

*The Insider's Guide*  
to Zion National Park



**ZION**  
**PONDEROSA**



RANCH RESORT

[zionponderosa.com](http://zionponderosa.com)

# *Look at this photograph*

This is a picture of one of the hundreds of slot canyons in Zion National Park. That canyon started out as a hairline crack, but flash floods and flowing water worked together to widen the crack to form a narrow crevice. As you navigate through its twists and turns, you will be followed by a tapestry of lines carved onto the walls by wind, water and time. The stone gets its red color from the iron oxide that is rusting inside the rock.





## *Welcome to Zion National Park* one of the world's great geological wonderlands.

Established in 1919, Utah's oldest (and most visited) national park encompasses 229 square miles of plateaus, canyons, arches, rivers and tributaries. From its lowest elevation point at Coal Pits Wash (3,666 feet) to its highest point at Horse Ranch Mountain (8,726 feet), Zion is home to a diverse range of habitats and species of plants and animals.

**This Insiders Guide** has been put together with help from numerous experts with decades of experience and involvement with Zion National Park. While it isn't all encompassing, this information will provide you with the details you need to properly experience Zion National Park.



## *Getting to Zion*

### **Zion does not lie on the outskirts of any major cities**

and so it is just a little off the beaten path. Fortunately, this has prevented Zion from being completely overrun with casual tourists, and so it has retained its natural beauty as a reward for the visitors who make the trip.

### *Nearby Airports*

The closest large commercial airports are McCarran International (LAS) in Las Vegas, 170 miles to the southwest, and Salt Lake City International (SLC), 311 miles north of the park. It takes 2 hours and 50 minutes to drive to Zion from Las Vegas and 4 hours and 30 minutes from Salt Lake. Flights to Las Vegas are typically less expensive.

There are regional airports in St. George, Utah, and in Cedar City, Utah. Both airports are less than an hour away from the park, but flights will cost about 60-100% more than flights to Salt Lake or Vegas. The St. George airport has flights from Salt Lake City and Denver, and the Cedar City airport has flights from Salt Lake City.



## Directions -

[Click here to visit our maps page](#)

### From Las Vegas

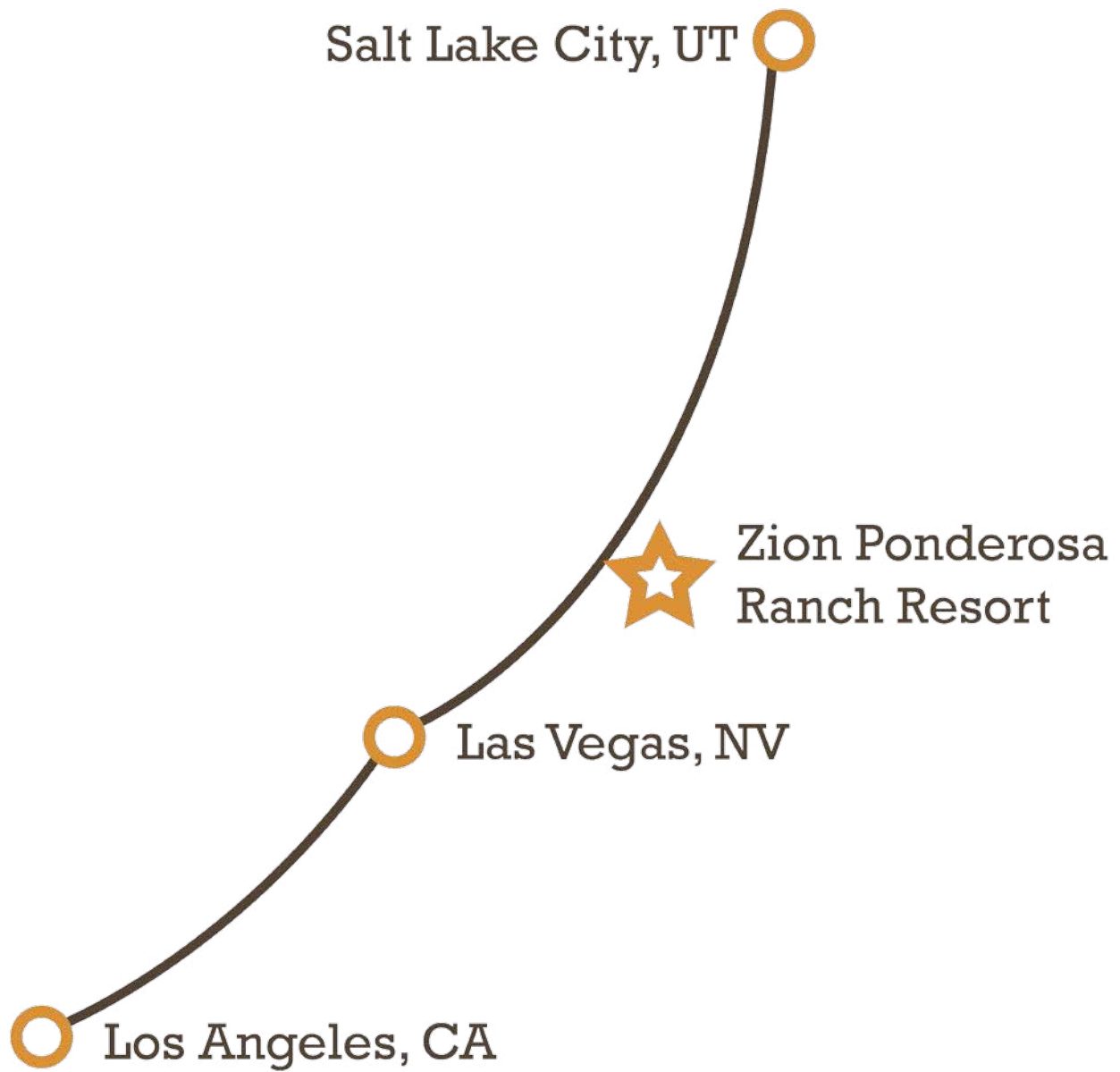
- Drive on I-15 North for 130 miles, passing through Mesquite, Nevada, and St. George, Utah.
- Take Exit 16 for UT-9 towards Hurricane/Zion National Park.
- After driving on UT-9 for 33 miles, turn right to stay on UT-9 in La Verkin, Utah.
- Stay on UT-9 to get into the park. The Zion Canyon Visitor Center will be about 20 miles from the right turn in La Verkin.

### From Salt Lake City:

- Drive on the I-15 South for 270 miles, passing through Cedar City, Utah.
- Take Exit 27 for UT-17 toward Toquerville/Hurricane
- After driving on UT-17 for 26 miles, turn left on UT-9 East in La Verkin, Utah.
- Stay on UT-9 to get into the park. The Zion Canyon Visitor Center will be about 20 miles from the left turn in La Verkin.

### Scenic route from Salt Lake City:

- Drive on the I-15 South for 211 miles, passing through Beaver, Utah.
- Take Exit 95 for UT-20 toward US-89/Panguitch/Kanab, and turn left onto UT-20 E.
- After driving on UT-20 for 20 miles, turn right onto US-89 S.
- Drive on US-89 S for 10 miles, and then turn left onto US-89 S/E Center St in Panguitch, Utah.
- Follow US-89 S for 50 miles, and then turn right onto UT-9 W
- Drive on UT-9 for 24 miles until you get to the park. This is a beautiful, winding highway that will take you through the Zion Mount Carmel Tunnel.





## *Cost of Entrance*

At the time of the creation of this guide, the cost to enter the park with a private vehicle is \$25. This fee will provide access to Zion National Park for you and everyone in your vehicle for 7 consecutive days (including the date of purchase). The same deal is available to motorcycles at a price of \$12 per rider. Bicyclists, hikers and pedestrians without a car can get in for \$12 per person.

For information about fees for non-commercial organized groups, commercial tours and annual and lifetime passes, check out Zion's [Fees and Reservations page](#) on nps.gov.

## *Shuttle System and Parking*

During the offseason, you can drive your car through Zion Canyon. But during the park's busy season from April to October, the main canyon is accessible only by shuttle. This has eliminated issues with parking, traffic and pollution. The shuttles are free to ride, and they run from the early morning until the late evening arriving at stops at least every 15 minutes.



### The shuttle system includes two separate bus lines:

- The Springdale Shuttle, which services nine stops in the nearby town of Springdale and goes to the Zion Canyon Visitor Center.
- The Zion Canyon Shuttle, which originates at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center and makes stops at nine locations throughout Zion's main canyon.

The main parking area is at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center, but on busy days, the lot will fill up quickly. So unless you get there early in the morning or late in the evening, the best way to get into the park is to take the shuttle from Springdale and transfer to the Zion Canyon Shuttle at the visitor center.



# What to do

Zion has something for everyone. Families take their kids to see the Emerald Pools. Adventure seekers explore Angels Landing or hike up the Virgin River Narrows. Rock climbers from around the world flock to Zion to make bucket list ascents up Moonlight Buttress or Prodigal Son.

I've lived near Zion for 27 years, and I still get excited every time I go to the park. With a multitude of activities, hikes and scenic drives, there are things to do for all types of visitors.



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## *Family-Friendly Activities*

These activities are appropriate for families with young children or for those of you who aren't looking for anything too challenging. They are not overly physically demanding and can be accomplished in less than a day.

### *Emerald Pools Trail*

**Sometimes, things are popular for a reason.**

The Emerald Pools trail is one of the most popular trails in the park, and it's not hard to see why. The contrasting beauty of red rocks, flowing waterfalls and lush vegetation work together to create paradise in the desert.

The hike runs alongside a stream that rolls down from cliffs to form several pools and waterfalls. The trailhead is a short walk from the Zion Lodge. Due to its beauty and accessibility, it can be quite busy during the summer, so be prepared to share the experience with other people.

There are three sections of the hike: lower, middle and upper.



### Lower Pools:

You can get to the lower pools pushing a stroller. It is a very simple 0.6 mile hike with only 70 feet of elevation gain, and it takes about 30 minutes to complete. Much of the paved lower trail is shaded by surrounding cottonwood and box elder trees. The destination is a tall alcove under two tall waterfalls with pools below. Mist from the falls feeds hanging gardens.

### Middle Pools:

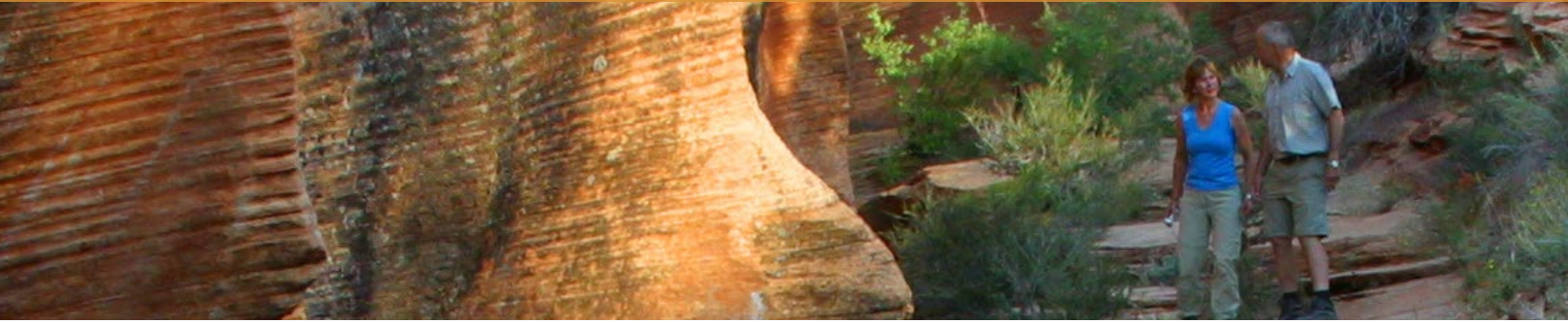
The middle pools are about a half mile beyond the lower pools. The hike will be slightly more difficult but is still doable for most people. This will take you to the streams that form the waterfalls that spill into the lower pools. Be careful - the water and algae can make the rocks slippery, so keep children away from the overhanging ledge.

### Upper Pool:

The final quarter mile stretch to the upper pool is the most strenuous part of the hike, but it is worth the effort. The upper pool is larger, with a high waterfall coming into it from a towering cliff.

### *Insider Tip:*

Go during the spring, when the spring runoff creates the most powerful waterfalls. If you get there early enough, you may even be able to avoid crowds.



## *The Zion-Mount Carmel Tunnel*

Completed in 1930, the Zion-Mount Carmel Tunnel is an engineering marvel.

At its completion, the 1.1 mile tunnel was the longest tunnel of its type in the United States. It follows the profile of the Pine Creek Canyon, and it has windows through the canyon wall for light and ventilation.

You can take your private vehicle through the tunnel, but size restrictions apply. The builders of the tunnel didn't have large tour busses and RV's in mind during construction, and so the curves make it difficult for large vehicles to ride alongside each other in the tunnel. Consequently, oversize vehicles must obtain \$15 permits which allow them to have "escorts" that take them through the tunnel while halting traffic from the opposite direction. So if you go to the tunnel, there is a chance that you may have to wait while a large vehicle is guided through it (usually not longer than 10 minutes).

### *Insider Tip:*

Summer travelers can drive the tunnel during the evening while there is still good sunlight. This lessens the likelihood of waiting for an oncoming large vehicle to get through it.



## *Canyon Overlook Trail*

The easiest way to get a high elevation viewpoint of Zion.

The Canyon Overlook Trail is immediately east of the Zion-Mount Carmel tunnel. The one mile roundtrip hike is the easiest way to get a high elevation viewpoint of Zion. The destination is the edge of a cliff that gives you views of lower Zion Canyon. West Temple, the Towers of the Virgins, the Streaked Wall, the Beehives and the switchbacks below the west end of the Mount Carmel Tunnel are all visible from this point.

## *Tanner Amphitheater*

For tickets and info, check out [dixie.edu/tanner](http://dixie.edu/tanner).

The Tanner Amphitheater is a 2000 seat colosseum surrounded by the cliffs of Zion. It is owned by Dixie State University and has live concerts on weekends throughout the summer.

### *Insider Tip:*

Go see the Utah Symphony perform here. It will knock your socks off.



## *Pa'rus Trail*

**Open to bicycles and pets**

This is the only trail in the park that is open to bicycles and pets (although pets must be leashed). It is also one of the only wheelchair-accessible trails in the park. It is a wide, paved trail that runs alongside the Virgin River with a few bridges that cross over the river. It's not uncommon to spot wildlife along the trail, as deer, coyotes and foxes visit the river for water.

The trail starts at South Campground just north of the Visitor Center and ends at the Canyon Junction.

### *Insider Tip:*

This trail is perfect for leisurely strolls or casual bike rides at sunsets or sunrises. The Canyon Junction bridge is one of the best places for photographers to catch the sunset.



## Grafton

### Ghost Town

Located just outside of the southwest corner of the park, Grafton is a great place to see what pioneer life was like in the 19th century. The town was settled in 1859, but flooding from the Virgin River and conflicts with Native Americans led to its abandonment.

An old school house and cemetery remain in the area. There are a few other structures, but some of them may not be accessible, so respect signs and fences.

### *Insider Tip:*

Some of the scenes for the classic film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* were filmed in Grafton.



# *Strenuous Activities*

These activities don't require you to be advanced climbers and mountaineers, but they do require participants to be physically fit. They are not recommended for small children or for people with fears of heights. Participants must actively plan ahead as they will likely be spending several hours (or even days) in the sun hiking and climbing up steep grades. Come prepared with lots of water and plenty of food and make sure you are dressed appropriately.





## *Angel's Landing*

**This is one of the most popular attractions in the entire park - and for good reason.**

Landing is the summit of a unique rock fin that extends to the center of the main canyon. Those who make the steep 2.4 mile ascent are rewarded with a stunning view of Zion 1500 feet above the canyon floor.

The hike starts at the Grotto Trailhead, the sixth stop for the Zion Canyon Shuttle. Before you reach the summit, you will come across a series of 21 steep switchbacks that have been dubbed “Walter’s Wiggles”. The last half-mile of the trail is an adventurer’s paradise, but it isn’t for the faint of heart. The path becomes a narrow spine on the mountain with sharp drop offs on both sides. There are chains, guard-rails and carved steps that make it easier, but it still requires caution and care with each step.

When you reach the summit, you are met with a 360-degree view of the entire canyon. You get tremendous views of the surrounding area, and you also get to look back on the trail that you traversed to reach this point.

### *Insider Tip:*

Hikers come to a point called Scout Lookout after the final Walter’s Wiggles switchback. For those that are afraid of heights, this is a good turnaround point - the final quarter mile is steep and exposed.



## Zion Narrows

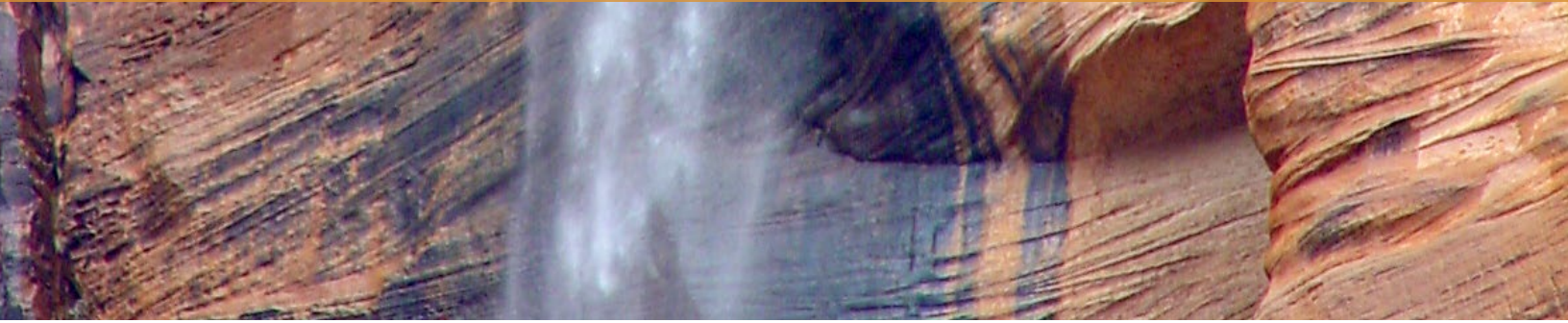
We have the Virgin River to thank for the Zion Narrows.

The river has carved a beautiful gorge into the canyon, resulting in a 16-mile stretch of flowing water, soaring walls and hanging gardens. It is up to 2,000 feet deep in some places and at times only 20 to 30 feet wide.

Plan on getting wet for any of the Narrows hiking routes - you will be walking and sometimes swimming in the river. You can rent or buy special water shoes, neoprene socks, walking sticks or other gear from shops in Springdale. When the water is cold, as it will be in the fall, winter and spring, you will need a wetsuit or even a drysuit. These can also be rented or purchased in Springdale.

There are a few different hiking routes you can take in the Narrows; all of them require preparation. Make sure your food, wallet and camera equipment and other essentials are in waterproof dry bags, and make sure the clothes you are wearing are ones that you don't mind getting wet.

Weather is an important factor as well. Always check the latest weather forecast at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center. If there's rain in the forecast, flash floods are a possibility. The National Park Service will close the Narrows to all hikers when there are flash flood warnings or when the water level is high from spring runoff.



*There are two main options for hiking the Narrows:*

**Bottom up from the Temple of Sinawava (day hike):**

This is one is perfect for casual hikers that want to get a glimpse of the famed Narrows. You start at the Temple of Sinawava, which is the last stop on the Zion Canyon Shuttle. It starts with a mile long paved trail that goes directly into the Narrows. Once you get to the river, you can walk up as far as you want to go.

A good stopping point is the Orderville Canyon tributary, which is about 1.5 miles from the end of the paved walkway. If you've got any energy left, you can hike two more miles to Big Springs. Once you pass Orderville Canyon, you will be in the narrowest section of the canyon where you will almost exclusively be in the water. Travel upstream into Orderville Canyon or beyond Big Springs is prohibited.

This hike has just about everything in the short distance between the end of the paved trail and Big Springs - steep cliffs, waterfalls, and running water. It can be as strenuous or as leisurely as you want it to be - just turn around if you've had enough or keep going if you want to see more. No permit is required to do the hike. Remember to use the restrooms at the Temple of Sinawava since there are none in the Narrows.



### Top down from Chamberlain's Ranch:

This one is much more adventurous - it encompasses the entire 16 miles of the Narrows from the top to the bottom. It will take at least one full day, but for many people, it makes more sense to split it up as a two-day backpacking trip.

A Zion backcountry permit is required for this hike. Go to [nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/narrowspemits.htm](https://nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/narrowspemits.htm) for more information about permits and to find out how to get one. You are not allowed to spend any more than one night in the Narrows, and reservations are recommended for weekend trips as campsite capacity is limited.

Although this hike requires more planning, hikers are rarely disappointed. In certain areas, the turquoise water meets with the red rocks to provide a stunning contrast. The steep cliffs rise 2,000 feet into the sky, with the canyon narrowing to 20 feet. You will be surrounded by hanging gardens and ponderosa pines in impossible-to-reach nooks. This hike cements Zion's status as the ultimate adventurer's playground.

Since you are starting at Chamberlain's Ranch, which is outside the northeast corner of Zion National Park, and ending at the Temple of Sinawava, you will either need two vehicles or a private shuttle. If you are using the two vehicle option, park one of your cars at the Temple of Sinawava before driving up to Chamberlain's Ranch; when you finish the hike, you will have to drive back up to Chamberlain's Ranch to retrieve one of your vehicles.

As I mentioned, this route can be conquered in a single day, but it will take 12-14 hours of grueling effort. In fact, the NPS won't issue permits for single day hikers on this route during the winter because there isn't enough daylight to complete the hike.



## The Subway

**The Subway, like the Narrows, is another iconic feature of Zion National Park.**

It gets its name from its tunnel-shaped chamber. There are two ways to explore The Subway (the Left Fork of North Creek). Both routes require permits, and camping is not allowed. Go to [nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/subwaypermits.htm](https://nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/subwaypermits.htm) to find out how to get a permit for this hike.

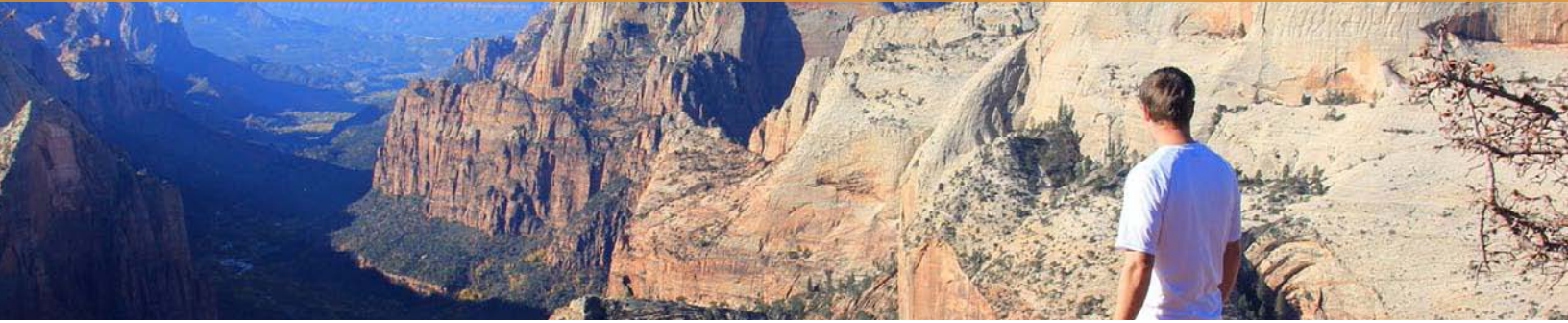
### From the Bottom Up:

This is the less technical of the two options, but it still requires route finding, creek crossing and scrambling over boulders. It ends with a fantastic view of the lower Subway. Give yourself plenty of time to do this hike - although it isn't overly technical, it takes 5-9 hours, and you don't want to have to turn around before the best part.

### From the Top Down:

If you're up for swimming through deep pools of cold water, rappelling down a few short cliffs and navigating through rugged terrain, this is a terrific hike. It's a strenuous, technical 9.5 mile route in which you will have to rappel down cliffs up to 30 feet and swim through narrow sections of the canyon. Don't do this hike without a map - the trail can be hard to identify in places. The hike itself is delightfully fun from the beginning to the end, and you get spectacular views of the majestic Subway.

This is a very popular hike, so the NPS has an advanced lottery and permit reservation system in place to allocate permits to 80 people a day. Similar to the Narrows top down hike, you will need to either arrange to have two vehicles (one at the beginning, one at the end) or arrange a shuttle. You will also need to come prepared with rappelling gear, and wetsuits/drysuits make it much more pleasant.



## Observation Point

On of the premier views of Zion National Park.

This hike starts at the Weeping Rock Trailhead, the seventh stop on the Zion Canyon Shuttle. It's a calf-burning 8-mile roundtrip hike in which you will gain 2,100 feet in elevation. The reward for those who make the hike is one of the premier views of Zion National Park. Along the way, you will be treated to views of Echo Canyon, a steep slot canyon with white cliffs that cuts through the rock in a northeastern direction from the trailhead.

### *Insider Tip:*

If you're staying at Zion Ponderosa, which sits on Zion National Park's eastern border, you can reach Observation Point by taking a more leisurely stroll through the forests and meadows of the east plateau. It's a one hour and fifteen minute hike in each direction. From Observation Point, you can walk down to Weeping Rock and you can get on the shuttle and explore other parts of the park. When you're finished, you can ride the shuttle to Springdale and a pre-arranged shuttle from Zion Ponderosa will come pick you up.

A scenic view of a canyon with a large, gnarled tree in the foreground and a person sitting on a rock in the distance. The tree is a large, dark-colored pine tree with many branches, some of which are bare. The person is wearing a light-colored hoodie and is sitting on a large, reddish-brown rock. The background shows a vast canyon with steep, rocky walls and a valley filled with green vegetation. The sky is a clear, light blue.

# *When To Go*

There really isn't a bad time to go to Zion. The park experiences all four seasons and there are things to enjoy about each of them. It is open every day of the year except for Christmas day.



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## *Summer*

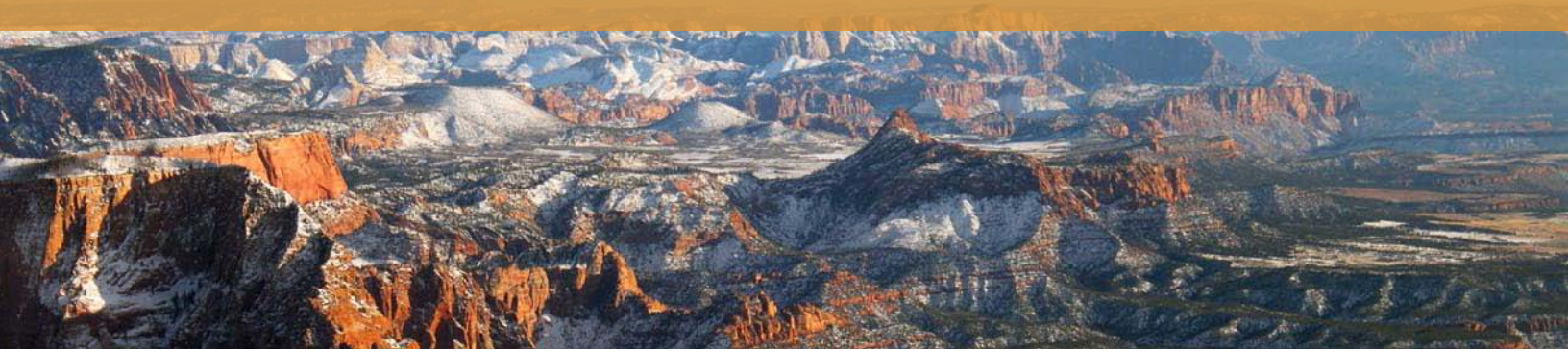
The park gets its highest visitation in the summer, and it can get quite crowded. But this is also the time of year when the most activities are available. The shuttle system has also made the park much more enjoyable during this time of year, eliminating hassles with traffic and parking.

Many families come to the park in the summer to take advantage of their childrens' summer breaks from school. The park has youth programs aimed at teaching kids about the park through hands-on activities, hikes and lessons. This is also the time of year when you can catch a concert at the Tanner Amphitheater.

Zion can get very hot during the summer months, with temperatures reaching 100°F. As a result, either bring plenty of water or plan your hikes during the mornings or evenings.

The summer is usually the best time to hike the Narrows because the spring runoff has leveled off and the water won't be as cold. However, the summer is thunderstorm season in the desert southwest, and flash floods and flash flood warnings are a possibility.





## *Fall*

The weather will be very pleasant in the fall as the park cools down from the heat of the summer. The trees will begin changing colors in September. In Zion Canyon, the fall colors will be at their most beautiful in late October.

This is a great time of year for hiking or canyoneering as the weather will be dry and the temperatures will be favorable. The temperatures can vary greatly across a day, though, so it's a good idea to dress in layers to prepare for changes in temperature.

## *Winter*

Winters in Zion are usually fairly mild, but they can be wet. Nearly half of the annual precipitation in Zion Canyon falls in the winter months. There are occasional snowstorms, but the snow reaches the canyon floor. It can accumulate at higher elevations, though.

Winter is the least busy time of year at Zion. The shuttle stops running in November, so you can take your car through the canyon and park in designated areas at the attractions. Lodging rates will typically be lower at this time of year.



You can hike the Narrows this time of year, but you will need a wetsuit or drysuit to deal with the frigid water. You can even snowshoe or cross country ski on some of the backcountry trails at higher elevations. This is also a great time of year to see bald eagles and golden eagles as they winter in and around the park.

## *Spring*

Similar to the fall, the temperature on a given day can vary by more than 30°F so it's a good idea to dress in layers. It can get rainy, but usually it's nice and sunny. Wildflowers start blooming in April, peaking in May. Waterfalls will be much more powerful this time of year as a result of the snowmelt.

On a related note, the Narrows are usually closed to hikers for the spring because the melting snow and spring run off will cause the current to be strong and dangerous.

### *Insider Tip:*

In the spring, when the water is already high from the melting snow, or during heavy rainstorms, waterfalls can be seen at every turn. The sky might be cloudy and you will probably get wet, but the waterfalls are a sight to behold.



## *Final Thoughts*

**Zion can't just be experienced through photographs and videos.**

As a photographer and videographer, I couldn't ask for a better workspace than Zion National Park. The red cliffs, waterfalls, hanging gardens and flowing currents are a camera lens' best friend. Some of the world's best photographers have Zion to thank for their best works of art.

But Zion can't just be experienced through photographs and videos. Ask anyone who has been to Zion - you really have to see it for yourself.

At Zion Ponderosa, we want to be your resource to help you have the ultimate Zion experience. If you're an adrenaline junkie, we have ATV tours, horseback riding, paintball or canyoneering adventures. If you're looking to relax, you can relax on your cabin deck, get a massage at our spa or read a book by our two-tiered swimming pool and jacuzzi.

Our concierge, Kourtney, can answer any other questions you may have. She is here to assist you with any help you may need with our amenities and is a true Zion expert.

**CONTACT KOURTNEY**

or Call Us at 1-435-261-4260

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