

## Sedona and the Grand Canyon will rock you

**B**efore our trip, my perception of Arizona consisted of a never-ending desert with a really big canyon somewhere in the middle. Now all I can do is look back at our breathtaking pictures in awe and mentally plot out our next trip. If you get the chance, get thee to Arizona, preferably when your kids are old enough to hike.

Upon arriving in Phoenix, you can't help but notice the cacti and brown landscape everywhere and realize, "Dorothy, we're not in Richmond anymore!" Our four-year-old son Sam couldn't believe a place so different was still part of the country. When people asked where we're from, he would respond, "We're from America!"

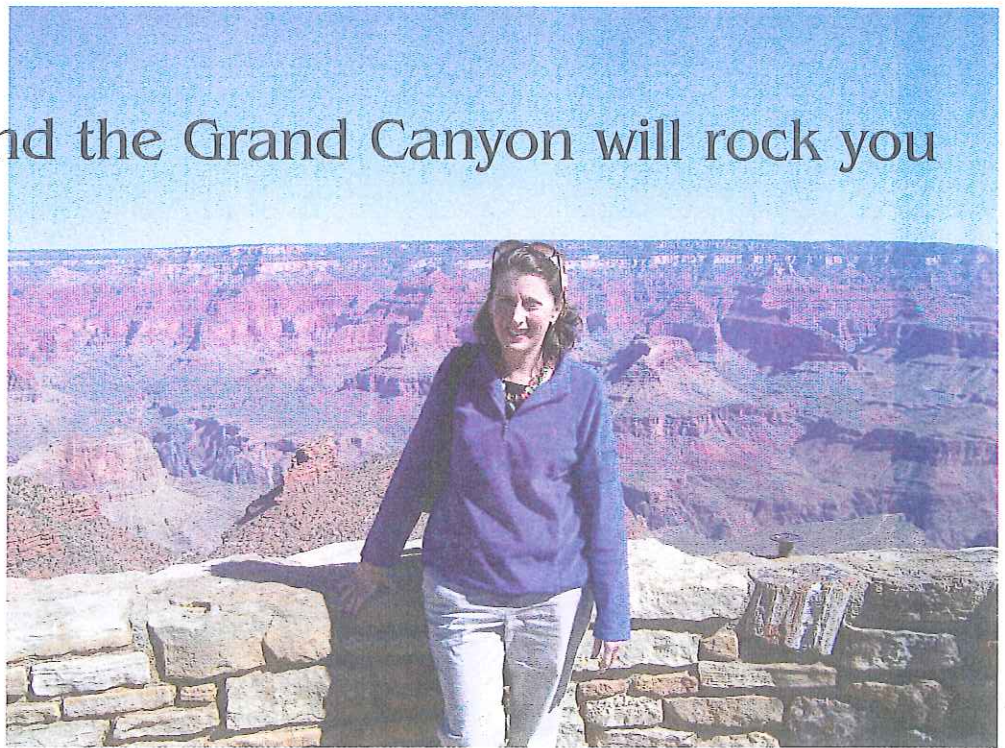
The climate is an adjustment as well, requiring plenty of drinking water and sunscreen. Arizona is at a high altitude, on average 4,000 feet above sea level.

After a quick stop at the magnificent Billmore Hotel in Phoenix designed by the legendary Frank Lloyd Wright, we headed north. Our destination was Sedona, truly one of the most spectacular places on the planet.

There is an old saying, "God created the Grand Canyon, but He lives in Sedona." I have to agree. When we drove into town, the towering red rocks of Sedona greeted us, and I couldn't help snapping pictures out the window like the tackiest of tourists.

At that point I thought we had seen the ultimate view of views. Much to our amazement, this was just the beginning of a visual feast everywhere we looked, each rock formation unique and stunning in its own way. In all shapes and sizes, they boast many well-deserved nicknames—Cathedral Rock, Snoopy Rock, Chimney Rock. Even Bart and Lisa Simpson have their own respective formations!

Meanwhile, we quickly learned four-year-olds do not appreciate views no matter how magnificent.



*Libby Carty McNamee at the Grand Canyon.*

ly take their preschoolers to Disney World and not Sedona. However, if you can afford the splurge, the breathtaking Enchantment Resort has a fantastic "Coyote Club" where you can drop your kids to play for the day, and they'll beg to go back again. (Really!)

For families with older kids who enjoy hiking and the outdoors, Sedona is an ideal vacation getaway. Parents love it, and kids think it's "cool." We did find a number of family-centered activities in the area, including a free trolley ride around town, the Sedona Heritage Museum, and a four-hour excursion on the Verde Canyon Railroad in a fully restored vintage FP7 locomotive. Right on the outskirts of town, the stunning Slide Rock State Park was a big hit as was Red Rock State Park.

Our all-time favorite activity was zooming off on a Pink Jeep Tour in a customized and very pink 4 x 4. With our knowledgeable guide, we had a rugged off-roading adventure to the inner canyons of the red rock formations. There was literally no trail but spectacular scenery and plenty of bumps to keep all of us thoroughly amused. Our only regret

another one of their many routes.

After a dramatic drive through the glorious Painted Desert, the next stop was the Grand Canyon. There are no words to describe it.

We drove in through the South Rim's East Gate so we could pass by the public viewing areas. (The North Rim was still closed due to snow.) Again we quickly found that this attraction was not a big draw for

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preschoolers. In fact, Sam preferred to stay in the car with his Tigger Pez dispenser rather than take a gander at one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Another popular option is arriving in style via the vintage Grand Canyon Railway from Williams, complete with a cowboy show and shootout.

For parents wanting to connect with older kids, hiking in the Grand Canyon would be a great place to

good ones! If you are interested in camping out on the canyon floor a mile down, make your reservations up to a year in advance. The same goes for dinner reservations at the majestic El Tovar Restaurant within the National Park, well worth the planning. And don't forget to ask about the Junior Ranger Program with special activity booklets.

I have to rave about the Grand Hotel located right outside the park in Tusayan. Decorated in a Western theme, the Grand offers a dining room, a bar with happy hour, and a nightly cowboy singer who is actually quite good! The kids will love the video games, arcade room, and swimming pool.

The Grand's concierge was a fabulous resource in planning and recommending local activities. For the adventurous type, the options are endless—helicopter rides, plane rides, rafting trips and more.

If you want a quick airborne fix without having to leave the ground, check out the Grand Canyon IMAX Movie across the street at the National Geographic Visitor Center.

In the Grand Canyon state, there are rocks and a hole like you've