“In the American Southwest, I began a lifelong love affair with a pile of rock”

- Edward Abbey
Trip Overview

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, hidden amongst the remote southern Utah wilderness, is one of the state’s most marvelous exhibitions of wild canyon lands.

It is a diamond-in-the-rough type of place, perfect for photographers and explorers alike who are looking for sights equal in amazement to the more acclaimed National Parks, but without crowds of people. In fact, this region is so “out there” that it was one of the last areas in the lower 48 states to be mapped.

The National Monument, dedicated in 1996, protects 1.7 million acres of rocky moon-like landscape. The greater Grand Staircase region was given the name “Grand Staircase” by geologist Clarence Dutton, stemming from his observation that the sedimentary layers of the rock
here have eroded, in a series of five “steps,” between Grand Canyon, Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks, topping out at the Aquarius Plateau. This erosion has revealed an array of shaped rock and colorful mudstone, shale, sandstones and limestone layers that are truly hard to believe exist. The Escalante River and its tributaries are responsible for carving through these layers of sedimentary rock a 2,000 square-mile network of deep and often narrow canyons here.

Join Backcountry Journeys as we’ll hike to the must-see highlights of this high desert and carved canyon landscape. Here we’ll find, and photograph, haunting rock formations, deep and narrow slot canyons, waterfalls, arches, cottonwood-lined streams; enormous alcoves and towering natural bridges.

At the end of each day we’ll relax in luxury, reviewing our day’s images at our charming and modern southwestern lodge.

Our guides have been hiking and photographing in southern Utah for years, and we have designed this itinerary to be perhaps our most hiker-intensive as we set out to explore the beauty that hides here. We’ll get to the right places, at the right moments, for ideal lighting conditions and photographic opportunities.

**Highlights**

- Arguably Utah’s wildest & most scenic locale
- Beautiful desert hiking - your choice spring or fall!
- Narrow, colorful slot canyons
- Stunning Navajo slickrock sandstone formations
- Unique desert waterfalls
- Incredible astrophotography
- Excellent lodging & fantastic meals included
- Small Groups
- Lead by a professional wildlife photographer
Noteworthy Travel Logistics

- This trip begins & ends in Saint George, Utah. The orientation includes introductions, a briefing on the trip itinerary, and a checking of personal gear.
- There is a pre-trip meeting on Day One at 5pm at the Hilton Garden Inn in Saint George
  1731 S Convention Center Dr, St. George, UT 84790
  (435) 634-4100

*Please note:* Exact hotel is subject to change - equivalent hotel may be substituted. If you are planning on arriving early or staying late please contact us.

- You can either fly into Saint George or fly into Las Vegas which is about a two-hour drive on good roads. There is a shuttle from the Las Vegas Airport to Saint George. Visit [http://www.stgshuttle.com/](http://www.stgshuttle.com/) for more information.
- We should be back in Saint George in the late afternoon on the last day of the trip.
Itinerary

*Most meals included – (B,L,D) denotes Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

Day One (Travel Day) (D)

Travel day. Arrive in Saint George, Utah for an orientation and welcome dinner. Please meet in the lobby of our hotel at 5pm.

Day Two (B,L,D)

We’ll get an early start this morning as we drive towards the small town of Escalante. While en route we’ll stop to photograph the morning sunrise at a viewpoint overlooking Zion Canyon from near the headwaters of the Virgin River. Upon arriving in Escalante, we’ll make a visit to nearby Escalante Petrified Forest State Park, where we’ll find fascinating petrified wood as well as dramatic landscape and evidence of ancient Anasazi and Fremont Natives who occupied this region a thousand years ago.

After checking into our cozy lodge, we’ll hike to Lower Calf Creek Falls, which will serve as our evening shot. Calf Creek Falls is one of the more impressive waterfalls on the Colorado Plateau. It plunges 150 feet into a deep pool from the lip of a narrow canyon. We’ll photograph here until everyone has had their fill before heading back to our lodge for dinner. This hike is an easy to moderate one along a well-maintained sandy trail with a total round-trip distance of 5.5 miles, and an elevation gain of around 500 feet.

Day Three (B,L,D)

We’ll depart our hotel for a full day of hiking and exploring as we venture into two of the famous slot canyons of this region. Plan to be hiking for the majority of this day as we explore and photograph these two otherworldly landscapes. We’ll have an early dinner prior to
heading out to set up for our evening shoot at Devil’s Garden. Here we will find a fairyland area of small knobs, arches, and other eroded landforms as they light up during golden hour and last-light.

We may stay late for a night-sky photography session before heading back to our comfortable beds for what should be a GREAT night of rest.

**Day Four (B,L,D)**

We’ll spend the day exploring and photographing a colorful canyon along slickrock and trails passing through willow streambeds eventually arriving at Phipps Arch, standing high atop the north wall of Phipps Wash surrounded by sandstone knobs. This arch was formed when the erosive forces of ice, wind and water cut through a thick, low ridge of Navajo Sandstone.

After a long day of exploration and photography we’ll have a quick dinner before departing for our sunset shot.

**Day Five (B,L,D)**

We’ll rise early today in order to capture sunrise from the rim of a deep canyon. We’ll have breakfast on the road today as we drive along the famous Hell’s Backbone Road. This highly scenic road was built in the 1930’s by the Civilian Conservation Corp to connect the remote villages of Escalante and Boulder. We’ll find wonderful views and compositions of slickrock country as we wind our way through the forest on this driving tour. We’ll spend the morning photographing along this scenic road before heading back to town for lunch.

We’ll take an afternoon break partly to recover from our previous days of hiking, partly so we can look over our images, before heading back out where we’ll hike to our evening shot at Sunset Arch, one of the area’s most unique arches.
Day Six (B,L)

Today we’ll rise early one final time in order to catch sunrise at yet another breathtaking vantage point. After breakfast we’ll settle in for our scenic drive back towards St. George.

Please Note: The exact sequence of the itineraries on all photography trips will be based on weather and lighting conditions. The goal on these trips is to make sure we are at the right place at the right time for the perfect light on our subjects. Also, itineraries can change for a variety of other circumstances including floods, forest fires, national park closures, road closures and more. Due to the nature of wildlife and nature photography we do not guarantee any specific sightings or specific compositions regarding wildlife or natural phenomena.
Trip Details

Physical Requirements
All participants must be in good physical condition and have the ability to hike 4-7 miles per day with a daypack over sometimes rocky, sandy and uneven desert terrain. We’ll also be visiting very narrow slot canyons, be prepared for tight squeezes, walking through water, and environments that could be classified as “claustrophobic.” The weight of your pack largely depends on what gear you choose to bring on each outing. Typically backpacks weigh between 15 and 20 lbs. But remember the choice is yours 😊

Group Size
We keep groups small to maximize your one on one time with the guide/instructor.

Trip length
6 days

Mileage
Approximately 16-24 miles for the duration of the trip, including some light scrambling and ladders over the course of the week.

Fitness Level
Moderately Difficult to Strenuous – Several hikes on rocky, sandy, uneven trails between 3-5 miles with water crossings and some elevation. This is a very hike-intensive tour, as we will need to hike to many of our shots and will explore trails and slot canyons during many of our days.

Meeting Time and Place
5pm on Day One at our hotel in St. George
Trip Conclusion
St, George, Utah. We can Drop you off at the St, George airport or predetermined location in St. George in the afternoon.

Price/Start Dates
See website for current dates/prices: Canyons of Utah: Grand Staircase Escalante

Accommodation
We will be staying in a comfortable lodge near Escalante, Utah.

Meals
Most meals are included during the trip dates. We’ll eat at our lodge, handpicked local restaurants, as well as out on the trail. We often do snacks on the trail and then return for a late breakfast during photography trips as we are often out early to capture the morning light.

Weather
Expect pleasantly warm days with slightly chillier mornings and nights. Southern Utah can bring weather of all sorts, but is typically dry. Remember some of the best photographs are made before, during and immediately after a storm cycle. There is no such thing as bad weather just poor layering and gear choices – please plan accordingly! For more info on what to bring please email or call us.

We recommend checking these weather links prior to your trip departure to plan your gear and clothing packing accordingly.

Price Includes
Most meals, ground transportation, accommodation during the trip dates: from the evening of Day One through the morning of Day Six, professional photography instruction, park entrance fees, medically certified wilderness guide, & gratuities for service personnel such as drivers, pilots, captains as well as hotel & restaurant staff.
Price Does Not Include
Airfare, alcoholic beverages, accommodations before or after the trip dates, one meal on your own, souvenirs & trip leader gratuities (industry standard is typically 10%-20% of the trip cost based on your experience)
Conditioning for Photography Trips

Always consult your physician before commencing with a workout program.

We will be hiking between 3-7 miles per day typically. The better shape you’re in, the more you will enjoy the trip. Even if you are very athletic, we recommend walking as often as possible with 15-20 pounds in your backpack, wearing the boots you plan to hike in. You can alternate this with other cardiovascular & strength routines. Balance is critical on rough ground. Whatever you can do to improve your balance will pay big dividends.

The elevation of Grand Staircase Escalante varies between 3,000-10,000 feet, and some of our hikes will be at over 6,000 feet! Proper pre-hydration shortly before your trip will immensely improve your experience as well as others experience on the tour, drink at least two liters of water per day as least 3 days before your trip starts!

Lodging & Meals

Backcountry Journeys Photography Tours & Workshops include most meals, lodging from Day One through the morning of the last day of the tour, ground transportation while on the tour, National Park entrance fees, guide fees and other items essential to a successful trip – meaning that once your there all you will have to focus on is your photography. We can accommodate most special diets so please let us know if you have any dietary restrictions.
Gear List

This gear list should answer a lot of your gear questions so please read through this carefully. If you still have questions, please give us a call.

Your clothing should be a system of layers that you add and subtract according to the weather and temperature. A good pair of good synthetic “Smartwool” type socks under sturdy boots works well. Clothing should be light-weight nylon pants (maybe base-layers), a polypro shirt and either a sunhat or warm hat depending on the weather. As weather conditions change add insulating and waterproof layers to your base setup. Don’t bring any cotton clothing. Cotton is not a good insulator and once it gets wet it takes forever to dry. Absolutely no jeans!
Photo & Field Gear

**Recommended Camera Gear:**

- DSLR or Mirrorless Camera. (Nikon, Canon, Sony, Panasonic etc.)
- Mid-range zoom Lens (24-105mm zoom or equivalent)
- Wide-angle Lens (10-20mm, 16-35mm or equivalent zoom)
- Normal Lenses (ranging from approximately 35mm to 100mm)
  Sturdy and lightweight Tripod (must be able to carry this for hikes)
- Memory Cards
- Batteries & Chargers
- Filters such as a circular polarizer are a must.
- Lens cleaning pen & cloth
- Camera Day Pack (this should appropriately carry all your gear & have a rain cover)
- Camera Rain Sleeve
- Headlamp (For early starts and late-night hikes back to the car!)

**Optional (but recommended) Camera Gear:**

- Back-Up Camera Body
- Medium length telephoto lens (70-200mm, 100-400mm or equivalent)
- Laptop Computer with Lightroom / Photoshop Pre-Installed(for personal use in hotels for downloading images while on tour)
- External Hard Drives
- Remote Shutter Trigger
- Camera’s Instruction Manual
Suggested Field Gear & Clothing:

- Personal Field Clothing (think layers)
- Warm top, such as a long-sleeved sweater or fleece jacket
- Long pants, or convertible hiking pants, one pair of leggings or lightweight trousers to block sun and give warmth at night
- Warm Hat & Gloves
- Down Jacket (My favorite piece of gear in cooler weather!)
- “Softshell” Jacket lightly insulated windproof/breathable jacket for layering and protection from wind
- Long Underwear (synthetic top & bottom)
- Shorts & T-Shirts for on the go during warmer months
- Wool Socks (Smartwool, Darn Tough etc.)
- Brimmed Sun Hat
- Sunglasses
- Good Walking Shoes or Sturdy Hiking Boots
- Casual wear, for your evenings off the trail
- Water Bottle or Hydration System (1-2 liters)
- Rain shell, waterproof/breathable jacket
- Rain Pants
- Shooting Gloves
- Binoculars (optional)
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray
- Knee pads (for low-angle shooting)
- Personal toiletries & medications
- Money, for tipping your guide (industry standard is generally 10%-20% of the trip cost based on your experience) and for any personal expenses not included in the tour package such as alcoholic beverages, a few of the meals, souvenirs, etc.

This is a general list. Please call with any questions!
Note on Packing for the tour: Please pack your extra clothing, toiletries, extra camera gear, and other travel items into a suitcase, duffel or travel bag. You will not bring all your camera gear on every outing. Each evening you will be briefed on which lenses, filters, etc. you will need to carry the following day on the scheduled tour or outing.