

Arizona canyons grand in different ways

Adventures permeate from wondrous destinations

The Grand Canyon is a pit of seemingly bottomless beauty. It's a masterful work of ecological art that needed millions of years to be completed.

It's nearly 277 miles long and 18 miles wide and is more than a mile deep. Unparalleled measurables, no doubt, and it can overwhelm sightseers and naturalists.

The Grand Canyon epitomizes Arizona. It symbolizes greatness and could lead you to believe it's the state's only massive gorge.

That's hardly the case.

Thirty-two canyons can be found in Arizona. They range in size and depth, and many are worth a visit. Other popular ones include Aravaipa Canyon, Madera Canyon, Oak Creek Canyon, Paria Canyon and Salt Lake Canyon.

Aravaipa Canyon hugs the northwest border of the Galiuro Mountain Range in southern Arizona and is 11 miles in length. Backpackers and hikers revel in its topography. Hike through Aravaipa Creek, a seasonal home to hundreds of bird species. Explore side canyons and witness desert wildlife. See bighorn sheep, coyote, coatimundi, Gila monsters and javelina.

Twenty-five miles southeast of



GORGE-OUS – Salt River Canyon comprises more than 32,000 acres of Tonto National Forest. Image: Teresa L. Jackson. Adobe Stock.

Tucson rests Madera Canyon – a part of the Coronado National Forest. Campsites, picnic areas and miles of hiking trails grab your attention. Desert surroundings add to the ambiance, making it a jewel.

Northern Arizona houses Oak Creek Canyon – a 12-mile-long gorge that spans from Flagstaff to Sedona and

is considered one of the state's most scenic. It offers many activities, including hiking, backpacking and fishing. It ranges in width from 0.8 to 2.5 miles and reaches depths from 800 to 2,000 feet. Its association with Sedona makes it second to the Grand Canyon in most popular tourist destinations in the state.

Paria Canyon is nestled in Northern Arizona. Known as a premier hiking and backpacking destination, Paria Canyon is a 112,500-acre wilderness area that hugs Utah's southern border. The Wave is a massive sandstone rock formation and the canyon's most-visited destination. White House Ruins and Lee's Ferry are popular backpacking routes that pass through Buckskin Gulch – the longest slot canyon in the world. Hikers should expect to be wet anywhere from ankle deep to waist high and do research before hiking the canyon. Flash flooding is common.

Salt River Canyon's wilderness, meanwhile, is comprised of nearly 32,100 acres in the Tonto National Forest, east of the Phoenix Metro Area. Its elevations range from 2,200 feet at the canyon's lower end to 4,200 feet. The hiking trails aren't maintained and most exploration happens by raft or kayak during Spring River-running season. The upper Salt River can be run from March through May, with rapids that range from Class II to IV. Permits are required when running the river between March 1 and May 15.

This is a snapshot of what Arizona offers and proof that not everything has to be grand to be considered great.

Staying in right lane not always simple

'Wrong-way' driving growing concern, leads to grave results

Moving in the wrong direction can lead to grave results – especially if you are behind the wheel of your vehicle.

Fatal, wrong-way crashes on our nation's highways have become a persistent and devastating threat that are making roadways less safe. A recent data analysis from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found there are approximately 500 deaths per year as the result of crashes on divided highways.

Researchers found that the odds of being a wrong-way driver increased with alcohol impairment, older age and driving without a passenger.

"Wrong-way crashes on divided highways are often fatal as they are typically head-on collisions," said Dr. David Yang, executive director of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

AAA works with National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and other traffic-safety organizations to educate drivers on the deadly impact of wrong-way driving. AAA and NTSB urge state-transportation agencies to adopt driver-based countermeasures that address these factors, such as alcohol-ignition interlocks, strengthened deterrence strategies like sobriety checkpoints, driver-refresher courses for older



LOSING DIRECTION – Drunk drivers and senior drivers are most likely to drive their vehicles in the wrong lanes on highways. Image: Brandon Klein. Adobe Stock.

adults and the installation of more visible signs and signals.

Researchers examined eight factors related to these types of crashes, with these three standing out: alcohol impairment, older age and driving without a passenger. Six in 10 wrong-way crashes involved an alcohol-impaired driver. Those with blood-alcohol concentrations more than the legal limit of .08 were significantly more likely to be wrong-way drivers than non-alcohol-

impaired drivers involved in the same crashes.

"Alcohol impairment is, by far, the single-most significant factor in the majority of wrong-way driving crashes, which unfortunately has not changed since the NTSB issued its 'Wrong-Way Driving' special investigation in 2012," said NTSB Director of the Office of Highway Safety Dr. Rob Molloy. "The important work done by AAA shows that we need to redouble our efforts to address this

safety hazard."

An alcohol-ignition-interlock device prevents a vehicle from starting until the driver provides a breath sample that registers below a preset limit, usually a BAC of .02.

The data also indicates that drivers older than 70 are more at risk of driving in the wrong direction than their younger counterparts. Previous Foundation research from the AAA Longitudinal Research on Aging Drivers (LongROAD) project found that drivers aged 75-79 spent less time on the road and drove fewer miles per trip than younger age groups. Yet, this same age group significantly represents wrong-way crashes.

Nearly 87% of wrong-way drivers were traveling alone, leading to the belief that the presence of a passenger might offer protection. Passengers could alert drivers that they are entering a one-way road, preventing them from entering the highway in the wrong direction, or alerting them to the error, helping the driver take corrective action before a crash occurs.

AAA reminds drivers to use common sense before getting behind the wheel. If you are driving, don't drink. If you are drinking, don't drive. And always remain alert.

Simple requests that too often are taken for granted.