

Accessible Travel on a Budget

An Accessible National Parks Adventure by Monica and Erin Pruitt



Photo ID: Erin (left) and Monica (right) sitting on some rocks with the Grand Canyon in the background.

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Introduction

Monica and Erin Pruitt are sisters from Maryland who currently live in Florida. Monica has [Usher syndrome type 2](#), the leading genetic cause of combined deafness and blindness. Her vision loss is characterized by tunnel vision and difficulty seeing in dim lighting. She shares her journey on social media as [@BendyBlindBlonde](#), creating content about accessibility, travel, and life with vision loss. Erin has typical hearing and vision and played an essential role in this project by ensuring safe travel along with filming content.

Growing up, the sisters loved hiking the forested trails of Maryland. After moving to Florida, they found themselves missing the sense of connection to nature that only hiking could bring. In early 2025, they applied for, and won, a **\$10,000 travel grant** from the [Blind Travel Foundation](#) to launch their project, *Accessible Travel on a Budget*.

From September 12 to October 2, 2025, they set out to explore seven national parks: [Sedona](#), [Grand Canyon](#), [Zion](#), [Bryce Canyon](#), [Arches](#), [Crater Lake](#), and [Mount Rainier](#). Their goal was to experience the parks through critical eyes and to document what accessibility looks like when taken off the brochure and into real-world terrain. They sought to answer questions like:

- What does it take to be a safe hiker with limited vision?
- What kinds of accessibility features are actually available in the parks?
- What works, and what doesn't?
- Is it possible to combine accessibility with affordability?
- How can more members of the blind and low vision community feel empowered to explore nature?

This guide was created as a comprehensive resource for travelers in the blind and low vision community. It covers everything from airport logistics and the National Access Pass to detailed park-by-park notes, travel tips, and reflections from Monica and Erin's lived experiences.

The next few sections outline the key tools and strategies that can help other travelers plan their own accessible adventures.

Accessibility Tools, Techniques & Apps

Traveling with a disability is deeply personal. There is no single method that works for everyone. The tips in this guide outline helpful strategies, but they are not meant to be universal. Use what supports you, adapt what does not.

Safety & Independence

Adventure is meaningful, but it should never compromise personal well-being. Safety always comes first. Sharing your location, along with expected return times, with someone you trust builds an additional layer of security. At airports, disclosing needs early allows flight attendants to support you more effectively during boarding or emergencies. The same is true of hotels and tour operators. On trails, hiking alone can be risky for anyone, blind or sighted. Short, familiar routes may be manageable, but for longer or unfamiliar terrain, traveling with a partner or group is strongly recommended.

Using Available Resources

Many tools and services support accessible exploration; using them can make travel significantly safer and more independent. Inside most national parks one can find rangers, tactile maps, audio-described brochures, and adaptive gear. Mobile apps also play an important role in navigation and orientation for blind and low vision travelers.

- [Aira](#) provides real-time visual interpretation through trained agents who can assist with reading signage, locating entrances, or navigating busy areas.
- [Be My Eyes](#) connects travelers to volunteers for quick visual support.
- [AllTrails](#) includes accessibility filters, elevation profiles, and offline maps for navigating popular hiking routes without internet service.
- [BlindSquare](#) provides GPS-based audio cues for intersections, points of interest, and trail features.
- [UniDescription App](#) offers pre-recorded audio description to official National Park Service brochures, giving users access to detailed landscape and exhibit descriptions.
- [NPS App](#) supports offline use, with [downloadable, printable, and interactive maps](#). Included are details on the roads, trails, and shuttle stops. It also provides updates on closures, ranger programs, and accessibility features. Travelers can download entire parks ahead of time and select “Save for Offline Use” to ensure they have access to essential information even when signal is limited.

Adaptive Gear

The right gear can make travel smoother and safer. A standard white cane works well on paved areas, while an [All Terrain](#) or [Urban Xplorer](#) cane provides better feedback on sand, gravel, roots, and uneven surfaces. Trekking poles add balance on steep or trails with uneven terrain. Bone conduction headphones allow users to hear navigation apps without blocking environmental sound.

Transportation

Visitors who use ADA paratransit or shared-ride services in their home state can request temporary eligibility for up to 21 days when visiting another city under federal ADA guidelines.

Navigating Airports

Travelers with special needs can request [TSA Cares assistance](#) at least 72 hours before a flight by completing the [TSA Cares form](#) or calling (855) 787-2227. This gives them access to a dedicated [TSA Passenger Support Specialist](#) trained airport employee who assists travelers with disabilities through security screening and can guide individuals through each step at a comfortable pace.

If you do not have in-person support, apps like Aira and Be My Eyes can be used for help with navigating security, finding gates, reading signs, or identifying amenities. Travelers with disabilities are eligible to board the plane early which allows extra time to

orient to the cabin layout, seat position, and any emergency procedures that need clarification before departure. Be sure to check in with staff at your gate and let them know you will need to pre-board.

Getting Your National Access Pass

[America the Beautiful Access Pass](#) is one of the most valuable resources for travelers with disabilities. This free, lifetime pass grants entry to more than **2,000 federal recreation sites** across the U.S.—along with all National Parks, national forests, and wildlife refuges.

Who Qualifies

U.S. citizens or permanent residents with a **permanent disability** (vision loss, hearing loss, and more) are eligible.

You do *not* need to receive disability benefits to qualify.

How to Apply

You can get your pass three ways:

- **Online:** Apply through the [USGS Access Pass page](#) with proof of disability, documentation from a licensed medical professional or agency confirming a permanent disability, and a \$10 processing fee.
- **By Mail:** Print and send the application with supporting documents and the same \$10 fee.
- **In Person:** Many national park visitor centers and recreation offices issue passes on-site with valid photo ID and documentation.
- the pass.

 *Pro Tip:* When issued in person, there's usually no fee.

What It Covers

- **Free lifetime entry** for the pass holder and everyone in a non-commercial vehicle at per-vehicle fee sites.
- **Standard fees** like day use, parking, and entry.
- **Discounts—usually 50%—** on camping, swimming, and some boat launch fees, depending on the location.

How to Use It

- **Display it visibly:** Hang the pass on your rearview mirror or place it on your dashboard at parking areas.
- **Carry ID:** Rangers will most likely ask to see identification matching the name on the pass.

 *Pro Tip:* When renting a car, bring your pass and hangtag with you—most parks will honor it even if the vehicle isn't registered in your name.

Sedona



[Sedona](#) is part of the [Coconino National Forest](#), and is best known for its towering red rock formations, clear blue skies, and serene desert beauty. Its famous red rock formations get their color from iron oxide (rust) coating the sandstone layers. The climate is typically sunny year-round, with low humidity and dramatic temperature swings between day and night. Sedona sits at about 4,500 feet (1,370 meters) elevation, offering visitors both crisp desert air and breathtaking views in every direction.

Travel Logistics

Most visitors travel to Sedona by air, arriving through one of three nearby airports:

- **Flagstaff Pulliam Airport (FLG)** — Roughly 40 minutes north of Sedona; a smaller, regional airport with daily flights to and from Phoenix.
- **Prescott Regional Airport (PRC)** — About 1.5 hours southwest of Sedona; limited flights connect through Denver and Los Angeles.
- **Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX)** — About a 2-hour drive south of Sedona; the largest and most connected airport with major airline options, car rentals, and rideshare availability.

Several shuttle services, including [Groome Transportation](#), provide direct connections between these airports and Sedona, multiple times per day. Shuttles can be reserved in advance and typically offer door-to-door drop-off at hotels or visitor centers.

Lodging Options

Sedona has a mix of lodging options both downtown and on the outskirts of town, ranging from boutique inns, resorts, and affordable motels. Staying downtown offers easy access to restaurants, shops, and tour pick-ups, while lodging on the outer edges

provides quieter surroundings and lower prices without sacrificing proximity to major trailheads and scenic drives.

What Monica and Erin Did

Erin and Monica flew from Tampa, FL, into Phoenix, AZ, and spent their first night there. Staying overnight in Phoenix allowed for a relaxed transition after a long flight with a three hour time difference. The next morning they drove north to stay at [Views Inn Sedona](#) located just outside of downtown.

Transportation & Parking

In the Sedona area, [Yavapai Regional Transit \(YRT\)](#) provides limited curb-to-curb paratransit for eligible riders.

For local travel within town, the [Sedona Shuttle Connect](#) offers on-demand service at affordable prices. The curb-to-curb rides (typically around \$2) can be booked through the TransLoc app. The Cottonwood Area Transit (CAT), or the [Verde Shuttle System](#), links central Cottonwood and Sedona.

Use the free [Trailhead Routes](#) to reach major trailheads such as Cathedral Rock, Mescal, Dry Creek, Little Horse, and Soldier Pass.

Disability Parking at Trailheads

If you drive a rental or personal vehicle, bring your [America the Beautiful Access Pass](#) (the federal disability pass) or other valid federal recreation pass. Displaying this pass in your windshield covers the cost of a Red Rock Pass, which is otherwise required for most trailhead parking in the Coconino National Forest. Parking lots can fill quickly, especially during sunrise and sunset hours, but most lots include designated accessible spaces close to the trailhead.

Transportation Contacts

[Sedona Shuttle Service](#) – (928) 203-5152

info@sedonashuttle.com

Website: sedonashuttle.com

[Yavapai Regional Transit \(YRT\)](#) – (928) 649-7084

info@yavapaiaregionaltransit.com

Website: <https://www.yavapaiaregionaltransit.com/riders-guide/accessibility/>

[Cottonwood Area Transit \(CAT / Verde Shuttle\)](#) – (928) 634-2287

transit@cottonwoodaz.gov

Website: <https://verdes Shuttle.com/routes/route-cat/>

Park Accessibility

The [Red Rock Ranger District Visitor Center](#) is a standout stop for accessible planning and adaptive support.

It features a communication keyboard system for Deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, a digital magnifier (originally installed for low vision guests but now also used in educational demonstrations), and friendly, informed rangers who provide accessibility guides and thoughtful trail recommendations.

Restrooms at the visitor center are standard accessible stalls, but most trailhead “restrooms” are portable toilets or vault-style restrooms. Visitors who prefer structured facilities may want to plan restroom breaks at the visitor center before heading out.

Trail markers use a combination of cairns (stone pillars), carsonite posts, and white-painted blazes on rocks. These large, consistent shapes help travelers with low vision orient visually or by silhouette, even in bright sunlight. Most trails consist of packed sand with scattered rock and brush, providing clear tactile feedback underfoot.

Cell service is reliable throughout much of Sedona allowing for easy access to apps such as Aira or Be My Eyes for real-time assistance with trail signage, reading interpretive panels, or identifying distant landmarks.

 **Red Rock Ranger District Visitor Center** – (928) 203-2900

Address: 8375 State Route 179, Sedona, AZ 86351

Hours of Operation: Wednesdays 12 p.m.-4:30 p.m. All other days 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r03/coconino/offices/red-rock-ranger-visitor-center>

Office Email: SM.FS.Cof_Webmail@usda.gov

Trails & Terrain

Sedona's terrain is sandy, dry, and uneven. Most obstacles are loose rocks, cactus clusters, and drop-offs.

Helpful links to download maps:

[Maps of trails](#)

Trails explored by Monica and Erin

- **Bell Rock Pathway:** *3.6 miles with packed dirt and sand.* A wide trail circling the base of Bell Rock and Courthouse Butte. It's one of Sedona's most accessible routes, though connecting trails can quickly increase in incline and difficulty.
- **Bell Rock Loop (Steeper Section):** *1.5 miles round trip with rocky terrain.* Initially it is flat with a packed sand trail. Ample signage is scattered along the path that quickly turns into a steep, rocky climb with minimal railing or tactile markers. It is challenging yet rewarding for individuals with good balance or those using an all-terrain cane.
- **Huckabee Trail:** *2.6 miles round trip with a moderate incline.* It begins on higher ground with a moderate descent through desert brush. The return climb can be tiring but offers panoramic views of the red rock landscape.
- **Thunder Mountain Area Trails:** *1–3 miles with packed red soil.* Its network of red-dust paths is ideal for testing adaptive hiking tools. It is not heavily marked but generally intuitive, with firm terrain and open sightlines.

Additional Accessible Trails

- **Crane Petroglyph Heritage Site:** *0.5 mile dirt-packed trail* leading to an extensive petroglyph panel and scenic views. Open Fridays–Mondays, 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m.
- **Sunrise Trail:** *1.6-mile packed-dirt trail* with beautiful red rock views.
- **Airport Mesa Overlook:** *Paved viewpoint* with spectacular sunset views of Thunder Mountain. Airport parking is \$3.

Tips & Recommendations

Sedona's environment can be deceptive. Trails that appear short on a map often feel much longer due to elevation gain, loose terrain, and the intensity of desert heat.

- **Pack:** Salty snacks, electrolyte tablets, extra water, sunscreen, portable charger and an all-terrain cane.
- **Wear:** A wide-brim hat, lightweight layers to protect from sun exposure, long pants to minimize irritation from dust and brush, and sturdy hiking shoes.
- **Plan:** Start early to avoid midday sun, pace yourself, and take breaks in shaded areas. Use Google Maps satellite view or Aira to preview trail intersections before setting out.

Sedona's dry air can cause sun fatigue before you feel hot so stay hydrated, reapply sunscreen often, and give yourself time to rest and enjoy the view.

Sedona on a Budget

The figures below reflect Monica and Erin's specific costs for Sedona (September 13 – 15, 2025), with prorated rental car and grocery expenses:

Actual Costs (Monica & Erin's Sedona Stay)

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Flight (Tampa → Phoenix): \$488.96

Checked Bags: \$70.00

Rental Car + Insurance (prorated for 2 of 9 days): \$251.84

Lodging ([Views Inn Sedona](#), 2 nights): \$379.98

Food & Groceries: \$184.02

Souvenirs: \$45.21

Ubers (Phoenix & Sedona): \$38.96

Total (Sedona portion): \$1,457.97

Budget Tips

- Use the Access Pass: Covers Red Rock Pass fees, saving \$5 per parking lot.
- Ride the Sedona Shuttle: Free routes reach major trailheads.
- Book weekday lodging: Rates drop between Sunday–Thursday.
- Pack snacks and refillable bottles: Food near trailheads can be pricey.
- Choose lodging outside downtown Sedona for lower costs.

Sedona is considered a resort destination, which means prices for lodging, food, and transportation can run higher than in nearby towns. Even so, a weekend trip of around \$1,500 for two travelers is relatively affordable given the region's popularity.

For travelers hoping to reduce costs further, consider visiting during the shoulder seasons (January–March or late August), when hotel rates drop significantly.

Final Takeaway & Rating

Sedona stands out as one of the most visually- and sensory-rich destinations in the Southwest. For travelers who are blind or low vision, it offers a rare combination of textured landscapes, consistent orientation cues, and engaged park staff who value

inclusion. The Red Rock Ranger District Visitor Center exemplifies this commitment through its adaptive tools and willingness to learn from visitors' feedback.

Sedona earns a strong four stars for overall accessibility. Wide, well-defined trails like Bell Rock Pathway and Huckabee Trail make independent exploration possible for confident cane users, while stable cell service supports reliable use of Aira or Be My Eyes. Occasional inconsistencies in trail signage and limited shade or seating prevent it from earning a perfect score, but overall, the environment remains navigable with preparation and awareness.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★★★★☆ (4/5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin's blog and reels below.

 *Reels:*

[Sedona Recap Pt 1](#)

[Sedona Recap Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

 *Blog:* [Sedona: Lessons from the Living Desert](#)

Grand Canyon National Park



The [Grand Canyon](#) is considered one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Carved by the persistent flow of the Colorado River, this immense landscape stretches across 1,218,375 acres (4,931 square kilometers) of northern Arizona. Reaching depths of around 1 mile (1.6 kilometers), it exposes nearly 1.8 billion years of geological history.

Standing at the South Rim, roughly 7,000 feet (2,130 meters) above sea level, visitors encounter colorful layers of ancient rock and sweeping views that change with the light. While its terrain is rugged, the South Rim is notably accessible, with paved rim trails, fenced overlooks, and a reliable shuttle.

Travel Logistics

Visitors can reach the South Rim of the Grand Canyon by **air, train, or car**.

- **Flagstaff Pulliam Airport (FLG)** — Roughly a 90-minute drive to the park entrance, with connecting flights from Phoenix Sky Harbor (PHX) or Dallas–Fort Worth (DFW).
- **Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport (PHX)** — About 3.5 hours south; a larger and more connected airport, offering car rentals, rideshares, and shuttles.
- [Groome Transportation Shuttle](#) — Provides direct service from Flagstaff and Phoenix to the South Rim multiple times per day (\$60–\$100 one way).

For visitors seeking a scenic and stress-free route, the [Grand Canyon Railway](#) offers daily departures from Williams, AZ, directly to Grand Canyon Village inside the South Rim. The most efficient way to take advantage of this option is to fly into [Flagstaff Pulliam Airport \(FLG\)](#). From there, it's about a 45-minute drive or Uber ride to the Williams Depot.

Lodging Options

The South Rim offers a variety of [lodging options within the park](#), ranging from historic lodges and modern hotels to campgrounds and RV sites. The [Market Plaza](#) inside the park includes a general store, post office, and accessible lodging close to shuttle stops, making it convenient for travelers without a car. Everything within the South Rim village is connected by the [free park shuttle system](#).

Because rooms inside the park fill up quickly, it's best to book early.

For those unable to secure lodging within the park, **Tusayan** provides an excellent alternative just outside the South Rim entrance gate, offering hotels, restaurants, and grocery options, all accessible via the [Tusayan–South Rim shuttle route](#) during the summer only.

What Monica and Erin Did

Erin and Monica drove north from Sedona to the Grand Canyon on September 15, 2025, through Oak Creek Canyon and Flagstaff. They stayed just outside the park at [Red Feather Lodge](#) in Tusayan, relying on the rental car to get to and from the park and using the free park shuttles for all in-park transportation.

Transportation & Parking

The Grand Canyon's [free shuttle system](#) is one of the most reliable accessibility assets. All shuttles are wheelchair-accessible, include audio stop announcements, and driver support for boarding assistance.

Key Shuttle Routes:

- [Blue Line](#): Connects the Visitor Center, Market Plaza, and major facilities.
- [Orange Line](#): Circulates near the main visitor area and several rim viewpoints.
- [Red Line](#): Travels west along Hermit Road with multiple scenic overlooks.

Because parking near major viewpoints fills quickly, visitors are encouraged to park at the Visitor Center and use the shuttle network for the day.

[Grand Canyon National Park Shuttle Information](#): (928) 638-7888

Website: nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/shuttle-buses.htm

Park Accessibility

The [South Rim Visitor Center](#) is the hub for accessible planning. It offers wide paved walkways, large-print materials, and rangers familiar with ADA and sensory access needs. Their website offers a downloadable [Accessibility Guide](#) which outlines accessible services throughout the entire park.

A highlight is the tactile map of the canyon at the [Yavapai Museum of Geology](#). This museum is easily accessed either by walking from the visitor center along the paved [Trail of Time](#) path or taking the orange bus shuttle.

Learn more about Grand Canyon [Accessibility](#).

Restrooms at the visitor center are standard accessible stalls, but most trailhead “restrooms” are portable toilets or vault-style restrooms. Visitors who prefer structured facilities may want to plan restroom breaks at the visitor center before heading out. [South Rim Pocket Map](#) clearly indicates where public restrooms can be found along the South Rim.

Trail markers along the South Rim are hip level, usually found at forks in the path, and clearly indicate what trail follows each path. For the most part, once on a non-paved trail they are lined by rocks, fences, or natural foliage.

Cell service throughout the South Rim is strong, supporting real-time navigation through Aira or Be My Eyes.

 **South Rim Visitor Center-** (928) 638-7888

Address: 8 South Entrance Road, Grand Canyon Village, AZ 86023

Hours of Operation: 9 a.m.–5 p.m. daily

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/grand-canyon-visitor-center.htm>

Trails & Terrain

The South Rim’s terrain is a mix of paved and packed-dirt surfaces, with railings and interpretive signage in key sections. Portions of the [Rim Trail](#) and [Trail of Time](#) are the most accessible ways to explore the canyon’s edge, offering expansive views without steep elevation changes.

Helpful links to download maps:

[South Rim Pocket Map](#)

[AllTrails](#)

[Introduction to Backcountry Hiking](#)

[Rim Trail PDF](#)

Trails explored by Monica and Erin

- **Rim Trail (Mather Point → Geological Museum):** *0.7 miles of paved path.* It is a short stretch with gentle elevation gain and secure railings. This section offers some of the best vantage points for safely experiencing the canyon's vastness.
- **Rim Trail (Bright Angel Lodge → Hermit's Rest):** *7.0 miles of mixed terrain.* Mostly flat and partially paved, this stretch follows the canyon edge between major viewpoints. Each shuttle stop ([red line](#)) has paved access, but surfaces become rougher beyond the main overlooks. Sections between **Monument Creek Vista** and **Hermit's Rest** are narrow, packed-dirt, and include short climbs.

Note:

[Rim Trail](#) is 13 miles total and runs along the canyon's southern edge, stretching from **South Kaibab Trailhead** to **Hermit's Rest**. Terrain and accessibility vary by segment, but the trail's proximity to shuttle routes makes it easy to customize shorter, scenic hikes. Visitors can combine short walks with the [shuttles](#) for a flexible "hike-and-ride" experience.

Other Rim Trail Segments

Although Monica and Erin did not hike these sections, travelers planning longer Rim Trail exploration may wish to experience:

- [Trail of Time](#): *~1.3 miles of paved path.* Starting at the **Yavapai Geology Museum** and ending at the **Grand Canyon Village**, following a fully fenced section of the rim. The trail uses tactile rock samples and signage to tell the canyon's geological story through touch and sight, making it both educational and sensory-rich. It's ideal for travelers seeking a safe, independent route with consistent orientation cues.
- **Mather Point → South Kaibab Trailhead / Yaki Point:** *~2.3 miles of paved path.* This easternmost section of the Rim Trail has some steeper grades and exposed areas with limited shade. Railings appear intermittently. The **Kaibab Rim ([Orange Line](#))** shuttle connects the Visitor Center with Yaki Point, so visitors can experience a portion of this walk and return easily by bus.

Tips & Recommendations

The Grand Canyon's high elevation (around 7,000 feet) can cause fatigue faster than expected. Move slowly, hydrate often, and use shaded rest areas or indoor visitor

centers to rest. Plan restroom stops in advance if vault-style toilets aren't preferred. Avoid tight schedules, allowing extra time for shuttle transfers, crowds, and moments to simply pause and take in the view.

- **Pack:** Water, electrolyte packets, sun protection, and two white canes. A standard cane works well for paved trails, but consider an All Terrain or Urban Xplorer Cane for packed-dirt or uneven sections.
- **Wear:** Layered clothing, as temperatures can swing by 30°F (17°C) between midday and sunset. Choose sturdy hiking or walking shoes with good traction.
- **Plan:** Start early to avoid crowds, and rely on the shuttle network for viewpoint access.

For blind and low vision travelers, consider visiting with a companion for maximum comfort, though independent travel is possible with preparation. Aira or Be My Eyes can help verify signage, locate shuttle stops, or describe distant landmarks. Remember to pause often because the canyon's stillness is as much a part of the experience as its view.

Grand Canyon on a Budget

Budgeting for accessibility at the Grand Canyon means balancing comfort with convenience. While entrance is free with the [Access Pass](#), lodging and transportation tend to be the biggest costs. The figures below reflect Monica and Erin's stay (September 15–18, 2025) with prorated rental car and grocery expenses:

Actual Costs (Monica & Erin's Grand Canyon Stay)

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Lodging ([Red Feather Lodge](#), 3 nights): \$967.55

Food & Groceries: \$236.76

Souvenirs: \$82.11

Rental Car + Insurance (prorated for 3 of 9 days): \$377.76

Estimated Total (Grand Canyon portion): ≈ \$1,664.18

Budget Tips

- **Use your Access Pass** for free park entry and reduced camping fees.
- **Stay in Tusayan or Williams** for lower lodging rates and easy park access.
- **Pack snacks and refillable bottles** — in-park food options are limited and often pricey.

- **Travel in spring or late fall** to avoid high-season crowds and higher hotel costs.
- **Book lodging early, ideally 6–12 months in advance**, as rooms inside the park fill quickly.
- **Rely on the free shuttle network** to minimize gas, parking, and rental costs.

While a three-night visit around **\$1,600** may seem steep, it's reasonable given the park's remote location, short-notice booking, and the convenience of staying near the entrance. With shared expenses or a shorter stay, costs can drop closer to **\$1,200 for two travelers (excluding airfare)**.

Whether arriving by shuttle, rental car, or the historic Grand Canyon Railway, the key is planning ahead and knowing where to invest for comfort and independence. Accessibility often begins with preparation, and in a park this vast, those choices can make the difference between simply visiting and truly experiencing it.

Final Takeaway & Rating

The Grand Canyon's accessibility lies not only in its paved paths or shuttle routes, but in its *presence*. For blind and low vision travelers, it offers both independence and awe, proving that the grandeur of nature isn't limited to sight.

The Grand Canyon earns a solid four stars for strong infrastructure, reliable staff awareness, and sensory accessibility across the South Rim.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★★★★☆ (4/5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin's blog and reels below.

 **Reels:**

[Grand Canyon Pt 1](#)

[Grand Canyon Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

[Aira at the Grand Canyon](#)

 **Blog:** [Grand Canyon National Park: The Power of Stillness](#)

Zion National Park



[Zion National Park](#), located in southwestern Utah, is known for its red sandstone cliffs, lush greenery, and unique sense of being *within* the canyon rather than above it.

The park sits at an elevation of roughly 4,000 feet (1,220 meters), with the Virgin River carving through its center supporting cottonwoods, hanging gardens, and desert wildlife. Zion's combination of paved trails, accessible shuttle systems, and staff awareness make it one of the more inclusive parks in the Southwest, though crowds and parking constraints can make it challenging during peak hours.

Travel Logistics

Most visitors travel to Zion by air, arriving through one of three nearby airports:

- **St. George Regional Airport ([SGU](#))** — Roughly a one-hour drive from Zion's South Entrance, this is the most convenient airport for visitors staying in Springdale or within the park. Limited daily flights connect through Salt Lake City (SLC), Phoenix (PHX), Denver (DEN), and Los Angeles (LAX).
- **Las Vegas Harry Reid International Airport ([LAS](#))** — Approximately a 2.5-hour drive east via I-15. This larger airport offers more flight options and rental car availability.
- **Cedar City Regional Airport ([CDC](#))** — Approximately 58 miles ($\approx$ 1 hour) from Springdale/Zion's south entrance; regional flights connect through Salt Lake City (SLC).

Ground Transportation Options

- **[St. George Shuttle](#)** — Provides direct service between Las Vegas (LAS), St. George, and Springdale multiple times per day. Reservations recommended.

- [Jayride Airport Transfers](#) — Offers private and shared rides from nearby airports to hotels near Zion or Zion Mountain Ranch.
- [SunTran Bus System](#) — Local transit serving St. George and nearby communities, with a dedicated Zion Route connecting to Springdale during peak season.

Once in town, the Springdale Shuttle provides continuous service through town and directly to Zion's entrance gate, where visitors can transfer to the Zion Canyon Shuttle for in-park transportation. Both systems are fully accessible and free to use.

Lodging Options

Zion offers a variety of lodging choices both inside and outside the park.

[Zion Lodge \(Inside the Park\)](#) — Provides unmatched convenience, placing visitors directly on the shuttle line and within walking distance of several trailheads. Rooms book quickly, often months in advance, and prices are higher than outside the park.

[Springdale](#) (Just Outside the Park) — The closest town to the South Entrance, Springdale offers numerous hotels, restaurants, and shops which are all accessible via the free Springdale Shuttle. Staying here allows easy park access without needing to drive, though rates rise during peak season.

[St. George](#) (Budget-Friendly Base) — About an hour's drive from Zion, St. George provides affordable lodging and larger hotel options. This base requires driving or relying on the [SunTran bus service](#), but it's ideal for travelers seeking lower nightly rates or longer stays.

Because accommodations near Zion fill quickly, booking several months in advance is highly recommended. Travelers staying in Springdale or inside the park will have the smoothest experience navigating the shuttle system and avoiding parking congestion.

What Monica and Erin Did

Monica and Erin stayed at [La Quinta Inn & Suites by Wyndham St. George](#) in St. George, UT. They spent their first day exploring the St. George area before driving north to Springdale and Zion. Upon arrival, they experienced heavy congestion both inside the park and in Springdale, eventually finding parking in town. From there, they used the Springdale Shuttle to reach the park entrance and the [Zion Canyon Shuttle](#) to travel between key stops throughout the park.

Transportation & Parking

Zion operates two connected shuttle systems that make car-free travel realistic and convenient:

- [Springdale Shuttle](#): Runs frequently through town, connecting hotels and restaurants to the park's pedestrian entrance.
- [Zion Canyon Shuttle](#): Operates within the park from the Visitor Center to key stops, including Zion Lodge and the Temple of Sinawava.

All shuttles are accessible, with ramps, priority seating, and audio announcements for each stop.

If you're arriving via the Springdale Shuttle, use [this official map](#) to see the walking route from the shuttle stop to the park entrance, Visitor Center, and Zion Canyon Shuttle boarding area inside the gate. This short walk is well-marked, follows a paved path, and includes shaded rest areas along the way. Don't forget to bring your [Access Pass](#) and photo ID!

Parking inside Zion is extremely limited, and Springdale lots fill by mid-morning. Visitors with disability placards can use designated accessible parking at the Visitor Center and select shuttle stops.

[Shuttle Information](#): (435) 772-3256

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/zion-canyon-shuttle-system.htm>

Park Accessibility

The [Zion Visitor Center](#) offers [large-print guides](#), tactile maps, and braille materials (braille copies must remain on-site). Rangers are knowledgeable and patient, offering orientation help and trail suggestions suited to varying mobility and vision levels.

Accessibility is a key priority at Zion, and the National Park Service provides several dedicated web pages to help travelers plan ahead:

Learn more about Zion [Accessibility](#).

- [Accessible Activities](#) – Details on accessible trails, ranger-led programs designed with inclusion in mind, and tips for visitors using mobility aids.
- [Ranger-Led Programs](#) – Current schedule of guided walks, talks, and evening programs, with accessibility notes where available.

- [Trail Access Information](#) – Descriptions of each major trail, including surface type, grade, and difficulty level for mobility devices.
- [Virtual Hikes](#) – Video-based virtual tours of several popular trails, allowing visitors to preview terrain and scenery (note: no audio narration).

Restrooms at the visitor center and most shuttle stops are generally ADA-compliant, though crowds can make navigation more stressful during mid-day hours. Early morning or late afternoon visits tend to be quieter and easier to navigate.

Trail markers throughout Zion are brown signs with white text, mounted at about eye level. While they are easy to spot visually, some can be confusing since several trail names may appear on a single sign.

Cell service is strong in Springdale, near the Visitor Center, around major canyon trails and Zion Lodge. Coverage becomes weaker deeper into the park or along narrow canyon walls, so it's best to download offline maps in advance (through the [NPS app](#)).

 **Zion Visitor Center-** (435) 772-3256

Address: 1 Zion Park Blvd, Springdale, UT 84767

Hours of Operation: 8 a.m.–5 p.m. daily

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/nature/zion-canyon-visitor-center.htm>

Trails & Terrain

Zion's terrain is a mix of paved river paths, compact dirt trails, and steep canyon climbs, surrounded by soaring sandstone cliffs. Most accessible routes are found in the main canyon near the Visitor Center and Zion Lodge, where shuttle access, rest benches, and clear trail surfaces support independent exploration. The visitor center and Zion lodge also have water refill stations and restrooms. Trails farther into the park often include steeper grades, uneven footing, or sandy patches that can challenge mobility or low vision navigation.

Zion offers several paved or well-graded trails ideal for independent or guided exploration.

Helpful links to download maps:

[Interactive Map](#)

[Trail Access Information](#)

Trails explored by Monica and Erin

- **Watchman Trail**: 3.3 miles round trip, with 368 ft elevation gain, dirt and rock steps, making it a moderate difficulty. It begins behind the Visitor Center and climbs steadily through open desert terrain. The path is not officially accessible but is manageable for confident hikers with adaptive gear.
- **Nung 'Wu Poa-Paiute Trail System** (Springdale): Long complex trail system, unpaved. Not within the national park, but it offers peaceful, free, accessible nature walks near town with gentle inclines and bridges over small streams. It can be accessed through the George Baker River Park.

Additional Accessible Trails

- **Pa'rus Trail**: 3.4 miles round trip, with less than 50 ft of elevation gain, and a fully paved path making it an easy hike. This scenic riverside path connects the Visitor Center to Canyon Junction, offering open canyon views, benches, and clear tactile contrast along its wide, smooth surface.
- **Riverside Walk**: 2.2 miles round trip with 57 ft elevation gain, and a paved path with some sandy areas, making it an easy hike. Following the Virgin River to the mouth of The Narrows, this lush, shaded trail provides a sensory-rich experience with the sounds of running water and birds echoing off the canyon walls. Some sections near the river edge can become wet or uneven.
- **Grotto Trail**: 1 mile one-way with 35 ft elevation change, and compact dirt with sand, making it easy. Connecting Zion Lodge to the Grotto Picnic Area, this quiet, gently graded trail offers a peaceful walk beneath cottonwoods.

Other Notable Trails

- **Lower Emerald Pool Trail**: 1.2 miles round trip with 69 ft elevation gain, and a partially paved path, making it moderate. It begins across from Zion Lodge and leads to a shaded alcove and small waterfalls. The first 0.6 miles are paved before transitioning to rougher terrain.
- **Canyon Overlook Trail**: 1 mile round trip with 163 ft elevation gain, the path is rocky and uneven, making it moderate. Short but challenging, with stone steps, drop-offs, and narrow sections. Provides one of Zion's most iconic viewpoints.

Accessibility Note

Zion's **shuttle system** connects directly to most trailheads, allowing visitors to plan a "hike-and-ride" day with minimal walking between stops. Combining short segments of the Pa'rus, Grotto, or Riverside Walk trails offers an accessible way to experience Zion Canyons.

Tips & Recommendations

Zion's narrow canyons amplify sound, heat, and light, which can make sensory overload or fatigue more likely. Move slowly, hydrate frequently, and rest in shaded areas or near the river when possible. The lower canyon is often several degrees warmer and more humid than higher elevations, so plan your activity level accordingly.

- **Pack:** Water, electrolyte packets, salty snacks, sun protection, and two white canes. A standard cane works well for paved trails, but consider an All Terrain or Urban Xplorer cane for packed-dirt or uneven sections.
- **Wear:** Lightweight, breathable layers to protect from sun exposure, sunglasses, and a wide-brim hat. Choose sturdy hiking or walking shoes with reliable traction for slick or sandy surfaces.
- **Plan:** Arrive early to secure parking or rely on the shuttles to explore both Springdale and Zion Canyon. Schedule hikes for early morning or late afternoon to avoid peak heat and crowds.

If possible, stay at Zion Lodge or nearby accessible lodging to minimize transportation stress and enjoy quieter evenings within the canyon. Keep your Access Pass and ID on you, and download offline maps through the NPS app to help with orientation when cell service drops.

Zion on a Budget

Budgeting for Zion means weighing affordability against proximity. Staying outside the park offers better hotel rates but adds driving time, while lodging in Springdale or inside the park provides unmatched access and convenience at a higher cost. The following figures reflect Monica and Erin's stay (September 18–21, 2025), with prorated rental car and grocery expenses.

Actual Costs (Monica & Erin's Zion Stay)

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Lodging ([La Quinta Inn & Suites](#), 3 nights): \$732.55

Food & Groceries (prorated): \$154.19

Laundry: \$5.25

Gas: \$68.09

Souvenirs: \$24.62

Water / Supplies: \$25.97

Rental Car + Insurance (prorated for 3 of 9 days): \$377.76

Total (Zion portion): \$1,388.42

Budget Tips

- Use the Springdale Shuttle to avoid parking fees and reduce travel stress.
- Bring snacks and refillable bottles — food options inside the park are limited and can be expensive.
- Visit during shoulder seasons (April–May or October–November) for smaller crowds and lower lodging prices.
- Book early — accommodations in Springdale and Zion Lodge fill months in advance.

While approximately \$1,350 for a long weekend may sound high, Zion's strong shuttle system, accessible infrastructure, and proximity of trails make the cost worthwhile for a smoother, safer, and more enjoyable experience.

Final Takeaway & Rating

Zion is one of Utah's most breathtaking national parks, filled with dramatic canyon walls, lush riverbanks, and a surprisingly vibrant ecosystem. While the park's shuttle systems, paved trails, and accessibility programs make it navigable for many travelers with disabilities, the sheer crowds and limited parking can make the experience more stressful than serene. With preparation and timing, however, Zion offers an unforgettable and accessible adventure.

Zion earns a solid four stars for its reliable infrastructure, accessibility tools, and ranger engagement.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★★★★☆ (4/5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin's blog and reels below.

 *Reels:*

[Zion Pt 1](#)

[Zion Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

 *Blog:* [Zion National Park: A Refuge in the Desert](#)

Bryce Canyon National Park



[Bryce Canyon](#) is home to the world's largest concentration of hoodoos (spire-shaped rock formations) and sits high on the Paunsaugunt Plateau at roughly 8,000–9,100 feet (2,440–2,775 meters).

Though cooler, smaller and quieter than neighboring parks, Bryce Canyon's design makes it one of the most disability-friendly destinations. For blind and low vision travelers there are tactile maps of buildings and the park. Large-print and braille materials and the [Bryce Canyon Access Guide](#) can be found at the visitors center, which rates the accessibility of every viewpoint, restroom, and shuttle stop, setting a national example.

Travel Logistics

Visitors can reach [Bryce Canyon National Park](#) by air or car, with several regional airports providing access to southern Utah's red rock country. The park is smaller and more remote than Zion or the Grand Canyon, but its well-connected highways make it relatively easy to include on a multi-park itinerary.

Nearest Airports

- **Cedar City Regional Airport (CDC)** — Approximately 85 miles (1.5 hours) southwest of the park; regional flights connect through Salt Lake City (SLC).
- **St. George Regional Airport (SGU)** — About 2.5 hours southwest; offers flights from Salt Lake City (SLC), Phoenix (PHX), Denver (DEN), and Los Angeles (LAX).

Bryce Canyon is accessed via Highway 12 through [Red Canyon](#) and Highway 63, a short spur road leading directly to the park entrance. The route passes through two picturesque natural red-rock tunnels.

Ground Transportation Options

- [Bundu Bus](#) — runs seasonally (spring–fall), linking Bryce with Zion, Las Vegas, Page, and Moab. Advance reservations are recommended.
- [Greyhound Bus](#) — Stops at [Ruby's Inn](#) and [Bryce Canyon Lodge](#), providing direct access to the park for those arriving from Cedar City, St. George, or Las Vegas without needing a rideshare or taxi. Service is limited, so plan around the schedule.

Lodging Options

Bryce Canyon offers several lodging choices, from historic park accommodations to nearby motels and campgrounds. Inside the park, the [Bryce Canyon Lodge](#) provides ADA-accessible rooms and a central location near Sunrise and Sunset Points, making it ideal for early risers or visitors using the shuttle. Reservations open six months in advance through the [National Park Service lodging page](#) and fill quickly. Just outside the park, [Bryce Canyon City](#) offers a convenient base with hotels, like [Ruby's Inn](#), restaurants, and grocery options, all served by the free [Bryce Canyon Shuttle](#).

For travelers on a budget, nearby towns like Tropic (15 minutes away) and Panguitch (25 minutes away) provide more affordable lodging while remaining within easy driving distance of the park. For additional options, visit [Bryce Canyon Country's lodging directory](#).

What Monica and Erin Did

Monica and Erin visited Bryce Canyon as a half-day stopover between Zion and Arches National Parks. They drove along Scenic Highway 12, one of the most beautiful routes of the trip, passing through Dixie National Forest and beneath the twin red rock arches at Red Canyon before reaching the park. While the drive itself was unforgettable, they humbly note that visiting Bryce as a brief stopover was not ideal.

Transportation & Parking

During the main visitor season (mid-April through mid-October), the [Bryce Canyon Shuttle](#) provides free, fully accessible transportation along the main park road, connecting the Visitor Center, campgrounds, and all major viewpoints. Shuttles run every 10–15 minutes, and all buses are wheelchair accessible with audio stop announcements. Visitors staying in Bryce Canyon City can conveniently board the

shuttle directly from local hotels, eliminating parking stress and helping protect the park's fragile rim environment.

Parking is generally ample and clearly marked at the [Visitor Center](#) and major overlooks, though it fills quickly during peak hours. Using the shuttle remains the easiest and most sustainable way to experience multiple viewpoints without re-parking.

Park Accessibility

[Bryce Canyon Visitor Center](#) sets a high standard for inclusive design. Inside you'll find a **tactile building map** with raised labels and a tactile park map featuring both braille text and raised topography to help visitors understand the amphitheater layout. The freely available [Access Guide](#) rates each viewpoint, restroom, and shuttle stop — and it's available in both print and braille. Educational videos in the museum are captioned, and the front doors, restrooms, and exhibits are fully accessible. Rangers are proactive and knowledgeable, offering clear, concrete trail and viewpoint suggestions without needing to be asked.

Accessibility extends well beyond the Visitor Center: most major overlooks include accessible parking, and paved portions of the Rim Trail, especially between Sunset Point and Sunrise Point. The park's official accessibility guide also highlights accessible viewing areas at Bryce Point and Paria View, making it one of the more inclusive destinations in the National Park System.

Learn more about Bryce Canyon [Accessibility](#).

Restrooms: Modern, wheelchair-accessible restrooms with running water are located at the Visitor Center, Sunset Point, and Bryce Lodge; vault toilets at smaller overlooks are also accessible.

Trail Markers: Trail signage is high-contrast with bold white lettering on brown backgrounds, offering good visual contrast and logical placement near paved paths.

Cell Service: Signal is strongest near the Visitor Center, Bryce Canyon City, and Sunset Point; coverage decreases toward Bryce Point and along interior trails — download maps in advance for offline use.

Ranger programs <https://www.nps.gov/brca/planyourvisit/ranger-programs.htm>

Horse back riding <https://www.nps.gov/brca/planyourvisit/horse.htm>

 **Bryce Canyon Visitor Center-** (435) 834-5322

Address: Highway 63, Bryce Canyon National Park Visitor Center, Bryce, UT 84764

Hours of Operation: 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.* varies by season.

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/brca/planyourvisit/tourvisitor.htm>

Trails & Terrain

Bryce Canyon's terrain varies from flat, paved overlooks to steep descents into the amphitheaters below. Surfaces range from pavement to firm dirt with roots and rocks. The park sits between 8,000–9,100 feet (2,440–2,775 meters), so altitude and exposure to sun can increase fatigue. Most visitors find the rim viewpoints and short paved trails the most accessible way to experience the park's iconic hoodoos.

Helpful links to download maps and trail information:

[Bryce Canyon Day Hikes](#)

[Accessibility at Bryce Canyon](#)

Trails Explored by Monica & Erin

- **Sheep Creek Canyon:** *0.6 miles (partial) with natural dirt trail that has the occasional roots and rocks, offering moderate shade and manageable footing for confident cane users.* The route descends gently outbound and climbs back on return. Hoodoos framed by pines create strong visual contrast. It is part of the [Swamp Creek Trail Loop](#).

Additional Accessible Trails (per Access Guide)

- [Sunset Point ↔ Sunrise Point](#): *~1 mile round trip, of paved path with elevation gain less than 40 ft.* One of the park's most accessible and scenic routes, lined with railings and interpretive panels. Expansive views of the Bryce Amphitheater make this a must-see for all visitors. Parking lots are available at both ends.
- [Mossy Cave Trail](#): *0.8 mile round trip, of partially paved path, with elevation gain less than 150 ft.* Dirt surface, partially paved, begins outside the main amphitheatre near UT-12. Follows a gentle stream and ends at a small waterfall and moss-lined grotto. Includes railings and even surfaces along most of the route. Restrooms and parking at the trailhead.

Scenic Drive & Viewpoints

The main park road extends 18 miles from the Visitor Center to Rainbow Point, with multiple accessible pullouts and overlooks:

- **Sunset Point:** Fully paved with railings, benches, and interpretive signage.
- **Swamp Canyon Overlook:** Quieter, shaded, and features firm, even ground.
- **Rainbow Point:** The park's highest elevation viewpoint; dramatic vistas but cooler temperatures.

Tips & Recommendations

- **Pack:** All Terrain or Urban Xplorer cane for unpaved surfaces; water, salty snacks, sunscreen, and a brimmed hat.
- **Wear:** Layers—temperatures swing quickly at elevation; supportive shoes for firm dirt and rock.
- **Plan:** Visit early or late to avoid crowds/glare; grab the Access Guide at the door; use the seasonal shuttle to string together multiple overlooks without re-parking. Avoid steep descents (e.g., Navajo Loop/Queens Garden) unless you're confident with elevation, footing, and return climbs.

[Trip Planning Packets](#) include a newspaper and glossy map and can be mailed to you. Send an **e-mail to brca_information@nps.gov** with your request, **including your full name and address.**

Bryce on a Budget

Because this was a brief stopover on September 21st, costs were minimal:

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Gas (St. George → Bryce → Moab, incl. Bryce stop): **\$24.98**

Souvenirs: **\$35.70**

Food: **\$0**

Rental Car + Insurance (prorated for 1 of 9 days): **\$127.19**

Total (Bryce portion): **\$187.87**

Note: No lodging or separate car-rental allocation applied here due to the short duration and pass-through timing.

Budget Tips

Rooms inside the park at The Lodge at Bryce Canyon often begin around \$250–\$300 per night in the off-season and climb to \$350–\$400 or more during peak summer months. Just outside the park in Bryce Canyon City, more budget-friendly lodging

begins around \$100–\$180 per night, depending on date and demand.
To lower your lodging cost:

- Visit during shoulder seasons (late winter/early spring, late fall) when room rates drop significantly.
- Stay in towns 15–30 minutes from the entrance rather than inside the park.
- Book as far in advance as possible to secure accessible rooms and better rates.
- Consider weekday stays rather than weekends when hotel rates are lower.

Final Takeaway & Rating

Bryce Canyon felt welcoming and thoughtfully designed for blind and low vision visitors. The park's strongest access points are at the Visitor Center and the paved overlooks, with tactile/print resources that make orientation straightforward.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★☆☆☆ (4.5/5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin's blog and reels below.

 **Reels:**

[Bryce Canyon Pt 1](#)

[Bryce Canyon Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

 **Blog:** [Bryce Canyon National Park: *Where Curiosity Meets Inclusion*](#)

Arches National Park



[Arches National Park](#) in southeastern Utah is home to more than 2,000 natural sandstone arches, the highest concentration in the world. Formed through millions of years of erosion, its red rock landscape shifts dramatically with the light, revealing textures that can be felt as much as seen. The park sits at an elevation between 4,000 and 5,600 feet (1,200–1,700 meters) and offers a high-desert climate with wide temperature swings between day and night.

For blind and low vision travelers, Arches offers hard-packed trails that provide safe access to viewpoints. Moab, the nearby gateway town, provides accessible lodging, restaurants, and a small-town atmosphere that supports both adventure and rest.

Travel Logistics

Most visitors reach Arches National Park through [Moab, UT](#) a small but well-connected adventure town located just five miles from the park entrance.

Nearest Airports

- **Canyonlands Regional Airport ([CNY](#))** — Roughly 15 minutes north of Moab. This small regional airport offers daily flights connecting through Denver (DEN) and occasionally Salt Lake City (SLC).
- **Grand Junction Regional Airport ([GJT](#))** — About 2 hours east in Colorado; larger than Moab's airport and typically more affordable for car rentals.

Ground Transportation Options

Moab Adventure Center and several local companies provide accessible shuttle and tour options for visitors without a car. Rideshares like Uber and Lyft operate within Moab but are not reliable for pickup inside the park. Rental cars are strongly recommended for flexibility.

- [Moab Express:](#) (435) 260-9289

- [Moab Sol Ride](#): (435) 250-3989
- [Moab In A Day](#): (435) 259-9402
- [Roadrunner Shuttle](#): (435) 259-9402
- [Moab Taxi](#): (435) 210-4297
- [Cyber Taxi](#): (801) 603-5555

Lodging Options

There is no lodging inside Arches National Park apart from the Devils Garden [Campground](#), which offers a limited number of accessible sites (reservation required).

In nearby [Moab](#), accommodations range from budget motels and adaptive Airbnbs to mid-range hotels like the Hampton Inn, Hyatt Place, and Red Cliffs Lodge. Many offer ADA-compliant rooms, roll-in showers, and proximity to shuttle pickup points.

Booking early is essential, particularly in spring and fall when temperatures are ideal.

What Monica and Erin Did

Monica and Erin arrived in Moab on September 21, 2025, after stopping to visit Bryce Canyon after departing from St. George, UT. They stayed in town for two nights at [River Canyon Lodge](#) and explored Arches on September 22nd utilizing a [timed entry reservation](#).

Transportation & Parking

Unlike some larger parks, Arches does not have an official shuttle system, so visitors must use a personal or rental vehicle to explore or third party options. The park's single 18-mile scenic drive connects all major viewpoints and trailheads, making it easy to plan flexible routes based on ability, time, and interest.

The main road begins at the entrance off U.S. Highway 191 and climbs steadily toward Park Avenue and Balanced Rock before branching into smaller loops near The Windows Section and Devils Garden. The drive offers several paved pullouts for photography or rest breaks.

Park Accessibility

The [Arches Visitor Center](#), located just past the park entrance, includes accessible parking, restrooms, exhibits, and a gift shop. Rangers are available to provide orientation help, accessibility details for each stop, and current trail conditions. At the

visitor center there are braille and large print versions of the guide available upon request. Additionally, there is an iPhone with Talkback enabled containing audio descriptions of all the exhibits at the center. [Ranger Programs at Arches National Park](#) include seasonal ranger talks and guided walks offered near the Visitor Center and major viewpoints. Visitors with accessibility needs are encouraged to contact the park ahead of time to confirm accessible routes or seating.

Learn more about [Arches Accessibility](#).

Restrooms: Accessible restrooms are located at the Visitor Center, Delicate Arch Viewpoints, The Windows Section, and Devils Garden trailhead.

Trail Markers: Brown-and-white trail markers are consistent throughout the park and often include clear arrows and distances, though glare from sunlight can make them harder to read midday.

Cell Service: Cell coverage is reliable near the park entrance and Visitor Center, but it weakens deeper into the park, particularly past Sand Dune Arch and Devils Garden. Download maps for offline use before entering.

 **Arches Visitor Center-** (435) 719-2299

Address: 5 miles north of Moab on US 191, Moab, UT 84532

Hours of Operation: 8:00 AM–4:00 PM

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/arch/planyourvisit/visitorcenters.htm>

Trails & Terrain

Arches' terrain consists primarily of **slickrock, compact sand, and red desert soil**, shaped by wind and water erosion. Elevations range from 4,000 to 5,600 feet, so even gentle climbs can feel tiring under midday heat.

Helpful links to download maps

[Arches National Park Trails Map \(NPS\)](#)

[Arches Day Hikes](#)

[Trail Accessibility Guide](#)

Trails Explored by Monica & Erin

- **Landscape Arch Trail**: *1.8 miles with 40 ft elevation gain, making it moderate.* A hard-packed trail leads to a spectacular ribbon of rock, whose span is longer than 300 feet. Steep climbs periodically.
- **Delicate Arch Viewpoint Trails**:
 - **Lower Viewpoint**: *200 ft with no elevation gain, making it easy.* The packed sand path is short and very wheelchair accessible.
 - **Upper Viewpoint**: *0.5 miles with 171 ft elevation gain, making it moderately difficult.* Very steep, rocky uphill route.

Additional Accessible Trails

- **Arches Visitor Center Nature Trail**: *150 feet with 0 ft elevation gains, making it easy.* Walk a short path behind the visitor center to learn about native desert plants and their traditional uses.
- **Balanced Rock Viewpoint and Trail**: *0.3 miles with 35 ft elevation gain, making it easy.* This loop trail is partly paved. Although parking is limited, many visitors stop to complete the short hike around the feature's base for unusual and up-close perspectives.
- **Broken Arch Trail**: *1.2 miles with 59 ft elevation gain, making it easy.* From the trailhead at the Sand Dune Arch parking area, the trail crosses a large meadow to Broken Arch.
- **Double Arch Viewpoint and Trail**: *0.6 miles with 30 ft elevation gain, making it easy.* Double Arch is visible from The Windows parking loop. A relatively flat, gravel-surfaced path leads to the base of its two huge, arching spans.

[Learn more about other hiking trails at Arches.](#)

Tips & Recommendations

- **Pack**: Extra water, electrolyte packets, sun protection, and a white cane that handles loose rock and packed sand.
- **Wear**: Light layers for sun protection and sturdy hiking or walking shoes with reliable grip.
- **Plan**: Reserve any **[timed entry](#)** in advance, map out your driving route, and download all maps for offline use before heading out.

Arches on a Budget

The figures below reflect Monica and Erin's specific costs for Arches(September 21 – 23, 2025)

Actual Costs (Monica & Erin's Arches Stay)

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Lodging ([River Canyon Lodge](#), 2 nights): \$427.70

Food & Groceries: \$115.19

Timed Entry Reservation: \$2.00

Souvenirs: \$23.03

Rental Car + Insurance (prorated for 2 of 9 days): \$254.38

Total (Arches portion): \$822.30

Budget Tips

- Book as far in advance as possible to secure accessible rooms and better rates.
- Consider weekday stays rather than weekends when hotel rates are lower.
- Visit during shoulder seasons (late winter/early spring, late fall) when room rates drop significantly.
- Bring snacks and water to minimize food spending.

Final Takeaway & Rating

Arches offers a strong mix of scenic viewpoints and moderate trails with wide, hard-packed surfaces. The visitor center accessibility features include tactile maps, braille and large-print guides, and an audio description device. Traveling throughout Arches is difficult without a car, and cell service is unreliable as you go deeper into the park.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★☆☆☆ (3/5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin's blog and reels below.

 **Reels:**

[Arches Pt 1](#)

[Arches Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

 **Blog:** [Arches National Park: The Strength of What Stands](#)

Crater Lake National Park



[Crater Lake](#) in southern Oregon is the deepest lake in the United States, filling a collapsed volcano known as Mount Mazama. Its brilliant blue color and near-perfect circular basin creates a sense of stillness unlike any other national park. The rim of the caldera sits at about 7,000–8,000 feet (2,100–2,400 meters) in elevation, producing cool summers and heavy winter snow that can last into June.

Accessibility is improving here each year. The park's visitor centers provide tactile maps, large-print guides, and film captions; the paved Rim Village area allows visitors with limited mobility to experience the lake from multiple overlooks. For blind and low vision travelers, the crisp air, echoing silence, and the temperature contrast between sun and shade creates a deeply sensory experience.

Travel Logistics

Crater Lake is remote, and most visitors rely on a combination of flights, rental cars, and strategic planning for groceries, gas, and lodging. Because public transit is limited, it's helpful to secure transportation early, especially during late summer and early fall when services begin to wind down.

Nearest Airports

- [Rogue Valley International–Medford Airport \(MFR\)](#) – 1.5 hours from Crater Lake. This is the most convenient airport with the widest selection of rental cars.
- **Eugene Airport (EUG)** – about 2.5–3 hours, often with good flight availability.

Ground Transportation Options

A small number of private shuttle and taxi companies offer service from Klamath Falls or Medford, but these trips must be arranged in advance and can be expensive.

- [Amtrak Coast Starlight](#) stops in Klamath Falls, about 1 hour south of the park. From there, travelers will still need a rental car or shuttle/hired ride.
- [Crater Lake Taxi](#) provides tour-style transportation from Rogue Valley International–Medford Airport (MFR) to Crater Lake, and additional taxi and private transport services can be found on the [MFR Ground Transportation page](#). These options can be helpful for travelers who prefer not to drive, but they should be considered supplemental rather than reliable public transit.

Lodging Options

Crater Lake has two lodges within its park. There are more affordable and flexible options about 20–45 minutes outside the entrance.

[Inside the Park:](#)

- [Crater Lake Lodge](#) – Historic lodge overlooking the caldera within Rim Village; books up months in advance.
- [The Cabins at Mazama Village](#) – A simpler, more budget-friendly option located about seven miles from the rim.

[Outside the Park:](#)

- [Union Creek](#) – Located 30-40 minutes west of the park. There are cabins, lodges and a small inn surrounded by forest.

What Monica and Erin Did

Erin and Monica drove from Moab to Salt Lake City on September 23, 2025, and stayed overnight at the [Salt Lake Plaza Hotel SureStay Collection by Best Western](#). On September 24, they returned their rental car, flew from SLC to MFR, picked up a new rental car in Medford, grabbed groceries, and then drove to [Union Creek](#), their home base for visiting Crater Lake.

Transportation & Parking

Crater Lake is a car-dependent park with no internal shuttle system, so visitors need their own vehicle to fully explore. Because Rim Drive loops around the entire caldera, having a rental car with a trusted sighted person to lead the tour is strongly recommended.

[Crater Lake Trolley](#) (Summer Only):

The Crater Lake Trolley offers one of the most accessible ways to view multiple scenic overlooks. The tour circles the rim with designated stops, and staff provide verbal

descriptions upon request. All tours begin at Rim Village near Crater Lake Lodge. Each tour lasts approximately two hours and includes several stops for photos, questions, and viewing opportunities. Questions can be directed to **BHULL@CraterLakeTrolley.com** or by calling **541-882-1896**.

Park Accessibility

The [Steel Visitor Center](#) (also called the Steel Information Center) is the best first stop for visitors. Inside, there is a large tactile map with braille and raised landforms that helps with spatial orientation of the park. There is also a film that provides captions and audio description. Park rangers can explain trail conditions, [ranger led programs](#), construction updates, and which viewpoints currently have the best visibility.

[Rim Village](#) is one of the most accessible zones in the park, with wide paved walkways, consistently graded paths, and rock barriers that provide protective edging along many overlooks. There is one low-hanging tree branch near the gift shop, but it is simple to avoid by hugging the path closer to the lake.

Learn more about Crater Lake [Accessibility](#).

Restrooms: Accessible stalls are available at Rim Village and the Steel Visitor Center.

Trail Markers: Most trailheads have standard signage at the start, but there are very few markers confirming that you are still on the correct path as the trail continues. Using context clues such as a clearly worn footpath, rocks lining the route, or walking near other visitors can help with orientation.

Cell Service: Coverage is minimal to nonexistent along the rim, throughout the interior roads, and even up to 35 miles outside the park. Download all offline maps before entering the area to ensure reliable navigation and be prepared to navigate without digital support once in the park.

 [Steel Visitor Center](#) (541) 594-3000

Address: Crater Lake National Park, 1 Sager Building Highway 62, Crater Lake, OR 97604

Hours of Operation: *Varies seasonally; check current schedule before arrival. 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM in the winter.*

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/crla/planyourvisit/visitorcenters.htm>

 [Rim Visitor Center](#)- (541) 594-3000

Address: Crater Lake National Park, Rim Village, Crater Lake, OR 97604

Hours of Operation: Closed in Autumn, Winter, and Spring. *Check the current schedule before arrival in summer.*

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/crla/planyourvisit/visitorcenters.htm>

Trails & Terrain

Crater Lake's trails range from fully paved paths to rugged volcanic slopes with loose pumice, steep grades, and uneven footing. Because the park sits at high elevation, even short walks may feel more strenuous than expected. Travelers using canes or mobility devices should prepare for shifting surfaces, exposed roots, and eroded edges.

Helpful links to download maps

[Official NPS Maps](#)

[Maps of Crater Lake](#)

Trails Explored by Monica & Erin

- **Rim Village Path:** ~ 1 mile of wide, fully paved walkway connecting the lodge, café, and overlooks. The path has consistent edging and rock barriers in many areas, making it one of the safest places for blind and low vision visitors. Excellent for slow exploration and orientation around the rim.
- **Discovery Point Trail:** 2.0 miles round-trip, with less than 100 ft elevation gain. This trail is mostly packed dirt and pumice, running northwest from Rim Village. Expect some uneven stretches, mild inclines, and loose gravel.
- **Sun Notch Trail:** 0.8 miles with less than 150 ft elevation gain. A short, moderate loop featuring volcanic soil that can shift underfoot. The trail leads to a rim-side overlook with views of the Phantom Ship. Although the path isn't paved, it is wide enough for comfortable navigation when aided by trekking poles or a steady guide.
- **Watchman Peak Trail:** 1.6 miles with less than 420 ft elevation gain. A more challenging hike with steep grades, switchbacks, and rocky footing. The elevation gain and loose volcanic gravel make this trail strenuous—especially for low vision hikers. Best attempted with a sighted guide and supportive gear, or alternatively, viewed from accessible vantage points by car.

Additional Accessible Trails

While Crater Lake has limited fully accessible hikes. The following offer relatively stable footing or partial accessibility:

- **Godfrey Glen Trail:** *1.1 miles with less than 50 ft elevation gain.* A flat, forested loop through old-growth trees with a new accessible surface. Frequently cited as the most accessible trail in the park.
- **Pinnacles Trail:** *0.8 mile with less than 10 ft elevation gain.* An easy forest walk above volcanic spires; some loose gravel but wide and relatively low-risk.
- **Mazama Village Paths;** *8.5 miles of short paved path* starting near Mazama Campground.

Other Notable Trails

- **Cleetwood Cove Trail:** *2.2 miles with less than 700 ft elevation gain.* The only legal access to the lake's shoreline; very steep with major elevation loss and gain. Not recommended for blind or low vision hikers unless extremely experienced and supported.
- **Garfield Peak Trail:** *3.6 miles with less than 1,010 ft elevation gain.* High-elevation trail with narrow ridges and steep drop-offs. Best appreciated from a distance unless with strong guiding support.

Tips & Recommendations

Crater Lake's high elevation, minimal cell service, and dim lighting in many lodging areas make preparation key. Plan ahead, download maps, and give yourself extra time for navigation around Rim Village and trailheads. Ask rangers for trailhead directions and current conditions as soon as you enter the park. Join ranger-led hikes for built-in verbal descriptions and guided interpretation. Stay at Rim Village Lodge if independent navigation is a priority; it offers the best central access and the most intuitive path network.

- **Pack** plenty of water and electrolyte packets (high elevation increases dehydration); sun protection: sunscreen, hat, sunglasses, and lip balm; a white cane suited for uneven ground or an All Terrain cane; a headlamp for dim cabins, evening walks, or early starts.
- **Wear** layered clothing for quick temperature changes (mornings and evenings can be cold even in summer); sturdy hiking or walking shoes with reliable traction on volcanic soil and loose gravel; a lightweight windbreaker for exposed ridgelines around the rim.

- **Plan** ahead by booking lodging early, downloading GPS maps offline, identifying grocery stores, gas stations, and Wi-Fi zones before entering the park.

Crater Lake on a Budget

Crater Lake can be surprisingly affordable with the right planning. The biggest expenses tend to be flights, lodging, and car rentals. Staying outside the park, shopping for groceries before arrival, and choosing self-guided activities can significantly lower overall costs. The figures below reflect Monica and Erin's specific costs for Crater Lake (September 24 – 27, 2025)

Actual Costs (Monica & Erin's Crater Lake Stay)

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Flights: \$470.98

Lodging ([Union Creek](#), 3 nights): \$524.65

Car rental & insurance: \$376.46

Food: \$296.83

Trolley Tour: \$78.00

Souvenirs: \$67.56

Gas: \$48.17

Total (Crater Lake portion): \$2,103.90

Budget Tips

- Stay outside the park (Union Creek, Prospect, or Fort Klamath) for lower nightly rates and easier last-minute availability.
- Buy groceries in Medford before driving to the park since food options are limited and more expensive near Rim Village.
- Book flights and lodging early.
- Use your National Parks Pass to waive entry fees.
- Split shared costs like rental cars, gas, and food when traveling with a partner or friend.

Final Takeaway & Rating

Crater Lake is stunning but poses challenges for fully independent blind and low vision travelers. Park staff are outstanding—knowledgeable, attentive, and eager to help—but

limited lighting, minimal cell service, and the absence of public transportation mean a sighted companion is highly beneficial.

[Rim Village](#) and the [Steel Information Center](#) provide the strongest accessibility features, including paved paths, protective rock barriers, a tactile map, and an orientation film with captions and audio description. Trails vary widely, from smooth paved routes to rugged forest paths with loose volcanic soil. The Crater Lake Trolley is an excellent option for reducing driving fatigue and receiving guided verbal interpretation.

Crater Lake is a place shaped by patience, erosion, collapse, and renewal—a reminder that transformation takes time. Accessibility here is still evolving, but the park’s spirit of adaptation and its rangers’ willingness to listen reflect real potential for continued improvement.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★☆☆☆ (3/5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin’s blog and reels below.

 **Reels:**

[Crater Lake Pt 1](#)

[Crater Lake Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

 **Blog:** [Crater Lake National Park: Where Time Carved Beauty From Chaos](#)

Mount Rainier National Park



[Mount Rainier](#) rises 14,410 feet (4,392 meters) above sea level and anchors the landscape of glaciers, meadows, and waterfalls. This active stratovolcano is both a geological giant and a source of life for the surrounding forests.

Accessibility at Mount Rainier centers around the Paradise and Sunrise areas. Paths, tactile exhibits, and ranger stations make independent exploration possible. The sound of rushing water can be heard near

many of the waterfalls along with the scent of fir and wildflower mixed with the cool mist drifting from nearby glaciers providing a multisensory experience unique to the Pacific Northwest.

Mount Rainier is large, spread out, and divided into several distinct regions—Paradise, Sunrise, Ohanapecosh, and Carbon River—each with its own roads, viewpoints, and lodging options. Because public transit is extremely limited and cell service is unreliable in the park, most visitors rely on a personal or rental vehicle for all movement. Planning ahead makes a huge difference, especially during late summer when crowds and construction delays can slow travel.

Travel Logistics

Mount Rainier has several airports that visitors may choose to fly into.

- **Seattle–Tacoma International Airport (SEA)** — The most common gateway, located about 2–2.5 hours from the Nisqually entrance.
- **Yakima Air Terminal (YKM)** — Roughly 1.5–2 hours from the east side of the park, closer to Sunrise during high season.
- **Portland International Airport (PDX)** — About 2.5–3 hours away; a good alternative if SEA prices surge.

Ground Transportation Options

- [Amtrak](#) runs to Seattle and Tacoma, but there is no direct connection to Mount Rainier. Travelers must rent a car or arrange private transportation from either city.
- [Tours Northwest](#) offers day tours that run from downtown Seattle to Mount Rainier and includes pickup from several Seattle locations.
- [Evergreen Escapes](#) offers small-group tours that depart from Seattle. They provide transportation, guided stops, and select hikes within the park.

Lodging Options

Refer to the NPS website for a more comprehensive list of lodging both inside and outside the park. <https://www.nps.gov/mora/planyourvisit/lodging.htm>

- [Paradise Inn](#): Historic lodge inside the park with iconic views; often books up months in advance.
- [National Park Inn \(Longmire\)](#): More modest rooms in a central location with easy access to the park's southwest region.
- [Gateway Inn](#) (Nisqually Entrance): Steps from the entrance with basic, convenient cabins—excellent for early morning starts.

What Monica and Erin Did

Monica and Erin flew into Seattle-Tacoma Airport and rented a car. They stayed at the [Gateway Inn](#), located directly outside the Nisqually entrance, giving them quick access to Longmire and Paradise for early morning exploring. The cabin had basic but comfortable amenities and was quiet despite being steps from the gate.

For their final night before flying home, they stayed at the [DoubleTree near SEA Airport](#), making the next morning's travel smooth and low-stress.

Transportation & Parking

Mount Rainier is a driving-focused park with large distances between regions and no internal shuttle system. Traffic can be heavy during peak seasons, and construction delays are common. Expect steep grades, tight turns, and very limited guardrails in some sections.

Parking availability depends heavily on time of day and region:

- **Paradise:** The busiest area of the park. Parking often fills by **9:00–10:00 a.m.** during peak season. Afternoon turnover occurs, but slowly.
- **Longmire:** More consistent parking, especially early morning and late afternoon. Good base for slower-paced exploration.
- **Sunrise:** Parking fills early due to limited spaces and clear-day crowds. Road access is also seasonal.
- **Trailheads & Viewpoints:** Most have small pullouts with uneven gravel surfaces; turnover is frequent but unpredictable.

Park Accessibility

The [Paradise Jackson Visitor Center](#) has a movie, full exhibit, gift shop, maps, information about ranger programs and a cafe. The surrounding area is fully paved, has a large parking lot and a handful of paved trails that begin with a flight of stairs.

Learn more about Mount Rainier [Accessibility](#).

Restrooms are available at the museum across the street from the Longmire Wilderness Information Center, and Paradise Jackson Visitor Center. During Monica and Erin's trip, there was a water shortage and no public restrooms were functional. They relied on porta-potties set up at Paradise parking lot.

Trailheads are positioned low to withstand heavy winter snowpack, meaning signs can be harder to spot visually and contain a lot of information about different trails. Ask rangers for printed maps or verbal orientation before hiking.

Cell service is spotty, however, at the paradise village there is a strong connection.

Mount Rainier Paradise Visitor Center

Address: 52807 Paradise Road East, Ashford, WA 98304

Hours of Operation: *Seasonal; verify current hours before visiting.*

Website: <https://www.nps.gov/mora/planyourvisit/hours.htm>

Trails & Terrain

Weather changes quickly at Mount Rainier due to its microclimate. Fog, rain, and low clouds can reduce visibility even on summer afternoons. Around Paradise, many short paths are paved or well-graded, though edges can be inconsistent and terrain transitions from pavement to gravel quickly.

Helpful Links to Download Maps

[Paradise Trail Map](#)

[Longmire Area Trail Map](#)

Trails Explored by Monica & Erin

- **Skyline to Myrtle Falls:** *1 mile of paved path with 100 ft elevation gain.* A deceptively steep climb following paved paths that lead to stunning Myrtle Falls with Mount Rainier in the background. This route tends to be crowded. There is a set of stairs at Myrtle Falls, without a handrail, to get a closer look. The trailhead is located on the north side of the upper parking lot, next to the visitor center.
- **[Nisqually Vista Loop](#):** *1.2 miles of paved path with 200 ft elevation gain.* The trailhead is located at the northwest end of the lower parking lot.
- **[Twin Firs Loop \(Longmire Area\)](#):** *0.4 mile trail with packed dirt with roots.* Trailhead on road between Nisqually Entrance and Longmire; 2 miles west of Longmire. The trail is short, yet steep with climbs up a hillside, and several crosses over a creek on a narrow log footbridge.

Additional Accessible Trails

- **Trail of the Shadows (Longmire):** *0.7 mile trail with packed dirt.* The trailhead is across the road from the National Park Inn at Longmire.

Other Notable Trails

- **[Skyline Trail \(Paradise\)](#):** *5.5 miles with 1,700 ft elevation gain, and a mixed terrain path.* Iconic but steep, with exposed ridges and uneven volcanic rock.

Tips & Recommendations

Mount Rainier's terrain, weather, and limited cell coverage make preparation essential. Even on paved routes, expect sudden elevation changes, stairs, and shifting conditions. Early check-ins with rangers help you choose trails that match your comfort level and accessibility needs.

- **Pack:** Extra water, electrolyte packets, sun protection, and a white cane that is designed for uneven terrain or trekking poles for stability.
- **Wear:** Layers for temperature swings, lightweight rain jacket or poncho, sturdy hiking shoes with grip for possibly wet rock, roots and gravel, hat and gloves for chilly mornings.

- **Plan:** Start early to avoid parking congestion, download maps offline, beware of erratic weather patterns, and to check in with park rangers to confirm trail conditions or guided programs.

Mount Rainier on a Budget

Mount Rainier can be manageable budget-wise, especially if you stay just outside the park, cook simple meals, and plan your logistics around weather and driving. The biggest expenses tend to be lodging and flights, while food and gas remain relatively low thanks to short driving distances once you're inside the park. The figures below reflect Monica and Erin's specific costs for Mount Rainier, one night in Seattle and their flight home to Tampa (September 27 – October 2, 2025).

Actual Costs (Monica & Erin's Mount Rainier Stay)

(All costs shown in USD; shared expenses are split between two travelers.)

Flights: \$561.58

Lodging (4 nights [Gateway Inn](#) + 1 night [DoubleTree](#)): **\$945.36**

Car rental & insurance: \$363.12

Gas: \$37.71

Food: \$360.43

Souvenirs: \$102.19

Ubers: \$26.42

Total (Mount Rainier portion) : \$2,536.07

Budget Tips

- Stay outside the park since it's significantly cheaper than staying inside the park.
- Buy groceries before entering the mountain; simple breakfasts and packed lunches go a long way.
- Visit Paradise and Longmire on the same day to reduce driving time and fuel use.
- Use your National Parks Pass to avoid paying multiple entrance fees if visiting other parks on the same trip.
- Share costs such as rental cars, food staples, and trail snacks when traveling with a partner.
- Choose free experiences like ranger led hikes or programs.

Final Takeaway & Rating

Mount Rainier offers extraordinary scenery but limited independence for blind and low vision travelers. Paradise provides some paved paths and helpful ranger support, yet steep grades, stairs on “easy” routes, shifting weather, and a total lack of shuttle services make the park challenging without a sighted companion. With preparation and flexibility, however, the mountain rewards visitors with moments of true awe.

Overall Accessibility Rating: ★★☆☆☆ (2.5 / 5)

To see this portion of the journey in action, check out Monica and Erin’s blog and reels below.

 **Reels:**

[Mount Rainier Pt 1](#)

[Mount Rainier Pt 2 Accessibility](#)

 **Blog:** [Mount Rainier National Park: A Lesson in Humility and Height](#)

Full Trip Budget Overview

Accessible travel doesn't have to break the bank, but it does require strategy. Across 21 days, seven parks, and 3,000+ miles, Monica and Erin spent **\$10,082.7** (split between two travelers). This total reflects flights, lodging, rental cars, food, and all on-the-ground expenses.

Category	Total (USD)	Notes
Transportation (flights + ground)	\$1,876.90	Includes checked bags & Ubers
Lodging + Trip Protection	\$4,213.98	Biggest cost; book early
Rental Cars + Insurance	\$1,883.56	Three rentals across the trip
Food & Groceries	\$1,430.28	Mostly self-catered meals
Souvenirs & Fees	\$460.42	Park souvenirs + entry passes + tours
Gas + Laundry	\$217.56	
Total	\$10,082.70	

💡 *Nearly half the trip's cost went toward lodging, with transportation and car rentals making up most of the rest—a reminder that accessibility often depends more on planning than luxury.*

Budgeting Tips for Accessible Travelers

- Use the Access Pass for free park entry and reduced camping fees.
- Compare airports: Secondary hubs like St. George or Medford often have lower fares.
- Book lodging 6–12 months ahead, especially inside parks or during shoulder seasons.
- Share costs with a travel partner whenever possible — many expenses (car, hotel, gas) scale easily.
- Pack reusable gear (bottles, snacks) to cut daily food spending.

- Leave a buffer fund: plan at least \$200–\$300 for unexpected needs like checked bag fees, hotel credit card holds, gas, impromptu tours.

Final Reflections

When Monica and Erin began their journey, their goal was simple but ambitious: to see whether accessibility and adventure could truly coexist. Over three weeks and seven national parks, they discovered that they could while being flexible and patient as things changed.

What does it take to be a safe hiker with limited vision?

Safety begins long before stepping onto a trail. It starts with researching terrain, understanding where cell service fades, and packing tools that match one's personal needs such as an All Terrain cane, extra water, or a portable phone charger to access Aira. True confidence doesn't come from perfect sight; it comes from knowing one's limits, communicating needs, and building trust in both people and systems.

What accessibility features are available—and what actually works?

Some visitor centers offered tactile maps, communication devices, and well-trained staff. Others relied on paved paths and signage that technically met ADA requirements but didn't always translate to real-world usability. Monica and Erin learned that accessibility isn't limited to the physical structures of the parks. Clear maps, consistent signage, and rangers who are open to learning about inclusivity make parks even more accessible. The state of inclusion in U.S. parks is improving, but progress still depends on awareness, feedback, and continued advocacy from both visitors and staff.

Is it possible to balance accessibility with affordability?

With planning and flexibility accessibility can be affordable. By staying outside park boundaries, packing meals, and using shuttle networks, Monica and Erin proved that accessibility doesn't have to be financially out of reach. Balancing comfort with flexibility allowed them to stretch their budget while still traveling safely.

What resources would empower more people to explore the parks?

Resources like this guide can help bridge the gap between what's promised and what's possible, offering both practical insight and emotional encouragement. Rangers who listen, organizations that collaborate, and travelers who share feedback all play a role in building more inclusive outdoor spaces.

Ultimately, this project revealed that “accessible travel” isn't about removing every obstacle. It's about making adventure *possible*. Nature doesn't change itself for any one person, but when travelers come prepared, it welcomes them all the same.

Monica and Erin hope this guide inspires you to get out of your comfort zone and explore the world. Whether you're hiking your local park or crossing the country, may this guide remind you that nature belongs to everyone.

Acknowledgements

Park statistics and accessibility information were verified through official National Park Service resources ([nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)) and direct communication with park rangers during the 2025 field visits. While accessibility conditions can evolve due to weather, maintenance, or policy updates, this guide reflects the most accurate information available during the 2025 field season.

This project was possible thanks to the generosity, creativity, and encouragement of an extraordinary community.

[Blind Travel Foundation](#) (BTF) — Thank you for believing in the vision of accessible exploration and for making this journey a reality through your support and grant funding. Your mission to empower blind and low vision travelers turned a dream into an achievable adventure.

[Aira](#) — Your sponsorship and gift of connection minutes allowed us to travel with confidence, turning moments of uncertainty into moments of discovery. Real-time access to visual information transformed how we interacted with each park's landscapes and logistics.

[FEELDOM](#) — Your thoughtful travel backpacks carried our essentials and sparked countless trail conversations about adaptive design. We are grateful for your sponsorship and your continued commitment to making functional gear that empowers independence.

[Two Blind Brothers](#) — Thank you for the socks that kept our spirits (and feet) warm on every early morning hike. Your dedication to giving back reminds us that every step forward in accessibility starts with empathy.

To the park rangers, guides, and staff who greeted us with kindness and curiosity—thank you for your patience, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn alongside us. Your guidance made these vast, natural spaces feel welcoming and safe.

To our friends, family, and community supporters, your encouragement fueled this journey even from afar.

Finally, a special thank you to Sedona Dave for gifting Monica an [All Terrain Cane](#) and [Urban Xplorer Cane](#), and for sharing his wisdom, time, and trail stories. Hiking with you reminded us that the world truly is our playground, and that accessibility is not about limitation; it's about expanding what's possible.

Stay Connected

Accessible travel doesn't end with this guide. It continues every time someone chooses curiosity over limitation and community over isolation. Our hope is that these stories, reflections, and resources spark more conversations about what's possible when the world is designed for everyone to explore.

Follow the authors of this guide online:

Monica [@BendyBlindBlonde](#)

Erin [@ErinPruittAuthor](#)



Photo ID: Erin (left) and Monica (right) standing at the stairs leading up to Mount Rainier. The steps have a quote by John Muir, conservationist, 1889 that says, "... the most luxuriant and the most extravagantly beautiful of all the alpine gardens I ever beheld in all my mountain top wanderings."