

3-Day Arches & Canyonlands Itinerary

Two Parks • One Moab Base • Built Around the Heat

3 DAYS

MOAB BASE

NO RESERVATION

Quick Facts Before You Go

- Arches lifted its timed-entry requirement for 2026 — no reservation needed, but arriving early still matters
- Two separate parks, two separate \$30 fees — and Dead Horse Point is a state park costing \$20 more
- Water exists at two places in Arches and almost nowhere at Island in the Sky — fill up in Moab
- Summer highs top 100°F; NPS advises against strenuous activity from 10 AM to 5 PM
- Canyonlands is three districts hours apart — Island in the Sky is the one near Moab
- Cell service is patchy in both parks and gone entirely on the Needles road



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Steal the research. Keep the adventure.

The Six Things That Shape This Trip

Read this page before you book anything

Do you need a reservation?

No — not in 2026. The National Park Service lifted the Arches timed-entry requirement for 2026, announced February 18, 2026. There is no ticket to buy and no entry window to hit.

But that is not the same as walking right in. During peak periods, roughly 8 AM to 3 PM spring through fall, parking areas and park roads fill and NPS can temporarily restrict incoming traffic — sometimes for three to five hours.

Reservations are still required for Devils Garden Campground and for the Fiery Furnace, self-guided or ranger-led.

The rest of it

- Two parks, two fees. \$30 each, 7 days each. Dead Horse Point is a state park — \$20 more, and no park pass covers it.
- Water is scarce. In Arches, only at the visitor center and Devils Garden. Nothing at the Delicate Arch trailhead. At Island in the Sky, limited and sometimes unavailable.
- Summer is a safety problem, not a comfort problem. NPS advises against strenuous activity between 10 AM and 5 PM in extreme heat.
- Arches is longer than it looks. Visitor center to Devils Garden is 18 miles and roughly 45 minutes of driving.
- Canyonlands is not one place. Its districts are hours apart. Island in the Sky is the one 40 minutes from Moab.
- You do not need 4WD for anything in this itinerary. You absolutely do for White Rim Road and Elephant Hill.

In 2026 rangers responded to roughly 23 heat-related search-and-rescue incidents across these two parks. Crowds are an inconvenience. Heat here is a hazard.

Which pass saves you money

Moab only? \$60 at the two gates, or the Southeast Utah Parks Annual Pass at \$55, which also covers Natural Bridges and Hovenweep.

Doing the Mighty 5? Individual entry across all five runs \$150. America the Beautiful is \$80. Not close.

Visiting from outside the US? As of 2026 there is a \$100 surcharge per non-US resident, aged 16+ at Zion and Bryce Canyon. It does not apply at Arches, Canyonlands, or Capitol Reef.

The Arches Icons

One road in, one road out — the only question is which direction

SEASON	HIKE DELICATE ARCH	WHY
Jun–Sep	First light	Safety. NPS advises avoiding strenuous activity 10 AM–5 PM in extreme heat
Oct–May	Late afternoon	Light. The arch faces west and glows in the last hour

DAY 01 • JUNE–SEPTEMBER

Run the Park Backwards

Hardest hike first, then work back toward the entrance

- 1

Drive straight to Wolfe Ranch

5 miles from Moab to the entrance, then 12 miles in. Do not stop — you will see all of it on the way back out.

FILL WATER FIRST

NO WATER AT TRAILHEAD
- 2

Delicate Arch — 3 mi round trip, 538 ft

The mileage is not the hard part. Exposed slickrock, steep climbing, almost no shade, and a final ledge about 200 yards long with a drop on one side. Be off the trail by 9 AM.

STRENUOUS

DON'T MISS
- 3

Sand Dune Arch

A short walk between two fins and one of the only genuinely shaded spots in the park. Deep sand underfoot.

SHADE

FAMILY-FRIENDLY
- 4

The Windows & Double Arch

Windows Loop ~1 mi, Double Arch ~0.6 mi. Both short, both almost entirely unshaded. If it is already brutal, do Double Arch and skip the loop.
- 5

Balanced Rock, then Park Avenue — from the car

Both have roadside viewpoints. Then go back to Moab and get out of the sun. That is how the day is designed to work.

Every stop after Delicate Arch is on your way out. You never double back, and you are off the exposed trails before the worst of the heat.

Run the Park Forwards

Work inward, then return for Delicate Arch in the good light

- 1** Park Avenue — ~1 mi one way
Point-to-point, with a trailhead at each end. With two cars, walk it one way. Otherwise it is ~2 miles there and back. Most guides list it as "1 mile" and leave you to find out the rest.
- 2** Balanced Rock, then the Windows & Double Arch
A quick roadside stop, then three arches on one short loop and the tallest arch in the park a few minutes away.
- 3** Devils Garden — Landscape Arch, 1.9 mi
The far end of the road, 18 miles from the visitor center. Flat and straightforward. Everything past Landscape Arch changes character completely — Double O Arch is 4 miles with sandstone slabs, narrow ledges and drop-offs.

EASY TO LANDSCAPE ARCH
- 4** Back to Wolfe Ranch for Delicate Arch
About 6 miles back. Be at the arch roughly an hour before sunset. Bring a headlamp — slickrock is harder to read in fading light.

BEST PHOTOS: SUNSET

HEADLAMP

Island in the Sky & Dead Horse Point

The Canyonlands district that is actually near Moab

- 1 Leave Moab 90 minutes before sunrise
32 miles and about 40 minutes to the visitor center. That timing covers the drive, the last few miles to the trailhead, the walk out, and getting a spot before the tripods do. Fill water in Moab.
NO WATER AT TRAILHEADS
- 2 Mesa Arch at sunrise — 0.6 mi, 56 ft
Light bounces off the canyon wall below and lights the underside of the arch orange. The honest version: NPS itself notes photographers gather here, and the front row is tripods, often three deep. If you do not care about the photograph, come mid-morning instead.
BEST PHOTOS: SUNRISE **CROWDED**
- 3 Grand View Point — 1.8 mi round trip
The end of the east branch and the best long view in the district, along the rim above Monument Basin.
DON'T MISS
- 4 Buck Canyon & Green River Overlooks
Buck Canyon is a two-minute paved walkway. Green River is the best view of the river from this district — and NPS names it among the best sunset spots here.
PAVED & ACCESSIBLE
- 5 Upheaval Dome, first overlook — 0.6 mi
A crater geologists argued over for decades: collapsed salt dome, or meteorite impact. The second overlook adds about a mile and the view is better.
- 6 Dead Horse Point for sunset — \$20 per vehicle
About 30 minutes from Grand View Point on the way back to Moab. Open 6 AM to 10 PM, no reservation. A Utah state park, so no national park pass covers it.
SEPARATE FEE **BEST PHOTOS: SUNSET**

Run the east branch to its end first, then pick up the west branch coming back. You drive the district once instead of twice.

Is Dead Horse Point worth the extra \$20?

For most first-timers, yes. The overlook sits high above a gooseneck bend in the Colorado, a view Island in the Sky has no equivalent to.

When it is not: if you are already done, on a tight budget, or with kids at their limit. Green River Overlook is free, inside the park you already paid for, and genuinely very good.

Choose Your Adventure

Three real options — pick one, do not combine them

OPTION A • THE DEFAULT

More Arches

Go back for what you missed and go deeper into Devils Garden. This absorbs anything heat or crowds cut short, which is why it is the right pick if you are unsure.

Landscape Arch 1.9 mi, easy — what most people should do. Double O Arch 4 mi, 275 ft, strenuous — real scrambling, narrow ledges, drop-offs. Primitive Loop 6.6–7.9 mi, difficult — experienced hikers, cool weather only.

OPTION B • A FULL DAY

The Needles

74 miles and about 1.5 hours from Moab, each way. Three hours of driving is the price of admission. What you get: banded red-and-white spires instead of arches and mesas, and a fraction of the people.

The easier day: Roadside Ruin, the Cave Spring loop, Pothole Point, and the overlooks — roughly two miles of walking. The hiking day: Chesler Park Viewpoint, 5.8 mi and 3–4 hrs, or the full loop with the Joint Trail, 10.7 mi and 5–7 hrs.

OPTION C • PICK ONE

The Day Off That Is Not Wasted

Corona Arch. BLM land off Potash Road — 3 miles round trip, moderately strenuous, no fee and no permit. Two safety-cable sections and a short ladder over a ledge.

Rafting. Half-day on the Colorado, morning departure. The one thing here you genuinely cannot do yourself.

Or neither. After two dawn starts, a morning off is a legitimate itinerary choice.

What three days costs you

You will not see the Maze. You probably will not do Fiery Furnace. If you pick the Needles you skip the second half of Devils Garden; if you pick Devils Garden you will not see the Needles at all.

That is the actual trade, and no itinerary makes it disappear. Three days in Moab buys you two parks done properly and one real choice.

Map This Route

Scan the QR code below to open the live, interactive Google My Map with every stop from all 3 days — colour-coded by day, with driving directions built in.



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE CAMERA

● Day 1 — Arches ● Day 2 — Island in the Sky ● Day 3 — Your choice

Tip: Cell service is patchy inside both parks and gone entirely on the Needles road. Open the guide and download the map before you leave Moab. And check the NPS alerts page the morning you go — conditions here change with the weather.