the Grand Canyon's section of the Colorado River – a 240-mile stretch of the waterway – were high enough to be considered a risk to fish and other wildlife. It's potentially dangerous for humans too. Scientists believe that the coal-powered Navajo Generating Station is one of the major culprits; further tests are scheduled.