

# New & Noteworthy

Utah's scenic Route 12

## ROAD TRIP

### First Impression: Utah

Three primo hotels debut, but this West is still wild. By Pavia Rosati Photographs by Ben Schott

One balmy Thursday last spring, we scrambled up Angels Landing in Utah's Zion National Park, with nothing between us and a sheer 1,400-foot plunge but a wobbly chain. The next day, our breath puffed white as we descended into the frigid air of Bryce Canyon. On Saturday, a gas station owner warned us (my un-naturey London boyfriend and my Manhattan self) not to drive over a mountain pass "unless you want me to come dig you out of the snow in two hours."

At points in between, we drove through endless fields of green interrupted by the occasional cow and jutting purple mountains, trying to comprehend the millions of years it took the rocks to settle just so. Such was our Utah initiation.

Utah is known for its wide-open, rugged landscapes. But unlike, say, Colorado, it hasn't softened its severity with pockets of opulence—until now. In October, Singapore-based luxury hotelier Aman Resorts

unveiled **Amangiri** (from \$600/night; [amanresorts.com](http://amanresorts.com)) on 600 rural acres near the Arizona border in Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, a swath of 1.7 million protected acres. The 34-room outpost took \$100 million to complete, and the result is a structure perfectly grafted onto its raw landscape, every line and color mimicking the canyons and desert that cradle it. Farther north, in Park City, **The St. Regis Deer Crest Resort** (from \$599/night;

[starwoodhotels.com](http://starwoodhotels.com)) opens December 18 with a funicular chugging between its buildings. Also in Park City, the Waldorf Astoria's first ski lodge, the **Dakota Mountain Lodge & Golden Door Spa** (from \$159/night until December 20; [dakotamountainlodge.com](http://dakotamountainlodge.com)), debuted in July. Compared with ski areas of its caliber, Park City has few prize lodgings, so the opening of two in one year is big news. Yet on this particular trip last spring, we weren't look-

ing for fancy resorts, just a last-minute, nature-minded excursion out West.

One classic road trip itinerary is the Grand Circle, which encompasses the Grand Canyon in Arizona, and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Monument Valley, Bryce Canyon, and Zion National Parks, all in Utah. We mapped out our own triangle: from Zion to Bryce and then to Canyonlands—a stupidly ambitious itinerary, I might add.

Zion alone would have

been enough with its 230 square miles of cliffs and rivers to explore. The most concentrated stretch of sites is along the Zion Canyon Scenic Drive. The park banned cars a few years ago (helping to restore its natural splendor), so everyone takes energy-efficient minibuses. An audio track describing the surrounding landscape simplifies millions of years of geology into informative nuggets.

Zion's peaks loom some 8,000 feet tall, and its hiking trails vary in levels of difficulty and risk. Hikers have plunged to their death at Angels Landing, but we were so dazzled by the sights that we forgot to be scared.

Bryce Canyon awaited us, a 2-hour drive northeast along U.S. Route 89, past roaming elk and buffalo and signs selling 6- to 10-acre lots. We tried to catch a post-sunset glimpse of Bryce, but ended up in a tussle with the cops. Apparently, one shouldn't drive 75 mph on

these empty roads: "Here's how it's going to go tonight: I'm going to let you off with a warning. But ma'am, if you hit a deer out here, hours from the nearest hospital, you will die."

Unlike at Zion, where hikers crane their necks to look up, at Bryce, they descend into its valleys crowded with peaks and points. The different perspective is striking: Zion towers above, humbling and intimidating; Bryce appears almost out of a fairy tale with its famous sandstone hoodoo pillars, seemingly dripped from the gods' fingers. We half expected a goblin to pop out.

The colors range from crimson to cream like so much desert coral—which is no accident: Millions of years ago, a massive sea ran from what is now Canada to Central America. When it receded, the sea left behind the minerals and deposits that became the Colorado Plateau, encompassing the Rockies, Utah's parks, and



A suite at the Amangiri

the Grand Canyon.

We continued along Route 12, stopping at Kodachrome Basin and Escalante state parks. Yellow cliffs gave way to beehive shapes and lunar landscapes. Every so often we saw an abandoned cabin, but otherwise, no one.

"Doesn't anyone know what's here?" we asked each other. Even though more than 2.1 million people visited Utah's national parks last spring, it felt like we had the state to ourselves. By the time we passed a SUMMIT 9600 FT. sign, the snow was falling thick and fast. To think we had started the day in a convertible with the top down.

On our last day, we set a crazy agenda: seeing both



En route to Kodachrome Basin State Park

Arches National Park and Canyonlands. But first we headed to Sego, a ghost town so unremarkable we initially drove right past. En route, we found an abandoned motel with pink walls covered in white handprints, with shag carpeting, a manual typewriter, and tumbleweeds inside—very

David Lynch.

We made it to Arches and Canyonlands, but realized that they're best seen from deep inside—in a white-water raft on the Colorado River or in tents on the edge of the buttes.

And then there are those new hotels. We'll know for next time. ■

## PLAYING HOUSE ON LAKE POWELL

### The Wahweap Marina on Lake Powell



Houseboating evokes the notion of a simple, throwback vacation, where one slowly drifts along and fishes or swims off the deck. On Lake Powell, however, the massive, turquoise man-made lake spanning the Utah-Arizona border in the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. **Lake Powell Resorts & Marinas** is stepping up its options in response to growing demand.

The top-tier luxury class vessels—which can easily sleep a dozen or more people—come equipped with barbecue grills, hot showers, entertainment systems, dishwashers, central heating and air-conditioning, and private staterooms. Additional amenities such as fireplaces,

rooftop hot tubs, and waterslides are available with an upgrade. In 2008, Lake Powell Resorts & Marinas started offering complimentary concierge services, as well as options like preordered, chef-prepared meals (such as citrus-marinated salmon or sweet pepper stuffed-chicken breasts), or the services of onboard private chefs.

Visitors can rent houseboats at the main Wahweap Marina in Page, Arizona, or at the Bullfrog Marina in Bullfrog, Utah. Those without nautical savvy should consider hiring a personal captain (for \$99 an hour) and a dockhand (rates start at \$50 an hour) for smooth sailing. *Three-day rentals from \$1,295; [lakepowell.com](http://lakepowell.com) —Elissa Richard*

FROM TOP: COURTESY AMANRESORTS; BEN SCHOTT; JEROME RICHARD